

The History of the Unification Theological Seminary

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Dean of Academic Affairs



Just a year ago at this time, many of you were here to witness the opening of the Unification Theological Seminary and the installation of its faculty and administration. This achievement was the fulfillment of a longtime dream of its founder, Reverend Moon, and the culmination of many months of legal and academic preparation. At the opening ceremony it was my privilege to give a brief history of events that led to the birth of the Seminary. This morning I would like to comment on its first year of life.

The question is often asked: "What are the students likely to do following graduation?" "What are they preparing for?"

Probably a number of the students who will graduate at the end of this academic year will work in local or regional Unification Church training programs. Others will be involved in ecumenical work in oral and written dialogue with Christian ministers and leaders of other religions, and with educators and scientists. Some graduates may take positions with the media. Some, perhaps eight or ten, will pursue doctoral studies, preparing for teaching and research in the academic world. Indeed some will prepare to teach in the Sun Myung Moon University of the near future. Others will go to leadership positions in the church or civic community which call for or are strengthened by a foundation in religious studies. Still others may go to foreign missions.

All, in one way or another, will interpret the message and work of the Unification Church and the Divine Principle. They will often be called on to be spokesmen or spokeswomen for the Church on a variety of problems and issues in our society.

In all of these tasks, dedication must be supplemented by knowledge and understanding. Our leaders will read a knowledge of our roots in Judeo-Christian history, of the biblical foundations of Christianity, the insights of traditional and contemporary theology and philosophy, the beliefs of major world religions, and the philosophy and methodology of education.

Graduates of the Seminary will return to the field and accept their new positions with a deep sense of responsibility and of appreciation for this opportunity to prepare here for the worldwide outreach of the Unification Church.

In general I viewed the first year as a fruitful one -- formation stage, to be sure, but nevertheless, a beginning. Some of the specific achievements of the first year were these. The Seminary admitted 56 students, 48 men and 8 women, to its first class. They came from a variety of academic, social and religious backgrounds, and from nine different nations. Many of the students left fundraising teams or other equally active missions and successfully made the transition to a life that demanded a different type

of discipline -- lectures, study, long hours in the library, term papers, tutorials and examinations. In the course of the year, grades improved with each quarter and I think I can say that every student laid a strong foundation in all curricular areas this year. They overcame barriers of language and culture. I do not know the attrition rate for seminaries or other graduate schools but an attrition rate of 5.3 is low by any standards.

Challenged by a visiting professor, a number of students prepared to enter the Hartford-Boston debate. They met, prayed, argued and worked together over a statement of the Church's concerns and Christianity's priorities at this time in history. The Hartford-Boston debate began in January 1975 when 18 prominent churchmen of nine different Christian denominations met in a three-day session at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut and issued a statement deploring the worldliness that had recently stamped liberal religion.

The statement stressed the reality of the supernatural and called for a more pious awareness of God. Then in January of this year, 21 persons of the Boston religious community issued a counter-statement that attacked the churches' retreat from political struggle and pleaded for increased social militance and suggested that God's activity is most forcefully at work in the struggles for the poor and the oppressed. As our students grappled with this dichotomy of emphasis in Christianity, the Barrytown affirmations took shape as a unique insight into God's providence in the Church today.

An independent research project for the Bicentennial was conducted by the students with faculty and administrative consultation. Students identified and researched 120 events which shaped America and brought to publication an attractive and informative pictorial magazine entitled *Toward Our Third Century*. In addition, a number of students as well as professors have had articles published during the year.

Experimenting with dramatic arts, students wrote and produced several plays including a musical version of the Esau and Jacob story. Such ventures clearly witnessed to the exciting potential of theater for telling the Gospel story.

The Seminary began its interfaith dialogue by sending a delegation to the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. The students found themselves considerably better prepared to dialogue with other Christians than they were a year before. They also made friends and established valuable contacts for the future.

The Seminary began a student-organized intramural athletics program. Through the program the Seminary and Barrytown staff met other sportsmen and women in the Mid-Hudson Valley area. An excellent article covering one of these encounters made its way all across the country.

The Seminary hosted a number of guest speakers this past year, many of them applicants for faculty positions. The students were enriched by visits from distinguished scholars, Dr. Herb Richardson and Fr. Arthur Gibson from the University of Toronto, Dr. Fred Sontag from the Pacific School of Religion, Dr. Jack Finegan from the University of California, Dr. Joseph McMahon from St. John's University, and Dr. Margaret Maxey from the University of Detroit among them.

The Seminary sponsored a cultural series which brought noted musicians and writers from the New York City area to the campus and provided them not only an appreciative audience but an opportunity to experience and make their own observations of a program of the Unification Church. On several occasions major national and international television networks visited the Seminary, giving students firsthand experience with broadcast media.

Students participated in both historic God Bless America festivals. I told them in June that the fact that their participation in Yankee Stadium did not result in mass schizophrenia was testimony to their great resiliency and to their faith. During the past 10 weeks, students have been fully involved in the Washington Monument festival in a variety of leadership capacities.

In the course of the year the Seminary has developed the most complete theological library in the area. Its collection of 20,000 volumes includes several smaller private collections which were purchased this year. The library is fortunate to have three professional librarians. It will expand its service to students with full reference service during the coming year.

Much of what the students achieved this past year can be credited not only to their own effort but to the dedicated faculty who oriented them to graduate work and inspired, taught, and worked with them beyond the requirements of a contract.

During the course of our first year, they have begun to fulfill the dream of many a religious educator. Coming as they do from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences and faced with a certainly unique student body, these professors have found a source of unity in their common commitment to deeper

understanding among the people of God. The creation of this new Seminary has taken intellectual and sometimes social courage on the part of each faculty member. I know that they are pleased to welcome their new colleagues on this occasion. In this light, the appointment of new members of the faculty is certainly among the most important achievements toward the overall goals of the Seminary. Their presence now adds to the strength of our faculty expertise in Orthodox Church history, in the history of Israel and Judaic studies. You might say we have added a representative of both Athens and Jerusalem.

Some achievements of the year have been more internal and less capable of being measured or described. A Seminary is more than an educational institution. It is significant that Rev. Moon founded a Seminary and not a liberal arts college with a department of religious studies. A Seminary, as Dr. Sallie TeSalle of Vanderbilt has articulated, is "not simply an intellectual community but a community of worship." Its academic goals must be pursued according to the highest standards of academic work but always within the context of the purpose of the Church -- to increase the love of God and neighbor among people.

Dr. Roy Pearson, president of Andover Newton Theology School, has commented that one can study theology and all the substance of theological education in the same way that an entomologist studies insects. "It can be approached," he remarked, "as a phenomenon like other phenomena -- something to be studied, coordinated, compared, reduced to manageable concepts and filed in accessible cases. The essence of the matter is that when the observer goes home to dinner, he need not take his observations with him, and its irony stems from the fact that the expert theologian can be totally irreligious." In our Seminary, rather, the unity of theological concepts and religious practice must be central. Theological education is the means, as he said, by which the Church prepares itself for the proclamation of truth to which the Seminary is so intrinsically committed that although the gospel could exist without the Seminary, the Seminary would lose its reason for being without the gospel, without the Divine Principle.

One of those difficult to measure achievements of the past year, an internal one in some respects, is that a beginning has been made toward creating a community of worship, a set of creative relationships whose purpose is to witness to and to channel God's presence in this world. In the struggle for academic achievement, students strove not so much to maintain a balance between intellectual and spiritual as to integrate the two. They studied not only their academic subjects but Divine Principle, listened intently to the words of Rev. Moon on his visits to the Seminary and sought the counsel of President Kim on his regular visits to the Seminary. Through the year they maintained an openness toward God and toward each other. They cultivated their prayer life and friendships, as well as their intellects.

The challenge to administration, faculty and students alike is to advance in creating the environment where life and religion are one, an environment of worship with its attitudes of openness to others, a sense of the sacred and of the joy of life in doing the will of God. In this environment, the search for God will not be separate from the search for truth in theology or any other discipline. The mind and the spirit and the body will all be engaged and centered on the fulfillment of the highest ideals at the level of the individual, the family, the nation and the world.