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This fact places a special burden on the administration of the school. It receives all of the contacts with the accrediting agency. It interprets the meaning of ATS accredited membership to faculty, students, trustees, alumni, and other constituents. Hence the president and dean have a unique role to play in generating or engendering motivation of a positive kind. Without administrative support for the accrediting review process, it can seldom eventuate in an occasion for the improvement of theological education.

The scheduled accrediting visit is also an opportunity for ATS staff, the accrediting visitors, and the commission. And it is entirely possible for an institution to invest itself fully in the accrediting process and still be denied the maximum opportunity for improvement because of the failure of one or more of the external ingredients in the process. Staff must consult wisely in ways that are designed to be of maximum assistance to the particular institution. These legitimately vary from school to school, and staff must be sensitive to that fact and not be bound slavishly to standards or procedures which are not helpful. On behalf of the commission, staff must select visitors who command the respect of the institution and function as wise evaluator/consultants to the school being visited. These persons must exercise their function skillfully, preparing a report which not only speaks to the juridical issues of standards but also consultatively and helpfully to the seminary about the findings of their investigations. And finally the commission must read the report both in the light of the standards and the needs of the institution and take such actions as will serve both the best interests of the Association's concern for "quality control" and the individual school's commitment to improvement.

Institutions anticipating an accrediting review have a unique opportunity to use the occasion constructively. Every educational enterprise at any particular moment has a series of issues which are timely, even urgent for its life. The accrediting process can be the time for addressing these issues within the overall pattern of the seminary's purposes. When the issues have been carefully clarified and appropriately treated in self-studies, the visiting team can be selected to complement these concerns. This brings p. 298 the accreditation process into sharp focus on the items of greatest importance, thus enhancing its intrinsic value.

When all of these things work together, accrediting can be an occasion for the improvement of theological education. But do not fail to note the multiple nature of the formula for success. Each ingredient is crucial, and its import should not be underestimated. The process of accreditation is an opportunity for self-analysis and peer/consultative evaluation and judgment which can significantly enhance the quality of ministerial education on a seminary campus. p. 299

Doing Church History at the Local Level

by PATRICIA J. HARRISON

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SOME EXCITING things are happenng in History today. Once the subject was equated with wars, treaties, events of great political and economic importance, and VIPs. Today it is

recognized that history can be written about almost anything. Historians want to know more about the life of ordinary people in days gone by. Social and intellectual history is coming into its own. We can read histories of costume, of toys, of music or child-rearing. Historians are interested nowadays in black and brown and yellow people, and in countries outside Europe and North America. Women, so long invisible in history books, are slowly finding their way back in. (High school history texts sometimes cover 1,000 years of history without mention of a single woman, unless perhaps a famous queen!)

Amid these changes, there is a new and unprecedented boom in local history. What happened in a small community 100 or 200 years ago is worth knowing, or it gives insight into everyday life in the past. It is probably a microcosm of life in thousands of other small communities of the time.

For those who teach Church History, these changes in the approach to history are important. Should we concentrate so much on the high-powered ecclesiastical and political studies of Europe, or would it be helpful to our students to know more about everyday Christian living in the past? About church growth and problems in lesser-known parts of the world and especially in our own area?

The study of history, among other things, seeks to provide *perspective*—an informed vantage point from which to assess present events. Historical perspective also demands the understanding of how history is done—that it is not simply a chronicle of cut-and-dried past events, but a *reconstruction*, which at best is only p. 300 approximate. One of the best ways for students to learn this, is to spend at least a term doing local history.

Some areas are extremely rich in local church history; students could devote a considerable part of their course time to its study. Other areas provide few, if any, opportunities for such study, but make sure you investigate before deciding that this is the case. Even young children today do a lot of local history through their own investigations. Good modern schools are awake to the excellent learning potential of such studies. Are we?

SOURCES OF LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY

If Christianity has been established in your region for some time, there will be many Churches with a history. There will probably be old manses, vicarages, halls or mission houses and stations with a story to tell. There will be old mission or parish magazines, reports, minutes, letters, and so on, housed locally or in denominational or mission head-quarters. Early newspapers may have contained church reports, photographs and so on. (Students should learn to "read" old photographs for information.)

Cemeteries are often a rich source of local history too. You can make many intelligent guesses about early life by studying headstones. What, roughly, was the population of the area 100 or 200 years ago? What was the average life expectancy? Did many folk lose children in infancy, and if so, from what causes? Were there epidemics in the area? Who were the early clergy, missionaries, or first converts? Were their lives hard?

Local history studies integrate well with a study of church growth. As we seek to plot the growth of our own denomination over a period of time, our knowledge of the church at that time and of important local events helps us account for sharp rises or falls in church membership, baptisms or church attendance. Often fascinating puzzles are posed and unexpected discoveries are made as students seek to unravel them. Even quite sleepy little towns can yield unexpectedly interesting finds about the past. And from the past we can so often learn for the present.

Among our richest resources for local history are elderly people, who can still remember earlier times. Usually they love to tell an p. 301 interested student about life as

they remember it. Elderly church members can share much information about Christianity as it used to be taught and lived in the area. In mission situations the elderly can often tell about the work of early missionaries, and their personalities. Sometimes they can remember what life was like before the Gospel came. Unless someone interviews these people and records or notes down their comments, their recollections will soon be lost forever. As students interview people, they learn how different points of view emerge, how the historian has to consider who said it, as well as what was said.

Local church history done in Europe will obviously be very different from that done in Latin America, or in the U.S. or Australia, but all can be worthwhile. In some countries students will have access to vast libraries, museums, numerous very old churches, documents, art galleries and so on. In other areas, they will study religion in the days of the frontier pioneers—how did the early padres visit their flock? What was church life like on the frontier?

In areas with younger Churches, students will be interested in life before the Gospel came, and in the first missionaries and their reception. They will learn about the first converts and the first Churches. It is good to study our own denomination, but also to discover what we can about the work of other missions.

Don't be too easily convinced that all that is worth knowing about the church history of your area has already been discovered. A little digging will often reveal surprising things. I recall one missionary in Africa whose research uncovered a great revival which had taken place on his station fifty years before. No one had known a thing about it!

METHODS IN LOCAL CHURCH HISTORY

Students should first be coached in the methodology of the local historian, and then, with the teacher's help, should select individual, group or class projects for study. They should plan their objectives and methods, and a deadline should be set.

Local church history can be done by students at any educational level. Even those who cannot write very well can record interviews, copy gravestone inscriptions, make sketches or photographs, p. 302 and (if equipment is available) photocopy documents, etc. More sophisticated students can delve into old documents and make copious notes from interviews; they will enjoy developing the skills of the detective historian, proving or disproving hypotheses.

Projects in local church history need to have some *use* planned for them upon completion, even though there is considerable satisfaction to be obtained purely in the doing.

The final outcome could be an article for a denominational paper, a booklet to be sold in local Churches, a radio program, a slide-tape set to be shown in surrounding congregations, a recorded talk, addresses to local church meetings or to a historical society, a dramatized presentation (which *could* also be filmed), a special evening pageant, a section of a TEE course, or a series of adult studies or Sunday School lessons for local use. In this way the findings are shared with others.

Some of my students in local church history have produced beautiful books of photographs explaining the history of a local church, and other interesting projects, such as those noted above. Often a local pastor is delighted to find someone sufficiently interested to explore the past, and proves most helpful.

In my own teaching of Church History, I have never felt such projects to be time-wasting luxuries. Rather, students learn by them some of the most fundamental concepts of what history is and how it is done. These lend deeper meaning to wider historical studies from books. In addition, students make important discoveries about the history of