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Reflections on Expectations for Ministry Study

William D. Huras

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REFLECTIONS ON

EXPECTATIONS FOR MINISTRY

STUDY

W. D. Huras

The Expectations for Ministry Study conducted by the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary Board of Governors throughout the year 1974-75 was concluded in the forum discussion on the final Sunday morning of the 1975 Convention of the Eastern Canada Synod. This paper constitutes my personal reflections on that study. Before we can move into those reflections, however, several introductory comments are in order:

1. My reflections are mine and are therefore personal rather than clinical. Naturally, different individuals will react differently to the same study. I am offering my reflections and also my feelings about "ministry" as they have been molded by the study.
2. This study is only one among many being conducted throughout the LCA and indeed throughout North America. It is not a final word by any means. Hopefully it is a helpful word to all those interested in ministry.
3. Our intention was to discuss ministry as opposed to pastoral ministry. We expected the study to deal with lay and pastoral ministries. The largest percentage of all replies dealt with the pastoral ministry. This in itself is indicative of our understanding of ministry.
4. It might well be asked how many people in Synod participated in the study. A preliminary glance at the replies to a letter sent to all pastors and a general invitation extended to all members of Synod through the Canada Lutheran resulted in only nine or ten replies. On the other hand, a large number of people

were involved in the study through Synodical committees and through the Seminary family.

5. It might also well be asked why the Seminary Board of Governors became involved in this study. Is such a study not the prerogative of the Synod? Certainly ministry is the concern of the Synod and we hope Synod will pursue such studies in the future. The Seminary family is involved in preparing pastors for the ministry and increasingly it is involved in preparing lay people for ministry. It seemed highly appropriate for the Seminary to involve itself in this kind of "expectations" study.

6. Some concern was expressed that the study did not deal with the present Seminary situation but rather spoke in general terms about what is expected in ministry. My personal concern in this area was that we not conduct a study which complains about what is but rather that we conduct a study that anticipates what might be. In some respects this has already taken place. The Seminary community has already acted upon some results which became evident in this study.

7. This paper on reflections is a working document. One should feel free to react to it and add to it. We are involved together in the ministry of the church. Our ministry is made much more fruitful and God-pleasing when many minds and hands work together.

Having said the above, we can now move into the actual reflections of the study. I recognized four major areas of concern:

- a concern for understanding the faith
- a concern for understanding the person
- a concern for ministry
- a concern for a ministry conducted by a "person of God".

UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH

There was widespread and deeply felt concern expressed for a ministry where the minister had an adequate understanding of the faith. Generally this meant an understanding and appreciation of:

- 1) The Bible
- 2) The Church
- 3) The Confessions

These might seem elementary to many of us but apparently they need emphasis. At least a great many people within Synod think so. Knowing the Bible includes the traditional Seminary curriculum subjects as Old and New Testament, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics and Homiletics. Understanding and appreciating the church involves a love for Christian community and an awareness of its historical continuity and life. While it is important for the Christian to be able to resist the institutional church in the name of God, it is equally important that the Christian be able to stand within the Church in the name of God. It was also felt that we cannot serve in a Lutheran ministry without

understanding our Lutheran heritage. And of course that is equally applicable to our serving within the larger Christian community.

I am indebted to Jaroslav Pelikan for bringing these three aspects of the faith to mind. In his book, *Obedient Rebels*,¹ he pointed out how the church has tended to lose sight of the balance provided by these three aspects of the faith and frequently emphasized one to the loss of the other two. His chapter on "Criteria of Apostolic Continuity" in his *History of the Development of Doctrine*² is helpful in recognizing the importance of balancing these three aspects of the faith in any understanding of the faith which can be called comprehensive.

UNDERSTANDING THE PERSON

This area was not as clearly delineated in the responses to the study, yet it nevertheless appeared in such sentences as "a pastor should be willing to listen to his parishioners." Here we are dealing with such age-old concepts as the Socratic "Know Thyself".

Self-knowledge, however, is not so easily attained. The traditional concept of personal examination and introspection often merely confirms us in our personal delusions of grandeur or misery. St. James was alluding to this when he said, "If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgeteth what manner of man he was." Simply looking at ourselves seldom leads to new awareness of self but rather merely confirms what we have always believed. The Toronto Institute of Human Relations has a motto that "he who is his own therapist has a fool for a doctor." It amounts to something very much like St. James' comment. We need to understand ourselves . . . our emotions and how we handle conflict. To do this we need the help of others.

This area also includes knowing our fellow man. An old Indian proverb suggests that to know a man we need to consume a bushel of salt in his company. Our Lord's ministry is beautifully illustrative of this knowledge of his contemporaries. He did not preach theology to the Samaritan woman but rather spoke to her where she was. It is of the utmost importance for ministry that we relate to people out of awareness of their concerns and anxieties. This whole area of knowing others can be expanded to deal with interpersonal relations in general.

Fortunately this general area is dealt with today through the Clinical Pastoral Education programs provided by CAPE (Canadian Association for Pastoral Education) which all seminarians receive.

A CONCERN FOR MINISTRY

A third concern is for ministry. Ministry results when an individual combines an understanding of the faith with an understanding of persons and brings these

1. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

2. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), Vol. I, pp. 108-120.

together in service to his Lord.

Where understanding of the faith exists without an understanding of the person, problems arise. At best we have an individual with cerebral knowledge who may also be an excellent preacher but who lacks appreciation of people. At worst we may have a heresy hunter who grossly abuses individuality in the name of the Lord.

Where understanding of the person exists without an understanding of the faith we also have problems. At best we have a kind of positive humanism which works for the betterment of mankind. At worst we have a kind of worship of the sensual. My personal bias, of course, is that a positive humanism cannot survive many generations without degenerating into an unhappy humanism. I am very fond of Dr. Marshall's statement that we cannot call every man our brother until we acknowledge our common Father.

Where faith and self-awareness work together, however, there ministry occurs. This involves all of the traditional aspects of ministry which we associate with the parish pastor. Such activities as preaching and teaching, administering sacraments and counselling, providing inspiration and leadership. Dealing with conflict within the parish and also dealing with individuals out of Christian love is involved in this area.

A CONCERN FOR A "PERSON OF GOD"

This category has deliberately been left to the end - not because it is of least importance but because it is the *sine qua non* of ministry. This area was constantly implied wherever we had reference to the minister as a converted individual. The minister is expected to believe in God and to strive to serve him.

Conversion is perhaps a controversial subject for Lutherans but surely we all agree that a minister is one who believes in his Lord. We could not add this category to the first concern (understanding the faith) as number four. That would equate God with the Bible, the church and the creeds. God must always transcend these authorities. Occasionally He will challenge them through His prophets and occasionally He will use them to humble His people. But the important point here is that God is not confined by anything we might have. He transcends us and calls us to account.

This introduces the concept of the call. Several letters spoke of a need for the minister to have a sense of the call to serve. The emphasis here was on an inner call rather than trust upon an external call to serve a congregation. Several letters also expressed fear over too much reliance upon professional status. "The pastor must never be a professional." I believe this is worth investigating more fully. There is certainly an arrogant professionalism that is unworthy of the pastor but there is also an unhappy self-denigration that is destructive to a pastor's self-respect and therefore of his ministry to others.

How do we provide for this concern? Our study brings us back to the Lord of us all and reminds us of our ultimate dependence upon His grace. Can we study expectations for ministry without prayer? After all our studies and our attempts to understand the faith and ourselves and then to provide ministry we surely need to

pray again every day of our lives; "Save and defend thy Church Universal, purchased with the precious Blood of Christ. Give it pastors and ministers according to thy Spirit . . ."

IN CONCLUSION . . .

And so our studies of ministry proceed. Hopefully our understanding of ourselves will help us realize we have never "arrived" but are always on the road. By God's grace our study of expectations will not lead to what might be called the tyranny of expectations but rather lead us to recognize the need to always grow and mature in the faith. I hope the Eastern Canada Synod will see this study and these reflections upon that study as an invitation to grow and mature together as long as we live.

"I Am Bound By The Holy Scriptures"

These words of Luther to his critics and accusers reflect both the compulsion and the inspiration of the Reformation. In a day when all authority is being questioned the authority of the Written Word of God is a central issue.

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