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CHAPTER XII

PREPARING TEACHERS AT THE SEMINARY

David Ewert

Whereas the apostle James warned, "Let not many of you become teachers" (James 3:1), the teacher is God's gift to the church (Eph. 4:11). Indeed the teachers are listed with the apostles and prophets as those who laid the foundation of the Christian Church (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20). That the gift of apostleship and prophecy overlapped with that of teaching can be seen, for example, in Paul's claim that he was a preacher and apostle, "a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (I Tim. 2:7). Moreover, it was from among the prophets and teachers in the local congregation of Antioch that Paul and Barnabas were selected as missionaries (Acts 13:1).

We should, therefore, not make too sharp a distinction between *kerygma* (proclamation) and *didache* (teaching). Luke reports that when Paul was in Rome he *preached* the kingdom of God and *taught* about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31). If a sermon is to edify it must have some teaching content. On the other hand, the teacher of Biblical subjects should not neglect the hortatory element in his lectures.

Interestingly, in our Mennonite tradition the preaching ministry used to be called *der Lehrdienst* (the teaching ministry). If then the Seminary seeks to prepare teachers for the church (as the title of this chapter suggests), this must be understood to include the pastoral ministry, teaching in church schools, as well as evangelistic ministries at home and abroad. In the long list of spiritual and moral qualifications for church leadership given in I Timothy 3, only one skill or ability is mentioned, namely the ability to teach (I

Tim. 3:2). (From I Timothy 5:17, however, it could be gathered that there were also non-teaching elders.) Obviously the high calling to care for the church of God demands more of a church leader than the ability to teach (I Tim. 3:4,5), but teaching is given a central place.

The teachers of the Early Church were generally called from the ranks of the local congregation. Schools for the training of church leaders who could instruct the congregations in the Christian faith had not yet been raised up. This has led some sincere believers to raise the question as to whether a denomination that seeks to be a New Testament church should have a seminary at all. Are we not buying into a professional ministry by encouraging pastors, teachers and missionaries to seek seminary training? Has not the seminary model of Christian education been taken over by the church from the university? If so, is it a model that fits into the life of the church at all?

While these are legitimate questions it should not be overlooked that the Sunday school also was not known in New Testament times. In fact the Sunday school is historically of fairly recent innovation, and there are countries with repressive regimes in which Sunday schools are forbidden. When a Baptist delegation from the Soviet Union visited the United States several years ago, these representatives of a suffering church were asked how it was possible to function as a church without a Sunday school. Their answer was: the Early Church (also a suffering church) did not have Sunday schools either.

Why do I mention this parallel? To illustrate that the Church has always felt free to borrow educational models from its surrounding culture and to 'baptize' these into Christ. In fact the Early Church's worship was patterned largely after the Jewish synagogue service and, although a deep cleavage developed between church and synagogue, it never occurred even to Gentile churches that they should restructure their worship service in order to set themselves off as clearly as possible from the Jewish synagogue.

If then our Brotherhood, under the guidance of the Spirit, develops educational structures which it can afford and which serve its needs, it is not necessarily departing from New Testament ideals, even if such structures were

not known in the first century. Paul's words to Timothy: "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others" (II Tim. 2:2), express a permanent obligation of the church, regardless of what educational models it may adopt.

Our North American Mennonite Brethren have developed a number of institutions for the training of its youth—the Christian academy, the Bible institute, the Bible college and the liberal arts college. In 1975 the Mennonite Brethren of the United States and Canada joined hands in an effort to give the future teachers of our churches, schools and mission fields a seminary education. The Seminary views itself as an arm of the church, working together with it in fulfilling its mission here on earth.

The Seminary is, of course, only one of a number of agencies participating in the training of teachers for the church. It would be highly presumptuous for the Seminary to think that it could prepare ministers of the Word in the brief span of two or three years. Before students enroll at the Seminary many others have contributed to their development—the home, the church, the schools. The Seminary simply builds on the foundations laid by others.

We might begin, then, by asking: What kind of *prerequisites* does the Seminary look for in its students? From here we shall go on to describe the Seminary's *programs* of study. Next we shall focus on the *patterns* of theological education which the Seminary encourages. Finally, we must say a few words on the *purpose* of seminary training for the Mennonite Brethren Church.

I. PREREQUISITES FOR SEMINARY TRAINING

Those who are interested in the formal entrance requirements of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary are encouraged to peruse the current seminary catalogue. Since the Seminary is a graduate school it is expected that students have a bachelor's degree. However, mature students, without a college degree also are encouraged to enroll. Graduate students are asked to take the Graduate Record Examination as well as several other entrance tests.

In such matters the Seminary is no different from the university—just as the nomenclature of at least one of its degree programs (M.A.) stems from the university. In what respect, then, does the Seminary differ from a state school? What is it that makes it a service agency of the church?

First, in the *dedication* of its students. By dedication we do not mean that seminary students are necessarily more avid students than those of other institutions, but rather that they have dedicated their lives to Jesus Christ and seek to follow Him in daily life. And since the confession that one belongs to Christ is expressed in baptism, the Seminary accepts only such students who are members of a Christian community.

Because the Seminary holds to the unity of all believers, regardless of color, race, sex or religious affiliation, it welcomes students from other Christian traditions. The interaction of Mennonite Brethren students with those of other denominations has proved to be a very fruitful learning experience. Since, however, the Seminary was raised up specifically to serve the Mennonite Brethren Church, it is the Seminary's policy that at least fifty percent of the regular student body belong to the Mennonite Brethren Church. All full-time faculty, however, must be members of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Secondly, students who come to seminary (other than for personal enrichment) should have a deep sense of *vocation*. Without the conviction that God has called them to be his servants, students will find it hard to make the adjustments Seminary training requires and to face the rigors of three years of study. Like Jeremiah of old, students must feel the fire in their bones which will not allow them to quit when the going gets tough.

How the student arrives at this sense of calling varies considerably. Some can tell of a place where and a time when they heard God ask them, as he asked Isaiah long ago: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" With others it is a growing conviction over many years. In fact some students come to Seminary to have their call to spiritual ministry clarified. Others have already had this call strongly affirmed by their home church. Indeed, some students

who come for seminary training have been ordained to the ministry of the gospel.

Whether the seminary graduate becomes a pastor, a missionary, a teacher in a church school, or enters some other form of Christian service is not really the issue when a student enters seminary. What is important, however, is that the student have the deep conviction that God has laid his hand on him or her and is asking him or her to prepare for service in the great harvest field of the world.

Thirdly, students who have dedicated their lives to Christ, and have a sense of divine vocation, must also have the necessary qualifications to be teachers of the Word. Students who have tested their gifts in teaching or preaching experiences before they enroll at seminary can study with much greater assurance than those who come straight out of college or university without having had the opportunity to have their teaching gifts affirmed. Students who have taught in public schools for several years or who have taught Bible classes in their home congregations know better where their strengths and weaknesses lie than those who have never taught.

We believe that when God calls us to some form of service in his kingdom that he equips us for such a task. When then a person claims to have heard God's call to the teaching ministry, but lacks the necessary gifts to fulfill that calling, one must seriously ask whether God's call has been properly understood.

Everyone knows, of course, that people of modest ability, who yield their lives to God in humble obedience, can be used mightily by God. If, however, one is called to the ministry of the Word, the gift of teaching is absolutely essential. The seminary can give a student good tools to facilitate the communication of the Bible message, and practice will help to develop a person's abilities, but the seminary cannot give a student the 'gift' of teaching. Sometimes, of course, this gift is latent and needs to be fanned into flame, but every person who proclaims God's message should be able to say with Paul, "Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power" (Eph. 3:7).

We have isolated three prerequisites for seminary train-

ing, which set the Seminary off from the university and which define it as an arm of the church. But, we may ask, if we take seriously the priesthood of all believers, is it right to limit enrollment at the Seminary to people who meet these requirements? Hardly! For that reason the Seminary classes are open also to those who do not feel called to the teaching ministry, but who want to deepen and to enrich their lives through the courses of study offered at the Seminary.

Moreover, an increasing number of women are being attracted to the Seminary, not only for personal enrichment but because the Seminary offers them the kind of training they need for their professional life, both within and beyond the confines of the church. Some hope to be Bible teachers in Third World countries, others plan to teach the Word here at home. The Seminary is happy to enroll Christian women in its courses.

Having then singled out several prerequisites for seminary training, let us turn next to the programs of study offered at the Seminary which are designed to train people for the teaching ministry.

II. PROGRAMS OF STUDY AT THE SEMINARY

If the program of studies at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary should be entirely like that of any other evangelical seminary, the Seminary would not be true to its mission. If there should be nothing singular about a Mennonite Brethren seminary, one must ask seriously: "Why have one?" After all, there are plenty of other good evangelical seminaries in the country. On the other hand, it would be precarious for any seminary to be so unique that it becomes irrelevant. It may then in fact be a 'cemetery'—as some wags like to speak of seminaries in any case.

What should the curriculum of a Mennonite Brethren Biblical seminary look like? We do not intend to name courses but shall rather single out three emphases which may be understood as a kind of commentary on the seminary's official name.

First, the seminary's curriculum must be *Biblical* in em-

phasis. Our Anabaptist forebears were known as radical Bible readers. They called the churches of the 16th century to shake off tradition and return to their roots—the Bible. It is only appropriate, then, that our school should be called a Biblical seminary. Everyone knows, of course, that calling it Biblical will not make it so in reality, but the curriculum must reflect this concern.

A Biblical seminary with an Anabaptist orientation must open up the fountains of living water to its students by breaking through the language barrier which lies between the English and the Hebrew and the Greek Bible. For this reason the seminary asks all students in the Master of Divinity program and those majoring in Biblical Studies in the Master of Arts program to get a basic training in the Biblical languages.

Sometimes people who did not have the opportunity (or the willingness) to study the Biblical languages speak slightly of those who do. Students are told that learning Greek and Hebrew is a waste of time. When we have so many good English translations, why bother with Greek? How much Greek can one learn in two years? And so it goes.

What these critics fail to see is that two years of Greek gives a student a good grasp of the grammar and vocabulary of the Greek New Testament (and this holds true for the Hebrew as well). Moreover, it is not only what the student later makes of the Greek and Hebrew (many forget their conjugations), but what these languages do to their understanding of the mind of the Biblical writers. And not least in importance, is the ability of students who have some knowledge of Greek and Hebrew to read the best commentaries available (which are based on the Hebrew and Greek texts)—not to mention the rich resources found in Hebrew and Greek concordances, dictionaries and word studies. Also, it is quite impossible to evaluate English translations of the Bible for accuracy, without a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew.

The study of the Biblical languages is by itself a study of the culture of the Near East, and without some understanding of the Near East, serious errors are often made in the interpretation of the Bible. God's revelation took place

in history, and so a knowledge of the history, geography, religion, and everyday life of ancient Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia, helps to put the Old Testament into proper context. And how could one possibly have a good grasp of the New Testament message without some knowledge of Palestine at the time of Christ, not to mention Hellenism and the Roman world? For this reason the Seminary requires all students to do some work in Old and New Testament backgrounds.

C.H. Dodd, famous Cambridge professor of New Testament, has expressed the importance of becoming conversant with the world of the Bible:

The ideal interpreter should be one who has entered into that strange first-century world, has felt its whole strangeness, has sojourned in it until he has lived himself into it, thinking and feeling as one of those to whom the Gospel first came, and who will then return into our world, and give to the truth he has discovered a body out of the stuff of his own thought.¹

Seminaries have at times been accused of teaching much about the Bible and too little actual exegesis of the Biblical books. We would be greatly remiss if we helped students to hone their tools for Bible study without ever studying the Scriptures themselves. The Seminary, therefore, offers a goodly number of Old Testament book studies every year, and most of the 27 books of the New Testament are offered as exegetical courses.

These exegetical courses give the student not only a rich supply of materials which can be worked into sermons, but they also introduce the student to the principles of hermeneutics. The principles of interpreting the Scriptures are learned best by practice. Moreover, quite apart from all other values, exegesis courses are a constant source of spiritual renewal and formation.

"It is pointless," said Spurgeon in his day, "to claim to be merely Biblical, when the whole question is what do the Scriptures actually teach on certain issues . . . No one can say that the Bible is his creed, unless he can express it in words of his own." In its courses in Old and New Testament Theology the seminary seeks to integrate the various

disciplines of Biblical study and come to grips with the basic strands of theology.

True Biblicism, however, resists the temptation to express the great doctrines of the Bible in categories alien to the Bible. True Biblicism seeks to set the Word free; to let it speak its own language and message. It refuses to force Scripture into logic-tight systems of thought. If, for example, Jesus and the apostles warn against apostasy, but also proclaim the security of the believer in Christ, so be it! One must then not force the alternative passages into an artificial harmony, but allow them to speak their own messages to us as we need them.

The Mennonite Brethren Church claims to be basically a non-creedal church and, because of its emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, it encourages all members of the church to study the Bible for themselves. This openness, however, can easily encourage an individualism that leads to doctrinal confusion. For this reason the Mennonite Brethren have a Confession of Faith, in which its understanding of the main biblical doctrines are set forth. This Confession, however, claims that the Bible is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice, and so this Confession, too, is subject to the Word of God. It is, however, only to be expected that all Seminary faculty members subscribe wholeheartedly to this Confession of Faith.

Secondly, the Seminary must also introduce its students to the history of the Christian church and its thought. There must be an emphasis on the *historical* in the curriculum. We do well to recall the words of Santayana: "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it." The Seminary, therefore, offers an array of courses which, for want of a better term, may be described as 'historical theology', which embraces both the history of the Church and the history of its theology.

A knowledge of the history of the Church has several benefits. One, it can be of great encouragement to us in times of distress and darkness. To know that God sustained his people in the midst of deepest gloom and let the light of his revelation break through the clouds of despair, again and again, gives us hope and confidence that he will do so again. The Church, the Body of Christ, is somewhat like her

Lord; she may die on Good Friday, but rises again on Easter Sunday morning. That puts heart into God's servants who are laboring faithfully in the building of the Church.

Also, some knowledge of the Church's history lifts us out of our provincialism. Everyone who is loyal to his or her denomination faces the temptation of equating God's work with his or her particular tradition. Acquaintance with the wider Christian community helps to put the work, the problems, the successes and the goals of one's denomination in perspective.

To be informed on the history of Christian thought also serves as a guide and corrective for a person's theological reflections (and every sermon represents such reflections). Many an error in the Church could have been avoided if one had known from history that this error had been made before. I had a professor at Wheaton College who used to say: "If it's true it isn't new; and if it's new it isn't true." That's not in the Bible, but it's an observation worth pondering.

Of special significance in a Mennonite Brethren Biblical seminary is, as one might expect, the history of the Mennonites and their forerunners the Anabaptists. Just as every Presbyterian seminary would introduce its students to Calvin's theology, and every Methodist seminary acquaints its students with the life and teachings of John Wesley, so also must a Mennonite seminary show its students where the historical and theological roots of our Brotherhood lie. Sometimes, it seems, we are so desperate in our attempts to be relevant that one gets the impression that we have no past, at least not a worthwhile one. Seminaries at times fall into the temptations of being so pertinent to modern culture that they have little to say to that culture.

Quite contrary to the opinion of some, an interest in Anabaptist-Mennonite history does not represent an attempt by starry-eyed idealists to return to the 16th century. First of all, that is quite impossible, and secondly, not everything that happened in the 16th century is worthy of imitation. But there was also much that remains permanently valid. Above all, the Anabaptist movement represented a serious effort to return to the New Testament. A

knowledge of Anabaptist theology serves then like a grid through which we can see certain truths of the New Testament more clearly.

Much of what our forebears discovered in the Scriptures, and for which many of them died, is today a common heritage of evangelical Christianity. Denominational pride, therefore, is to be condemned, but an appreciation for our spiritual heritage is to be encouraged. It strikes one as singularly strange that some of our congregations so readily appoint pastors who know very little about our history or our theology.

What are some of the emphases in our Anabaptist heritage? There is the concept of the believers' church as a covenant community, including the discipline by the community of those who violate this covenant. There is the emphasis on discipleship as a way of life which flows out of conversion to Christ as Lord. Also, one is reminded of the great importance of missions and evangelism in the Anabaptist movement. Then there is the separation of church and state, including a strong witness to peace and non-resistance. Moreover, an appreciation of our heritage teaches us to identify with the poor, the oppressed, the refugees and the displaced persons.

Quite properly it may be contended that the Anabaptists are not our model; we take our cues from the New Testament. Precisely! But are not all of these great truths deeply anchored in the New Testament? A knowledge of the 16th century helps us to see these truths more clearly as Biblical teachings.

Will not our interest in our past make us sectarian? Should we not rather develop an appreciation for that which we have in common with other evangelical churches? Experience seems to demonstrate that those who have come to terms with their own church's tradition have the strength to transcend it and to appreciate other traditions without being threatened by them. Our distinctives become important to us only against the background of what we have in common with other denominations. And only as we learn to appreciate them can we share with others. If we recognize that all insights into God's ways come to us freely by his grace, and if we are deeply aware of our own sinfulness and

failure, we shall be kept from spiritual pride. There is a vast difference between loyalty to one's denomination and denominationalism.

When our Brotherhood accepted the Seminary as a General Conference school in 1975, it affirmed that the philosophy of education at the Seminary was to be not only 'Bible-centered' but also 'history-centered'.² There was, however, another emphasis which our Brotherhood wanted to see in our curriculum, namely that it should be 'church-centered'. And that leads us to a third focus in our Seminary's teaching program, namely the *practical*.

To be teachers of the Word in the local congregation calls for an understanding and appreciation of the church's Christian education program—whatever form it may take. Whether a pastor himself teaches a Bible-class on Sunday mornings or some weekday evening is not our concern at this point; we simply want to underscore the great need for good Bible teaching in the church and the pastor's role in Christian education. For this reason all students in the Seminary's Master of Divinity program receive some basic training in the field of Christian Education. Also, the Seminary offers a Master of Arts program with a Christian Education major for those who wish to specialize in this field.

Another area in which the Seminary enters into the life of the church is in its emphasis on mission and evangelism. Not only does it offer a Master's program in mission but it seeks to foster an interest in winning people to Christ in all of its students. It is hoped that all Seminary graduates, whether they enter the pastoral ministry or some mission program, will be active in evangelism and church planting. It was in the Radical Reformation that the missionary implications of the priesthood of all believers were worked out.³ The church is missionary or else it is not a church.⁴ To participate in Christ is to share in his mission. "As the Father has sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21). There is no other kind of church, according to the New Testament, than the 'apostolic', the 'sent' church. The church is not engaged in mission as a wealthy man throwing crumbs to a beggar, but as a farmer who sows precious seed, fully aware that his very life depends on the harvest. Without mission the

church withers and dies. The Seminary, therefore, has no option in the matter of mission. Mission is not the hobby of a few believers, but the calling of all.

Whether a student goes into urban ministries, foreign mission, or pastoral work, he must be able to proclaim God's message. For that reason the Seminary puts a strong emphasis on preaching. A pastor may not always have the gift of administration or be a specialist in counseling, but if he can open up the Scriptures to the congregation so that its message comes alive he will have an effective ministry.

Preaching stands at the center of the worship in the church, for the sermon interprets for the people of God the meaning of God's great acts of redemption. It is through preaching that the church remains in touch with the apostolic age. Unfortunately the sermon is often a kind of postscript to the worship service.

R.T. Kendall, an American who now ministers in England, writes:

There is a widespread notion that preaching in the traditional sense is irrelevant for today's generation. I am sympathetic with this mood to some extent. I'd much prefer dialogue to most monologues I've heard. And who wouldn't prefer guitar-strumming, or holding hands in a circle . . . to what is most readily available today? The vogue approach to worship is at least an attractive alternative to the affected tone and mannerisms of so many clerics . . . Preaching became irrelevant because preachers did not know what to preach. Preaching is preaching only when it is the Bible that is expounded. But as a robust conviction in the Divine inspiration of Scriptures has diminished, so has preaching. A preacher is at home in the pulpit only when he is at home in God's Word.⁵

I am sure we all resonate with that observation. From my own experience I can testify that the awakening, renewal and the formation of my spiritual life in my teenage years can be attributed to the sermons I heard. Granted, the preachers in my youth (and we had a number of them, since our church practiced the multiple-ministry) did not have the

mass media to contend with in their demand for attention as we do today, but Spurgeon's counsel, that people will pay attention when you give them something to attend to, is still valid, I should think.

While there are many more subjects in a seminary curriculum than a student could possibly take in three years, it would be a great pity if a student did not avail himself of the courses on Preaching offered at the Seminary.

The course offerings at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary are designed to equip the student to think Biblically, to get a better grasp of the church's history and thought, and to develop his God-given gifts of communicating the Gospel.

From the prerequisites and the programs we turn now to some patterns of theological education which we believe to be significant in the training of others to become teachers of the Word.

III. PATTERNS OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

I once heard a seminarian of another denomination make the observation that at the university he had found no 'heart' and when he came to seminary he found no 'head'. The contrast was obviously overdrawn, but his observation points to the conflict that seminarians often experience in their attempt to keep 'heart' and 'mind' in proper perspective. Phillips Brooks, the great 19th century preacher of Boston, was taken aback when at the beginning of his seminary training he noticed that some students who were very punctual at worship came to class with unprepared lessons. "The boiler had no connection with the engine," was Brooks' criticism. Although deeply devout himself, Brooks wrote to a friend: "When you are coming to see me? Leave your intellect behind; you don't need it here."⁶

It would be great gain if we could all come to a healthy holistic attitude toward the use of all our God-given powers in the service of God. In one of the statues of Augustine, which stands in an Augustinian chapel in Paris, the great African theologian holds in his hand an open book with a heart on it, to symbolize the synthesis of heart and mind—

so obvious in the life of this influential churchman and scholar.

If God calls people to prepare themselves to be teachers of the Word at seminary, then seminary studies themselves must be looked upon as a sacred vocation, a sacrifice which the student brings daily to God, an act of devotion. Students are sometimes discouraged from entering joyfully into their studies by warnings that study will quench the Spirit in their life. But why should studies be inimical to worship or fellowship when each of these activities is done in its place? A well-rounded theological education calls for a number of ingredients, which I would like to call patterns of theological education. We begin with the *classroom*.

Whatever the method of teaching that a professor may employ, the purpose of the classroom is to impart useful information on the various subjects in the curriculum. Faculty members are appointed presumably because they have some expertise in these subjects and can impart such information. Whereas it is hoped that students who graduate will continue their quest for such information as is needed to make them effective teachers of the Word, the seminary classroom can lay a good foundation for this quest. A pastor who regularly prayed for power before he preached was gently reproached by a faithful hearer of the Word, that it was not so much 'power' he needed as 'ideas'. An informative sermon or Bible lesson (other things being equal) always captures people's interest more readily than one that is entirely hortatory.

In our day the emphasis on experience has led some devout Bible students to believe that the mastery of a body of facts in Biblical studies is of little consequence. John Mackay warns:

"Just as ideas about God can become substitutes for the personal awareness of God's reality, so an emotion, expressive of some form of religious experience, but not necessarily involving meaningful contact with God, can become a substitute for a personal relationship with God and devotion to him. Religious emotions, like theological ideas, can become ends to themselves."⁷

Heart and mind clearly beong together.

Paul stresses the need not only of experiencing Christ at deeper levels (e.g. Phil. 3:10ff.), but also for a good grasp of the Biblical 'traditions', the 'deposit of faith'.

"In view of the relativism of so much contemporary thought it is worth emphasizing the crucial importance of truth. It has well been said that by and large men today are more interested in what helps than in what is true, in what they are doing by way of works of love than in what they believe. This is the atmosphere in which we must live out our lives, the very air we breathe. It tends to make our generation impatient of serious discussions of what is true. It is apt to dismiss such inquiries as hair-splitting and to return with relief to the more congenial task of enjoying life."⁸

The manner in which a professor communicates knowledge is often as important as the information itself. Of a famous professor of Greek it was said that when he wrote the word *doxa* (glory) on the board, the classroom seemed in fact to be full of the glory of God. When students sense that the professor is seeking to 'do the truth' just as they are; if he comes to the Scriptures with deep humility, standing, as it were, 'under' the Word of God, the classroom can at times become a veritable house of God.

The spirit in which the instruction is given is as important as the content of the lecture. The great British missionary statesman, Max Warren, tells of one of his teachers who took his spiritual fumbings seriously, never exploited his ignorance, and always treated him with respect. "He never tried to give easy answers to difficult questions, and so I began to learn that in the life of the Spirit there are no easy answers. I sometimes forgot this later on, but the basic lesson stuck. It was worth learning if one was ever to be a leader in helping others to discover truth."⁹

When it comes to the unshakeable verities of the Word of God a professor in an evangelical seminary is expected to be unyielding; dogmatic if you like. But there are so many areas of knowledge in which one must allow for options. Openness to new insights is a highly prized attitude. Of course, if one never shuts the doors on anything, one's mind can become rather draughty. Of the Athenians it was said

that they spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new (Acts 17:21). They were interested only in dating theological girls—to use the language of John Mackay—rather than marrying great ideas.¹⁰

Work in the *classroom*, however, needs to be supplemented with work in the *library*. Only part of a student's week is spent in lecture halls. Much of his time is spent in the library. To be a teacher of the Word one must learn where to find useful information if one's well is not to run dry in the ministry. The late Dr. A.H. Unruh used to say that a housewife may have all the tools to prepare a dinner but if the cupboard is bare these are of little use. Students must learn to re-stock their mental and spiritual cupboards by reading.

Samuel Johnson in his day wondered where people had got the idea that one could learn only in lecture halls. He thought that the reading of books (from which the lectures were probably taken) could do much more for a person. When Paul lay in prison he begged Timothy to bring him "the books and the parchments" (II Tim. 4:13).

The books in any good seminary library represent a broad stream of Christian (and non-Christian) thought. Here a student discovers the contributions of Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist and other thinkers to our understanding of the Christian faith. Often it is only against the background of other traditions that we learn to understand one's own, see its distinctiveness and discover its strengths and weaknesses.

Through his work in the library the student discovers for himself the most useful tools to carry on his studies after he leaves seminary. By demanding that students read in areas in which they may have no interest initially, professors often open up new veins from which gold can be mined. William Barclay's counsel to ministers holds also for seminary students: "If there is one bit of good advice in regard to study, it is to keep always on one's desk at least one great difficult book, a book which really stretches the ming."¹¹

It is said of the Scottish divine, John Baillie, that he combined the affectionate faith of a little child with the

poorly trained, but because he could not get along with people.

Naturally *koinonia* is not something that one learns in five easy lessons. It is something that one must exercise throughout life, and all that Seminary can do is to make students and faculty sensitive to this need and to encourage its exercise.

Having mentioned some prerequisites, described the program of studies, singled out some patterns in theological education, let me conclude with a few comments on the purpose of seminary studies. Assuming the Seminary accomplishes its stated purpose (to prepare teachers of the Word), how might this effect the church? We said earlier that the Seminary is not an end in itself; it is but a means to a higher purpose. What might this be?

IV. THE PURPOSE OF SEMINARY STUDIES

One of the purposes of training at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary is the *unification* of our churches in doctrine and practice. The strong influence of American individualism is a constant threat to the unity of our Brotherhood. In the past our ethnicity or closely-knit communities may have served as adhesives, but through urbanization and our mission efforts these bonds have become less significant, and so it is mandatory that we put a greater emphasis on unity in doctrine and practice. The Seminary sees itself as an agency helping our churches to maintain that unity.

This does not mean, however, that the Seminary is there simply to defend and endorse the *status quo* of the church. Our Brotherhood expects the Seminary to be on the cutting edge of the church's life. We might say, then, that another purpose of seminary education is *examination*.

Our churches live and work in the cross-currents of modern culture. They are constantly bombarded with novel ideas, complex problems, new challenges. This drives the church constantly back to the Scriptures, and the Seminary seeks to help students work through current issues, for this is what they will have to keep on doing wherever they minister in the future.

This means that even some traditional views and practices may have to be reexamined again and again to see whether we as a Brotherhood have understood correctly what God desires of us. E. Stanley Jones, who spent most of his life in India as a missionary, confessed later that he went to India with his theology neat and tied up with a blue ribbon, and felt that all he had to do was to defend what he believed. Then God showed him that it was wrong for him to be nervous about his theology, and that he must be free to explore new truth. After he had accepted Christ as his compass, as he put it, he felt free to investigate God's truth—free because he was anchored. So the Seminary must be anchored to the Rock, but geared to the times.¹⁵

Finally, the Seminary is there to bring seminarians and, through them, also the church to maturity in Christ. This purpose may be called *edification*. Perhaps we can do no better than to express this in the words of Paul to the Ephesians: "And his gifts were that some should be . . . teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood . . ." (4:11-13).

Who is sufficient for these things? We are not. But through the intercessory prayers and the support of our Brotherhood God may, in his grace, use the Seminary to train those whom he has called, so that they be "able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2).

NOTES

- 1 C.H. Dodd, "Theologian of Our Time," *Expository Times* 75 (1964), p. 102.
- 2 Yearbook of the 53rd Session of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches (The Christian Press, 1975), pp. 21-26.
- 3 J. Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (Lutterworth Press, 1962), p. 120.
- 4 G.H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Westminster Press, 1962), p. 845.
- 5 R.T. Kendall, "Preaching in Worship," *Themelios* (April, 1979), p. 89.
- 6 A.V.G. Allen, *Life and Letters of Phillips Brooks* (E.P. Dutton and Co., 1901), I, p. 175.
- 7 John Mackay, *Christian Reality and Appearance* (John Knox Press, 1969), p. 58f.
- 8 Leon Morris, *I Believe in Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1976), p. 45f.
- 9 Max Warren, *Crowded Canvas* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1974), p. 30.
- 10 John Mackay, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
- 11 William Barclay, *A Spiritual Autobiography* (Eerdmans, 1975), p. 84.
- 12 David Wells, "Musings on God's Ways," *Christianity Today* (September, 1972), pp. 16-18.
- 13 Donald Coggan, *Convictions* (Eerdmans, 1975), p. 257.
- 14 Robert Mounce, "The Marks of an Educated Person," *Christianity Today* (November, 1979), p. 24.
- 15 E. Stanley Jones, *A Song of Ascents* (Abingdon Press, 1968), p. 91.