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The Rev. Dr. Lawrence Rast reminds us that the Church must recommit itself to the highest level of theological articulation.

RESPONSE TO DR. ALBERT COLLVER

LCMS Mission Summit, Nov. 19, 2015

by Lawrence R. Rast, Jr.

Introduction

It is important that we have clergymen and ministers who are mighty in the defense of the Word of God and in the maintenance of its purity, especially in these recent times when confusion and misfortune appear to increase daily. ... Hence, we sound this solemn warning to our dear son and his loved ones. Their father kindly but most emphatically directs that they uphold the institution of higher learning at Wittenberg, *regardless of its cost or the energy required.*¹

We'll come back to that later.

The church is changing — and that includes Lutheranism generally and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod specifically. No surprises there. The Church always experiences change, though sometimes the change is more dramatic than others.

One area of change for the American church is the impact of globalization. Dr. Collver's paper marvelously shows (1) the hermeneutical circle that is church and pastoral formation; (2) the manner in which our global partners can help us in capturing a vision for the future of pastoral formation domestically and internationally.

The increasingly global character of human life confronts the Church with the waning dominance of Europe and the West to a growing importance of China (at least economically), coupled with the emergence of the global South. Philip Jenkins' enormously influential study, *The Next Christendom*, argues that it is in the global south that Christianity is growing most rapidly and that in the next 50 to 100 years, a number of the most "Christian"

countries in the world will be found in the global south. At the same time, Jenkins alerts Western Christians to the fact that the kind of Christianity emerging in the global South will challenge certain assumptions and deeply held doctrines of the Western Church. For him church doctrine is a dynamically developing reality — not in some Hegelian, dialectical sense, but in a human, sociological sense. In other words, for Jenkins every expression of Christian doctrine is located in and subject to cultural and social influences found in the particular context in

which the doctrine is applied. This means, very simply, that doctrinal change is not only likely, it is inevitable.²

This is where the challenge — and the opportunity — for confessional Lutherans comes in. We believe that there is *the faith* — the *fides quae*, the faith once delivered to the saints, *sola gratia*,

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sola fide, *sola scriptura*, *solus Christus*. The Scriptures teach this one, true, catholic and apostolic faith — and as such, this faith is as true and unchanging as the God who revealed it in the Scriptures. The faith does not change. At the same time, we all know that the Church today exists in rapidly changing circumstances. The theological/religious questions of the post-Constantinian age in which we find ourselves are framed differently than those of Luther in the sixteenth century; just as the questions Luther framed differed from those of Augustine. Yet at the same time we strive — as did Augustine, Luther and all the faithful over the ages — to apply the unchanging message of the Gospel to these differently framed questions.

¹ Schwiebert, 27 [emphasis added].

² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford, 2002).

Lutheran commitment to handing down the *fides quae demanded* — *absolutely required* — that its clergy be intellectually capable, academically trained and articulately able. Historically, Lutherans have placed a high priority on the intellectual attainment of understanding the faith — yet it should be noted that this deep understanding of the faith always was seen ultimately in the service of teaching the faithful and reaching the lost through the clearest possible proclamation of the Gospel. And so Lutheran pastors have been theologically formed from the beginning in universities and seminaries. At the same time, however, the settings and circumstances in which Lutherans have found themselves have indeed challenged assumptions about the extent — the duration and character — of pastoral formation — a conversation that is going on even today. But I would submit it is a conversation that we need to engage more intentionally, strategically and collegially. And by collegially, I mean two things specifically: (1) that we do so within our own Synod’s context; and (2) perhaps more importantly, that we engage our international colleagues actually as colleagues. This latter is something that the Global Seminary Initiative (GSI) has begun to help us to do.

I. Lutheran Identity and the Lutheran University

Lutheranism is an intellectually demanding confession.³ In a way this is not at all historically surprising. Luther, after all, was a professor, in addition to being a pastor. And he was deeply committed to the Church’s historic, catholic, biblical confession. Lutheran identity is closely bound up with careful theological exposition of the *fides quae* — **the** faith once delivered to the saints. To put it a bit differently, the confession of the biblical witness — the *fides quae* — is the doctrinal content of in the Augsburg Confession (1530) as the foundational

³ Affirmation of the Holy Trinity — one divine essence in three persons — confession of the two natures in Christ — two natures in one person, undivided and unconfused, the justification of the sinner, the sacramental presence of Christ, the *communication idiomatum*, the *genus maiestaticum*, etc., all assume/all demand a high level of intellectual commitment and capacity on the part of one who confesses the faith fully.

confession of the Lutheran tradition, and in the Lutheran Symbols that make up the Book of Concord 1580, *because* these Lutheran Confessions are a faithful exposition of the doctrine of the Scriptures.

Hopefully there are no surprises in such statements — at least among this audience. But saying this is what we believe and what we are is different from doing it. While Wittenberg was the obvious center of the Lutheran educational enterprise in the first century of German Lutheranism, without Frederick the Wise (d. 1525), John the Steadfast (d.1532) and, perhaps especially, John Frederick (d. 1554) — all electors of Saxony — it is unlikely that the Lutheran Reformation would have succeeded as it did.⁴ Indeed, as John the Steadfast lay dying, he charged his son John Frederick to maintain the educational work begun at Wittenberg.⁵

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It is important that we have clergymen and ministers who are mighty in the defense of the Word of God and in the maintenance of its purity, especially in these recent times when confusion and misfortune appear to increase daily... Hence, we sound this solemn warning to our dear son and his loved ones. Their father kindly but most emphatically directs that they uphold the institution of higher learning at Wittenberg, *regardless of its cost or the energy required*.

Hear those words again: “regardless of the cost or the energy required.” This is a remarkable statement in that it underscores the centrality of education for the success of the Lutheran endeavor — delivered as the elector lay dying it shows how near this was to his mind — and his heart. The prince knew that without well-formed, articulate pastors, the Reformation would struggle to survive. That remains true today.

The drafting of an educational method and a set of pedagogical assumptions fell, in the end, to Philip Melancthon. In 1533 he drafted the *Statutes*, which

⁴ Note on Frederick biography.

⁵ Schwiebert, 27 [emphasis added].

outlined how the university would operate and what formation of students involved. First and foremost, Melancthon pointed to the Augsburg Confession because it confessed “the true and perpetual teaching of the Catholic Church.” In short, “Wittenberg’s theology would not be new, but Apostolic.”⁶

What was important was the Church’s confession of the Gospel, which Lutherans were convinced that Luther had recovered through his reading of the Scripture and that had been rightly confessed in the Augustana. Pastoral formation was a process of shaping a man in the Church’s confession so that he might preach the Scripture in its truth and purity.

This kind of intense pastoral formation took time and money. We’ve seen how John the Steadfast made provision for this. Assumptions regarding the time that this took were embedded within the process of higher education itself.

II. The Substantive Issue — When Is a Man “Apt to Teach”?

The biblical requirements for the candidate for the Office of the Ministry are well known to us all.

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money” (1 Tim. 3:1–3).

“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1–3).

“The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2 Tim. 2:22–26).

⁶ Ibid, 29.

The Scripture is clear on the requirements for pastoral candidates; the question for us has at least two aspects: (1) what does this mean for us in our context(s); and (2) how do we do this?

III. Context

Several years ago now, Daniel Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools, peered into the uncertain future of theological education and offered these thoughts on where theological schools might be in twenty-five years or so. First, he offered three dominant external pressures that he believes will shape the experience of theological schools. I’ll offer them in bullet form with little comment.

1. *The changing social status of religion in American cul-*

ture. “The culture-shaping power of religion has weakened and continues to dissipate — not because the seminaries are employing or educating less talented people, but because the broader culture has reassigned religion from a social

role of culture shaper to one that is more personal and private.”

2. *A demographic shift.* “By 2040 the American population will have completed a fundamental shift that began in the late nineteenth century: this nation of immigrants largely from Europe and the British Isles will become a nation in which ‘white’ will be the racial minority.”

3. *The shifting character of Protestantism.* “If the current mainline trends continue for the next two decades, a significant number of congregations will close, and a considerably larger number will have joined the ranks of those that used to be able to support a full-time pastor but are no longer able to do so. The enrollments of mainline Protestant theological schools will be influenced by the number of positions available for graduates. Enrollments in evangelical Protestant schools are not as closely related to pastoral positions because evangelicals tend to be more free-market and networked in their structures.”

Second, he expounded on the characteristics of theological schools. I’ve included five here.

1. *Multiracial and multiethnic.* “The majority of the student bodies of most seminaries will comprise racial/ethnic students.”

2. *A changed community of theological schools.* “New schools will reflect the growing edges of American

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religion, as they always have, while schools that close will most typically be related to religious movements that have declined or lost their unique identity.”

3. Educational diversity. “Theological education practices will be more diverse in almost every way. Schools will have to decide what practices they will engage, discern why they choose the practices they do, and assess the impact on mission and service that is inherent in their choices. Seminaries will be much more different from one another than they are now. Even within one degree program, such as the MDiv, there will be greater educational variability.”⁷

4. Continuation of current patterns of institutional support. “Future financial realities will resemble and amplify the current financial status of schools. The dominant patterns of funding will be either endowment or current gifts from a committed constituency. *Denominational support*, except for Roman Catholic schools and a handful of Protestant schools, *will be gone for all practical purposes*. Schools will have expanded missions and programs in an effort to broaden their bases of support, but individuals will continue to be the primary source of institutional support.

5. Different facilities. “The facilities for most Protestant schools will be built or modified to sustain program more than community. [*Seminary facilities will look more like a University of Phoenix location* than a traditional liberal arts campus. They will have classrooms and offices, gathering spaces, and information commons, but they will *not* have the residential, eating, and recreational space that support communities of people who live and study together.] For many schools, facilities will reflect the programmatic needs of a web of educational programming

⁷ Here the perspective of Anya Kamenetz is particularly important (DIY U: *Edupunks, Edupreneurs, and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education* [White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green, 2010], xi): “Self-directed learning will be increasingly important. Already, the majority of students attend more than one institution during their college careers, and more than half seek to enhance their experience with an internship. In the future, with the increasing availability of online courses and other resources, individuals will increasingly forge a personal learning path, combining classroom and online learning, work and other experience.” In “Pastors by Degree,” (Christian Century [December 15, 2009]), L. Gregory Jones, Dean of Duke Divinity School, wondered whether there will even be an M.Div. degree in thirty years.

that brings more people to campus for shorter periods of time, blends learning that is both web and classroom based, provides classroom instruction simultaneously in multiple locations, and utilizes contexts of ministry for more educational purposes. All of these, of course, already exist, but they exist for some schools and as exceptions to the norm. In another twenty-two years, they will likely be the normative pattern.

On this last point, it is striking that just last week, the Religious News Service published an article that outlined the sale of the historic campus of Andover Newton⁸ A couple of paragraphs from that article:

And over Newton’s move is likely a harbinger of what lies ahead for about 80 percent of America’s 100 mainline seminaries, according to Daniel Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools. Built more than a century ago, they’ve relied primarily on residential education models that are fast becoming unsustainably expensive and ill-suited to current needs.

“Andover Newton is a canary in the mineshaft on the issue of, ‘what is the future of mainline institutions?’” Aleshire said. “You’re going to see some mainline schools seek to affiliate with other larger institutions. And the primary reason for that is the reduction of their indirect costs.”

What we see from this canary in the coal mine is the quickly shifting reality for many seminaries in the United States and Canada. Increasing costs are driving many seminaries out of their historic buildings and into cooperative relationships that were unthinkable a generation ago. We’ve had conversations along these lines ourselves.⁹ But the conversation has usually been a bottom line one — ways to reduce costs. Of course that’s important. But the first question should be, how we understand the biblical injunction of “apt to teach,” and, having defined that, we can then turn to the questions of *how* we get there institutionally and financially.

⁸ G. Jeffrey MacDonald, “Oldest US Graduate Seminary to Close Campus,” Religious News Service, November 13, 2015, <http://www.religionnews.com/2015/11/13/oldest-u-s-graduate-seminary-to-close-campus-denominations-secularization-andover-theological/>, accessed November 17, 2015.

⁹ Sauer in *FL*.

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Conclusion

Lest we end on an especially negative note, let us return to the biblical texts that frame this convention's work.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42).

Note how God's people "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship." There is no theological synergism here. This is the response of the regenerated will of God's people called by the Spirit through the Word and Sacraments. It is something that they *work* at, something they commit themselves to.

In the post-Constantinian West, the Church must recommit itself to the highest level of theological articulation. This is what our GSI colleagues are challenging us to do. Their desires are becoming the new benchmark in an increasingly minimalistic American context. But pastoral formation is never an end in itself, nor is it primarily about institutional survival, whether that be Synod, seminary, district or any other institution. It is all for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel to a world that increasingly no longer shares basic Christian assumptions about the Bible, sin and redemption.

It is important that we have clergymen and ministers who are mighty in the defense of the Word of God and in the maintenance of its purity, especially in these recent times when confusion and misfortune appear to increase daily. ... Hence, we sound this solemn warning to our dear son and his loved ones. Their father kindly but most emphatically directs that they uphold the institution of higher learning at Wittenberg, *regardless of its cost or the energy required*.¹⁰

The Rev. Dr. Lawrence R. Rast, Jr., is president of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

¹⁰ Schwiebert, 27 [emphasis added].