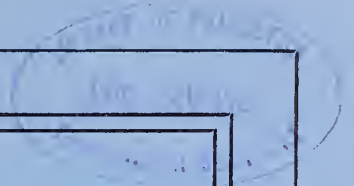


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**The  
Princeton Seminary  
Bulletin**

**Theological Triennium: For What?**

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**Religious Overtones in Psychoanalysis**

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# The Princeton Seminary Bulletin

Vol. LII

JANUARY, 1959

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# THEOLOGICAL TRIENNIUM: FOR WHAT?\*

JOHN A. MACKAY

**D**R. HOMRIGHAUSEN, members and friends of our Princeton Seminary community: The statements which I have made across the years on occasions like this have covered a wide range of interest and concern. This year, my subject is "Theological Triennium: For What?" Three years of theological study, for what purpose? To what end?

We can take it for granted, I think, that the three-year period in a theological school, following a full course in the liberal arts, is here to stay for a considerable time to come. It is the traditional and the classical period. In the most recent study of theological education, the three-volume work of the Niebuhr Commission, it is strongly recommended that this three-year period continue to be the standard length of a seminary education.

As I speak on this subject, I find it difficult not to become reminiscent, even lyrical perchance, because I myself have been involved in my time in this same triennium. I think of my own theological course—a quadrennium it happened to be—two years in Scotland, my native land, and two years here in my adopted country. During my second year there were three of us who studied together under the direction of a scholarly pastor away in the Scottish North Country. We occupied a room together within the sound of the North Sea breakers in the fishing port of Wick. We studied and slept together in the same room, two in one bed, and one in another. Then came two years in ampler quarters on this campus.

Since returning here as President I

have seen seven complete triennia, theological cycles, come and go, seven complete generations of theological students arrive on this campus, and leave it again. In view of the fact that a good many of us here present will be terminating our triennium within a year, and "graduate" together, I hope, next June, it is fitting that we in particular should ask ourselves—*Theological Triennium: For What?* What is the ideal which a theological education should fulfill? When I say "we" I am thinking chiefly, of course, of those of you who are students. But I am thinking also, and in a very real way, of those of us who are teachers. For we, too, must ask ourselves this question. Under what conditions can we be all that we should be while occupying the master's seat one triennium after another?

I would suggest that there are several imperatives which must be taken seriously by students and teachers alike if the current theological triennium, or any theological triennium, is to be what it should be, what the Christian Church desires and needs it to be.

## I

First, *we must seek an understanding of the Faith*. Theological seminaries are, or certainly should be, the intellectual centers of the Church. Now the Christian Church has a Faith, at least, when the Church takes itself seriously. That Faith is God-given. It is objective, and it is historical. It is enshrined in the Bible, in the great Creeds and

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\* Address delivered in Miller Chapel at the opening of the academic year, September 30, 1958.

hymns of the Church, in the biographies of countless men and women now dead, as well as in the living, on-going Christian community. This God-given Faith centers in a Person, Jesus Christ. He is the personal Truth. It is no exaggeration to say that Christianity is Christ. Now, the God whom Jesus Christ revealed is a God who must be loved with the mind, as well as with the heart. That fact imposes from the beginning an intellectual obligation and responsibility. Our Christian faith calls, therefore, for understanding. We are not dealing with sentiment, still less with esoteric magic. We are dealing with something which is objective and which must be studied with all the resources of learning. The essential data for such a study we find in the Bible, in the episodes of Church history, not to speak of world history, in theological and philosophical systems, in the lives of saintly men and women, and in ethical behavior.

Let us be clear about it; there is no substitute for study. No lesser goal can be ours, if we take our vocation seriously, than to engage in serious and effective study, striving to make study a native habit "till traveling days are done." But something much more is needed than the cultivation of studious habits, development of intellectual capacity, or the acquisition of dialectic acumen. Every student of theology should strive to possess a structure of thought. It should be the ideal of every seminary student, not to speak of every teacher, to have a massive, luminous, theological structure, as the guide and foundation of his life.

For one thing we can be grateful today. We witness in the culture of our time a reawakened interest in a theological structure, in a vertebrate theol-

ogy, and not merely in a mass of disconnected ideas or insights. You will pardon me at this point if I become somewhat lyrical for a moment. In my mid-teens, theology, so far as a teenager could pursue it, became a major interest. I can never forget how in my mid-teens I wrestled with that masterpiece of American metaphysics, Jonathan Edwards' "Freedom of the Will." It became my privilege later, in Aberdeen days, to sit at the feet of a philosophical Gamaliel, J. B. Baillie, a great Hegelian, the translator into English of Hegel's "Logic," and his "Phenomenology of Spirit." I didn't agree with my professor's main ideas, I didn't need to; but I admired the massiveness of his philosophical structure. He was no mere teacher of the history of ideas. He was an unashamed Hegelian who saw the world from the viewpoint of his great German master. One could not but admire the massiveness of his thinking, a reflection of Hegel's. He did not demand that his students should accept his philosophy, but he did demand that we should possess accurate knowledge, that we should think clearly, that our thoughts should be governed by a very rigorous logic. If we did that, he didn't mind what we believed. But if we were sloppy in our thinking, woe betide us. When after tea in his home he began to talk about our term papers, the experience could be literally terrifying, despite the preliminary amenities of conversation over the tea and cakes!

I can never forget the debt I owed later on this campus to that supremely great teacher, Benjamin J. Warfield, a true master by the vastness of his theological knowledge, and the penetration of his dialectical acumen. "Bennie" Warfield opened up to us the Reformed System. One came to know something



of that massive structure, the theology of John Calvin, as found in his "Institutes of the Christian Religion," the only scheme of Protestant theology which can be compared with that of the great Aquinas, in the Roman Catholic heritage of thought.

Later, through one's sojourn in the Hispanic World, in Spain and Latin America, there followed a quite different type of experience. The Spanish spirit in recent generations has tended to be encyclopedic, and to lack massiveness and structural capacity. It was the tendency of his fellow countrymen to butterfly over the fields of knowledge that aroused the ire of that great Spaniard, Miguel de Unamuno. Unamuno felt that Spanish intellectuals lacked a world-view and that they needed it. This lack was still more apparent in South America. A Peruvian literary critic wrote a book which he entitled "A Novel without Novelists." He portrayed South American thought and life as a great novel; but the Continent never had an authentic interpreter of life, whether philosopher or theologian, poet or dramatist. Encyclopedic knowledge abounded; there was interest in everything, but there was no insight into the depths of man or God or history.

It was natural, therefore, that following these experiences, theology should take on new meaning and importance in one's personal outlook. My inaugural address, delivered here nearly twenty-two years ago was entitled, "The Restoration of Theology." It was a time when theology was still largely disdained in our American culture and religious life. Some years later some of us here present founded the *Institute of Theology* and dared to call it just that, instead of by the name of *Minis-*

*ters' Conference*. Then came THEOLOGY TODAY which has had a considerable literary progeny in the realm of theological journalism.

Now let me make myself clear. Those of us who were interested in reviving theology are not going to say that its revival in this country is directly related to what we tried to do. Far from that. We did stand, however, in the forefront of a great movement, a prophetic movement if you like. Nowhere is the reality of a revived interest in theology and in theological study at the present time more significantly acknowledged than in one of the volumes of the Niebuhr Commission. In the third volume, "The Advancement of Theological Education," we read these words:

"A special feature of the present situation when we consider it against the background of 19th century Christianity which went through several decades of the 20th century is the strong tendency in all of the churches, whatever their origin, toward the development of a Christian theology. That is, toward the development of a comprehensive Christian understanding of man and his destiny, of creation, sin and salvation, of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Church. Conversion and spiritual experience continue to be important, but the understanding of Christianity as a reasoning and reasoned faith, as an intelligible conviction about God and salvation is gaining ground. Such ration of religion is far removed from rationalism. It remains religion, but has become faith that seeks understanding. Theological schools are being founded and are growing, not only because American Protestants desire a well-educated ministry, but because ministers want theology."

To this let me add: You, who are preparing yourselves for the Christian ministry, are going to be utterly irrelevant to the contemporary situation in the Church and in the world, if during your triennium in Princeton Seminary you do not find, or have not found, a theology, a theological structure.

It is occasion for rejoicing that we are far beyond the old disdain of theology. No longer dare this disdain flaunt itself. We are in a literally thrilling and creative movement. Let me say it with reverence. Once again, in the Church and in society, the question is being asked, "What must I do to be saved? How can I be the man, the woman, I ought to be in all my relationships, human and divine?" A story used to be told, some twenty-five years ago, of a professor in a great sister seminary, a disciple of John Dewey, who believed that in the educational process nobody should make any positive affirmation. He should merely stimulate a discussion. Somebody pictured this man as meeting the Philippian jailer. The prison warden asked in anguish, "What must I do to be saved." The professor's answer was, "Well, my friend, what do you think?" That is no reputable or common answer today. What matters is what God thinks, what there is at the heart of the universe, and what it is that we need to make us true men, true women. Certainly it is not enough to make reply, "What we need is 'justification by faith,' if faith is merely a synonym for pure ignorance. It is precisely the meaning of faith that needs to be explored. What is the Faith? What does it mean to be 'justified by faith?' This is the first great imperative, *to study the Faith. Engage in study while you are here in such a way that, when you leave this campus, you may*

*move out into the Church and the world possessing a massive, theological structure. Not that your theology will then be complete, no, but it will be something vertebrate, which you will proceed to clothe with flesh and sinews. Let me pass to the second imperative.*

## II

Secondly, *we must accept involvement in the Faith.* A structure of truth is important, but insufficient. We must move beyond intellectual apprehension. In a very profound sense that Dane, Søren Kierkegaard, was right when he said, "Subjectivity is truth." What did the father of true existentialism mean? He meant that there must be a personal involvement with God and a personal relationship to God. To begin with, this means worship as its native expression. When we engage in worship, we express our sense of the reality of God and our relationship to Him. Involvement with God means also the daily practice of His Presence in groups or in solitude.

Allow me to say, however, that worship, private or public, does not necessarily mean the kind of involvement in the faith which I have in mind. For worship can be purely formal. It can become mere aestheticism. Liturgical practice, while it contributes undoubtedly to reverence, can also be a substitute for true involvement with the Faith. It can become a flight from reality. Why? Because it may lack the dimension of depth, and fail to express, the relationship of my being to God and the universe, to life and destiny. One of Paul Tillich's real contributions to contemporary thought is his emphasis upon the lost dimension in religion, the dimension of depth.

In this connection, I want to refer to a great figure, a man who was a master in the art of worship, who was religious and sincere as a theological student and as a young minister, but whose life lacked depth. I refer to Thomas Chalmers, about whom Thomas Carlyle said that he was the greatest Scotsman since John Knox. Chalmers was a mathematical as well as a religious genius. He lives on in Scottish history as a pioneer in economics and astronomy. He was a great preacher, a great theologian and a great churchman. His greatest moment was in 1843 when he refused to allow the State to dominate the Church, and brought into being the Free Church of Scotland. Let me read a passage from his biographer, William Hanna, regarding Chalmers as a young theological student in St. Andrews. "In his first theological session, it came by rotation to be Chalmers' turn to pray. His prayer, an amplification of the Lord's Prayer, clause by clause consecutively, was so originally and yet so eloquently worded, that universal wonder and very general admiration were excited by it. 'I remember still,' writes one who was himself an auditor, 'after the lapse of fifty-two years, the powerful impression made by his prayers in the Prayer Hall, to which the people of St. Andrews flocked when they knew that Chalmers was to pray.' The wonderful flow of eloquent, vivid, ardent description of the attributes and works of God, and still more perhaps, the astonishing, harrowing delineation of the miseries, the horrid cruelties, immoralities and abominations inseparable from war which always came in more or less in connection with the bloody warfare in which we were engaged in France, called forth the wonderment of the hearers. He was then

only sixteen years of age, yet he showed a taste and capacity for composition of the most glowing and eloquent kind."<sup>1</sup> But as Chalmers himself tells us in his diary, at that time and for years thereafter, there was no dimension of depth in his life. He did not know God; he was not involved with Deity. But he began to long for something he did not have. We hear him cry out, "Oh give us some steady object for our mind to rest upon." Says a friend of his young manhood: "I knew that he was exceedingly earnest in seeking the light of truth at that time in his private devotions, and was often on his knees at my bedside after I had gone to bed."<sup>2</sup> Later Chalmers fell ill. He passed through a long severe illness and reached the point of death. He writes: "My confinement has fixed on my heart a very strong impression of the insignificance of time, an impression which I trust will not abandon me though I again reach the heyday of health and vigor." "Strip human life of its connection with a higher scene of existence, and it is the illusion of an instant, an unmeaning farce, a series of visions and projects, and convulsive efforts, which terminate in nothing."<sup>3</sup> He had been reading Pascal's *Thoughts on Religion*.

On the edge of the tomb Thomas Chalmers came to realize that it wasn't enough to pray eloquently and to denounce all the iniquities of the world in accordance with a fine, ethical sensitivity. He needed to find himself in relationship to Deity, and to be involved with God, to know God, and to serve Him. This "magnitude of eternity" was, in the phraseology of the time, nothing

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Thomas Chalmers*, Vol. I, pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*, p. 112.



else than the confrontation of a transient human spirit with the Eternal Spirit. The inquiry was aroused, "What wilt thou have me to do?" "What must I do to be saved, that I may truly live and be a true man?" It is this magnitude which every human must discover, to which we in a theological seminary must be vividly sensitive. What Chalmers called the "magnitude of eternity" and some moderns might call the "dimension of depth" has as its supreme expression the total transformation of a human life. Conversion may be gradual or dramatic. In either case God, the living Eternal God, becomes known in personal experience and His claims are accepted. No longer is religion pure, aesthetic emotion; no more is theology a study of ideas, historical episodes, or psychological phenomena. God becomes known; all things are made new; a new man is *involved* in the ancient Faith.

This leads me to say that not only young ministers like Thomas Chalmers have begun their ministry without knowing anything about this dimension; there are theological students who come to seminary quite unaware of it. But some become introduced to this dimension while here. Let me share with you one of the greatest experiences of joy that I have had in many years. It came to me in a letter written last June by a student who entered Seminary fourteen years ago. He is today one of the finest of our younger ministers, a man relevant in every sense to the Church and the world in our time. "I entered Princeton Seminary," he says, "in the winter of 1944, having been discharged under good conditions from the Navy. My reasons for wishing to enter the Gospel ministry seemed good to me then. Having learned a little of what Godlessness does to a nation, or a man,

I sincerely believed the Christian faith had the answer, and I wished to identify myself with that as my life work. My first semester at Princeton brought me into your course on Ecumenics." I pass over some intimate personal references to what he felt, and proceed. "But it all came as an immense revelation to me as you held before us the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Here were concepts about Him, and about the world, which is held together in Him which had never entered my mind or heart before. As I continued to attend your classes, you brought me to the place to which you were led that noon at Rogart. With your witness and guidance I beheld Him truly for the first time, and my life was changed." Not for fourteen years, although I continued to know the writer of the letter, did he ever mention this matter to me. This is one of those things that make teaching in a theological seminary worthwhile, and I know that there are fellow faculty members who could recount similar joys.

### III

Now the third imperative. *We must incarnate the Faith in corporate living.* That brings me to community. There is no place in the Christian religion for pure individualism. At the heart of the Faith in its historical manifestation is the basic reality of the Church, the community of Jesus Christ. I have known great Christian men, true lovers of Christ, who did not make their maximum contribution, in their time and environment, who did not develop their personality as it might be developed, because they refused to be identified with the Christian community. We can speak of the Church on the Princeton Seminary campus, as we can of the Church at Corinth, and the Church at



Rome. It is a tremendous advantage to belong to a theological seminary which is located on a campus where students and teachers can live together as members of a community, and not as most Scottish and European students of theology have to live, in lodgings, or as we used to say, in "digs."

It was the desire to express community, to give expression to the Church concretely, that led to the creation of our Campus Center. Read the inscription on the marble slab in the Foyer: "This building, erected by the sacrificial gifts of many alumni and friends of Princeton Theological Seminary, is dedicated to the creation on this campus of a Christian community whose members drawn from diverse lands and churches, shall serve in all the world the one Church which is Christ's Body." The "one Church" transcends nation and race, denomination and class.

At this point allow me to read quietly the fruit of our corporate thinking when we tried some years ago to state what is meant by a Christian community. I read from the *Handbook*: "Princeton Theological Seminary is more than a school for the preparation of pastors and teachers of the Christian Church. It is a community which undertakes to order its common life in accordance with the obedience of faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. Insofar as Jesus Christ is the norm and guide of all that happens in the life of the community, it is possible to speak of Princeton Theological Seminary as a Christian community, and to commend the privileges and responsibilities of membership to successive generations of faculty, students and staff. Where Jesus Christ is the Lord of life, and is at work among those who live together in His service, the common life of all becomes the con-

cern of each member of the community: and what happens to each member of the community belongs to the common life and the well-being of all.

"Membership in the Christian Community of Princeton Seminary implies:

(1) The willingness to be guided in all things by the mind of Jesus Christ our Lord.

(2) The obligation to give every effort to the preservation and the upbuilding of the unity and well-being of the common life.

(3) A responsible concern for the freedom, rights, and obligations of the other members of the community—faculty, students and staff in all phases of Seminary life."

That is our goal. We have by no means achieved it. Some have smiled at this code, some have been cynical about it, some have violated it, yet all must admit that there is no substitute for Christian community. To understand our faith is not enough. Personal relationship to God is not enough. As Christians we must become personally related to one another, we must put the interests of the community before our own selfish interests, and each must be sensitive to the other person. A member of the community must go out of his way to sit down with one who is lonely or discouraged. We must all recognize that our neighbor is not the person who may be most congenial to us but the person who needs that we show ourselves neighborly. This is the genius of community. And thank God something has been achieved. Nothing has given me a greater thrill as I have had occasion to visit many lands than to find that students from abroad, whatever their race or nationality, or denominational background, felt that they

were welcome on this campus and that they belonged to a single community of faith.

#### IV

Lastly, *we must discern the world relevance of the faith.* It is ours to transcend all self-centeredness, whether in thought or piety or community-mindedness. You must while in seminary strive to fix your gaze on the world and to move out into the world.

This involves a *prophetic outlook upon contemporary history.* Here is where relevance is needed. What is happening today? God, the Living God, is being patronized, God and religion are being used for selfish ends. There are fellow Americans who are God's patrons, who seek to use God and the religious sense of man for their own purposes, as an antidote to anxiety. They prescribe peace of mind; they offer religious strength in order that success may be obtained in the secular order; they present self-discipline as a means of achievement. Some are in peril of seeming to chum up with Deity, of becoming Christ's "cronies," instead of being His true friends and loyal servants. As it was in Jeremiah's time, there are false prophets today who say "peace, peace when there is no peace," who in their own way re-echo the words that the professional prophets in Jeremiah's day were saying: "The temple of the Lord. The temple of the Lord. The temple of the Lord." There are contemporary "prophets" who say "We are not atheists like the communists. We have our religious heritage. We have God. We have the Church."

It is in the international sphere that this religious self-righteousness has the most tragic results. The statesmen of today, and the statecraft of today, both

lack a sense of the Almighty and Holy God, and His judgment. God is being substituted by national security and national self-interest. It is not recognized that there is a Divine Providence which can bring our nation and other nations into judgment. There is an inexorable Divine order which men ignore.

Some months ago the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church dealt with the prophetic role of the Christian Church and gave expression to it in a message. I venture to read part of the document that was issued. It runs thus: "The Church is called to radiate the light of God in every society and in every age. In our day nations are tragically divided. This is a time of judgment. Mankind journeys through dread. The world is in the darkness of nuclear despair, but Christians need not lose their calm. We believe God. He reigns. He is the Sovereign Lord over men and nations, over all the forces of nature and of history. God and His righteousness, not the falsehood and villainy of men, shall have the last word. God's wrath falls upon nations whose rulers wilfully and openly deny Him, but he may use them to execute His purpose and chastise His own people. Against Israel He used the imperial power of Assyria as the rod of His anger and the staff of His fury. He may in our time use communists, or other godless powers, to chastise privileged, nominally Christian nations who forget God, and ignore their indebtedness to Him. Our nation, favored by God, stands in the same jeopardy as ancient Israel. Are we subtly yet surely dethroning God in our national life? Are we patronizing God and ceasing to serve Him? Are we trying to fit the Almighty into our own little schemes instead of fitting our-

selves into His great plan for the world?

"A nation, as well as an individual, can lose its soul. We Americans are in danger of rejecting the heritage which made us what we are. With penitence let us confess that as a people we are becoming less interested in righteousness than in national security and in international superiority. Relations between us and other peoples are no longer primarily determined by moral principles, or by considerations of human need. The ancient words 'justice' and 'righteousness,' emptied of their true content, are used as weapons in international politics. Self-interest is becoming the great absolute. Even baptizing self-interest with the adjective 'enlightened,' does not make it Christian.

"Our fathers' concept of freedom is also being debased. For them, freedom flowed from obedience to God. We must be deeply disturbed by the contemporary myth of the 'free world.' This nation counts among its allies some nations which are in no sense free. By our actions we proclaim to the world that lands where human freedom is utterly dead can qualify for membership in the 'free world' simply by supplying military bases or strategical knowledge. This kind of international hypocrisy should be abhorrent to Christians, and in its presence the Church dare not keep silent. In the effort to achieve a posture of power, our nation must not ignore the suppression of God-given human rights in any land. We call, therefore, for a reappraisal of the current concepts of freedom and the free world."

The same document speaks also about the *Church's redemptive mission* in the world. Not only must the Church speak prophetically, it must also move redemptively into the world. It must

radiate the light of God as well as mediate the love of God. To do this the Church must become a pilgrim Church. Its place is the frontier. The message runs on: "Only as Church members become Christ's missionaries in their several vocations, in government and diplomacy, in industry and commerce, in the home and in the classroom, in the clinic and on the farm, will men perceive that Christ is the way, the truth and the life. Christ has called us friends. 'You are my friends,' he said, 'if you do what I command you.' Abraham, the Biblical example of a friend of God, showed his friendship by his obedience. At God's command he embarked on an adventure into the unknown. Let us today dedicate ourselves as a Church to a new Abrahamic adventure. Let us be so constrained by the love of Christ that we shall show our love for Him by becoming channels of His love to others."

But if ministers of the Church are to have redemptive significance they must learn to communicate the divine truth, by word and by deed, proclaiming the Gospel, and living the Gospel, in order that Jesus Christ may be made known. For those who devote a triennium to theological study this means preparation of a practical nature, if communication is to be worthily achieved. It means acquaintance with the resources of science and of art and with the media of mass communication. It means training in the techniques that make the human voice an effective instrument. It means instruction in Homiletics, or the art of sermon making. It means instruction in Church polity and the orderly conduct of Church business. The future minister must also devote a proportion of his time to field service, to put into practice what he learns by direct con-

tact with congregations and responsibility for some aspect of congregational life. From time to time he should be a member of a team that goes out from the Campus to declare the Gospel, to interpret to the Churches the missionary obligation and the situation on the great frontiers of the Kingdom.

It is of the utmost importance that men and women preparing for the Christian ministry should during their Seminary course not only become competent in their knowledge of the faith, but also learn how to make this faith relevant to others in what they say and above all by what they are.

Let me close with two allusions which give clarity and force to what I am saying.

Listen to the words of the Niebuhr Commission, "Protestants in America look to their ministers as defenders of morality and the representatives of spirituality. They have expected them to stand out as examples of what people ought to be morally and spiritually."

Listen too to the words of a famous Princetonian, Woodrow Wilson, when he was President of Princeton University. This is what he said: "It makes no difference what the minister

wears, but one thing matters supremely, he should never be in any company of men for a single instant without making them realize that they are in the company of a minister of religion."

God help us all to make Princeton Seminary a center of light and life and love of the brethren, a place of contemporary relevance, by word and deed, to the Church and the world in our time. If we do that we shall fulfill our destiny and together transfigure the significance of Theological Triennium. Let us bow our heads.

Oh, God, our Father, without Thee we can do nothing. With Thee we can do all things. Make Thyself real and dear to us. Graciously grant that Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, may vouchsafe us His Presence on this campus, in classroom and Chapel, as we stroll around together, as we seek to conform our lives to the mind of Christ, as we seek to make our Seminary family a true expression of the Family of God. Holy Spirit of Truth, make us the object of Thy concern, so that our hearts may make Thee, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the object of our response, the subject and companion of our life's loyalty. Amen.

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#### ANNIE KINKEAD WARFIELD LECTURESHIP

February 2-5, 1959

"The Grace of God in Christian Theology"

Lecturer: James I. McCord, D.D.

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