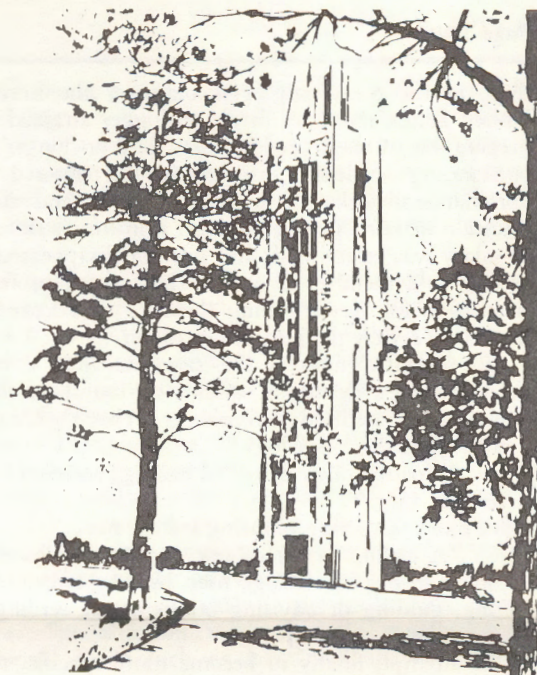


RELIGION

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THE LAY PERSPECTIVE REGARDING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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Being the State Geologist in Kansas, Dr. Hambleton has served for four years as Director and subsequently as Chairman of the Council on Education in the Geological Sciences of the American Geological Institute. In addition, he has held appointment as Associate Dean of the Graduate School and later Associate Dean of Faculties for Academic Affairs at the University of Kansas. He has served as Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Theological Education of the United Church of Christ. In his fifth year on the Board of Trustees of the Kansas School of Religion, he is currently in his second term as President of the Board. The presidency of the Mid Continent Research and Development Council is currently one of his many related services and directorships in scientific and research circles of Kansas. He is the author of a high number of monographs and scholarly magazine articles. Presented here is his paper given to the 1972 Annual Meeting of the Academy of Parish Clergy.



Jesse Ziegler, Executive Director of the American Association of Theological Schools, has noted that one can almost trace the development of theological education in America by tracing the development of American history and culture. The Church had at least one foot firmly planted in the cradle of American history, in the tradition of the Puritan life. The concept of a learned ministry that was deeply enmeshed in community life, helped to determine the direction of community life in colonial New England. As frontiers moved westward through Pennsylvania, down the Ohio River valley, through Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, onto the Great Plains, and to the settlements on the west coast, churches drew initially on educated leadership from the east coast.

Very soon, men rooted in the frontier were needed, and a westward movement developed which led to establishment of seminaries and church colleges, related to needs for leadership for the frontier churches. These seminaries and church schools expressed also the need for a particular denomination to estab-

lish its identity in a given region. Problems deriving from the necessity for denominational identity still plague the theological education enterprise. . . .

At the same time the frontier moved westward, major additions to population tied churches, seminaries, and colleges to ethnic origins resulting, for example, in the establishment of Lutheran seminaries that were basically German, and then heavily Scandinavian, from Gettysburg to Philadelphia and west and south across the continent.

Other groups experience¹ difficulty in making themselves at home in the established churches. These groups came out of the nineteenth century great awakening, and included the Methodists, Baptists and Disciples. A little later, less affluent groups such as the Nazarenes, Churches of God, and Assemblies of God emerged, and the ministry centered in newly established Bible colleges and Bible schools.

The result has been a tremendous contrast in kinds of ministry. The learned clergy of puritan New England was a rational, intellectual kind of clergy. The kind of clergy growing out of the nineteenth century revivalism was characterized more by charismatic gift. One was liturgically oriented, the other was not. A polarity in theological education developed. Theological seminaries, accordingly, reflect historical struggles on questions of doctrine, ethnic origins, status, graduate emphasis, standards in higher education, innovation and unrest among students or faculty, and the definition of professional and professional competence. I announce now that I will make a case for professional theological education.

There was a time in history when everyone knew what a profession was. . . . I refer to the time when everyone spoke of the "learned professions"—and there were only three: theology, law, and medicine. . . .

The inexorable passage of time, the proliferation of academic programs, the establishment of new degrees, the lengthening of time required for completion of the formal educational process in many fields—all have militated against this erstwhile clarity of definition. The result is that today almost every vocational group calls itself a profession; we have come to the point where any person, if he carries a briefcase, or wears a distinctive uniform, considers himself and is considered by others to be a professional. Almost everyone, that is, except

those in the profession of theology or the ministry. In the United States, many ministers no longer attained the academic preparation of their predecessors; they no longer attended the outstanding academic institutions, but entered strongly denominationally-oriented schools of Bible and the like. The tradition of reimbursing the local minister with turnips in lieu of salary was established, and has not disappeared entirely; his decline as a member of one of the learned professions began. As a basis for reestablishing theology as a learned profession, let us first review the idea of profession.

So muddled now is the situation that a unitary, clear, simple, concise definition cannot be found in the dictionary. Among the manifold definitions, Webster's Unabridged Dictionary gives the following:

"Broadly, one's principal calling, vocation or employment."

A bit more restricting phrasing is this one:

"A calling in which one professes to have acquired some special knowledge used by way either of instructing, guiding or advising others, or of serving them in some art."

In an attempt, finally to become more specific, the dictionary makes this statement:

"The occupation, if not purely commercial, mechanical, agricultural, or the like, to which one devotes oneself."

In all of the available definitions, we have missed or forgotten those facts that give true meaning to "profession." A profession is not a vocation, a calling, an occupation, or an employment; it is rather, *a way of life of service*. It is a way of life developed from a multitude of experiences, but the basic experience is a well-rounded program of formal education of high standard. It is a way of life based further on a highly developed, well-understood, and rigidly adhered to code of ethics. Without adherence to an ethical code, and without a liberal as well as a specific educational experience, there is no profession.

If one now is to discuss the preparation for such a way of life of service, it is necessary further to delimit what one means by the educational experience. To me the limitation is clear: the educational experience should consist of a full liberal arts program consonant with the awarding of a baccalaureate degree; this to be followed by the attainment of an advanced degree in a specialized professional school (and I do not mean a B.D., but something similar to the Juris Doctor of the law schools). The delineation of aims, however, appears to be arrived at only with difficulty. It would seem to the un-instructed that the aim is simple: to produce a competent professional man. Faculties have considerable differences of opinion, however, as to what a competent professional man may be. In the field of theology, for example, the dichotomy is this: on the one hand, a "complete minister," on the other hand a theologian and teacher. In the field of law there appears a similar situation; on the one hand a practicing attorney, on the other, a teacher or theoretician.

A professional school it must be assumed, cannot long continue to neglect its mission and hope to survive. Any professional school worthy of the name should be so broadly based, so flexible in its operation, so blessed with a thoughtful faculty that its product will be a good professional man or woman. One of the most eroding and pernicious influences to the concept of professional theology, although understandable historically, has been the strongly denominational, Bible-oriented school or seminary, without even the slightest pretext to a well-rounded program of formal education of high standard.

The professional man, above all, should know his field thoroughly, and this knowledge includes an understanding of

its origins, its past, its present, and a capability to deal with its future. The profession of theology is *not* explicitly the profession of Christian theology. Religion, as a moving force in man's history, his intellectual attainments, and his social and political institutions, derives from the interrelating contributions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and the like. In fact, it may be the inability of the professional clergy today to deal with religion in this large sense that has turned the young and questioning student to other sources of intellectual stimulation and instruction. Experience in colleges and universities indicates a great resurgence of interest in religion among students, whereas interest in being religious in traditional terms, with emphasis on the "thou shalt not's," is reflected in the absence of young people from churches today. The professional minister must be capable of leadership in the study of religion, for young people will extract their own value system from an understanding of the origins, past, present and capability to deal with the future of the whole spectrum of religious thought, and they will find instruction in appropriate institutions and the literature.

The professional man should be aware of his relationships to others and of the interdependence of individuals. If religion stresses the importance of the individual, and to love man is to love God, then to love man is to know man and all his institutions. The professional man should know the art of communication, for to be incapable of writing in a literate fashion or incapable of speaking articulately truncates his professional worth and his professional growth.

For the professional person to fulfill the criteria I have enumerated, there is demanded a sensible curriculum. Unfortunately, most curricula have grown by a process of addition, untempered usually by subtraction, rather than by a process of careful thought and cold calculation on the part of faculties. Insofar as revision of professional curricula is concerned, certain influences operate to retard and make difficult academic change. First among these retarding influences is a group of individuals that might be called, for want of a more convenient collective term, "the older generation." Characteristically, as the professional man becomes older, his recollections of his own educational experience occupy an increasingly hallowed place in his mind. Concomitant with the aging process, there comes to a chosen few, appointment to various bodies that have some regulating influence over professional education. A second retarding influence is that exerted by specialty organizations, by professional subgroups, and by accrediting bodies. The specialist in any profession is inclined to exert pressures toward the aggrandizement of his own specialty in the curriculum.

However, stimulating influences for curricular change are at work. The pressure of finance is one of these. The young man or woman contemplating a professional career cannot fail but be distracted by the thought that a number of years in the prime of life, generally considered to be the most productive, will have been spent in an educational program that effectively prevents gainful employment. The trend toward early marriage supplies added dimension to the problem, for the care of a family requires a source of income larger than that required to sustain the individual alone. Another stimulating influence is faculty concern. Faculties are becoming more and more impressed with the fact that the so-called lock-step, the inflexibility of curricula, must be broken.

Facts relating to proliferation of knowledge must also be recalled. Not all of this knowledge is extension of the old; rather it is a refutation of what we once thought. As new thought or facts are described, they sometimes supplant old ones. The overriding purpose of professional education, therefore, should not be to place emphasis on encyclopedic erudition; it should be to place emphasis on fundamental informa-

tion and the ability to deal with new facts and novel situations. What seems most important to me for the professional man is an opportunity for obtaining that vital element called insight and perhaps most importantly, for achieving value formation. In sum, I believe these elements are what constitute maturity, or at the very least, what provide the basis for mature judgment. In the ability to make mature judgment, after collecting facts and submitting them to evaluation, is the hallmark of the competent professional person.

The professional person assumes from the very beginning a life-long learning experience. This experience can be divided conveniently into two parts; a formal part consisting of the undergraduate collegiate and professional school, and the following informal part, which is primarily without structure, practically unconnected with an educational institution, and basically a self-operated and self-sustaining experience. The formal part of this learning experience is the shorter of the two, but it is fundamental to the success and value of the longer, informal period. If it has been well spent, the informal phase comes as a logical sequence; if it has been idly spent, the informal phase has little chance of success.

The first phase of the formal part of education is the period of time devoted to the cultivation of intellectual skills; the cultivation of those skills primarily is accomplished in the collegiate or undergraduate phase. Upon this cultivation depends all the rest of professional education. Few, if any, professional men return to collegiate work to sharpen their basic skills after they have attained professional status; it is a once in a lifetime opportunity. There is no one route toward professional education in any field. There is no one major that best prepares all for professional endeavor. Indeed, the strength of a profession like the strength of a professional school, depends ultimately upon the diversity of backgrounds of the individuals who comprise it. How many scientists enter the ministry?

It seems logical to me that the professional phase of formal theological education can best be taught within the traditions of the graduate schools, especially in close proximity to other kinds of professional schools. Professional theological education within seminaries, at least insofar as I have been able to observe, has taken a few steps in the direction of overture or closer relation to the social sciences, and belatedly has shown interest in the complex and interacting problems of the inner city. However, traditional interest in church history and Bible study, albeit increasingly ecumenical, has remained preeminent. I have even learned the meaning of terms like hermeneutics, exegesis, and homiletics, although they still sound like dirty words to me. Professional theology should have been in a leadership role in speaking to the pressing ethical problems of law, medicine, the environment, Black expectations, and even the privacy of the individual with respect to criminal investigation or the ubiquitous computer. The professional theologian is virtually without experience in business administration, either as it relates to the operations of his institutions or to the ethical problems of business. His somewhat cloistered seminary training has made him often unaware of and unable to deal with the changing lifestyles of young people. I have heard little discussion within the Church of the changing character of the family structure, especially as described by practicing social psychologist, James Taylor of the Menninger Foundation. He notes that the change from a pre-industrial society to a technocratic society has weakened family and clan ties, which traditionally have been the strongest societal links. Many young people, aware of this change, have sought the elements of family in the communal structure, suggesting renewed interest in old forms of tribalism. It seems not to have occurred to many that the local church congregation, in a much more communal form, might have served a

great need of young people. Preoccupation with form, denomination, being religious, a Bible-confronting perspective, and failure to assume leadership in speaking to the great ethical problems have turned young people to another form of communal structure where religion as a moving force can be explored, and where love of each person is overwhelmingly evident.

What is required is professional theological education of greater flexibility and pattern and more individualization of program than is currently in vogue. To do this calls for an unusual faculty, one not jealous of prerogatives, and one so certain of individual merit that it has no fear of losing students. To be truly revolutionary, one must provide elective programs at the expense of basic ones, or, to say it another way, to convert some of the basic programs into elective ones. We live in a specialized society, and all professions have become specialized by necessity. The time is literally past when a professional man can successfully and competently be a jack-of-all-trades. The steps to be taken by the professional theological school is to allow election of a specialty early in the professional educational process. Specialization might include penetration of other professional fields such as law, medicine or business administration, or non-professional fields such as the sciences, social sciences or computer science. This penetration could be broad and shallow for the parish minister, or could be in depth for a specialist in professional theology. Professional theological education of this kind is evidently education for versatility. Although higher education will always be concerned with learning in great depth, the specialist should be able to retain capacity to function as a generalist. Whether he actually does so depends partly on motivation, partly on the manner in which he was educated and partly on the nature of the organization in which his ability matures.

In my judgment, only within, or in close proximity to, the graduate and professional school of the university can the kind of pattern I have described take place. In such an environment a free interchange of lay faculty is possible. A pattern is provided for flexibility, versatility and capacity for transference of ideas, and permits a student to test himself in a great variety of activities that are of his own choosing.

It seems to me that this kind of professional theological education sets a pattern from the very beginning for a life-long learning experience, and can provide a professional leadership in the ministry that really leads.

Jesse Ziegler has asked the following kinds of questions:

1. Can education for ministry survive the suggestions and proposals of its friends?
2. Can the theological education enterprise survive as education for ministry by breaking the hard pattern of German-style, graduate-school education, moving into genuine education for a learned profession?
3. Can the theological education enterprise avoid bankruptcy?
4. Can theological education open up to evaluation of quality on the basis of what it can do to a person who comes to the seminary, between the time when he or she is admitted, and goes out into the ministry, instead of being evaluated on how many Ph.D.'s are on its faculty, how many buildings it has, how many million dollars it has in endowments.
5. Can theological education become genuinely binaural?
6. Can theological education find means of developing greater productivity in the educational process?

I judge that the answer is *yes*, and have proposed a model for study of theological education that derives from my own service and experience in changing geological education. Seemingly, I have convinced the Committee on Theological Education as follows:

1. It is important to determine whether the essential character

of the discipline of theology has changed, and whether there are new conceptions of basic problems.

- 2. It is important to determine whether the occupational situation in the professional practice of ministry has changed. What are the demands and opportunities in contemporary life for use of the professional ministry.
- 3. What is the background of the students who are entering theological education for the first time, A knowledge of a student's academic background, abilities, interests and the kinds of skills and understandings he has that are relevant to a particular discipline is needed.

These three kinds of information are the primary sources for ideas about what should be taught—the structure and nature of the discipline itself, the contemporary situation in life, and the consideration of what the student brings with him. These kinds of information and a coherent educational philosophy provide the background for change.

Drawing upon the experience of other professions and disciplines, a method of approach should begin with a careful examination of the entire field of theology. A record of the concepts and ideas, opinions, practices, and aims at a wide range of schools, organized, annotated and evaluated should help individual schools to find their own answers to problems and provide guides for further action on a profession-wide basis. The study should provide the critical interchange of ideas, permit observation of effective activities, and evoke additional thought and effort. An early effort should be a drawing together and correlation of all available information about other studies of theological seminaries, and the preparation of an up-to-date bibliography on the subject. Included are the Brown and May study of the 30's, the Niebuhr study, the Harrison report, the Blizzard studies, the Ministry Studies Board material, and the Fred Kling studies.

The structure and nature of the discipline itself can be approached in a variety of ways. One of the ways is to engage in an analysis of skills for the profession of the ministry. One can develop a matrix of skills versus courses. The information for this matrix could be secured through inquiry to practicing professional ministers, theologians, laymen, and seminary students. Experience indicates that key areas of skills and courses will be identified and that these areas can well become the basis for curriculum development in a variety of institutions.

The first important step in revising a curriculum is to remove the material that has become trivial. Secondly, attention should be directed toward those ideas, concepts and under-

standing that give entrance into the profession, and help the student to develop an intellectual independence. Thirdly, one should consider the means by which this kind of learning can be promoted. Next, one should consider the organization of the total curriculum. Systematic sequence pattern contributes to learning effectiveness, for the more the student uses basic modes of inquiry and basic concepts in a variety of ways, the more he becomes a part of a profession. Finally, the effectiveness of the program must be evaluated. . . .

Considerable attention should be paid to institutions, especially with respect to optimum size and funding. The Bareither Report of the University of Illinois could be the framework for providing basic background information in determination of the size and number of theological seminaries necessary. At the present time, it does not seem reasonable to eliminate seminaries until it has been determined what kinds of institutions are necessary. Should they be more like INTERMET in Washington, D.C. or like the Churches-In-Transition Program at Vanderbilt?

One evening about dusk, I was on the lake in a canoe with my wife, who is a wondrous woman having unexpected talents that have been revealed only slowly to me over the years. Nearby, a male loon began its amazing call and I expressed regret that I could not reproduce its devilish sound, for it would serve me well in terminating particularly difficult staff meetings.

My wife unexpectedly declared that she could do it, and without further consideration threw back her head and uttered the most marvelous loon call. The male loon responded and the two of them conversed for the better part of ten minutes. When they had exhausted the possible range of subject matter she remarked "I wonder what he said." I relate this incident with hope that we do not part on a similar note.

Bulletin

Special Events, 1973, at the Kansas School of Religion

- June 4-15 "Institute on Teaching About the Bible in Public Schools." Dean Lynn Taylor in charge, dealing with content and methodology, legality and propriety of studying the Bible in secondary and elementary schools.
- July 29- August 3 "Chaos Invading Cosmos—A Re-Shaping of Hope," featuring Rubem Alves and Gregory Baum, returning by request from the 1971 Consultation on Theological Reflection, co-sponsored with UMHE.

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