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SOME QUESTIONS REGARDING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION:

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PRINCETON SEMINARY¹

JOHN A. MACKAY

PRINCETON Theological Seminary enters this evening upon a new academic year, the one hundred forty-fourth in its history.

Campus Light and Shadow

Allow me, first of all, to extend some words of welcome. It is fitting that I should welcome officially at this time the new Dean of the Seminary, Dr. Elmer G. Homrighausen, who presides at this gathering. He has just returned from a sabbatical leave in East Asia where his ministrations made a profound impression upon the churches in many lands. For nearly eighteen years now Dr. Homrighausen has been a dear friend and loyal colleague, and we all rejoice that he has come into this influential position in our Seminary life. I wish also to recognize Dr. J. Christy Wilson who, as Dean of Field Service, begins this academic year with a new title for an old task.

I would extend at the same time a most hearty welcome to our distinguished guest professor from abroad, Dr. C. E. Abraham, the Principal of Serampore College, India. For the first term of the present school year, Principal Abraham will teach two courses

¹ Address delivered by President John A. Mackay at the opening of the Seminary year, September 27, 1955.

as a member of our Faculty. It is thrilling to think that he is the first Indian Principal, or President, of the only private institution of higher learning in India which has a charter to grant degrees. Serampore College, now Serampore University, is the institution founded by the famous William Carey.

Dr. Clarke, our new professor of Homiletics, has been with us for some time. I take the occasion, however, at the opening of a new academic year, to give him and Mrs. Clarke their first official welcome to our midst. May I also greet two other Faculty members just returned from their sabbatical leave? I mean Dr. Kerr and Dr. Lehmann. I feel I should also welcome, not from sabbatical leave it is true, but, from an annual long journey, Dr. Jones and his Choir of Princeton troubadours. All sorts of echoes have come to me of their tour. Once again they have made by their singing a contribution of incalculable importance to Christ's Church and the Christian cause in this country.

In the name of my colleagues of the Faculty and Administration, let me now welcome all students, old and new, very especially those of you who are here for the first time, and you are many. A large number of you come from abroad. I trust you will discover

in our midst the warmth of a true Princetonian welcome. As regards those of you who do not happen to belong to the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., you are as welcome as your fellow students who are members of the denomination to which this institution belongs. You will find, I hope, that we try to make this place an expression of the reality of being "in Christ," where we are all one in Him, as members of His Body. the Church, whatever be our country of origin, or the denomination to which we belong. Lastly, let me welcome the residents in Payne Hall. Some of you are missionaries, or fraternal workers, from this country, some are Christian nationals of other lands. Bring us some spiritual gift as those who have preceded you have done. Welcome, one and all, and bear in mind that all that we have is vours.

And yet, I cannot but give expression to a note of sadness. Miss Edna Hatfield, the much-loved Registrar of Princeton Seminary, has been ill and continues in hospital, although I am happy to learn that there is a likelihood that she will be with us in a short time. This, I believe, is the first Seminary opening Miss Hatfield has missed in forty years.

But the deepest note of sadness is that one of our new students, Richard Armstrong, who has come to Seminary after a brief but brilliant career in the baseball world, has lost a little boy, five years of age, who for years had been progressively dying with leukemia. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to Richard and his young wife. Their Christian spirit has been a deep inspiration to me personally, as it has been to many others. I learned just an hour ago that the little lad has passed beyond.

I come now to the subject of my address this evening. Let me preface my words, by saying that I have just been through a very unusual experience. What I have tried to say on each opening session of a new school year has been inspired for the most part by reflections or experiences of the preceding summer. Until yesterday morning, it appeared that the talk on this occasion would be true to type. For the past month, as I journeyed through several European lands, and on the voyage from Naples to New York, my mind was absorbed in the theme, "Glimpses of Shame and Splendor in the Christianity of Today." Upon that theme I proposed to speak this evening. But in the early hours of yesterday, as I sped on a Pennsylvania express through Indiana to Chicago, where I gave an address last night under the auspices of the Board of Foreign Missions, I felt very strongly, just as consciousness returned, that I should speak upon another theme. This I now purpose to do. taking all the risks of doing so. The decision has made me particularly dependent upon God's grace and the indulgence of my audience. It seemed to me, however, that I ought to speak on this subject: "Some questions regarding theological education, with special reference to Princeton Seminary."

It is true, of course, that while I decided only yesterday to deal with this theme, the thoughts and reflections to which I will give expression have been coming to the birth, or crystallizing in my mind, over a long period. In these days when so much is being thought and written about theological education, I venture to believe that the Holy Spirit has guided me towards this par-

ticular topic. In that faith I will now proceed to open up the matter.

I

The first question regarding theological education which seems to me to be important is the question of *institutional relationships*.

To what, or to whom, does an institution which educates theologically belong? Does it function under the auspices of an independent corporation? If it does, its principal type is Union Seminary in New York. Does it function under the control of an interdenominational Board? If so, we think immediately of some of the great Union seminaries of the world, the seminaries in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and in Matanzas, Cuba, for example, or those in Manila, in the Philippine Islands, and in Tokyo, Japan. Or, are we thinking of a seminary governed by the representatives of a single denomination? In that case, we have Mt. Airy Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia, or General Seminary in New York City, which ecclesiastically is Episcopalian. Or does the institution which teaches theology function, perchance, as a faculty organically related to a great university? If it does, then good examples of that type are the Yale Divinity School and the Harvard Divinity School.

What is the institutional relationship of Princeton Theological Seminary? This institution belongs to one of the great traditional denominations of this country whose ecclesiastical title is the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Belonging to this denomination, Princeton Seminary comes in that great confessional tradition which is commonly called *Reformed*. Affiliated with this tradition there are

some forty millions of Christian men and women today. It can be said of the Reformed tradition that it is natively ecumenical; that is to say, it emphasizes in its confessional standards the Communion of Saints. It lays it upon the heart and conscience of all Christians in Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to put Christ's Church Universal above every secondary interest or loyalty. It is important to bear in mind that, while this Seminary belongs to a great denomination in the Reformed tradition, its policies are not controlled directly by the ecclesiastical body to which it is ultimately responsible. It functions under the direction of a Board of Trustees which is self-perpetuating, whose members are elected subject to the approval of the Church's General Assembly. In this way, however, Princeton Seminary is not at the mercy of current ecclesiastical whims, but enjoys real autonomy within the terms of its own charter, as approved by the General Assembly.

When we review the nearly one century and a half of our Seminary's history, we discover that, while it proudly stands in the Reformed tradition, and belongs to a particular denomination, its tradition, spirit and loyalty have been ecumenical from the beginning. Many churchmen belonging to other denominations have been educated here. The late Bishop Matthews of the Episcopal diocese of New Jersey was a graduate of this institution. The present Dean of the Divinity School of Duke University, a Methodist, is another. So, too, is the Dean of Goshen College, a Mennonite institution. The great Kierkegaardian scholar, Walter Lowrie, a fellow Princetonian, and a member of the Episcopal Church, graduated from this Seminary in 1893. And so I might go on, recounting similar cases, across this nation and around the world. Not only today, but throughout our long institutional history, we have welcomed to this campus for study the representatives of other denominations; and never more so than today. I venture to say that, in one respect, we are unique among all the great front-line seminaries in the world. While belonging to, and being rooted in, one of the great Christian confessions, we have more denominations represented on this campus than any confessional seminary in the world. Last year, the first Coptic Monk ever to take graduate study in the western world was one of us on this campus, and a beloved figure he was. A few days ago I received a letter from Father Makary, pouring out his heart in gratitude for what this place had meant to him. I might reciprocate, as I will, and say to him, "Princeton Seminary has owed much to your radiant presence in our midst." And what shall I say about many other churches, the ancient Syrian churches of India, for example, and the recently formed Church of South India, all of which are represented in our student body this year? It is thrilling indeed to feel that while Princeton Seminary is related to one of the great Protestant traditions, we strive on this campus to create ecumenical reality, glorying in the fact that we are all one in Christ Jesus.

This raises an important question. Which type of seminary of those I have mentioned is most relevant to the contemporary situation, and very especially to the ecumenical situation today? Is it the church-related seminary, or is it the non-denominational seminary which in many instances is part of a university

structure? I am fully aware that the sentiment exists in some influential circles that the future, as regards theological education, is with the non-denominational seminary which is academically related to some university. I venture to differ from this view. I do so, moreover, not through any lack of interest in the ecumenical movement, to which I am deeply committed. But I am bound to take cognizance of the fact, and not in any spirit of sectarian exultation, that there exists today a confessional resurgence. A rebirth of confessional interest, a kind of neo-confessionalism, something quite different from sectarianism, is a creative fact of our time. There is a reborn desire on the part of many Christians to understand their own religious heritage, not in order to idolize it or to absolutize it, but to draw from it what it may have of authentic and unique Christian worth, and to make this the contribution of their denomination or confession to Christ's Church Universal.

Non-denominational seminaries have their own particular contribution to make. On the other hand, they have a very real problem to confront when it comes to transcending the purely denominational. It frequently happens in institutions, non-denominational in character, as some close friends of mine who are responsible for the direction of such institutions inform me, that their greatest problem is how to create on the campus the experience of ecumenical oneness, as distinguished from ecumenical sectarianism. The reason is simple. Those who belong to different denominations tend to become aware of their separate identity within the academic whole. Why is it so? The answer would appear to be this. When

it is impossible to create the concrete reality of the Church in a theological institution through its lack of rootage in any given tradition, there arises in the student constituency an acute consciousness of sectarian separateness, even within a non-confessional atmosphere. Because students do not find the Church, they become acutely aware of the churches. While I believe that nonconfessional seminaries have their place. and an important place, I am committed to the proposition that, in this ecumenical era, and given the fact of resurgent confessionalism, the confessional seminary which is ecumenically minded, where confessional boundaries are transcended, has the greatest contribution to make in our time to the cause of Christian unity. Why? For the simple reason that you cannot belong to the Christian Church in general, any more than you can belong to the humankind in general, or be an American in general. You become an American through belonging to a locality, a community, a state. And to be truly human, one must pass through all those humanizing influences of the home as well as of the community, with its traditions, its folk lore, and its culture in general. A person who says, "I am just a human being," or "I am just an American," is a pure monstrosity. As things are, we become Christian in a series of Christian relationships through which we grow up into Christ. The truth is, and there is New Testament sanction for the idea, that it requires the contribution of many groups and experiences to express the fullness that is in Christ. On this campus we strive, and to some degree have succeeded, to create a sense of belonging locally to the one Church of Jesus Christ. A student

may not be a Presbyterian, nor belong to the Church under whose auspices this Seminary functions; yet, through his participation in the life of this campus community, and partaking of the Holy Communion as administered by one of the great Christian confessions, he feels himself related concretely to the Church of Jesus Christ.

We in this Seminary have also another advantage. We are in the happy position of enjoying close academic relations with a great university, even while we are not an organic part of its structure. Between Princeton University and Princeton Theological Seminary the finest relations exist, both in the sphere of personal and academic relations. The University's decision to expand the program of its Department of Religious Studies into the graduate realm opens up the way for fruitful cooperation between that Department and the Seminary. Meetings have already taken place to work out a basis for effective partnership. Thus, in God's providence, we shall have all the advantages of a university connection without any of the disadvantages. We shall remain free to function in our own way and reap at the same time the benefits of an academic relationship with a great sister institution. We shall also be able to make our own positive contribution to the work carried on by the University's Department of Religion.

It will be said, however, that any seminary which is church-related is bound to be sectarian. That I deny with all my soul. An institution can be confessionally-related and be, nevertheless, ecumenically minded. The paradox is strange but true. Speaking personally, I can say unashamedly that I never felt

myself to be more Presbyterian than today; I can say on the other hand that I never felt myself to be less Presbyterian than today. And both are true, the Yes and the No. A dialectical situation, if you like, but, for some of us, real and inevitable! The situation is this. The crucial ecumenical problem of our time is to get the great denominations, or confessions, to establish true rapport and unity in Christ, not merely in ecumenical conventions, but in local communities and in individual institutions. Let the future leaders of the Church get the feel of confessional reality in an ecumenical atmosphere. The rest can be left to God. I am myself committed to the proposition that the Holy Spirit has not yet exhausted forms of church organization. The Spirit of God will eventually create an appropriate pattern of organization to integrate the confessions. But that pattern will not be a super-church. Happily, the World Council of Churches has disavowed any intention of becoming a super-church. The Council does not propose to Romanize Protestantism or non-Roman Christianity in general. True unity, or, if you like the word better, true ecumenicity, does not require "a single unified Church structure" to give it expression. The problem remains, however; how shall confessional churches be related creatively to the ecumenical movement? In the solution of this problem, institutions which belong to one particular church, but which are nevertheless committed to the Church Universal, which is greater than any denominational expression, have a decisive role to play.

II

My second question concerns vocational commitment.

I have spoken about this Seminary community as the "mother of us all." our Alma Mater, as it will become. But who are we? We are people who are vocationally committed. Committed to what? To God, of course, Otherwise, why should we be here? What meaning could being here have for any of us. teachers or students, unless we were committed to God, unless we felt we belonged to Him as "Christ's men and women"? Do not misunderstand me. I am well aware that some students come to Seminary without this commitment having been made. Some, also, have made their commitment on this campus to which they came in wistful quest. Until they found themselves and really knew who they were, their position was in a sense illogical. Let there be no mistake about this. Christian vocation, especially the Christian ministry, has no meaning whatever for uncommitted people, or for people who are merely theists, or who have no more than a general religious interest.

There is today, in a great English university, the University of Reading, a very remarkable teacher, Professor H. A. Hodges. He is, in my judgment, the most original thinker in contemporary British philosophy. When Hodges was a young agnostic tutor in Balliol College, Oxford, he passed through a profound experience of conversion. He has recently written a book entitled, "Christianity and the Modern World View." Let me read one or two striking sentences on what he calls the "Abrahamic presupposition." "I shall contend," he says, "that Christian thinking proceeds

on a presupposition of its own which I shall call the Abrahamic presupposition, or Abrahamic theism. For the New Testament insists over and over again that Abraham is the model for Jew and Christian alike and that the true Christian is the spiritual child of Abraham; that is, one whose relation to God is the same as Abraham's was. Abraham is the story of a man who has committed himself unconditionally into the hands of God, a man who does what God asks of him without hesitation, however paradoxical or self-contradictory it may seem, and who accepts God's promises, however mysterious and incredible they may appear. It is by virtue of this unconditional selfcommitment to God that he has won the title of 'the friend of God.' But such an attitude evidently presupposes a great deal; it presupposes that merely the existence of God, about which the philosophers have debated so lengthily is not enough, but that God is of a certain character. It presupposes that God has complete control of the world, and the course of events in it, that he exercises this control in a way which is purposeful, that human beings have a place in his design and that he communicates with them in ways which they can legitimately understand as commands and promises, and by which their lives can be guided. This is the presupposition of Jewish and Christian thinking which I call Abrahamic theism; to work it out in detail, showing how it applies in actual life and thought is the business of theology."

The Abrahamic presupposition is a basic acceptance of the God of Abraham who is also the "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This means commitment to a God who revealed

Himself in a People and in a Person, a commitment which leads to the calm affirmation: "This God is my God forever and ever." Let me repeat it, lovingly but emphatically: There can be no genuine choice of the Christian ministry as a vocation that does not presuppose a commitment of the Abrahamic kind. This does not mean that we all pass through the same kind of dramatic experience. Let us never forget that there have been Christians, and great Christians at that, who could not tell the hour, day, or even the year, when they began to love God. The time or circumstances of commitment to God is not the real question. Let me speak in quite personal terms. The question for me as a Christian is whether I, a teacher and administrator in this institution, am today committed unconditionally, not to a great Unknown but to Abraham's God, to the God of Jesus Christ, the God who came into my life, who made life new for me and who continues to make it a constant adventure into the unknown.

The question of personal commitment to God is followed by the question of vocational commitment to one's life work under God. This means commitment to the full-time service of God. whether to be a preacher and pastor, a chaplain or a missionary, or to teach in church school, college, or seminary. There are always some in seminary who are not sure of their vocation, of their call to the ministry. Let us look honestly at this question. For some of us here, while there is no question about our commitment to God, we are, nevertheless, not sure that God wants us to give our whole time to His service. That is the real question, and many doubts may arise in seminary regarding

it. At this point we have got to be mutually helpful to one another. A special Rockefeller Fund now makes it possible for Christian young men and women of outstanding caliber to spend a year in seminary in order to find out whether they feel called to full-time service as Christ's ministers. Some of those Rockefeller Fellows are in this chapel. We welcome them and also others like them who want to be quite sure that they are called to the ministry. They are here to find out whether God really wants them to be full-time servants of the Christian Church, Such indecision is not unreasonable. Some of the greatest tasks to be performed today are being performed, and must be performed, by lay men and lay women. And yet there is an unprecedented challenge for the full-time service of Christ. May one not hope that before graduation day comes the question of vocation may become clear and commitment become real for some of you for whom it is still obscure. May every one of us say eventually, "Here am I."

And may I add this: Never try to blueprint your life; never say, "I'll do this and nothing else." Be willing to gamble your life with God in a great adventure. Accept the challenge of the ministry in humble trust that the God of Abraham and of Jesus Christ has a place for each of you. If you but trust Him, He will put you in the place of His choice, whether to minister as an urban or rural pastor, or as a chaplain on a college campus, or with the Armed Forces, or in industry. Some of you he will make teachers in seminaries and in colleges, and ministers of education. The vocation of others will be that of frontiersmen who will go into missionary service at home or abroad, or whose task it will be to grapple with frontier problems in thought or in life. In every instance, leave yourselves in God's hands. If personal experience has an authentic note to sound this evening. it is this: The important thing in life is to prepare oneself to the utmost along the lines of one's capacity, taking full advantage of every opportunity that presents itself. As regards the exact nature and sphere of your particular work, leave that with God. Many of Christ's greatest servants are today engaged in types of service they never thought they would have to undertake. What happened? A voice seemed to speak to them, or a need presented itself before them, or a path opened up in front of them, and in humble trust they responded; and they found themselves in the end where God wanted them to be. If faith in God, if the Abrahamic prespposition means anything, it means this; that God will guide aright the soul that trusts Him.

III

I come now to a further important question: the question regarding our educational goal as a seminary.

Institutionally speaking, we have a task which is both theological and vocational. We are interested in a structure of truth as well as in a system of training. Being a confessional seminary, we start from a definite position. We take the Bible seriously. We believe that the Bible is, in its deepest essence, a Book about Jesus Christ, that Christ is the core of its message, and the clue to its meaning. We are unashamedly Christocentric in this Seminary. We believe that true theology is Christ-centered theology. We believe also that theology which is relevant to human need, as well

as loyal to divine truth, must be both dy-

namic and prophetic.

In these last years, Princeton Seminary has played an important part in the theological situation. We set ourselves to rehabilitate theology at a time when religion and ethics tended to be discussed with very slight regard to a doctrinal basis. Nineteen years ago the inaugural address of the new President was on the theme, "The Restoration of Theology." A few years later we founded the summer Institute of Theology to take the place of the old Pastors' Conference. Subsequently to that, Theology Today came into being, a quarterly review which circulates more widely and is more influential than any theological journal in the world today. We set out to look at "the life of man in the light of God," and we have reason to thank God for what has been accomplished. In this connection, it is important to emphasize that, quite apart from the vocational training which it provides, this institution is interested in making the truth of God's revelation relevant to every situation in thought and in life. The cultural problem, the social problem, the political problem—in a word, the human problem in its entirety and its complexity—is our concern. Upon every phase and facet of man's mortal life, we want the truth of God to shine. But besides and beyond that, we desire, God helping us, to provide the best possible training of a professional kind for future "servants of the Word."

IV

The final question with which I wish to deal concerns the *corporate life* in Princeton Seminary.

We are blessed by having a campus,

as do most theological seminaries in this country. Students from continental Europe, the seat of Western culture, will appreciate what I am saying. Because we live, most of us, in a campus situation, it is our privilege to enjoy the reality of community life in a way which is denied to theological students and teachers in many parts of the world. The typical American campus offers something even richer than what is found traditionally in the great English universities of Oxford and Cambridge. One rejoices at the same time that unique features in the life and organization of these universities are being incorporated increasingly and creatively into campus life in this country.

It is the cherished ideal of those of us who have already been part of this campus community to give expression to what it means to belong to one another because we all belong to Christ. If belonging to Christ is real, we become willing captives of His will. The kind of freedom which has meaning in our lives is the freedom which flows from being Christ's servants friends. We are not free to do anything that is unworthy of Him or of one another, nor yet of the Christian name, the reputation of this institution, or the Christian ministry. The frontiers of our freedom are established by Christ. Some of us are teachers, others of us are students. We are free to become all that is implicit in our commitment whether we teach or are taught. As teachers, let us fulfill our vocation by being true teachers, honest in our work, diligent in our research, thoughtful in our concern for those who learn through us. If we are students, let us take our calling seriously, mapping out our time in such a way that first things

shall always be first. Let us, one and all, be considerate of one another and reverent towards those things that belong by common consent to the structure of our common life. Let us recognize, in a word, that seminary life would be meaningless unless it were marked by honesty, by friendliness, and by a maximum devotion to academic toil.

On this note of concern, let me bring to an end the several questions I have raised. Colleagues of the faculty, members of the student body, let us live together as Christians should, as teachers and learners should, as husbands and wives should, whether we be Presbyterians or belong to other Christian communions, whether we be Americans or come from beyond the land or ocean boundaries of this nation. Let us learn from one another, let us talk to one another, let us pray with one another. Above all, let us not put labels on one another. Let us constitute here a true fellowship of the Spirit, the kind of fellowship which the Holy Spirit alone can create.

That we may know authoritatively

what that fellowship signifies, I will conclude with some words of St. Paul. In the second chapter of his great Letter to the Philippians (2:17), Christ's greatest follower offers us a pattern for our common life. Listen to what he says from his Roman prison: "If there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit," (or as some render it, "If the fellowship created by the Spirit is a reality,") "any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

May God make us worthy of our heritage, our task, and of one another.

L. P. Stone Lectures, April 9-12, 1956

"A Theological Restudy of the Canon"

1. The Canon in Current Biblical Study

- 2. The Old Testament as Christian Scripture
- 3. The Protestant View of the Apocrypha
- 4. The Basic Role of the Apostolic Witness
- 5. The Relation of Tradition to Scripture

Lecturer: Dean Floyd V. Filson

McCormick Theological Seminary