



For the Church

A Collection of essays

by Dr. Leonard K. Allen

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*A collection of essays
by Dr. Jason K. Allen*

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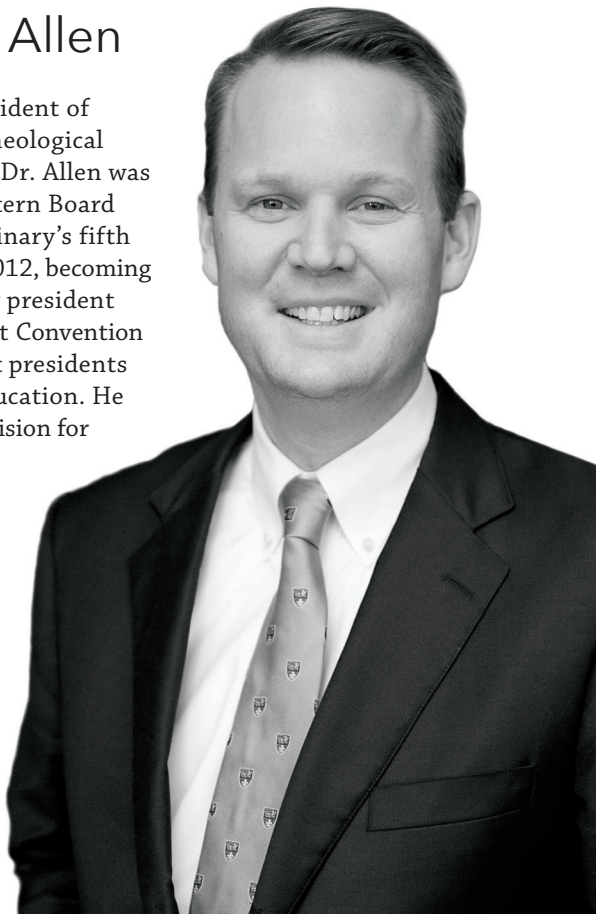
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serves as the fifth president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and College. Dr. Allen was elected by the Midwestern Board of Trustees as the seminary's fifth president on Oct. 15, 2012, becoming the youngest seminary president in the Southern Baptist Convention and one of the youngest presidents in American higher education. He came with a renewed vision for the school, focusing its mission and vision on a seminary's sacred calling to serve the local church.

Dr. Allen married Karen Brunson on June 26, 1999. Together they have five children: Anne-Marie (10), Caroline (9), William (7), Alden (5), and Elizabeth (4).



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BY NEW TESTAMENT MANDATE,
DENOMINATIONAL EXPECTATION,
AND SELF-IMPOSED DETERMINATION,
MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
STANDS WITHOUT COMPROMISE IN ITS COMMITMENT
TO SERVE THE LOCAL CHURCH. THIS ESSAY
SERIES ANSWERS THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS OF
"WHAT IS A SEMINARY TO BE?" AND
"WHAT IS A SEMINARY TO DO?" THE
ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS
OF IDENTITY AND MISSION ARE
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A SEMINARY IS TO BE A PRE-
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ONE INESCAPABLE CONCLUSION:
A SEMINARY MUST EXIST FOR THE
CHURCH.

By New Testament mandate, denominational
expectation, and self-imposed determination,
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
stands without compromise in its commitment
to serve the local church. This essay
series answers to the fundamental questions
of "What is a seminary to be?" and
"What is a seminary to do?" The answers
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- Dr. Jason K. Allen

Theological Education, the SBC, and the Future of Midwestern Seminary

In Arthur Schlesinger's award-winning biography of Franklin Roosevelt, he famously labeled the economic and political malaise of the 1920s and 30s as "the crisis of the old order." Schlesinger argued that political, cultural, and economic norms were changing so rapidly that, coupled with government inaction, they coalesced to form a crisis of the entire American status quo—a crisis that would upend society and necessitate re-conceptualization of American economic and social policy. Current observers of higher

education, including theological seminaries, likewise acknowledge a crisis exists in many of the seminaries and divinity schools in North America today. This crisis is so profound it is forcing institutions to re-conceptualize their model of education and their means of delivering it.

Admittedly, *crisis* is a tired word. We hear often of political, economic, geopolitical, and cultural crises. Yet, when subjected to careful review, theological education in North America must be

deemed as in a state of crisis. This current distress evidences itself in at least three areas.

First, most theological institutions in America find themselves, at least to some degree, mired in a crisis of resources. The escalating costs of higher education, nagging questions about the value of advanced degrees, encroaching federal regulations, and persistent economic sluggishness present even the best-funded institutions with daunting operational challenges.

This crisis of resources has forced historic institutions to merge or close, and has left the remaining ones searching for a sustainable business model. These fiscal realities, and more, have been like a spiraling whirlpool, drawing almost every theological institution into its vortex. The persistent generosity of

Southern Baptists through the Cooperative Program has proven to mitigate this fiscal challenge; however, even Southern Baptist seminaries are not immune to this struggle.

Sadly, the most urgent and consequential crisis in theological education is not one of funding. It is more fundamental and philosophical; the crisis is one of identity. What is a seminary to be? Stemming from and coupled with this crisis of identity is a crisis of mission. What is a seminary to do?

The answers to these questions of identity and mission are predetermined because a seminary is to be a pre-committed entity—looking to Scripture for its purpose and mission. When a seminary looks to Scripture for its identity, it will be drawn to one inescapable conclusion: a seminary must exist FOR THE CHURCH. When Christ

promised in Matthew 16 to build his church, it was more than a reference to a secondary kingdom initiative. Rather, it was a prophetic word, a declaration, as to his redemptive and kingdom intent.

After all, Christ died for his church. He is the head of his church. He is the church's bridegroom. He gifts his followers for service in the church. He calls out pastors, teachers, and evangelists to equip his church. When baptized, believers are baptized into his church. Christ is currently building his church, and he will one day return for his church. In fact, Christ is so personalized with his church that he identifies persecution against his church as persecution of himself.

Therefore, Christ's preoccupation with his church must inform a

seminary's rationale and mission. His pledge to build his church is not only a promise to which a seminary should cling, but it is also a mandate a seminary should embrace. After all, Jesus has promised to build his church—not his seminary.

Though in the New Testament the form of a seminary is more overheard than heard, the function of a seminary—teaching, equipping, mentoring and sending—is heard quite clearly. In many ways, the entire trajectory and contour of the New Testament points to Christ fulfilling his promise to build his church. Moreover, the New Testament Epistles read like a veritable manual of how to do and how not to do church, conveying the predominant concern of health, growth, and faithfulness for the local church. Cleavage between the seminary and the church is to the detriment of

the former because it undermines its rationale for existence. That same cleavage also robs the church of further equipping for the work of ministry. If a seminary drifts from the church, the church will drift from it; if the seminary stops serving the church, the church will—and should—stop supporting it.

Of all denominations, the Southern Baptist Convention is uniquely positioned to enjoy seminaries that exist FOR THE CHURCH. After all, the Southern Baptist Convention is nothing more than a confederation of churches, structured with a denominational framework that exists by, for, and as part of her churches.

By New Testament mandate, denominational expectation, and self-imposed determination, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

stands without compromise in its commitment to serve the local church. Thankfully, there is no question of identity or mission. Trustees and donors are not being polled to inform the identity of Midwestern Seminary. Focus groups are not being assembled and queried as to what our market niche should be. Faculty and students are not being surveyed to find our mission. On the contrary, with appropriate self-confidence, Midwestern Seminary is unquestionably committed to serving the church and is unapologetically bending her resources and energies toward this end.

This is not to suggest that other SBC seminaries or institutions beyond our denomination are not serving the church and not serving the church well. Nor is it to suggest that Midwestern Seminary in her past has not served the church and served it

well. This is to say that regardless of what other institutions are or are not doing and regardless of what Midwestern Seminary has or has not done, the future is certain: Midwestern Seminary exists FOR THE CHURCH. Every proposed event, initiative, class, program, personnel

FOR THE CHURCH IS A VISION TO BE IMPLEMENTED OVER EVERY SQUARE INCH OF MIDWESTERN SEMINARY'S CAMPUS, AND IT IS A MESSAGE TO BE CARRIED TO EVERY CORNER OF THIS GREAT DENOMINATION. In the essays that follow, I will flesh out what this vision means for Midwestern Seminary. Know that Midwestern

For the Church is a vision to be implemented over every square inch of Midwestern Seminary's campus, and it is a message to be carried to every corner of this great denomination.

hire, or decision made will be subjugated to one over-arching question: How will this help Midwestern Seminary fulfill its mission to serve the church?

Seminary's identity and mission are clear: Midwestern Seminary exists FOR THE CHURCH.

No Man Can Serve Two Masters: Trustee Oversight, Financial Influence, and a Seminary's Resolve.

No man can serve two masters. This is true, and never truer than in theological education. Individuals and groups compete for institutional influence, adding their voice and, if permitted, interjecting their hand, into a seminary's affairs. The U.S. Department of Education, accreditation agencies, donors, alumni, and all aspects of an institution's constituency exert some measure of influence. Most of this is unavoidable and much of this is good. Yet for a seminary to exist FOR THE CHURCH, it must filter through this cacophony of

voices and train its ear on the churches it serves.

There is no better way to ensure a seminary serves the church than for the churches served to exercise absolute oversight of the seminary. Indeed, for a seminary to exist FOR THE CHURCH it must self-evidently demonstrate this commitment at every institutional pressure point of accountability. To paraphrase Ronald Reagan, "trust, but verify" is an appropriate posture for churches to hold toward the seminaries they own.

TRUSTEE OVERSIGHT

For Southern Baptist seminaries, local church oversight rests primarily in the trustee system. Elected by the Southern Baptist Convention, the seminary's trustees act on behalf of the denomination's churches to bear the governing and fiduciary responsibility for the institution.

At times, the Southern Baptist Convention trustee system reminds one of the Electoral College—with the same observers alternately defending or lamenting its peculiarities and function, depending on their assessment of the board's most recent decision rendered. Granted, it may even be true, to paraphrase Churchill, that the trustee system might be the worst form of institutional governance, save all other forms.

What is beyond dispute, however, is that without the trustee system the Southern Baptist Convention would not have been able to recover her entities during the Conservative Resurgence. The appointive power of the convention president, ultimately shaping the entities' trustees, was the lynchpin of the Conservative Resurgence.

Now with the trustee system, and especially in light of bylaw revisions, sole member designations and the ever-present lesson of our own denomination's history, the trustee system is the best mechanism to perpetuate the denomination's legal ownership and operational oversight of her seminaries. For Southern Baptists, the trustee system rightly honored and executed remains unsurpassed as the mechanism to accomplish church governance over the seminaries.

FINANCIAL INFLUENCE

Southern Baptists have proven themselves relentlessly generous in funding their seminaries. So much so, that currently the Cooperative Program supplies between 25 and 45 percent of each of the six seminaries' budgets. In addition to being generous, this sacrificial support is also healthy. The surest way to maintain operational control over an institution is to continue to be its strongest financial supporter.

As Cooperative Program gifts become less of an institution's operating budget, the temptation exists for a seminary to look elsewhere for funding and to succumb to external influence. As flowers grow towards light, institutions almost inexorably lean toward their sources of funding.

If one needs evidence, look to the many Baptist state colleges that have distanced themselves or altogether broken from their state conventions. For Southern Baptists, the pernicious taking of many of our state colleges and universities is one of the great tragedies in our denomination's history. Those who engineer such moves bear judgment, and those who permit such moves bear little less. Though diminishing denominational support is a lamentable trend, it is not a permission slip to drift from denominational governance.

Whether the Cooperative Program supplies 100 percent of an SBC seminary's budget or 1 percent, from an ownership standpoint the amount is irrelevant. Southern Baptists have built, funded, and own their seminaries. Any cleavage between the seminaries and the

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is committed, even
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own detriment, to
serving under the
accountability and
scrupulous supervision
of the churches of
the Southern Baptist
Convention.*

churches that own them is a malicious act against which the denomination must guard.

As it relates to ownership and governance, the issue is not just current funding, but past funding and present ownership. This generation bears a moral stewardship to our Southern Baptist forebears who built six great seminaries. We honor them when we keep the six Southern Baptist seminaries faithful to the denomination.

A SEMINARY RESPONDS

First, in order to be FOR THE CHURCH, Midwestern Seminary must be unambiguously committed to the churches she serves. To this end, MIDWESTERN SEMINARY IS COMMITTED, EVEN IF IT WERE TO PROVE IN SOME WAY TO HER OWN DETRIMENT, TO SERVING UNDER THE ACCOUNTABILITY AND SCRUPULOUS SUPERVISION OF

THE CHURCHES OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION. In addition to honoring the letter of her commitment, Midwestern Seminary is also determined to honor the spirit by seeking to meet the denomination's needs, being sensitive to its concerns, and sharing its aspirations.

Second, the history of higher education is a history of institutions chasing and ultimately following the money. In the decades to come, revenue sources will either facilitate apostasy or ensure fidelity. We have it within our power to accomplish the latter. Midwestern Seminary, in order to ensure perennial faithfulness to the Southern Baptist Convention, will so contractually bind every endowment gift confessionally and denominationally that each fund will serve to provide perpetual accountability to the seminary's

confession of faith and the Southern Baptist Convention as a whole. To do so tosses to the wind conventional wisdom in higher education, which encourages institutions to word development memorandums of agreement for maximum institutional flexibility. **However**, institutional flexibility is not the goal. Institutional faithfulness is the goal.

Of course, the most consequential form

of accountability a seminary maintains is its confessional accountability. Such confessional accountability will ensure that Midwestern Seminary's identity and mission will remain FOR THE CHURCH. Confessional integrity demands hiring professors who share, without hesitation or mental reservation, the institution's confessional commitments. This confessional accountability will be considered in the next essay: *Guard the Truth*.

Guard the Truth: Serving the Church by Maintaining Confessional Integrity

Since Southern Baptists founded their first seminary in 1859, the denomination has experienced an uneasy relationship between her seminaries and the churches that own them. Though the year 2013 finds the seminaries very much in line with the denomination's confessional statement—the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*—such has not always been the case. Moreover, a survey of the history of theological education indicates the need for churches to keep an ever-vigilant eye on the

seminaries they own. Paul designates the church as “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim 3:16). Moreover, the New Testament is replete with references to the church's role to cherish, defend, and proclaim the truth. The faithful seminary intentionally co-labors with the churches it serves to this end.

Rightly related, the seminary and the church enjoy a symbiotic relationship. The churches hold the seminaries theologically accountable and send them students

to train. The seminaries return those students to serve the church as pastors and ministers who are reinforced biblically and strengthened doctrinally. Thus, a mutually beneficial cycle of theological faithfulness should exist. How might the church ensure such a cycle of faithfulness is maintained?

MORE THAN SIGNATURES

No single act more intentionally communicates an institution's commitment to confessional fidelity than when a professor publicly signs the seminary's statement of faith. Though every professor signs the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*, the public, ceremonial signing typically occurs after the professor has been formally elected to the faculty by the board of trustees. The act itself is a significant communal reminder of the institution's determination

to be doctrinally faithful, but this act alone is insufficient.

Many seminaries' confessional statements are littered with signatures that proved not to have been rendered in good faith. In fact, many of the names are now infamous in Southern Baptist life, such as C. H. Toy, Dale Moody, and Molly Marshall, to name only a few.

Closer to home, and in great irony, the first signer of Midwestern Seminary's Articles of Faith was Ralph Elliott. His embrace of higher critical interpretive methodology, as evidenced in his Genesis commentary, plunged Midwestern Seminary, and the entire denomination, into a theological crisis known as the “Genesis Controversy.” These rumblings would portend broader denominational conflict to come over the inerrancy of Scripture.

History teaches that signatures are important, but signatures are not enough.

HISTORY TEACHES THAT SIGNATURES ARE IMPORTANT, BUT SIGNATURES ARE NOT ENOUGH.

Every professor who once taught in our Southern Baptist seminaries, including Ralph Elliott, did so ostensibly with confessional faithfulness. They signed their confessions of faith, as do we, and they spoke of these things, as do we.

PRIMA FACIE EVIDENCE, PLEASE

Throughout the Conservative Resurgence, professors often engaged in an insidious game of “catch me if you can.” When an allegation of heterodoxy arose, the

moderate establishment placed the burden of proof on the “fundamentalists.” Moderates argued that fundamentalists bore the moral responsibility to sift through their obfuscation and double speak to prove, beyond a shadow of a doubt, their guilt of errant belief. The moderates assumed the conservatives were morally obligated to function like a court of law, honor-bound to prove conclusively that a professor had violated the confession of faith. Such burden of proof is nonsensical and needless.

It is not the Southern Baptist Convention’s moral responsibility to find evidence—beyond a

shadow of a doubt—that a professor is violating his confessional commitment. Rather, each signatory bears the moral and confessional obligation to demonstrate, *prima facie*, that he or she believes and teaches in accordance with, and not contrary to, the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*. The burden of proof is not on the denomination; the burden of proof rests on those whose salary the denomination pays. The Southern Baptist Convention has every right to expect members of their seminaries’ instructional staff to demonstrate, in a *prima facie* way, their own theological faithfulness.

MAINTAINING VIGILANCE

We must recognize that, at the very least, the embers of the world burn within us all. The noetic consequences of the fall, the allure of the academy, and the riptide-like pull of an increasingly secular culture all necessitate sobriety and care. Moreover, seminaries must resist the tendency to treat the churches they serve paternalistically. Seminaries must resist thinking they know the churches’ needs better than the churches themselves. It is not the role of the seminary to prod, drag, or enlighten the churches theologically. The seminary

does not sit in judgment of the church; the church sits in judgment of the seminary.

As to the issues themselves, “Hath God said?” is Satan’s perennial question, and the contest for inerrancy will likely be with us until Jesus returns. Furthermore, the subtle undermining of the exclusivity of the gospel will come with ruinous consequences, upending the entire rationale for the modern missions movement. In the immediate future, slippage will most likely occur where, in so many of our homes and churches, there is already growing discontinuity between our confession and our praxis. We can see this most especially in relation to gender roles and the increasing acceptability of homosexuality.

Just like federal laws and regulations can hardly keep up with new forms

of criminal activity, so confessional statements—important as they are—can hardly keep up with new forms of disbelief.

Moreover, no confessional statement can include everything that could be stated. That is what the Scriptures are for.

Confessional faithfulness demands that we remain vigilant. We must seek to anticipate doctrinal drift, to perceive proactively where theological slippage may occur. Theological faithfulness must also include a relentless refusal to settle for obliqueness—probing and distilling questions must never be out of bounds. After all, ambiguity has proven to be the incubator of doctrinal unfaithfulness.

FOR THE CHURCH

The fulcrum of doctrinal accountability for a seminary is its confessional statement, but it is only as

meaningful as the integrity of the one signing it, and only as helpful as the courage and care of those charged with enforcing it. This oversight begins with the seminary’s administration, but it encompasses the churches that own the seminary.

As the Constitutional Convention adjourned in Philadelphia in 1787, a woman approached Benjamin Franklin and asked, “Mr. Franklin, what

kind of government have you given us?” “A republic, madam,” Franklin replied, “if you can keep it.”

➤ We may amend this story and ask, “What have Paul Pressler, Paige Patterson, and Adrian Rogers bequeathed to this generation of Southern Baptists?” The answer is doctrinally faithful seminaries, but we must have the courage and determination to keep them.

Southern Baptist: By Conviction, by Culture, by Determination

Midwestern Seminary's vision is simple, yet full: she exists FOR THE CHURCH. This purpose both defines our institutional to-be list, and it drives our institutional to-do list. To exist FOR THE CHURCH, however, does not quite tell the whole story. Midwestern Seminary does not simply exist FOR THE CHURCH generically, but for Southern Baptist churches specifically.

The overarching vision of Midwestern Seminary is to train gospel ministers to serve Christ *within the context of Southern Baptist*

churches. While Midwestern, like all six Southern Baptist seminaries, happily receives students from the broader evangelical world, there is no question as to who is our core constituency. As an entity of the Southern Baptist Convention, we bend our entire program of theological education toward SBC churches. This determination to serve the churches of our denomination is a happy acknowledgement of our ownership and a contented submission to our statement of faith, but it is also a confident and winsome resolve to own

and project our Southern Baptist identity.

To be sure, as a denomination we have idiosyncrasies and unseemly moments, but embarrassment or cynicism must never set in. Ours is a great denomination, and the call to serve its churches is a noble one. Southern Baptist Convention churches have entrusted their six seminaries with a precious stewardship: to train their pastors, ministers, and missionaries.

As referenced in “Guard the Truth: Serving the Church by Maintaining Confessional Integrity,” the determination to serve Southern Baptist churches begins with ironclad confessional integrity, but it is much more than that. This commitment should also form a seminary’s culture, shaping its ethos and pathos.

APPRECIATING OUR SOUTHERN BAPTIST HERITAGE

Jaroslav Pelikan famously observed that tradition is the living faith of the dead, while traditionalism is the dead faith of the living (*The Vindication of Tradition*). As Southern Baptists, we should eschew traditionalism, but happily embrace our tradition, for it is rich indeed. To fawn for a denominational golden era is unhelpful nostalgia, and the seminary or church that determines to live in the past will soon be relegated to history itself. However, to neglect our heritage is a ruinous form of denominational amnesia that exhibits a most strident form of ingratitude. Southern Baptists’ blood, toil, tears, sweat—and yes, money—founded, built, maintained, and recovered our institutions. We both honor our Baptist forebears, and

we inform and strengthen our present witness when we appreciate our Southern Baptist heritage. In other words, we need to keep the faith, but pass on our tradition.

In this regard, though we have little influence over whom the churches send to seminary, we do have much influence over the type of graduates we send back to them. Increasingly, students arrive at seminary from unchurched backgrounds or from churches of marginal SBC affiliation. The phrase “Cooperative Program” means little to them and names like Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong even less.

The frequent discontinuity between students and the denomination is regrettable, but not inalterable. As an SBC seminary, Midwestern bears a missiological and moral imperative to instill within our students knowledge of and appreciation for

the Southern Baptist Convention. While in seminary, a student’s ministerial formation is often caught as much as it is taught. The culture of a seminary can impact a student as much as the curriculum or classroom experience. To this end, as the culture of a seminary pulsates with an affection for the SBC, graduates will depart more attuned to the denomination and more desirous of partnering with it.

A SEMINARY FOR THE ENTIRE SBC

Midwestern Seminary’s identity as a Southern Baptist seminary means she is committed to training students for the entire convention. Midwestern is not called to focus on a niche group. Southern Baptists are a diverse lot—generationally, geographically, ethnically, theologically, and methodologically. Midwestern Seminary

intentionally seeks to serve all of these different currents within our denomination, under the purview of the *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*.

There is a sense in which the Southern Baptist Convention is both a family and a neighborhood. As a family, we share overarching passions for the Word of God, the Great Commission, and Baptist distinctives. However, we also are like a neighborhood, in proximity to one another, but not in the exact location on many secondary issues. Midwestern Seminary is committed to serving the entire neighborhood known as the Southern Baptist Convention, with the *BF&M 2000* fencing the property.

GRADUATED AND READY TO SERVE

To serve Southern Baptist churches means we graduate ministers who are

well positioned to serve in them. One practical aspect of our seminary’s stewardship is to keep tuition as low as possible so students will graduate as expeditiously and as unencumbered as possible. Most seminarians manage through their schooling by juggling multiple jobs and cobbling together just enough resources to get by. Such circumstances often protract their time of study, delaying their deployment into the local church. Even worse, some students graduate with burdensome debt, which will prove difficult to repay on a minister’s salary. We therefore have a missiological obligation to make theological education as affordable as possible and a moral obligation to discourage student indebtedness. Whether graduating to serve the church locally as a pastor or minister or internationally as a missionary, the financial constraints

associated with such ministry posts could stymie God's call on one's life, if not preclude it altogether.

BY CONVICTION, BY CULTURE,
AND BY DETERMINATION,
MIDWESTERN SEMINARY EXISTS
TO TRAIN STUDENTS FOR THE
CHURCHES OF THE SOUTHERN
BAPTIST CONVENTION. Yet, the
primary way Midwestern

serves SBC churches is by meeting their most pressing—and most manifestly biblical—need: to train pastors, ministers, and evangelists FOR THE CHURCH. I will address this topic in the next essay, “First Things First: Training Pastors, Teachers, and Evangelists For the Church.”

*By Conviction, By Culture, And By
Determination, Midwestern Seminary
exists to train in students for the churches
of the Southern Baptist Convention.*

First Things First: Training Pastors, Teachers, and Evangelists For the Church

Harvard University stands as one of America's truly elite universities. Founded in 1636, Harvard is America's oldest institution of higher learning, and also its most storied. Boasting a corpus of more than \$32 billion, it enjoys, by far, the nation's largest endowment. It has produced more United States presidents, congressmen, and members of the judiciary than any other college or university, thus buttressing its claim to be America's most prestigious and influential university.

Yet when founded, Harvard declared an even loftier goal: to train faithful ministers of the gospel. In fact, emblazoned upon Harvard's historic entranceway, the Johnson Gate, the Puritans' founding intent remains ensconced, "After God had carried us safe to New England and we had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, reared convenient places for God's worship, and settled the civil government, one of the next things we longed for and looked after was to advance learning and to perpetuate it to our posterity, dreading to leave

an illiterate ministry to the churches when our present ministers shall lie in the dust."

Harvard has come a long way since its founding, and its confessional and missiological reorientation is one of the most visible, and lamentable, shifts of any institution in the history of higher education. The lesson is clear: confessional integrity is paramount, but it is not enough. Confessional integrity must be coupled with missiological intentionality.

Midwestern Seminary's mission is crystal-clear: we exist **FOR THE CHURCH**, and we train pastors, teachers, and evangelists accordingly. Most especially, given the New Testament imperative, current denominational need, and Great Commission urgencies, Midwestern Seminary will unapologetically give its best energies and resources to training pastors **FOR THE CHURCH**.

A NEW TESTAMENT IMPERATIVE

The Puritan emphasis on training pastors was first a Pauline emphasis. As the apostle reminded the church at Ephesus, "He [Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." In a sense, the specified offices of Ephesians 4 are tangible fulfillments of Christ's promise in Matthew 16 to build his church. In many ways, the remainder of the New Testament corpus is given to documenting the fulfillment of Christ's promise to build his church and to defining and defending the church's doctrine and practice.

Never are the expectations of the pastoral office more clearly presented than in I Timothy 3:1–7. Herein, the distinguishing mark between

So goes the Pulpit, so so goes the church;
 and so goes the ministry of the Word,
 so goes the equipping of the saints for
 the service of the Church.

the pastoral and diaconal offices is that the former must be “able to teach.” To be sure, not every call to ministry is a call to preach, but every call to ministry is a call to a ministry of the Word—the Word preached, taught, shared, or counseled. One can argue that every formal, ordainable ministerial position, in some way or another, has at its core a ministry of God’s Word, and that the candidate to that office must demonstrate at least some level of proficiency therewith.

Therefore, a seminary must make sure priority one is strengthening the preaching and teaching capabilities of the people it trains. SO GOES THE PULPIT, SO GOES THE CHURCH; AND SO GOES THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD, SO GOES THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH. At the institutional level, we can add that so goes the intentionality of training for these offices, so goes the competence of the graduates and the resulting health of the church.

A DENOMINATIONAL NEED

The Southern Baptist Convention’s central expectation of its seminaries is that we train pastors and missionaries FOR THE CHURCH. After all, in its most distilled form, this is precisely what the SBC is—a confederation of churches, with pastors (and often no other vocational ministers), partnering to win the world for Christ by collectively funding and sending missionaries abroad. These are the two irreducible components of

our denomination and the two irreducible positions for which the seminary must equip.

Looking to denominational demographics accentuates the need to train pastors and missionaries for the churches. The median age of pastors within the SBC continues to drift upward, with an increasing percentage of pastors approaching retirement. A dearth of pastors looms on the horizon and, in a sense, is already here. If churches do not call out pastors and seminaries do not train

them, from whence will they come? The churches of the Southern Baptist Convention expect much from their six seminaries, but they expect nothing less than we make our first priority training pastors for their churches and preparing missionaries for the world.

URGENT
A GREAT COMMISSION
URGENCY

Finally, it is impossible to contemplate the role of the seminary without considering how the effectiveness with which it prepares ministers intersects with how aggressively the gospel is spread. As Paul reminded the church at Rome, “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, ‘How beautiful are

the feet of those who bring good news of good things.”

Inherent in the call to train pastors is the call to train evangelists/missionaries. At its heart, to be a missionary that is planting a church is simply to be a pastor in another culture. Moreover, the complexity of modern ministry and the accompanying Great Commission challenges due to cultural decadence and multicultural complexities serve as a reminder to double-down on the ministerial mainstays. This does not negate contextual and cultural considerations, but it does abridge them. Though it may be counterintuitive, the more complex ministry becomes, the simpler we must make it. It is still the preaching and teaching of the Word that God blesses, the power of the gospel that changes lives, and the health of the church, as a counter-cultural, ever-present witness that the world needs. Therefore,

the irreducible work of a seminary is to train pastors, evangelists, and teachers FOR THE CHURCH. We then fling these graduates out as workers of the harvest and watch with joy and satisfaction as Jesus builds his church and reaches the nations through them.

CONCLUSION

Many seminaries—even evangelical seminaries—function like shopping malls, offering a myriad of course options in an attempt to cobble together a sufficient enrollment to justify and facilitate their existence. This dilution of energies might in the short-term help pay the bills, but in the long run it jeopardizes the mission and rationale of the institution. It may also inadvertently undermine the ministries of the churches the seminary ostensibly serves.

If Southern Baptist seminaries do not intentionally train the next generation of pastors, then from whence will they come? Seminaries are not indispensable, but under the auspices of Christ’s plan to build his church, the pastoral office is indispensable. While Midwestern Seminary does many things, and many things well, we unapologetically minister under an Ephesians 4 mandate, giving our best energies to training to pastors, ministers, and evangelists FOR THE CHURCH.

The Proof is in the Graduates

How does one determine a seminary's effectiveness? Modern institutional benchmarks include endowment size, capital projects initiated and completed, enrollment growth, campus attractiveness, and other such pragmatic and aesthetic indicators. While these standards are not irrelevant, they are not paramount either. If a seminary exists **FOR THE CHURCH**, the most appropriate benchmark of effectiveness is how purposed and equipped its graduates are to serve the church.

Though the quality of a seminary's graduates is directly linked to the quality of students the churches send them, a seminary still exercises profound influence over the students it trains. A seminary is not a spiritual or ministerial panacea, but there is, at least to some degree, a correlation between the type of minister a seminary seeks to equip and the type of graduate a seminary ultimately produces.

To this end, theological education must be a holistic endeavor that seeks to

nurture and equip the whole minister for service in the church. When a church calls a minister, they do not call a portion of him. The church calls the total person for a ministry assignment that will prove wholly demanding. Therefore, a seminary must influence all four aspects of the seminarian: heart, mind, hand, and soul.



IMPASSIONED HEARTS

Ministry preparation, though primarily given to instructing the mind, is initiated in the heart. Students arrive at seminary to learn, but only first because they have perceived, and their churches have affirmed, God's ministry calling on their lives.

Ministry convictions and passions are baked into the soul over the course of a student's time on campus. To be sure, a seminary education is not

an all-purpose spiritual disinfectant or a holy cure-all for students. But students should nonetheless graduate more in love with Christ, not less; more committed to the Great Commission, not less; and more resolute in their calling to serve the local church, not less than when they first arrived.

As Paul exhorted Timothy to kindle afresh his call to ministry, so at seminary students' love for the ministry should be deepened and fortified. Moreover, the call to ministry should be nurtured and cultivated to produce graduates with the Pauline aspiration of not only imparting the Word, but also their very lives, to the congregations they are called to serve.

RENEWED MINDS



Theological education, like other forms of Christian discipleship, begins with

the mind. Due to Adam's sin, and the resulting noetic consequences of the fall, to be a Christian is to be engaged in a life-long pursuit of renewing the mind. In fact, Paul makes the renewing of the mind integral to sanctification, writing: "Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed, by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

Renewing the mind by instilling sound doctrine is the *sine qua non* of faithful theological education. To be a disciple is to be a learner, and to make disciples is to teach learners. In its most distilled form, theological education is the mere fulfillment of II Timothy 2:2, one disciple teaching another so that he can teach others also, thus preserving continuity of biblical truth and sound

doctrine FOR THE CHURCH.

A seminary education should be more than an intellectual experience, but it must never be anything less. In an age marked by the dumbing-down of academic standards, the seminary that best serves the church maintains a commitment to teaching the original languages, the full body of divinity, and the classic, timeless disciplines of ministry preparation.

✓ EQUIPPED HANDS

The lion's share of a seminary's curriculum ought to be perennial, unchanging from generation to generation, and fixed, even in light of changing contexts and cultures. This does not negate, however, the need to train ministers with an eye toward the contextual and practical as well. Cultural considerations, contemporary

methodologies, and an awareness of current ministry opportunities and seasonal local-church needs shape and facilitate, not abrogate, the conveyance of timeless truths of Scripture. After all, the goal of theological education is not merely to graduate "seminoids," young theologs with encyclopedic doctrinal knowledge, but detached from local church expectations and congregational needs.

Moreover, too many aspiring pastors have graduated from seminary without a proper understanding of how to coordinate and lead a funeral service, officiate a wedding, administer the ordinances, or rightly engage in crisis counseling. Theological education must not be an abstract endeavor; and a mere clinical transmittal of ministerial theory is insufficient. Real students must receive

real preparation for real ministries in real local churches.

ENRICHED SOULS

Finally, a seminary must intentionally seek to strengthen the spiritual health of its students. A gifted minister may gain a position of notoriety, but if he does not have biblical character he will not stay there. Residing in every graduate is a measure of the glory of God. When a minister is faithful to the gospel and lives a life above reproach, the church is strengthened and Christ is glorified. When, tragically, a minister is struck by scandal, not only is his life ruined and the church harmed, but the glory of Christ is tarnished.

As Robert Murray McCheyne, noted, a minister is "a chosen vessel unto him to bear his name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfection

of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God.” McCheyne therefore concluded, “The greatest need of my people is my personal holiness.”

Furthermore, in his *Lectures to My Students*, Charles Spurgeon writes, “We must cultivate the highest degree of godliness because our work imperatively requires it. The labour of the Christian ministry is well performed in exact proportion to the vigour of our renewed nature. Our work is only well done when it is well with ourselves. As is the workman, such will the work be.” Thankfully, the building and prevailing of Christ’s church is ultimately not dependent upon the righteousness of his servants, but he has called his servants, as they serve his church, to be holy as he is holy.

CONCLUSION

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, Warren Buffett famously referenced the irresponsibility of excessively leveraged businesses, remarking, “It is only when the tide goes out that you learn who’s been swimming naked.” Similarly, it is often not until a seminary graduate is in the rough and tumble of local church service that he fully knows how helpful—or unhelpful—was his seminary experience. THE FAITHFUL SEMINARY ENDEAVORS TO TRAIN THE WHOLE PERSON FOR THE VARIEGATED MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES BEFORE HIM. Midwestern Seminary intends to produce such graduates—proven, equipped, and resolved to serve FOR THE CHURCH.

A seminary will not rightly impact a student’s heart, mind, hand, and soul coincidentally.

The faithful
seminary endeavors
to train the whole
person for the
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challenges before him.

Rather, a seminary must be intentionally seek to influence these four areas, and in the following essay, we shall consider how an institution’s culture, curriculum, and classroom experience can purpose to affect these four dimensions of a minister.

Teach These Things to Faithful Men, Who Will Be Able to Teach Others Also

A call to ministry is a call to be equipped to minister. To be sure, one need not possess a seminary degree to have a faithful ministry. Many preachers lacking formal theological training have served the church, and served the church well, but they are the exception, not the rule. In fact, preparation for ministry is an established biblical pattern, referenced throughout the New Testament, and succinctly expressed in II Timothy 2:2, “Teach these things to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

Though a seminary experience should be short-lived, its effect on students is long-lasting. Both by what is taught and what is neglected, the seminary experience shapes students, for better or worse, for the duration of their ministries. The stakes are high in theological education because the calling to serve the church is high and the needs of the church are great.

Much like the value of a meal is dependent upon the nutritional content therein, so the benefits of a seminary education are contingent upon the

strength of the institution. If one is called to serve the church, then one should attend a seminary that will intentionally equip one for such service.

The seminary that will most effectively train pastors, teachers, and evangelists FOR THE CHURCH will not do it unwittingly. Rather, a seminary must intentionally aim its three pedagogical touch-points—curriculum, faculty, and campus culture—toward this end.

THE CURRICULUM

When evaluating a seminary’s academic value-system, the curriculum is the right place to start. A seminary’s curriculum—what degrees it offers and the requisite coursework required to complete those degrees—reveals an institution’s priorities and demonstrates its convictions related to theological education.

The curriculum must be geared towards local-church needs and expectations, with a special emphasis on the preaching and teaching ministries of the church. The curriculum must be comprehensively evaluated and positioned to equip pastors, teachers, and evangelists to serve the church.

Theological education in the twenty-first century evidences a myriad of degree options packaged in numerous delivery vehicles. Descriptors such as residential, non-residential, extension, online, and hybrid, to name a few, remind us of the ever-changing formats of theological education. Moreover, the modern seminary offers a plethora of degree options, with scores of sub-specializations and niche focuses. Academic expansion can be good so long as it does not become synonymous with

institutional mission creep. Expanded academic offerings must serve to amplify and strengthen the seminary's service to the church, not undermine it, by diluting institutional focus and resources.

A curriculum is to a seminary's instructional efforts what the skeleton is to the human body. It provides essential structure and form, but for life and health much more is required. If the curriculum is the skeleton, the faculty is the organs of the seminary's academic program.

THE FACULTY

No single factor influences the curriculum more than the composition of the faculty. At the formal level, the faculty approves and monitors the curriculum. Most importantly though, the faculty embodies and personifies the curriculum in their

respective classrooms. In the classroom, to be **FOR THE CHURCH** means every course and every lecture must be envisioned in light of the question, "How does the subject matter intersect with the church, how will it prove to strengthen the church?" If courses do not naturally align with the needs of the churches the seminary serves, then the course should be culled from the curriculum or reconfigured so as to serve the church.

More specifically, each class ought to have a direct line from the syllabus to the church. Ethics is taught as bringing the Word of God to bear in the milieu of cultural challenges the church faces. Counseling is taught, first and foremost, as soul care for those in the church. Church history is taught through the prism of what God has done throughout time to redeem, preserve, and build his church. Personal

evangelism is taught as part of enlarging the church. Missions is taught as God's plan for his church to undertake the Great Commission so that his church may be comprised of every kindred, tongue, and tribe. Leadership and administration courses should present how to structure, lead, and administer rightly ordered churches. Pastoral ministry must be taught so that churches might be appropriately shepherded. Theology is taught to equip the members of the church in sound doctrine. Language and exegesis classes are taught so that ministers may divide rightly the word of truth **FOR THE CHURCH**. Apologetics classes are taught so that the church can defend the truth, the church's foundation. Preaching classes equip students to exposit God's word, to strengthen the saints in the church, and win the lost **FOR THE CHURCH**. The list goes on,

but all such courses can and should be taught with an eye toward the church.

Yet, even more important than what the faculty teach is who they are. A seminary should expect from its faculty, in amplified form, what it desires its graduates to believe, exemplify, and practice. Students must find in faculty members not merely a professor from which they learn, but also a person with whom they study and grow. Most especially, **WHEN STUDENTS LOOK TO FACULTY, THEY MUST SEE CHURCHMEN, WHO BY THEIR TEACHING, PERSONAL DISPOSITION, AND DEMONSTRATED SERVICE TO THEIR OWN LOCAL CHURCH CLEARLY PERCEIVE THEIR MINISTRY AS ONE GIVEN TO CHRIST'S CHURCH.**

THE CULTURE

Transformative ministry preparation experience takes place in the midst of healthy campus communities. Ministry

preparation is as much caught as it is taught. It is as much overheard as it is heard. Often times the seminary community and culture impacts the student as much as the curriculum or classroom. This is to say, the whole spiritual momentum and kingdom impact of a seminary should be far greater than the sum of its form and academic parts. Therefore, cultivating a campus community that values, honors, and humbly serves the church will serve to instill an ethos of church service in the students.

As a family, my wife and I determined long ago never to criticize our church—or people in it—in front of our children. We desire our children to grow up loving, serving, trusting, and admiring God's people known as the church. Likewise, though lamentable trends and saddening occurrences in the modern church exist,

When students look back to faculty, they must see churchmen, who do so by their teaching, personal disposition, and ad demonstrated service to their own local churches clearly perceive their ministry as one we give to Christ's Church.

attitudinally, the seminary culture must point students to love, serve, and honor the church.

Too many seminarians want to put the church in the dock—criticizing, assessing, and bemoaning perceived deficiencies or errors in local congregations. It is not a seminarian's, or seminary's, role put the church in the dock. The seminary does not sit in judgment of the church; the church sits in judgment of the seminary.

Thus, the seminary community that best equips students to serve the church when they graduate is the seminary that instills in students a pathos and ethos to honor and serve the church before they graduate.

CONCLUSION

For Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, its vision to exist FOR THE CHURCH serves as both a compass and a catalyst. FOR THE CHURCH directs

our institutional efforts, pointing our way forward. FOR THE CHURCH also provides institutional velocity, energizing our efforts to most optimally train students accordingly.

The seminary that will train students FOR THE CHURCH intentionally will bend its three pedagogical influencers—curriculum, faculty, and campus culture—FOR THE CHURCH.

To the Ends of the Earth: Midwestern Seminary and the Great Commission

Midwestern Seminary exists FOR THE CHURCH, and to serve the church means we share the church's most urgent commitment: the gathering in of the nations for the glory of Christ through the proclamation of the gospel to all people.

Jesus' Great Commission is an abiding and authoritative charge to every Christian in every age. While faithful seminaries can differ over degrees offered, curricular prominences, ministry preparation emphases, and

other important but not ultimate considerations, theological faithfulness leaves no room for a seminary to negotiate over the exclusivity of salvation through conscious faith in Jesus Christ, the gospel, the urgency of spreading the gospel, or the necessity of every seminary—and every seminarian—to minister under a Great Commission mandate.

This series of essays has sought to present, in both theoretical and practical terms, what it means for a seminary to exist FOR

THE CHURCH. In conclusion, this essay series has built toward this final installment, where the mission of Midwestern Seminary and the local church most manifestly—and directly—intersect: the fulfilling of the Great Commission.

OUR GREAT COMMISSION MOMENT

For Southern Baptists, before us is what International Mission Board President Tom Elliff calls our “Great Commission moment.” This Great Commission moment arrives with the alignment of two dramatic realities. First, the world is marked by a vast and accelerating lostness—a lostness that is simply daunting when one considers the billions of people yet reached and by their apparent decreasing openness to the gospel. Yet, juxtaposed alongside this lostness are conduits for

gospel advancement not known by prior generations. Modern technologies, including advances in communications, travel, accessibility, and linguistic and translation progress, all position the church with ripened Great Commission opportunity.

In a very real sense, before this generation is the opportunity to eradicate the phrase “unreached people group.” Currently, more than 3,000 unreached people groups—a defined group of people with no current access to the gospel—exist. As Midwestern Seminary faithfully co-labors with both the churches and the mission boards of the Southern Baptist Convention, we can hasten the day when the expression “unreached people group” is anachronistic, belonging to a previous era.

**DENOMINATIONAL
EXPECTATION AND
INSTITUTIONAL PEDIGREE**

As Midwestern Seminary serves as a Great Commission institution, it upholds the Southern Baptist Convention's *raison d'être*. Since its founding in 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention has existed first and foremost as a collection of Great Commission churches partnering together to reach the world for Christ. As a denomination, we are a Great Commission people, and every entity or initiative the convention owns or undertakes in some way is and should be a Great Commission endeavor.

Moreover, when the Southern Baptist Convention founded Midwestern Seminary in 1957, the expressed rationale was to further the gospel's reach into

the Midwest and pioneer region, which was, and is, under-reached with the gospel and underserved by evangelical churches. Promisingly, this region is once again at the forefront of the SBC's imagination with the North American Mission Board's designation of Kansas City as a Send City. What is more, the consciences of Southern Baptists seem to be kindled afresh to church planting and international mission work.

These renewed denominational interests intersect with Midwestern Seminary's pedigree and geographical location, but, more importantly, they intersect with our institutional passions.

Midwestern Seminary is **FOR THE CHURCH**: the church planted, established, revitalized; the church domestic and the church international.

**A METRIC OF
MIDWESTERN SEMINARY'S
FAITHFULNESS**

In his Lectures to My Students Spurgeon argues, "In order further to prove a man's call, after a little exercise of his gifts...he must see a measure of conversion-work going on under his efforts..." For Spurgeon, conversions occurring under one's ministry proved not only a sign for ministry effectiveness, but also a confirmation of one's call to ministry. Similarly, the passion and effectiveness whereby an institution's graduates share the gospel is an appropriate benchmark by which to measure a seminary's faithfulness.

An institution that graduates students eager to preach Christ, plant churches, and disembark to the mission field is an institution that is doing something right.

Conversely, an institution that sends forth graduates apathetic about the Great Commission and unburdened for the lost is an institution that has lost its way. Midwestern Seminary must settle for nothing less than training a generation of ministers burdened over the lost and zealous for the Great Commission.

From an institution's vantage point, this is indeed a high metric of faithfulness. It is an appropriate metric, though. The gravity of this challenge is all the more sensed when one considers the context of ministry in the 21st century. Materialism, Western comforts, unsupportive family members, and more can subtly undermine God's call to the mission field. To combat this, we must give a robust and sustained call for this generation of seminarians to answer the call to go to the ends of

the earth. The call to the Great Commission is, in a sense, a radical call, but the reoccurring declaration of its urgency should vanquish complacency from hearts and fortify our Great Commission resolve.

CONCLUSION

As Midwestern Seminary labors FOR THE CHURCH, we do so with the assurance that Christ is building his church, but we also do this with a sense of custodial stewardship. Christ is building his church through pastors, teachers, and evangelists, whom we train.

In the ever-changing world of theological education, Midwestern Seminary owns a never-changing mission, to exist FOR THE CHURCH. Our mission to exist FOR THE CHURCH is interconnected with the church's mission itself, the Great Commission.

Midwestern most effectively labors FOR THE CHURCH when it labors with the church, and we must serve with and FOR THE CHURCH in our combined Great Commission efforts until the end of the age, when "The Kingdom of the world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. And he shall reign forever and ever."

Ultimately, as Midwestern Seminary proves faithful to the Great Commission, we will prove ourselves worthy of our institutional designation: FOR THE CHURCH.

For the Church.

Pray

for the thousands of Midwestern students and alumni training and serving in various ministry contexts around the world.

Invest

in our students. Your gift to Midwestern Seminary allows us to keep our tuition low, our standards high, and our impact great.

Tell

others about our vision for the church and encourage them to stand with us through their prayers and financial support.

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