Twenty-Three Theological Schools: Aspects of Canadian Theological Education*

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In the spring of 1966, twenty-three Canadian theological schools were expecting to graduate 230 students with their first professional degree in theology or with some other indication that they had undertaken a course to prepare them for some form of Christian ministry.[1] In the final three years of these various courses, 667 students were enrolled. In the five largest schools, the final three-year enrolment was as follows: 79 (Emmanuel, Toronto), 62 (Queen's, Kingston), 48 (Union, Vancouver), 44 (Knox, Toronto), and 44 (Trinity, Toronto). In the five smallest schools, the enrolment was 16 (St. Stephen's, Edmonton), 15 (King's, Halifax), 12 (Queen's, St. John's), 9 (Bishop's, Lennoxville), and 7 (St. John's, Winnipeg). To teach these 667 students, along with some graduate students mostly at McGill and Toronto, the schools reported having 123 full-time staff members, though to these would have to be added a large number of part-time instructors. If, at a statistical guess, we balance off the part-time staff against the graduate and other students, we should come up with a staff/student ratio of about one teacher to five students.[2]

The five churches with which the twenty-three schools are associated are Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and United. (The Baptists listed are the largest group, the Baptist Federation of Canada, with which Acadia and McMaster are associated.) Of the three major groups of Lutherans in North America, two have theological schools associated with them in Canada. The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America have

*In 1962 the author was invited by the American Association of Theological Schools to make "a study of practical training for the ministry, with special attention to supervision." This study is expected to be published by the Association in the fall of 1966 under the title *Education for Ministry*. The material in the present article was collected during the larger study. It is published separately in Canada because the statistical material is peculiar to this country. For an account of certain aspects of North American professional theological education today readers are referred to *Education for Ministry*, which aims to deal with common developments in both the United States and Canada.

1. I must express my gratitude to all the heads of colleges who answered questionnaires over a three-year period, enabling us to secure figures which were not only accurate but *comparable*. Before this, no uniform method of reporting had been developed in Canada, where most of our schools lack the continuing relationship with an accrediting agency which might otherwise have led to one. Some schools have customarily reported as theological students those who are under their care but still in their undergraduate years at a university. This has led to confusion in the past and makes earlier over-all figures unreliable.

2. I inquired of each school how many professors allotted at least two-thirds of their working time to teaching theological students in the program leading to the first theological degree or diploma. It would hardly be sensible in Canada at present to interpret "full-time" teaching more rigorously. With so large a number of schools, many professors are administrators, many (if not most) teach in other programs besides the basic theological course, and many are actively engaged in various duties in their respective churches.

a joint Lutheran faculty in Saskatoon, and the Lutheran Church in America is represented at Waterloo. There is no theological school in Canada of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, but there is ground for expecting further Lutheran reunion.

I am not aware that any college would forbid the enrolment of students for the ministry of churches other than its own, and most, if not all, would probably welcome such enrolment, especially in graduate work where it is offered. Canadian students among all those enrolled would include at least a few from the Disciples of Christ, Eastern Orthodox, Mennonite, and Roman Catholic Churches. Adding the few students who come from the United States and overseas would swell the list of churches slightly.

One of the twenty-three schools is the Faculty of Divinity of McGill University, Canada's only non-denominational school of this type, made possible by the co-operation of Anglican and United Church authorities in Montreal with McGill. The faculty at present includes the university-level students of the Montreal Diocesan Theological College and the United Theological College; these schools are therefore not counted separately in the list of twenty-three.

At least two of the schools offer a course in theology combined with a course in the humanities at a neighbouring university, so that these students receive an arts degree towards the end of their course rather than before enrolment. All of the schools accept non-graduate students—some in great numbers—so that about 30 per cent of their total enrolment is non-graduate.

Two factors, one educational and the other ecclesiastical, have led to the selection of this particular grouping of twenty-three schools for study. All the schools aim to provide a course in theology taught at university level and if possible for university graduates; this fact excludes, for example, listing any of the Bible colleges which offer instruction oriented towards the ministry. Secondly, this group of schools does not include the largest seminary population of all—that of the French and English-speaking Roman Catholics—nor does it include an Eastern Orthodox school. These omissions, therefore, exclude from our present consideration the education of the clergy associated with more than half the church-related population of the country. Among these large groups there are schools of high academic quality—both French and English—as well as many schools which teach below university level. The latter belong to an inchoate system[3] of congregational selection, independent action, and Bible college and church-sponsored training which provides a large but undetermined number of ministers, salaried and voluntary, for most of the smaller religious groups as well as for some of the larger churches.

By eliminating the schools just mentioned, we are left with what historians (with some theological abandon) usually call the "Mainline Protestant"

3. It is not, of course, a deliberately organized or rational system; but I believe that sociological investigation would have no difficulty in finding the common elements which lead to the provision of a ministry outside the normal channels whether by a gospel hall, a regular congregation, a bishop, or a presbytery.

schools. They represent the older white Anglo-Saxon Protestant supremacy whose declining power and proportional strength and whose past myopia now compel us to exercise some restraint in assessing its present influence. Whatever their place in Canada's life—and it is certainly a sizable one—we are only dealing in this article with twenty-three particular schools which are far from embracing all Canadian theological education. In some sense, perhaps, they constitute a middle group flanked by two other systems. One system, the Roman Catholic, is larger and provides clergy for a larger proportion of the population. The influence of the various Bible schools (which do not generally aim to train ministers) and of the other types of ministerial training is often overlooked because it is beyond the haze within the academic pale, and statistics are difficult to come by. A survey of all the ministers in any sizable community will quickly reveal a great many whose training stems from this group.

Any conviction that the ministry is a learned profession has been frankly abandoned in some quarters; consequently some older stereotypes must now be given up. Today, for example, 79 per cent of the students in training for the ministry in the two Baptist schools are university graduates, while in the nine Anglican schools (omitting the Anglicans at McGill) university graduates make up only 57 per cent of the enrolment. If to the Anglican figures are added the students preparing for the ministry under episcopal direction outside the recognized colleges, the Anglican percentage drops below 50 per cent. In either case it is the lowest of all the larger churches.[4] Lutherans, on the other hand, have the highest percentage of university graduates studying for the ministry (84%) and the other two churches occupy a middle position, the Presbyterian and United Churches each having 73 per cent (omitting again the United Church students at McGill).

The figures in the above paragraph, with one exception, are based on a three-year average, using the three academic years ending in the spring of 1966. The Anglican figure for students studying under episcopal direction is based on a 1965 survey; I believe that the number has now declined materially. In individual colleges with small enrolment, one-year variations are best ignored. However, total enrolment in the final three years in the twenty-three schools has dropped in the three-year period from 751 to 667. There has so far been no corresponding drop in the number of students completing their respective courses. The total graduating classes during the three years have been, respectively, 223, 230, and 230. This seeming statistical anomaly can probably be accounted for by the larger entering classes of the preceding years.[5].

Some of the emerging trends may be related in part to the degree of lay

4. This remains true even if the Anglican students who are granted a university degree towards the *end* of their course are counted as graduates.

5. If the trend of proportionately higher graduating classes in relation to total enrolment were to continue, it would suggest that standards are lowered to retain students. Absence of failures in the final year has often been noted, and students who fail are sometimes allowed to proceed to ordination anyway.

interest and lay control in theological education. Does the relatively high in the ministry, and the relatively high degree of episcopal control, when degree of lay control among Baptists lead to higher educational standards unrestrained by canon law, lead to lower standards among Canadian Anglicans?[6] I have argued elsewhere[7] that lay initiative has already led to improvements in theological education. However, these facts would have to be balanced against a more conservative and sometimes powerful lay element which supports fundamentalism and the *status quo ante bella*, and recommends pietism for the clergy—all in the name of old-time religion. It is time the new laity were given their due. They do not come so much with theological expertness as with a battery of sensible questions demanding clarification of the purpose of the Christian ministry and of the education required for its exercise. They can sometimes provide a large measure of executive ability in relating means to ends, doing so with a minimum of sentimental attachment to obsolete institutions.

II

Theological education is in ferment all over the world. It is also in confusion. Dr. Jesse Ziegler, Executive Director of the American Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, has recently given an account of this ferment, based on his extensive knowledge of theological schools in all the major traditions of North America.[8] There is, I think, less ferment in Canada, unless perhaps occasional eruptions of our anti-American defensiveness are a sign that something more is going on below the surface. Using Dr. Ziegler's analysis as a basis, I believe that the following points would emerge in Canada.

1. There is a growing awareness of the crisis in Christian communication. The lesson of failure in communication which might have been learned from the success of *The Comfortable Pew* has been too often passed over in a niggling preoccupation with the book's theological trivia. Nevertheless, shock about the crisis in communicating Christian faith and morals has probably brought about a certain amount of badly delayed change in curriculum and in teaching methods.

2. There is increasing dismay over the reluctance of present institutional and denominational power-structures to permit greater co-operation, not only in theological education, but in other areas as well.

3. There is growing realization that the preoccupation of churches, and hence of pastoral theology, with the domestic and residential sphere (family life, Sunday schools, and counselling) may be an escape from responsible

6. In the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. a bishop may not ordain candidates without the consent of his Standing Committee, on which the laity are well represented. There is no similar universal canonical provision in Canada. In the Roman Catholic Church it is often held that standards of theological education in seminaries under the control of religious orders are generally higher than those under episcopal or diocesan control. The general level of education in the whole community is evidently rising faster than the level of theological education, so that lay influence in some areas might well lead to improved standards; but the question in the text remains as yet unanswered.

7. *Education for Ministry*, Section 1.

8. In a paper privately circulated but shortly to be published.

behaviour in the public sphere (housing, poverty, employment policy, welfare legislation, civil rights, world hunger, the population explosion, war and peace, etc.).

4. The "success" of the suburban church is seen to be offset by the failure of the churches in the inner city and urban life as well as in isolated rural places. Neither the ministry nor theological education as a whole has come to terms with urban living or with rural isolation.

5. Doubt is now openly expressed as to the capacity of the present institutional structures of the churches to manifest the spirit of Christ and of the gospel in the contemporary world.

6. There is widening repudiation of the notion that the ordained ministry of the church can be simply equated with the church's ministry to the world. There is growing frustration at failure to find or support viable structures of ministry to replace some of the old ones.

7. Profound confusion exists about the nature of the specifically Christian and specifically pastoral contributions which can be made by an ordained clergyman when he finds himself one among other professional people ministering to human needs.

8. There is disenchantment with the teaching of theology because so much of it is forgotten after graduation and appears to contribute little or nothing to the day-by-day practice of the pastoral ministry. (Continuing education may be expected to develop reactive patterns until theological education is improved.

9. There is obvious confusion among church and educational leaders as they observe the decline in theological school enrolment but remain reluctant to make fundamental reassessments of the church's purpose and of the educational provision required for its ministry.

10. There is growing awareness of the low educational requirements for entrance into the professional ministry and of the low standards of education which follow from this. (Caution must be exercised in interpreting data which refer only to academic achievement and not to other types of qualification; however, undue emphasis on this point leads to the introduction of the dubious category, "pious [or friendly] but dumb.")

No competent university graduate can be expected to attend a school which is obviously poor in its educational resources or possesses a staff too small to engage his interest. On the other hand, schools of high academic excellence south of the border are still sometimes difficult to enter because of the competition of highly qualified applicants for places; this is especially true of their graduate departments. Good schools attract good students. Good students look for good schools. Now that travel is easier and communication better, students are less apt to succumb to the blandishments of inadequate schools or to the financial inducements to attend them. Student selection of schools has become a potent factor in the setting of standards.[9]

What constitutes a good theological education for pastoral ministry in

9. This is confirmed by research in higher education. See *Education for Ministry*, Sections 13 and 15a, for references.

the local church or elsewhere must be determined by the nature of the Christian faith and life and by the social environment of Christian life and ministry. Generally speaking theologians can tell us something about the first and social scientists about the second; between them they will be amplifying and elucidating Christian faith and common sense.

In a not very distant past it was easy enough for a pastor to learn about his community by talking to his neighbours over the back fence and by walking the streets. Today, while these are still indispensable sources of information, they are misleading when treated in isolation. The character of a community today is determined more by the vocational groups to which its residents belong, and less by geography. Individual conscience is determined more by mass media and larger vocational groups beyond the home, and less by the family. The whole life of the community is determined far more by decisions and movements originating at great distances, and much less by local autonomy. The view over the back fence which stood our forefathers in such good stead now leads to myopia or incomprehension and so to false judgment. The churches' strident calls to the family and the individual, blaming them for structures of life of which they are the victims and not the authors, place impossible burdens on them. Insufficient attention is paid to other structures of society besides the family, and the churches betray in this way their still agrarian orientation towards society. The disciplines of social science have become essential to understanding the human environment and the possible impact upon it of the Christian mission. Too much theological education, especially in Canada, still assumes that all we need is the correct faith (as it was interpreted yesterday) and the capacity to shout louder to people who are no longer within earshot. The introduction at least of psychology, sociology, and communications theory, as these apply to the work of Christian mission, has become essential in theological education. While this has already been achieved in the better schools in the United States, none of the twenty-three Canadian schools under consideration are large enough to make it more than barely possible even when it is seen to be desirable.

The teaching of the Christian faith and way of life as apprehended in the classical Christian tradition is only in little better case. We live under religious pluralism, in a time when there has been an explosion of theological knowledge, and when older religious divisions are often cut across by newer ones of greater significance. A professional religious teacher and pastor who cannot find his way around in this multiform state of affairs is quickly ignored if he is not already lost. The schools on the whole have let him down; their staffs were too small to expose him to the views of more than one scholar in each field, and often he has been taught by someone filling in for lack of a more competent teacher.

In the last two paragraphs I have drawn on the conclusions arrived at by the Niebuhr study of theological education in 1957.[10] The theological

10. See H. R. Niebuhr and others, *The Advancement of Theological Education* (New York: Harper, 1957), *passim*, but especially pp. 87 and 101f., and *Education for Ministry*, Section 20a.

curriculum, it was argued there, must provide knowledge in *two* areas: the Christian heritage and the world in which the minister works. To mount such a curriculum and to provide supervised practice of ministry, as well as to make provision for the human and Christian development of the students, a theological school could hardly manage with less than twelve to fifteeen full-time staff members, with a normal complement of special assistants. Readers might assign these in different ways; here I offer a sample distribution only for the sake of illustration: biblical subjects (4); theological and historical subjects (4); ethics and the social sciences (3); pastoral theology and the pastoral arts (3); director of field education (1). This list makes no allowance for administration and none for graduate students or the distribution of part-time assistants. A feasible though not low student/staff ratio is 10/1. This suggests a school of 150 students as the minimum size adequate to mount an educational process equal to the demands of our time. As the twenty-three schools have under 700 students at the B.D. level and a handful of full-time graduate students, there do not appear to be enough students in this entire group to justify the existence in Canada of more than five schools for this group of churches.

The twenty-three schools, even if they were in easy communication with each other, could not decide on relocation without considering the possibilities of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox co-operation. Formal Roman Catholic co-operation has already begun at the graduate level[11] and, through the American Association of Theological Schools and other channels, overtures of more extensive co-operation are continually being made.[12]

Changes in Canadian theological education are bound to come about in the future, as in the past, as the result of various pressures. Among these today we should not underestimate the following: (a) the refusal of able students to attend inadequate schools—schools whose educational resources and standards cannot bear comparison with the university-related schools of other professions; (b) the ecumenical thrust at denominational pride and divisiveness; (c) disillusion with the present fragmentation of educational resources and the seeming irrelevance of curricula and teaching methods; (d) the inadequate salaries offered to staff in many theological schools which in earlier days could count on the willingness of teachers from the United Kingdom to work in Canada for substandard salaries; (e) grossly inadequate libraries; and, finally, (f) the exhaustion of money-raisers and contributors struggling to keep an impractical and wasteful system afloat. Change sometimes occurs with frightening speed; it can be quite unplanned or planned for narrow denominational advantage; in these cases it can all

11. In May, 1966, the Graduate Division of the Faculty of Theology of the University of St. Michael's College joined formally with Emmanuel, Knox, Trinity, and Wycliffe Colleges in the already existing and provincially incorporated Toronto Graduate School of Theological Studies. Comprehensive and specialist examinations and the examination of all theses at the master's and doctoral levels from now on will be directed by joint committees.

12. See Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., "The Import of Ecumenical Developments for Theological Education," *Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Biennial Meeting of the American Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada*, to be published by the Association at Dayton, Ohio, 1966.

too easily be for the worse. The purpose of this article is to encourage more people to think about whether change might not be for the better—indeed even for the best—if denominational pride and local sentiment can be converted into concern for the Christian faith in the Canadian nation.

It is now widely agreed that theological education of professional quality must take place in association with a university where there are other professional schools as well as good resources in the humanities. Today's theological student should be in *working* encounter with theological students in other religious traditions besides his own. He must have access to appropriate libraries and to resources for learning the practice of various types of ministry.[13] Students of the twenty-three schools in Canada could only find these conditions at present in six cities: Vancouver, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax. If Roman Catholic co-operation were to become significant, Quebec and other university cities might eventually be added, but this is not for us to suggest. Present and immediately foreseeable enrolment would seem to require some choice between Saskatoon and Winnipeg, where the number of churches able to co-operate, the total library holdings, endowments, and related university departments would be among the many factors demanding logistic analysis and co-operative planning.

The clustering of denominational schools on a university campus is often proposed either as a temporizing solution or as a denominationally acceptable one. Neighbouring schools, however, can be as isolated from one another as schools deep in the country, and the clustering of schools is of little value unless accompanied by a realistic policy of staff appointments and a joint library. Four or five schools each with a full complement of staff in Bible, theology, history, and pastoral care have no resources left for widening the curriculum. The same number of libraries all buying the same basic books and periodicals have no resources left for genuine expansion. Even if the difficulties of establishing a joint purchasing policy can be overcome, the student is still faced with the frustration of tramping with his books and notes in all weathers from one library to another to secure his references. Joint catalogues in so relatively small a field are an invitation to a walking tour rather than to serious study. Merely adding together the numbers of volumes in the existing libraries gives a false picture of the actual resources, especially of periodicals.

It would be impossible to consider the location of theological schools apart from the growth of departments of religion in the universities. Not everyone who wants to study religion or Christian theology wants to enter the ministry. In fact the tendency to make theology into a subject of exclusively masculine and clerical interest has done it much harm. University departments of religion are growing. There is an increasing number of theologically literate laymen and laywomen who will be able to share in the church's teaching ministry and who will no longer put up with the results of shoddy

13. These and similar points are treated and illustrated at length in *Education for Ministry*. See especially Sections 8e, 10, and 11, and Chapters VI and VII.

training for their clergy. Informed Christians are to be found in large numbers in all the helping professions; they and the members of churches will not endure bumbling pastoral ministry, uninformed by sound learning, or learned casually if at all without supervised pastoral practice. And finally, as experience in England has begun to show, it will not be possible to tolerate for long a developing caste system based on good standards, good libraries, and good scholarship in university departments of religion, and poor standards, poor libraries, and underpaid teachers in weak seminaries. But this subject is too large for treatment here.[14]

There is clearly some better way for Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and United Churchmen to manage theological education in Canada than to have 123 full-time and numerous part-time staff members teaching 667 students and a few graduates in twenty-three schools, none of them large enough to provide an education adequate to the Christian ministry today or on a par with other professional schools of high standing in our universities.[15]

14. See *Education for Ministry*, Sections 17 and 18, for a fuller treatment.
15. See also Charles L. Taylor, "The Location of Theological Schools," *Theological Education*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter, 1965), 104–09; George F. Donovan, ed., *College and University Institutional Cooperation* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1965).