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CONTENTS

Fifty Years of Theology and Theological Education at Duke: Retrospect and Prospect 3
by Robert E. Cushman

Theological Education: Near Horizons 23
by James T. Laney

God and America's Future 31
by John K. Roth and Frederick Sontag

Responses 43
by Waldo Beach, Herbert Edwards, Frederick Herzog, and by John K. Roth and Frederick Sontag

Book Reviews 55

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Fifty Years of Theology and Theological Education at Duke; Retrospect and Prospect

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I. Our Just Cause for Rejoicing

Let me say first—and especially to faculty, to students, and to alumnae and alumni—that I am sensible of exceptional privilege in addressing this company on the occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of our Divinity School. What, to me, is distinctly a gracious invitation is, at the same time, if not a dreadful, then an awesome responsibility. This latter is so because an anniversary such as this puts us in remembrance of a host of men and women: founders, administrators, faculty, staff, and students who labored here. To what, during a half-century, it has been given for this school to become, this company—visible and invisible—is a cloud of witnesses to a vision, to a faith, and to a hope for which very many, in divers roles and ways, have invested the substance of life itself. I know this is true; I have known the investors.

Fifty years is not a long time in the annals of theological education, even in this country. Yet in these fifty years I number nearly four score teachers—of varying tenure—whose learning and devotion to Christian enlightenment have enriched the minds and the lives of students and the Church itself. At the same time, I count approximately 3500 students, in the several degrees, who have enlarged their understanding of their faith and of their vocation and passed through these halls—the majority of them—to service of God and mankind, literally the world around. These graduates of the Divinity School—whether in the Southeast or northward, the mid or far West, or in far off Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Sweden, Austria, Greece, France, England, Scotland, Canada, Indonesia, India, Tonga, or Ghana, to remember only a few—these graduates are, likewise, a cloud of witnesses. They are witnesses to the outreaching vision of our founders but, more centrally, to the Lord of Life who is over all. As I see it, it is their testimony of word and deed—

quiet or renowned, in obscure or in focal places—that is very central to our celebration and its principal justification.

I think it was at the closing Divinity School service of worship in June 1958 that the late James Cannon III—and, as it proved, on the eve of his deanship—prayed over the assembled students and faculty somewhat as follows:

> We thank thee, O God, that thou has called us to serve thee in the work of this school. We remember with gratitude our fellows who labored here to advance the training of young ministers of Christ. We thank thee for the tasks we have been given to do in our time of passage, and the strength to do what we could. Establish thou the work of our hands, according to thy Word; and to thee shall be the praise. Amen.

As presiding minister that morning, I was struck by Dean Cannon's prayer. In retrospect, it seemed to me nothing could have been more appropriate. With terse eloquence it said: *Sic transit gloria mundi.* But, above all, it said: We are a cloud of witnesses in transit, and what it has been given us to invest looks beyond itself for its justification. So it is, "and thine shall be the praise world without end."

Something like this I take to be the real authorization of our Fiftieth Anniversary celebration. We signalize a corporate endeavor of a host of witnesses. Always we are debtors to a heritage bequeathed to us. We are stewards of riches to which we may add our small treasure, but the harvest is the Lord's.

But, now, what *is* a school? Is it not a place or, better, a community where light is kindled and nurtured *in the meeting of minds?* Of a Divinity School, however, it may also be said that it is a collective or corporate biography of faith in search of understanding. Here, St. Augustine's declaration is masterful: *Fides quaerens intellectum,* "faith seeking understanding." By this, Augustine meant to signalize not only a point-of-starting but a process, and the Divinity School or the seminary provides the auspices. It is the hope and expectation for such a school that, in the meeting of minds, the light of faith burns brighter—perhaps bright enough, by God's grace, for men and women to find their way to fulfilling service in the Kingdom of God. No other kind of school either expressly aspires or presumes to attempt so much!

As, now, we look back over a half-century, I venture to affirm we need not doubt that something like the lighting of the way has truly happened in the lives of very many. Accordingly, I believe we may justly celebrate these fruitions as a harvest of the years that

proves itself commensurate with the vision and the hope of the founders. And, in the measure this is so, I have no hesitancy in judging that at half-century Duke University Divinity School, as a corporate endeavor, has, so far, vindicated its reason for being. I know of no other significant criterion to judge such a school. Comparisons in externals are not only invidious; they are by reference to the primary goal finally irrelevant. In a Divinity School what counts is whether, in the meeting of minds, the light of faith burns brighter to illumine the way of those who venture into the dark night of this world in the Name of Him whose radiance "lighteth every man" coming into it. At half-century, it is these things, I believe, I have the awesome privilege of calling to our common remembrance, and, with you, to rejoice and give thanks that we can celebrate—and with a cloud of witnesses—the prospering of Christian enlightenment through the years 1926-1976.

II. What of Theology at Duke?

On this Fiftieth Anniversary these things are what I am most deeply moved to say on the subject of "theological education" at Duke. On this subject, however, I believe I have earned the right to be brief, since I am copiously—I hope not redundantly—on record in the Divinity School *Review*, or its predecessor, from 1945 until a final Alumni Address in 1971. Meanwhile, every opening Convocation Address in my years as dean (1958-1971) was devoted to aspects of theological education and is on record in the *Review*. Having reread the statement of 1945 and having glanced at others, I doubt that I would now retract much of anything I have hitherto said, but why must I repeat myself?

Accordingly, I would like to invite your attention to the other end of the stick I was expected to balance. With you I should like to reflect upon "fifty years of theology" at Duke. In a formal way little has ever been said about it. Undoubtedly the business is full of risk. The whole story is long, and our time is short. But I was asked. I will, therefore, accept the risk, but with the warning that what I shall have to say is subject to the limitations and biases of a chief participant over many years and, in that time, a wearer of different hats. Furthermore, I must warn in advance that the course over which we must needs travel is both long and various, sometimes colorful and exciting, but now and again tedious and, sometimes, hazardous as a minefield or studded with sandtraps—if, as is probable, you prefer golfing!

First, then, if we are to speak of theology at Duke, what may we mean by "theology"? Nowadays, this is not an idle question. The fact is that it has been in dispute for so long that there is today no little controversy among practitioners and, understandably, no little confusion among bystanders. In this situation I might show my colors and invite you to join me in taking our cue from John Wesley's *Plain Account of Genuine Christianity* (1749), except that, to my knowledge, hardly any Methodist theologian ever had the good sense to set us a precedent for doing so. We might ponder the subject by reference to the first paragraph of Calvin's *Institutes*. This might well be helpful, especially if we were also interested in going on to show how Schleiermacher laid the foundations of so-called "modern theology" by seizing upon one horn of the dilemma Calvin there seemingly propounds. But we have no time for elaborate historical recollections, and I will come quickly to the conception that, for me, alike describes both theology and the role of theological education.

It is that saying of Augustine's already quoted: *fides quaerens intellectum*. For me, whatever more it is, at rock bottom, Christian theology is "faith seeking understanding." And the *scandalon* is—as the Apostle Paul first saw and enforced upon the attention of the Corinthians—that appropriating Faith in "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," however alien to the wisdom of the world, is just exactly the kind of response suited to that unspeakable gift which passes all human understanding. For the Apostle faith is acceptance of the incomprehensible grace of God in Christ. Accordingly, St. Paul saw that it was indeed a God-given starting-point, *from* which, not *to* which, enlightenment proceeds.

This, too, is what John Wesley, at length, arrived at by way of a personal ordeal he found resolved under the auspices of the long-standing Pauline formula, then, lately rejuvenated: "justification by grace through faith." But what had been a tenet of doctrine among both the Continental and Anglican reformers became alive and recapitulated itself in Wesley's own experience, and the 18th century Evangelical Revival was born. For Wesley, as it were, the doctrinal map had all the while lain open before him, but it was a "dead letter" until Wesley himself actually made his own way over the road. This is what he conveys in his *Plain Account of Genuine Christianity*. Then, for him also, theology became "faith seeking understanding." And this meant new comprehension of the whole range of human experience—its depravity without Christ,

its radical promise of renovation through Christ—and this, both for the individual and for societal renewal.

III. Faith Seeking Understanding—A Corporate Endeavor

With this background we are, perhaps, in better position to understand the meaning of "theology" within the institutional context—that of the theological school, including this one. If indeed, theology—as also theological education—is, at bottom, "faith seeking understanding" as chief witnesses of the Faith declare, then, plainly, the indispensable prerequisite of any Christian theology is Christian faith. And this is more nearly a gift than a good work. It follows that this puts theology in a somewhat different position from other human inquiry, although not so different as is usually supposed in one respect, since all human inquiry starts, at last, either from naturally assumed premises or expressly formulated hypothetical ones. In any case, Christian theology, in so far as it is candid and not primarily apologetics, openly acknowledges its faith-premise as its reason for being and proceeds to inquire what this premise means, that is, how it illuminates the totality of human life in the world. This is interpretation and reaffirmation of the *given* Christian faith.

The exploration of this import through successive generations in changing contexts—which history always thrusts upon us—is, perhaps, a major differentia of systematic theology as distinguished from historical studies, whether Biblical or doctrinal. Yet we can hardly speak of theology in the institutional setting—that of a Divinity School—without acknowledging that this same theology is a corporate endeavor of the whole faculty, and, furthermore, in the context of serious faculty-student dialogue.

Space forbids discussion of the distinctive contribution of the several disciplines to the theological climate and standpoint of the school. It is apparent, however, that the curriculum of Biblical studies, the application of historical method to the Scriptures, to the interpretation of Christian origins and to the Apostolic and post-Apostolic witness, adopts standpoints having implicit doctrinal import. Yet, for all of these inquiries, it is still faith seeking understanding. Likewise church history, attending as it does to the unfolding of the tradition catholic—as the church discharges its vocation in the world and in interchange with it, for better or worse—is nerved also by faith pursuing enlarging self-understanding. Nor can pastoral theology and professional studies be ex-

cluded from this comprehensive inquiry, since the meaning and verity of Christian faith comes better into relief precisely in the granulating exchange which attends its communication and interaction with the resistant and resilient mind of the world. All of these disciplines, premised upon faith, pursue, in their several provinces, enlarging understanding.

When, therefore, we seek to take the measure of theology at Duke over the half-century since 1926 and ascertain its character and directions, we are immediately confronted by the fact that theology, here as elsewhere, is the many-sided *resultant* of a corporate endeavor of a company of teacher-scholars manning their distinctive disciplinary tasks in their own time and place. But there are, in addition, other very influential factors that have shaped theological emphasis and standpoints during the half-century of Duke Divinity School. These can be mentioned and some of them considered briefly.

IV. The Policy of the Founders: A Dialectic of Opposites

Let us, then, attend first of all to the intention of the founders. When we do so, we shall, I think, be persuaded that the presiding influence has been the inherited religious motivation and theological frame of reference of the founders, firmly rooted in the Methodist tradition. Yet it would be over-simple not to perceive that, granted this foundational commitment of the founders, their ends and aspirations for the school also reflected perspectives and a certain selectivity from the given tradition which seemed to them of central importance in setting forth the objectives of a university school of ministerial education. These objectives were, in fact, quickly implemented in the gathering and subsequent further staffing of the faculty. And, in this whole matter, William Preston Few was undoubtedly the original architect and builder as also, for many years, he continued to shepherd at close-hand the fledgling enterprise.

The two-fold principle that embraces *both* the received religious tradition of the founders *and* yet freedom to accent those essentials deemed suited to advance theological understanding in a university context is simply and candidly set forth under the title "School of Religion" in the first *Bulletin* or catalogue for 1926-1927. It reappears largely unaltered for several years and, in revised language, has persisted substantively to this time. Because of its formative significance I shall quote the concluding paragraph entire:

> Duke University retains the same close relationship which Trinity College always held to the Conferences in North Carolina of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. This legal relationship has always been broadly interpreted. Members of all other Christian denominations, as well as Methodist, will be made to feel welcome in the School of Religion and may be assured that the basis on which the work is conducted is broadly catholic and not narrowly denominational.[1]

No little exegesis and commentary upon the facets of this statement—which must, I believe, be referred to President Few himself primarily—might well occupy us. Concerning the original name of the school, Professor Emeritus Kenneth W. Clark, in his important account "Four Decades of the Divinity School," refers to the change of name from "School of Religion" to that of Divinity School as occurring in 1940.[2] The theological import of that change was far from negligible, as Professor Emeritus H. Shelton Smith is quite able to tell if he were inclined to do so. But I let this and other matters pass that we may focus upon the two facets of this declaration which are offered in dialectical juxtaposition so as to implicate, rather than negate, one another.

On the one hand, then, the status of the new school—as that of its parent institution, Duke University—stands in close, derivative, and even legal relationship with the then Methodist Episcopal Church, South; but, on the other hand, instruction in the theological disciplines is to be "broadly catholic and not narrowly denominational." On this latter basis, it is affirmed that "all other Christian denominations" are welcome. And on this basis, and from the very start, theological education at Duke was grounded on the ecumenical premise. This was immediately implemented by recruitment of an interdenominational faculty and, likewise, little by little, an interdenominational student enrollment. In the first two decades it was mainly Congregationalist and Baptist students who swelled the predominatingly Methodist core of the student body. Meanwhile, the second dean of the school was Elbert Russell, a Quaker.

The history of developments cannot here detain us. Yet the import of this candid and daring policy—combining in single amalgam Methodist derivation and grounding with ecumenical or

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1. *School of Religion—Duke University,* 1926-27, Announcements for 1927-28 (Durham, N. C., 1927), p. 18.

2. *The Divinity School Review,* Vol. 32, No. 2 (Spring 1967), p. 172. The School *Bulletin,* Vol. 13, No. 6 (May 1941), supplied the official public notice of change of name.

"broadly catholic" commitment— not only makes the status of Duke University Divinity School, from its origin, all but unique among university divinity schools in this country but also, without much question, was the formative influence in pre-determining the tone and character of the theological enterprise at Duke during the past half-century.

This deliberate and clear-headed espousal by President Few— in collaboration, we may reasonably suppose, with Edmund D. Soper, the first dean—of a *dialectic of opposites* as foundational policy must be seen for what it was and still remains. On the one hand, it expressly grounded theological endeavor at Duke in one particular historical tradition of Reformation Christianity as channelled through the Wesleyan evangelical heritage. On the other hand, it explicitly claimed a place for the riches of the whole range of "catholic" Christian tradition as the rightful domain of responsible scholarship and unfettered theological teaching. But in this, too, it is not amiss to note that it was scarcely at variance with Wesley's notable sermon on *The Catholic Spirit* or with his equally famous *Letter to a Roman Catholic.*

V. Corollaries of the Founding Policy

There are two or three corollaries deriving, I believe, from this dialectic of opposites, which I should like to mention for the record. The first is that the founders did not suppose that legitimate theological reflection or teaching could proceed without reference to either a particular living church or to the Church universal. Theology without grounding in a living *consensus fidelium* would be, in the absence of this, rootless. The founders did not, therefore, confuse the scientific study of religion as a phenomenon of human culture, with the distinctive tasks of Christian theology. Such study, together with philosophy of religion, might well have place in the total University curriculum, but it was not the galvanizing center of Christian theological studies devoted to the Church's ministry.

Secondly, resident in the phrase "broadly catholic and not narrowly denominational" was the clear reaffirmation of both "the freedom of the Christian man" under God (Luther) or "the liberty of prophesying" (Jeremy Taylor). To both of these John Wesley, long since, had already consented. And here was the minimal statement of the "liberal creed" which the founders invoked. By this they meant to say that, however rootless theology is in abstraction

from a living church, yet it can never be in bondage to any one dogmatic rendering of the Christian Tradition. From these two corollaries in tandem a third quite properly followed: the founders were standing in the truly "catholic" tradition—whether of Augustine in the 5th or Wesley in the 18th century—namely, that theology if it is to be *Christian* theology is at the core "faith seeking understanding."

If we put the outcome of these three corollaries together, they come to this: There is to be, as an integral part of the University, a faculty of theology which—with the School it represents and whose defined tasks it discharges—relates itself positively to the *consensus fidelium* of the living Church as its primary and constant point of reference. From that reference, the standpoint of living faith, it proceeds to enlarging understanding of the on-going tradition and to the communication thereof as its reason for being. But it does so with liberty to explore the entirety of the Tradition and, furthermore, in the confidence that the tradition of faith itself is a *living* reality with, as we say, a growing edge or an expanding frontier. And, indeed, this frontier must expand if it is to be commensurate with its proper Subject-matter. And that is God, the Creator and Redeemer, in his dialogue with man in history.

VI. The Structural Basis of Christian Theology: the Curriculum

If I have treated at some length the intentions of the founders and commented upon their conception of the role and task of the faculty of theology in this Divinity School, it is because, at half-century, it seems timely to recall from what wells we have been dug and, by reference to these, calculate better how theology at Duke has fared in the interim. As, shortly, I turn to this theme, I would have you alert to factors I think essential to any reliable understanding of the unfolding shape of theology at Duke Divinity School over these years.

It must be seen that, whatever form or style "theology" has taken, as a resultant, it is, plainly, the outcome of the corporate endeavor of the entire Divinity School faculty. And we may add that, to this end, the unfolding of the curriculum over a half-century must be studied and interpreted for its important indications concerning the substance and character of theology at Duke. To put it in a word: the curriculum is the message, that is, the dominating theological emphases current over the years of our purview.

If the curriculum is, as it were, the message, then it is plain that it is the curriculum which may, in any era, be tested most easily by reference to the three basic principles I have described as inherent in the founding policy. Nor is the curriculum, therefore, indefinitely admissible of modification or rank growth to comply with the intellectual fashions of the times; rather must it remain accountable to basic principles as adjudged by the faculty and, finally, by arbitrament of the dean and the University. This I believe has prevailed at Duke Divinity School this first half-century. It is, however, to be observed that tendencies to blur the lines between the explicit mandates of a faculty of Divinity and those of a merely scientific and phenomenological study of religion have become marked in American universities for a quarter-century and are not without a presence among us today. Unless this is understood and the integrity of the Divinity School's curriculum conserved, an erosion of the intent and policy of the founders is a possibility and will always remain so. During this half-century the leadership of Duke University has been remarkable both for its understanding and its undergirding of the founding policies.

I wish there were space for some observations and generalizations respecting the curricular history of this first half-century. The barest mention must suffice. The curriculum from the start, but progressively, has been diligent to represent the whole spectrum of the Christian Tradition from its Biblical origins through the successive ages of the Church and of the Church's witness and worship. The Biblical languages have been taught with great distinction. The liturgy has been plumbed for both its doctrinal import and its vehicular power in the School's life of corporate worship.

Some twenty-five years past the curriculum, through specialized professional studies, began far more expressly to relate the message of faith to the corrugations of life in the world and, I think, with direct bearing and usefulness for the minister's task in an increasingly problematic and changing society. Important revisions of curriculum took place in 1948, 1959, and 1968—the last, perhaps overly responsive to the anti-institutional and anti-ecclesiological spirit of the time.

Yet it is, I think, fair to say that, on the whole, the curriculum has remained answerable to the *dialectic of opposites* expressed in the formative policy of the School, with the corollaries I have mentioned. These have indubitably fostered and encouraged the

character of theology at Duke all the way from appointment of faculty to the presiding emphases of the curriculum. The influence of the policy of a dialectic of opposites has been, at once, ecumenical and liberating; at the same time, it labors under no misunderstanding as to whether the theological faculty has as its controlling point of reference the on-going and living Church.

VII. Fifty Years of Theology at Duke in Résumé

Now, having fully insisted upon these fundamental considerations and principles as basic to the unfolding shape of theology at Duke, how, then, would one characterize the outcome over these fifty years? This is to raise the theological question head-on or, more exactly, the question of doctrine in the theological curriculum. This question is no longer concerned simply with what *has been witnessed,* historically considered, but what *must* be reaffirmed in fidelity to the essential Gospel as it bears upon human life in the world. But this, to be sure, is always being done according to the light and understanding of its delegated professors at a given time in history. So we ask, what is the doctrinal profile of the School during these years? Can we, or ought we, label it, and with what tag or tags? Or are tags both dangerous and superfluous in evaluating the doctrinal contribution of the School to its students, the Church, or the world?

Now, at this point, the dreadful privilege to which I referred at the start becomes pressing indeed. To address myself to this latter question requires, it would seem, the naming of names of justly revered teachers and the omission of others, both living and departed, whose express and implied Christian witness has been doctrinally formative through these years. In addition, I find myself in a peculiarly delicate not to say treacherous position, since for well-nigh thirty-two years, for better or worse, I have been by title a teacher of systematic theology and for thirteen years—likewise for better or worse—I administered policy as dean. In short, I am, as they say nowadays, "involved"! Accordingly, I must avoid at all costs a course which John Henry Newman—and however laudable in his case—found unavoidable, namely, an *apologia pro vita mea!*

Fortunately, both of these hazards can be circumvented in some measure if we may take careful note of the conception of systematic or doctrinal theology twice referred to already in this paper. The latest mention was the implied definition of this kind of theology

as what must be or *ought to be reaffirmed* in fidelity to the essential Gospel as the latter bears upon human life in the world in the considered judgment of its delegated professors. Here I use the word "professor" in its classical as well as in its etymological meaning. But, more importantly, I intend to differentiate systematic from other theological disciplines by two considerations: first, it takes explicit responsibility for what *ought to be reaffirmed* of the received catholic Tradition, and, secondly, it does so, in part, by reference to the pressing issues enforced upon it by sundry problems of man's life in the world as currently understood, and, in turn, as these reflect back upon the Christian message itself.

Do not confuse this description of the doctrinal task with the late Paul Tillich's much patronized "method of correlation" in theology. Rather, is the description I give, as it were, the more general case of which his, in my view, is a very dubious derivative. The intentions here are very nearly the reverse of one another. Tillich would find what is still luminous in the Faith by submitting it to the "spot-light," as it were, of the world's ultimate concerns. Mine would be to illuminate the human world with the light of the Gospel and, *in the process,* recover and further discover the inherent luminosity of the Faith itself. In this way Faith not only seeks but finds understanding, indeed, acquires enriching discoveries respecting its own essence.

But, now, this conception of the task of theology is useful for deciphering the character of theology at Duke these fifty years. In short, one may get significant leads respecting Duke theology (or any Protestant theology of the recent past) by taking one's bearings—much as the sextant serves the sea captain—by reference to the prevailing "problematics" acknowledged and faced by theologians at given periods.

Accordingly, in fifty years of theological reaffirmation at Duke there have been, I judge, at least three quite distinguishable periods of doctrinal response to the circumambient environment punctuated, at intervals, by World War II, the civil rights movement, and the prolonged and adversely influential Viet Nam national debacle. It is this surrounding environment of issues—as understood, of course, by theologians—that stimulates the response of faith and greatly contributes to the shape of theology or doctrinal expression anywhere. This has most surely been the case at Duke. Here, this generalization applies provided we do not forget that theology is a corporate product and that, at Duke, it has developed

under the aegis of what has been described as the "dialectic of opposites."

The three periods to which I refer—each distinguishable by presiding concerns, problems, and diagnoses—are the following: There is, first, the liberation of preaching and doctrine from both Scriptural fundamentalism and provincial and denominational traditionalism. There is, second, the powerful thrust of the World Ecumenical Movement toward recovery of a united Christendom—attended, at the same time, by a truly vast reassessment and critical reappropriation of doctrinal riches of the Church Universal. There is, thirdly, the current period—world-wide in scope and presupposing, likewise, the so-called "third-world"—which, taken at large, is bewilderingly diversified in concerns and aspirations. It manifests a reactionary temper toward the previous period in persistent ambivalence toward confessional theology and the Church catholic. Its prevailing standpoint is "contextual," which means *either* that it measures the truth of Christian faith by its *relevance* to the ubiquitous human problem, *or* that it lays the churches under judgment—in some few instances, truly, the judgment of God in Christ.

About each of these eras and how they are reflected in theology at Duke only a few words can be said in the allotted space.

(1) Concerning the first era: when Gilbert T. Rowe accepted appointment at Duke for the fall of 1928, the catalogue had already for two years carried six hours of "Christian Doctrine" as required work but with no surname in the space prefixed by the word "professor." When Dr. Rowe—whose colleagueship I was privileged to share for three years prior to 1948—took up teaching duties, he was already a pastor and noted preacher of the Western North Carolina Conference with a record of rather meteoric rise to church-wide recognition and veteran experience. Furthermore, he had come to Duke from the important position of Book Editor for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and was the highly admired if somewhat controversial editor of the *Methodist Quarterly Review*. The persistence with which he was courted by Drs. Few and Soper, albeit with near failure, to occupy the chair of Christian Doctrine has now been revealed by Reverend O. Lester Brown in his valuable biography of Dr. Rowe.[3]

Among the interesting statements of the reported correspon-

3. *Gilbert T. Rowe: Churchman Extraordinary* (Greensboro, N.C.: Piedmont Press, 1971), pp. 74-90.

dence is Dr. Rowe's written comment to Dr. Soper, which gives us a glimpse both of the context for doctrinal revision as Dr. Rowe conceived it then, and of the message he deemed suitable to the hour. In 1927 he wrote: "It seems to me that Duke has a very great opportunity and responsibility in the matter of helping the preachers get in touch with the last [latest?] thought and life of the age and at the same time to be genuinely evangelical in their ministry. . . ."[4] In his subsequent teaching of Christian theology he recurrently used as textbook D. C. Macintosh's *Theology as an Empirical Science.* This he commented upon with extensive elaborations of his own in a style inimitable, picturesque, whimsical, but also trenchant. As one who studied under Professor Macintosh —indeed as his first successor at Yale as also, curiously, Dr. Rowe's successor at Duke—I believe I understand something of Dr. Rowe's theological interests and prepossessions. Both men—Rowe and Macintosh—were, in their distinctive ways, spokesmen for an "evangelical liberalism" that accepted the findings of Biblical criticism and the import of the biological and physical sciences as these related to God's work in creation, and yet strongly affirmed both the experiential basis of Christian faith and its consequential compelling and lofty moral vocation.

Much, much more there is to say were there space to say it, and as it should be said. The *Resolution* of the faculty on the occasion of Dr. Rowe's retirement in 1948—written by very knowledgeable colleagues—underscores the point of special bearing upon the question before us. Among other things, it states: ". . . the South owes him much for the transition which he assisted it to make from an older uncritical orthodoxy to a more *timely* grasp upon the eternal gospel."[5] As one studies Dr. Rowe's article on "Present Tendencies in Religious Thought" in *The Divinity School Bulletin* of 1936, one has clear glimpses into the theological premises from which he worked.[6] His final word on the work of the new school, after just over two decades, was this: "Without pressure from any source all the members of the faculty were gradually drawn together into an essential unity, and Duke Divinity School is now well known as an institution characterized by evangelical liberalism."[7] Although we have but scratched the surface, this general characterization of

4. *Ibid.,* p. 78.
5. *Divinity School Bulletin,* Vol. 14, No. 2 (May, 1949), p. 20. Italics are mine.
6. *Ibid.,* Vol. 1, No. 2 (May, 1936), pp. 29-35.
7. *Divinity School Bulletin* (May, 1949), p. 19.

theology at Duke in the earlier days, I am content to leave standing, coming as it does from a chief expositor.

(2) Chronologically, the second period at Duke overlaps with the first, extending, let us say, from 1940—or prior to the Second World War—into the mid-sixties. I take, for objective reference, the close of the Second Vatican Council (1965) as the approximate terminus as, likewise, it was the summit point of the World Ecumenical Movement. This movement, together with its accompanying theological renaissance, undoubtedly provided the living *milieu* for theological endeavor and doctrinal reformulation at Duke as elsewhere during this second period. Not merely regional but even national boundaries of earlier American theological preoccupation, animus, and debate acquired a span, certainly as wide as the Western Christian world.

The theological faculty began to re-think long-standing impasses between conflicting confessional viewpoints as refracted by species of Protestant "liberalism"—either historicism, on the one hand, or ethicism on the other. It did so in the enlarging consciousness, sometimes half-articulate, that Christian faith and devotion, after all, do antedate the 16th century Reformation. Especially did trends in Biblical study at Duke as well as in Church History both reflect and contribute to the emergence of an expanding context for doctrinal restructuring and emphasis.

The marks of this change of perspective at Duke cannot all be enumerated here. One such mark was the manuscript and textual researches of Kenneth Clark, that made him a respected and trusted New Testament scholar of the West with leading representatives of Orthodoxy in the eastern Mediterranean world and led to unprecedented textual studies and findings at St. Catherine's monastery, Sinai, at Athos, in Palestine, and elsewhere. One of them was Ray C. Petry's extraordinary unfolding of the rich Medieval inheritance. Another, surely, the flowering of studies in the hitherto obscure and neglected but rich heritage of our own American Christianity in the notable work of H. Shelton Smith. Still another sign is the enormous undertaking represented by the Wesley Works Editorial Project, now incorporated. Begun in 1959—and still far, too far, from completion—it is committed to the publication of the *Oxford Edition* of the Works of John Wesley. Of this, Frank Baker is the incomparable Editor-in-Chief. The collaboration required has been international. In this enterprise the Divinity School has been principal investor and so continues.

Other marks there are of the thrust toward recapture of the great tradition—such as Stinespring's studies in Near Eastern history and Cleland's quarter-century of preaching and teaching in Duke Chapel. One would miss the main point, however, unless he sees that the ecumenical movement, not only fostered unprecedented international theological exchange across long and rather firmly closed denominational frontiers, but that it nurtured exploration and recovery of the entire range of the Christian Tradition in depth.

It is in *this* perspective, primarily, that Karl Barth's or Emil Brunner's resurgent neo-Reformation theology received the attention it in fact commanded in those days. Today, it is doubtful that such system-building is possible, were it in all respects desirable. A principal reason, I believe, is that there is today no comparable "rising curve of Christian affirmation" in the churches to support it. The emerging but unfinished *consensus fidelium* that attended the high-tide of the ecumenical movement has fallen silent—not so much exhausted, I think, as overwhelmed by other insistent cares in an era of world-wide and profoundly resident anxiety. In our time the word salvation, therefore, has largely been redefined by the twin-concept: security and social mobility.

If, then, I am to characterize the second period of doctrinal ferment at Duke, I might venture to describe it as the inaugural era of exploratory ecumenical theology—as yet unfinished—and based upon a very considerable recovery of the Tradition catholic as contrasted with the traditions, plural, and featuring the two-fold theme of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order, namely, "Christ and his Church."

(3) In the second period of the Divinity School's theological creativity, professional theology assayed its tasks in a consciousness of growing colleagueship with practicing churchmen and the larger fellowship of believers. In addition to enhancing general ecumenical vision, the now near-forgotten liturgical revival of the same period offered a common ground of the Spirit for both theological revision and common worship in a developing interdenominational forum. For historical reasons of baffling complexity and enormous scope, the succeeding third period of theological endeavor at Duke reflects more than a decade of widespread societal disassociation if not disintegration, although signs of healing may be appearing in the wings. As, perhaps, the disunion of Christendom was the central "problematic" of theology in the second

period, so, in the third, the self-conscious disunity of mankind becomes the focus.

A mark of this trend is that, viewed as a whole, theology in America has become predominantly either "free-lance" or emphatically "academic," and tends to be as remote from "Church dogmatics," in self-understanding and method, as the previous period was well advanced on the way towards it.[8] This is true especially of the American scene, and more emphatically, perhaps, than in Europe. American provinciality in theology, therefore, is already fully resurgent but in pluralized and multifarious shapes and platforms too numerous even for mention here. Meanwhile, the so-called "third world" viewpoints—representing more nearly socio-economic and ethnic concerns than geographic ones—are belatedly clamorous for their share in Christian doctrinal revision, especially as this bears upon *both* the social application of acknowledged Christian ethical norms to the plight of the oppressed of the earth and, also, the fidelity of the Church to its calling in the world.

Of the several species of so-called "renewal theology," which came forward with some very understandable incentives in the late sixties, two mottos, in particular, may sample aspects of the theological program of the time. As you may recall, one of them was: "Let the world provide the agenda." This was exhortation to the churches. The other was its complement, namely, J. C. Hoekendijk's injunction for the times: "The Church Inside Out." The corrective included the thesis that the whole business of Christianity *is* mission—indeed, it seems, is quite exhausted in mission. Explicit was the exhortation to "de-ghettoize" the church—which is, to be sure, always timely—but in particular Hoekendijk with others enjoined the need to quit making of the Church a refuge for private salvation and all cloistered virtues. For some representatives of the viewpoint, justification by faith considered as private salvation was totally expendable. Accordingly, a new evangelicalism was in the making! But it is not clear that it had a firm grasp upon the whole Gospel.

Further accounting of recent theological tendencies is excluded. On the whole—and taking a purview of the rather humorless, tactless, and joyless voices in "professional" theology of the im-

8. The word "academic" denotes more than institutional setting. It denotes also, as Dean James Laney makes clear in his Convocation address, a "guild" mentality among academicians who are more disposed to find their "identity" by reference to their "peer group" than to any fellowship of the community of believers, the Church.

mediate present—the preponderance of utterance seems to derive from three sources: the applied-ethics bureaucracy of the churches, religious journalism of many stamps, and the faculties of university departments of religion. Meantime, it is a good while since churchmen of the stature of Francis J. McConnell, Henry Sloan Coffin, William Temple, or a Gilbert T. Rowe of the South have entered the lists for anything like serious theological discussion.

Taken together, these circumstances are, I think, indicative of a pressing issue today respecting the sources and norms of Christian doctrine, namely: "Who speaks for the Church"—*anymore*? Shall the word spoken be primarily that of its critics, or, if its thoughtful communicants speak, will they have the currency of "paper-back" appeal and, hence, find a publisher? Here at the Divinity School, as elsewhere, the disciplined theologian experiences as his regular diet something not unlike a Sahara of sand in the midst of which he is intermittently buffeted by squalls of special interest, often abrasive, coming from the twelve points of the theological compass. What shall he do? Where shall he begin, and how shall he speak?

Under such circumstances it does get to be rather a matter of nicely calculated priorities, as Professor Herzog has quite lately urged, namely, as to which of the winds—and from what point of the compass—one faces into. Yet facing into the winds is much as any seagull, I have noticed, regularly does on the rock-bound coast of Maine. This goes even for Jonathan Livingston Seagull!

In his frequently misunderstood "liberation theology"—yet, I think, with a proven evangelical concern—Herzog has faced into winds blowing, probably, ever since the Barmen Declaration of the confessing Evangelical Church of Germany—with solitary courage in 1934—acknowledged in the face of the ill-wind of Hitler's National Socialism a treacherous temptation of the churches and reaffirmed the sovereignty of God over man's history and the fidelity of the Church to its calling before God in the world. Karl Barth later declared himself on this head in his *Rechtfertigung und Recht* (*Justification and Justice*, 1939), and one will not really understand "liberation theology" in Herzog's version, I believe, unless one sees that—in line with Barth, his teacher, before him—Herzog is urging that to take "justification by faith" seriously and to comprehend its full import requires the acknowledgement that salvation is not only a private transaction between Christ and the individual, but a public commitment of the justified community, the Church, to the purpose of God in the affairs of mankind.

I think I am not far afield in judging that "liberation theology" is a call to the Church and church people really to affirm their liberation, through Christ, from conformity and bondage to "the mind of the world." In addition to recalling the Apostle Paul to our attention in this way, Professor Herzog is underscoring what Luther was saying in the 16th century: Let God be God in the Church! In Herzog's view this is an urgently needed word for the hour among the established churches of the South. On this point, although I think we can be somewhat more inclusive, he can scarcely be wrong. Yet the insistence is as old as Amos' exhortation against "ease in Zion" and as recent as H. Richard Niebuhr's stress in the '40's on the pressing need of Christians to be converted to Christianity.

Anyone who has read even moderately in the writings of Wesley knows that the conversion of nominal Christians to Christianity was what Wesley's preaching and indefatigable labors of more than a half a century were all about, and, furthermore, that in contrast with very nearly the whole Continental Lutheran and Reformed theology Wesley made "Christian perfection"—with social outreach—the undoubted test of any private salvation worth mentioning. It does not follow, of course, that Wesley's succession has continued to hear him. It is, therefore, reassuring to know that the voice of authentic Wesleyan evangelicalism is timely among us. I believe it has promise of recovery of the great tradition. It is always healthy for Methodists, in particular, to be reminded of Wesley's later life *Thoughts Upon Methodism,* where he says: "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power."

What this means for us today Dr. W. P. Stephens touched upon in his first Gray Lecture in the stress that "conversion is political and social as well as personal." Unpopular as this has been among many evangelicals, it is plain enough that Wesley would be no stranger to the thought that authentic Christianity cannot be passed off for private fence-mending between God and the sinner. He was, of course, clear about man the sinner. But, in the hotly controverted *Conference Minutes* of 1770, Wesley scandalized the Calvinists of his day by declaring that "works meet for repentance" are the inescapable obligation and outcome of justification and, further, if absent, absent too is the "condition" of salvation. This

let loose probably the most formidable doctrinal debate of the 18th century, between John Fletcher, against antinomianism, and Augustus Toplady and others. In plain words, Wesley had flown in the face of Reformed theology simply to stand firm with the words of our Lord: "By their fruits ye shall know them." With Wesley "Christian perfection" was not optional. It was part of the doctrine with which the Methodists began and heedlessness to which might incur the sectarian deadness he feared most.

VIII. Conclusions

My account of theology at Duke these fifty years is now done. I have attempted, in brief compass, to recount and to interpret the story as faithfully as I am able. It cannot escape our notice how vastly expanded is the context and how multiplied the issues by reference to which doctrinal reaffirmation today must be undertaken as compared with the '20's and the '30's of this century. Nevertheless, I must register the judgment that any and all responsible theological reflection of the future at Duke will be well advised to keep before it the foundational guidelines embraced in the founders' conception that I have named "the dialectic of opposites." Authentic Christian theology must recognize that, from *faith,* it may *hope* to move onward to understanding—also that its primary point-of-reference is the faith of a living Church. Coordinately, on the other hand, this same theology is under mandate to go on probing the Scripture and the tradition of the Church catholic, always with a view to illuminating the darkness of the human world with the "light of the world," even Jesus Christ.

Finally, I see much in the story recounted to reassure us, as also the founders, and to justify no little rejoicing that, in truth, the Divinity School of Duke University has been, during this half-century, a real community for the meeting of minds whereby the light of faith has been nurtured and has burned brighter to illumine the way of those who, nerved by it, have ventured forth to discharge their given vocation in church and world. But the Psalmist has the final word for the past as also for any future in theology: "In thy light shall we see light."