



THE MISSION OF  
GORDON  CONWELL  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Copyright 1983, 2023  
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary  
130 Essex Street, South Hamilton, MA 01982  
[gordonconwell.edu](http://gordonconwell.edu)

## VISION

*Guiding our future and trajectory, we live into the truth of Revelation 7 in which there are many languages, one Lamb, and no tears.*

## VALUES

*We are a thoughtful, loving, Christ-centered community of global discipleship.*

## MISSION

*To advance Christ's Kingdom in every sphere of life by equipping Church leaders to think theologically, engage globally and live biblically.*

### Articles

To encourage students to become knowledgeable of God's inerrant Word, competent in its interpretation, proclamation and application in the contemporary world.

To maintain academic excellence in the highest tradition of Christian scholarship in the teaching of the biblical, historical and theological disciplines.

To train and encourage students, in cooperation with the Church, to become skilled in ministry.

To work with the churches towards the maturing of students so that their experiential knowledge of God in Christ is evidenced in their character, outlook, conduct, relationships and involvement in society.

To provide leadership and educational resources for shaping an effective evangelical presence in Church and society.

To develop in students a vision for God's redemptive work throughout the world and to formulate the strategies that will lead to effective missions, evangelism and discipleship.

# The Mission of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

*To advance Christ's Kingdom in every sphere of life by equipping Church leaders to think theologically, engage globally and live biblically.*

## Preamble

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary is an educational institution serving the Lord and his Church. Its mission is to prepare men and women for ministry at home and abroad. The Seminary undertakes this task as a training partner with the Church so that what is learned on campus may be complemented by the spiritual nurture and the exercise of ministry available through the Church.

Those who work and study at Gordon-Conwell are united in the common belief that the abiding truth of God's written Word and the centrality of Christ's saving work are foundational to the Seminary's mission. These principles structure the Seminary's life and values, inform its curriculum and activities, and determine the evangelical perspective in which it sees its responsibilities in preparing students for ministry in the modern world.

Gordon-Conwell's institutional identity is formed as a result of its past history and the understanding of its present mission. Today, it seeks to combine fidelity to the teaching of the inerrant biblical Word with rigorous, responsible inquiry in all matters pertaining to Christian faith. It guards the essentials of the Reformation faith but allows freedom in the formulation of non-essentials. It is firmly evangelical but maintains professional relations with schools of different theological persuasions. It is committed both to academic excellence and practical relevance, both to personal piety and social responsibility, both to historic orthodoxy and its expression in language and actions understandable in the modern world. Gordon-Conwell is interdenominational and yet warmly supportive of the denominations. It is committed to the Church while also opening its programs to those who will not be preparing for service in traditional congregational settings. God has richly blessed its ministry in New England, an area where abundant educational resources and spiritual need exist side by side. Gordon-Conwell is grateful for this ministry, but its vision is also national and international.

## Statement of Mission

*To advance Christ's Kingdom in every sphere of life by equipping Church leaders to think theologically, engage globally and live biblically.*

Gordon-Conwell's mission arises out of God's redemptive work in this world effected in Jesus Christ, understood through the biblical Word, and mediated by the Holy Spirit. As a theological seminary, it provides learning, resources, and training through which men and women may acquire knowledge, gain skills and develop attitudes needed in Christ's ministry. Its mission, accordingly, is to serve the Church in the following ways:

### Article 1

*To encourage students to become knowledgeable of God's inerrant Word competent in its interpretation, proclamation and application in the contemporary world.*

Because the teaching of God's Word is indispensable to the well-being and vitality of God's people, the Seminary has a fundamental responsibility to encourage in students a love for Scripture. It is to teach exegetical skills by which they will be enabled to interpret the Word and inculcate understanding by which they will be able to apply it effectively.

### Article 2

*To maintain academic excellence, in the highest tradition of Christian scholarship in the teaching of the biblical, historical and theological disciplines.*

Theological education, which is properly done within and for the Church, ought to function with rigor and academic integrity. The Seminary, therefore, must provide an environment within which teaching and learning can best occur and encourage high levels of scholarly competence and research in its faculty.

### Article 3

*To train and encourage students, in cooperation with the Church, to become skilled in ministry.*

The Church and the Seminary share the goal of seeing knowledge, skills and attitudes integrated in the person who ministers. Both in traditional degree programs and in continuing education a combination of careful training and supervised experience in ministry are educational practices essential to achieving that goal.

### Article 4

*To work with the Churches towards the maturing of students so that their experiential knowledge of God in Christ is evidenced in their character, outlook, conduct, relationships and involvement in society.*

Academic learning divorced from a life of biblical spirituality neither honors God nor serves his people. Such spirituality is to be expressed cognitively, relationally and socially. It is to be translated into action, God's people embodying his compassion, declaring his justice and articulating his truth in society.

### Article 5

*To provide leadership and educational resources for shaping an effective evangelical presence in Church and society.*

Gordon-Conwell's academic and institutional resources are to be put in the service of the Christian community to provide careful research on and informed understanding of critical issues, as well as in exercising leadership in learned societies, in movements of renewal and reform, and in a variety of off-campus ministries in order to develop a more informed understanding of what the lordship of Christ means in our contemporary world.

### Article 6

*To develop in students a vision for God's redemptive work throughout the world and to formulate strategies that will lead to effective missions, evangelism and discipleship.*

The central mission of the triune God is the creation of a fellowship of men and women who are mature in Christ and who will love and serve him forever. This mission is realized evangelistically through the proclamation of the biblical gospel by those who embody the message they proclaim and who seek to make disciples from among all peoples.

## Preamble

Gordon-Conwell is united around the twin convictions, the Preamble asserts, of “the abiding truth of God’s written Word and the centrality of Christ’s saving work.” These principles - the formal and the material - constitute the center of the Seminary’s theological commitment. Provided these principles are honored, differences in denominational outlook and theological formulation are welcomed.

This is the context in which the word *evangelical* is being used. Being evangelical has always meant more than merely affirming the centrality of the material and formal principles, but from the Protestant Reformers to the present, it has never meant less than this. These principles are the irreducible minimum of an evangelical outlook and for this reason they are determinative of the Seminary’s theological character.

These principles also establish that it is a commitment: truth, specifically to theological truth, which defines an evangelical as this term is being used in the statement which follows. This truth has Christ at its center and the whole of the revealed character, will and purposes of God for its content. To know God and his Word is to know his truth. It is to know the meaning of his created world. It is to have a vantage point from which to understand the contemporary world in which we live as well as the moral criteria for our action in it.

The *objective* content of this knowledge of God comes from the appropriation of what God has revealed in the inspired biblical Word which is for Christian thought and action authoritative, what classical Protestantism called the formal principle; the *subjective* condition for knowing God is repentance from sin, belief in Christ as sin-bearer, and the regeneration of the sinner by the Holy Spirit, what classical Protestantism called the material principle; the end of knowing God is that we should seek to glorify him by thinking his thoughts after him, understanding the world from the perspective of the God whom we know to be holy and compassionate, seeking his will above our own and his honor above our comfort and success such that his character and truth are made known in our world. It is in this sense that theological truth is the touchstone of evangelical authenticity. Evangelicalism is not, therefore, being defined in this statement by ethnic or class interests, nor by political or ideological distinctives, but by theology. For this reason theological identity is paramount at Gordon-Conwell in the selection of faculty members and in the education of the students. It is thus that we earn our name of being Gordon-Conwell *Theological* Seminary.

In speaking of the Seminary as being “firmly evangelical,” it is important that the word *evangelical* be understood in this way. Blacks, for example, have often associated with it social apathy if not opposition to those who are poor and oppressed. Some whites in the South have equated it with Northern religion and, for that reason, used it as a pejorative term. Reformed thinkers have sometimes expressed their dismay over the word because it is broad enough to include Arminians. Fundamentalists have disliked it because it is synonymous, in their minds, with theological compromise. And in our culture in general, it has been used so loosely and promiscuously that its descriptive usefulness often appears to have been jeopardized. It is, however, a term by which the Seminary can link itself to its past and by which it can clarify what is fundamental to its life and functioning. It is for these reasons that it is employed in the Mission Statement.

A continuing task of the Seminary, therefore, is the careful delineation of those matters in which pluralism is legitimate and those in which it is not. It is the Seminary’s convictions about the formal and material principles which underlie and structure its “life and values, inform its curriculum and activities, and determine the evangelical perspective in which it sees its responsibilities...” It is these principles which represent what is non-negotiable at Gordon-Conwell. They are viewed as the *sine qua non* for a coherent and effective educational program. And if the Seminary’s understanding of these principles should weaken, its usefulness as a center of Christian learning would be vitiated and its relationship to the broader evangelical movement jeopardized.

Unity and diversity, therefore, need to be carefully delineated so that two dangers are avoided. On the one hand, diversity cannot be allowed to undermine those convictions in which the Seminary must be united. Diversity is a means by which we constantly challenge ourselves to be more faithful to the formal and material principles; it is not an end in itself nor a value to be prized above the profession of those truths in which we are to be united. Latitude and haziness in the center would result in a seminary quite different from what Gordon-Conwell seeks to be. On the other hand, the central unity cannot be allowed to stifle legitimate diversity. In the name of evangelical authenticity, unity cannot demand uniformity in exegetical conclusion, ecclesiastical outlook and theological interpretation. Gordon-Conwell is committed to remaining inflexible about the formal and material principles, to being flexible in relation to those modes of thought and those practices that reflect these principles, and

to being charitable in all things, as the Scripture requires. It is therefore necessary to examine in some detail what is understood by the formal and material principles so that a clear delineation can be made between those matters in which a legitimate diversity may exist and those in which it may not. It will also be necessary to state briefly what is intended by the use of the word Church in the Mission Statement.

This Mission Statement, in exploring these themes and in developing the commentary which follows, is not offering an alternative to the existing Basis of Faith. The Basis of Faith is primary and the Mission Statement, with respect to matters of belief, is derivative and explanatory. What this statement does is to take the items of belief to which the Seminary assents and to derive from these both the principles by which this educational institution should shape its life and the goals which it should struggle to attain if it is to serve the Church most effectively. It is thus an application of the Basis of Faith, not a substitute for it or an addition to it.

### The Formal Principle

God has given his Word to his people as his means of self-disclosure by which they come to know him and understand his will. It is in this Word, our written Scriptures, that God has spoken and by this Word that he continues to speak to each succeeding generation. What is spoken, therefore, is our prime means of understanding the speaker. This identity - what God says and what Scripture says - is secured by the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiration.

By inspiration, Evangelicals have understood that God the Holy Spirit creatively utilized responsible human agents to write the Scriptures in such a way that what they intended to convey and what they did convey corresponded fully with what God willed should be conveyed. Inasmuch as God does not mislead or misinform us and because these Scriptures are the expression of his will, they reflect completely and without exception his character of veracity and faithfulness. Scripture is inerrant.

Although there is a derivative sense in which we may speak of the authors of Scripture as being inspired, inspiration is primarily related to the product of this process namely, *autographa*. The relation of the *autographa* to the copies that we have and even to carefully executed translations is so close that the Church is not left in any doubt as to what the Word of the Lord is. At the same time, it is to be affirmed that any translation may claim to be the Word of God only to the extent to which it corresponds to the autographic form and any claim to being the Word of God is correspondingly diminished to the extent to which it departs from the autographic form.

Although some matters are more central than others in Scripture, it is not legitimate to argue that one part is more inspired than another. Nor is it legitimate to ascribe inspiration to the whole while excluding some parts of the biblical Word from the Spirit's work of inspiration. Because inspiration extends to all the parts of Scripture, the quality of divine truthfulness extends to all the parts. This is no less true of the Bible's own account of its human authorship, its literary origins and the history it records than it is of its

accounting of God's acts and the significance of these acts for our salvation.

Although the manner in which the Holy Spirit utilized human thought to produce the inspired writings is unknown to us, it is necessary to affirm that human language is the medium within and through which God has disclosed himself. The fallenness and finitude of the biblical authors do not, in the providence of God, mitigate, modify or distort what God wished to disclose. What he disclosed, therefore, is to be identified with the thought expressed in the very words which each author employed. This thought and these words are, moreover, indissolubly linked. It is not possible to have the revelation without the verbal propositions nor are the verbal propositions merely the setting or occasion when revelation is given in personal encounter with God, but God's revelation comes in, through, and with the words. What God has revealed, therefore, needs to be discovered by ascertaining what it was the authors intended to communicate through their choice of words, the literary forms they employed and the structure they gave to their writings.

Although God chose to reveal himself through the rich variety of literary forms which we find in the Bible and although this revelation was given in a variety of contexts and cultures, the Scriptures as a whole comprise a harmonious account of God's acts and of their significance for human life. This harmony, however, cannot be discovered apart from the careful investigation of the whole of Scripture and it is not to be formulated in such a way that parts of the Scripture are forced to bear a meaning which is alien to them. By the same token, parts of Scripture cannot be isolated from the whole and the particular concern or perceptions of individual authors so accentuated that the coherence and wholeness of Scripture is lost and the parts of this whole are likewise forced to bear a meaning which is alien to them. The unity within and between the Testaments is presupposed by the diversity. Unity and diversity are always complementary, never contradictory.

The integrity and meaning of this revelation is neither obscured by nor lost in the variety of cultures in which it was given. Although God employed the languages and conceptions of these cultures, the objectivity and uniqueness of his revelation are nevertheless completely preserved.

Inasmuch, then, as God has provided in Holy Scripture all that is indispensable to our understanding of his character, purposes and acts as well as our spiritual welfare, all competing authorities, whether these arise from critical reason, ecclesiastical teaching or the assumed norms of secular society must be treated as invalid for the structuring of our thought and life. Furthermore, it is the text of Scripture which is authoritative; reconstructions of the history behind it, modern systems of thought imposed upon it, or a particular mode of interpreting it, be it devotional or critical, are not. All categories of thought and forms of behavior, all belief and all conduct, must be subject to the continuing authority of God's written Word.

Gordon-Conwell has attracted students from many different denominations and from a variety of backgrounds. We value this, not least because it declares that our common faith

in Christ is more important than the distinctives through which that faith is expressed ecclesiastically. We also recognize, however, that this diversity can become a liability if what we hold in common is not clearly recognized, for then variety will become destructive disunity. What constitutes our unity is clear perception of and a deep commitment to the centrality of Christ's saving work and the necessary functioning of God's authoritative Word in our lives. It is around this common understanding and upon these common foundations that we will be able to cultivate and develop most fruitfully our Christian spirituality, our relationship to the Church and our responsibilities in society.

## The Material Principle

The language of justification, which is predominantly Pauline, has also become the distinguishing mark of those who stand in the Reformation tradition. The issue that divided Paul from the Judaism of his time also divided Luther from the Catholicism of his time. Paul's contemporaries considered faith as being synonymous with meeting the obligations of the Torah. Luther and the other Protestant Reformers believed that medieval Catholicism made the same mistake with respect to Church teaching and so they faced Rome on the same ground and with the same biblical arguments as Paul had his Judaistic opponents.

For Paul, the language of justification describes God's act of freely remitting sins and reckoning legal standing to those whose guilt had brought them under his wrath. What is in view in justification is not inner transformation but the outer and objective cancellation of liability for unrighteousness before the law. It is a judgment passed on us, not a work wrought in us. It is the gift of a new status, not of a new heart. Through it we have pardon of sin, the end to our vulnerability before God's judgment, the bestowal of a righteousness alien to fallen human nature and title to all those blessings that belong to those who are God's children. The ground of this changed status does not lie within any human capacity nor is it the result of any human work of cooperation. These blessings are found only through the substitutionary death and victorious resurrection of Christ. Through the work of Christ, God's wrath is averted, our guilt is cancelled and his blessings of salvation are received. The means of receiving this status and these blessings is faith. We are justified "by" or "through" faith (*dia* and *ek pisteos* or *pistei*) in Jesus Christ; that is, we are justified when we believe God's promise of forgiveness through his Son and commit ourselves to him in trust and with repentance.

This, then, is Paul's way of stating the essential gospel message. It is central to his understanding of Christ's work because God's fundamental relationship to us is that of loving holiness; therefore, our relationship to him is determined by law. As sinners, our fundamental problem is that we are in violation of God's law and until we are right with the law we cannot be right with the God whose law it is.

The New Testament, of course, uses a rich variety of terms to describe the many facets of Christ's work in addition to that of justification. These include reconciliation (which

describes how God who is alienated from sinful people by his wrath and sinners who are alienated from God by their rebelliousness are brought together in Christ through whom divine wrath is turned aside from its proper objects and human guilt is cancelled); propitiation (which has to do with the turning aside of divine wrath; not only is sin expiated but wrath is also propitiated, God himself providing the means for the exhausting of his own wrath in his Son); sacrifice (in which the thought of cleansing from all that has defiled human life is prominent, a cleansing that occurs through the substituted life of Christ in atonement); redemption (through which the New Testament affirms that God liberates people from the calamity of his judgment by the payment of a price in the death of Christ); conquest (in which God overthrows the powers of evil at the cross and through the death and resurrection of Christ liberates those who are his by faith from the tyranny of evil). These motifs are, to be sure, developed in different ways in the New Testament. Redemption language, for example, often has an eschatological emphasis to it which is not the case with justification. Those who are Christ's have been redeemed in full, because nothing more can or need be added to what Christ has done for them, but those who are Christ's are not fully redeemed because sin still lives on within them. Redemption, like the language of salvation itself, has reference to the past and to the future. Different as these motifs may be, however, they all describe how guilty sinners come into filial relationship with God the Father, receiving forgiveness from their sin and access to him through Christ. Christ bore their sins. He could not bear their sins without dying in their behalf. He did for them what they could never do for themselves, canceling their liability before the law, replacing their relation of hostility to God by one of amity, and rescuing them from the tyranny of sin and the calamity of divine judgment. All of this, Christ did *for* them, objectively, in space, time and history.

What Christ does *in* each sinner subjectively through the work of the Holy Spirit who makes Christ's objective work contemporary is also variously described in the New Testament. It is described, for example, as being born, being born again, being given birth, or being spiritually created, or receiving life. This language all describes the act of God by which spiritual life is originated within those exercising faith in the saving work of Christ. It is a decisive, instantaneous change which is wrought that brings life where there has been death. It is a change which affects the whole person. The giving of this new "heart," therefore, is the giving of a whole new direction to all of the faculties of which a person is constituted. This work characterizes those who are "in Christ," joined to him by faith. It will reach its completion through the process of sanctification as this is terminated either in death or by the return of Christ.

Between the gospels and epistles a dramatic change in terminology occurs. In Jesus' teaching, the language of the Kingdom was dominant but by the time the epistles were written references to the Kingdom had become rare. They were replaced by terms for salvation such as justification, propitiation, regeneration and sanctification as well as by many fresh elaborations of the ethical consequences of be-

ing “in Christ.” This was no an unnatural development. In Jesus’ teaching, the reality of the Kingdom sometimes had to be veiled and even concealed. The apostles, by contrast, looked back on those events to which Jesus could only look forward – his death and resurrection. The need for concealment of them did not exist. Their teaching, now given in an increasingly Gentile context, could develop clearly and explicitly what had been veiled and implicit in Jesus’ words and deeds. The change was one of language; the substance remained the same.

The Kingdom of God has to do with the inbreaking of the “age to come” into our world through the person of Christ in whom that “age” becomes redemptively effective in those who have entered it. This rule is sovereignly initiated and established by God, taking the form of salvation in the present but issuing in judgement in time to come. Common to both this salvation and this judgment, however, is the overthrow of sin, death, and the devil initially at a personal level but ultimately on a cosmic scale. The two foci of this rule – salvation being principally connected with Christ’s first coming and judgment principally connected with his second are chronologically separated, but already in the first, the inauguration of God’s rule, there is the anticipation of the second, its ultimate triumph. It is between these two events that Christian life is lived, in which the “age to come,” thought not yet fully triumphant, has nevertheless been tested and experienced.

Entering the Kingdom is synonymous with believing in Christ. Common to each is the same sovereign reign of God, the same redemptive content, and the same expected outcome. Entering the Kingdom or believing in Christ alike speak of supernatural reality which is alien to the domain where sin reigns, which can be experienced only on God’s terms and in the manner which he prescribes. His terms are those of his Son. To come to Christ and to receive his forgiveness implies that he is our sinbearer and substitute, sacrifice and high priest, the expiator of our sin and the propitiator of God’s wrath through his crosswork by which eternal life is received and entry is made into his eternal Kingdom.

This transition from death to life, from being outside the Kingdom to being in it, from being outside of Christ to being in him, is not made through baptism. It is not made through baptism and faith. It is made through faith by which assent is given to the biblical message of Christ’s salvation and commitment is made to Christ. This transition is made by faith alone. The confusion between the sign of baptism and that which it signifies contradicts the biblical understanding of how regeneration occurs and has adverse consequences for scriptural teaching on the nature of grace, justification and faith.

The relation between justification and the two sacraments or ordinances which Protestantism has recognized, but especially the Lord’s Supper, is clearer than the history of debate would suggest. In the Lord’s Supper we have a visual representation of the substitutionary work of Christ. What is debated is how this representation effects or imparts spiritual blessing. Some argue that this occurs through Christian memory, prompted by the visual representation, as

it recalls the promises of Gods Word; other argue that these promises are made effective in the believer’s life at the time of the Lord’s Supper through the work of the Holy Spirit in the presence of faith; others speak of the spiritual presence of Christ who, on the basis of faith, confirms in the lives of believers the realities symbolized in the bread and wine. The are all legitimate options within evangelicalism. That violates the biblical understanding of justification is to argue that God’s grace is conveyed materially through the sacrament so that the sign and that which is signified by it become fused in part or in whole. There is a consensus that runs from the Reformation to the present throughout evangelical theology in all of its phases that this kind of sacramentalism undercuts the gospel and violates the biblical testimony. We are justified by the objective and finished work of Christ and it is upon this that our theology is focused and centered.

### **The Use and Implications of “Church”**

Gordon-Conwell is an institution, according to the Preamble, which serves “the Lord and his Church”; it works as a “training partner with the Church”; it is “committed to the Church.” Theological education is done “within and for the Church” (Article 2); in training students to become skilled in ministry, it works “in cooperation with the Church” (Article 3) because the preparation of students is a joint responsibility. The Seminary sets itself the task of working “with the churches” (Article 4) in nurturing student growth. Finally, Gordon-Conwell works to strengthen the evangelical presence in “Church and society” (Article 5).

The word Church is used deliberately in these sentences because it is flexible enough to bear a wide range of meanings and it is in a wide range of contexts that Gordon-Conwell does its work. In practice, Gordon-Conwell works most commonly with the local church. Where this is the case, church stands for the company of persons, gathered in obedience to the command of our Lord and in consequence of its union with him for the purposes of worship, fellowship and witness. It is the church’s purpose, under the leadership of its pastor(s), elders, or deacons to nurture the life of God within the people of God and to declare the evangel. To this end, the church is called to preach the Word faithfully, administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper correctly, and exercise discipline judiciously and compassionately.

Today, however, a substantial amount of Christian life and activity occurs outside the local church. Involved are people who belong to the invisible Church because they belong to Christ by faith, but their activity is not channeled through the local church or even denominational structure. In what sense this work may be considered a part of the Church’s is not a matter on which Evangelicals have reached agreement. Some reserve the word church exclusively for local church life as alone being normative for the “visible church”; others extend it to include the whole evangelical constituency, which also transcends church structures and others use it of denominations, Christian communities, and Protestant groups as a whole. The Mission Statement declines to adjudicate between these different ecclesiologies, believing that

these are among the “nonessentials” in which freedom of formulation is to be allowed, provided the formal and material principles are honored.

The orientation of the Seminary to the Church is the natural outcome of its understanding of the work of Christ. Being centered on Christ must lead to having his people, the Church, at the heart of our interest. The Lord has given his name to the church. It is the body of Christ. One cannot truly be part of the Church unless there is ownership of its chief confession, “Jesus is Lord.” To the extent to which such an affirmation is muted or deprived in any way of its full strength to govern behavior (piety) or to inform convictions (doctrine), there occurs a diminution of the Church’s claim to hold Christ’s name authentically and to represent his mandates and interests on earth effectively.

Evangelical theology seeks to think God’s thoughts after him for the sake of the church’s spiritual health and vitality. Gordon-Conwell’s educational goals must therefore be defined in terms of the church’s edification, correction, knowledgeability, and vigorous embracing of all the promises and responsibilities clearly appropriate to life in Christ and living within his body. In the evangelical perspective, there is no other reason for the enormous expenditure of energies, commitment of lives, and marshalling of support involved in doing theological work than that the resulting fruit of such labors should be contributed to the Church for purposes of the deepening of its self-understanding and the effectiveness of its mission.

The summoning body which calls for theological thinking is the Church. The Church is commissioning agency and receiving depository. The responsibility for making judgments sustaining or rejecting the validity of these theological endeavors should emerge within the Church. In sum, theologians and professional teachers devoted to the tasks of theological education speak not only to or for the church but within it as they formulate its theology.

It is for these reasons that Gordon-Conwell seeks to express in its life and educational program its essential relation to the Church. At the same time, it also recognizes its distinction from the Church. As an educational institution it is a mission structure within the Church universal but it is neither a church nor the surrogate for one. Although it is ecclesial in ethos and practice, and although much of the character and function of church is present, it cannot legitimately be viewed as *ekklesia* for three important reasons. First, the biblical offices of bishop, elder and deacon are absent. Second, the temporary nature of student presence, and the fact that we deal largely with young adults means that the life encompassing covenant characteristic of the church is not present. Third, it is the Seminary’s function simply to train leaders for the mission of the church. Naturally, it is appropriate that these functions find expression as part of the education process. There is, however, an important difference. The character of the church is defined by its explicit biblical mandate; the churchly character of the Seminary is simply the expression of the common life we share as a group of Christians engaged in a common task.

It is, then, this relation to and yet distinction from the

churches that gives the Seminary its character and prescribes for it its mandate. The Seminary is largely called to train men and women for ministry in the organized church. Its vision, however, is large enough to include the whole people of God and it sets itself the responsibility of making available its resources and experience, its learning and its leadership, to all those who seek from it the means to develop more effective service for Christ.

The relationship to the churches, which is one of both dependence and yet of independence, produces its own characteristic ethos within the institution. It is important to note this fact, especially in regard to the Seminary’s understanding of accountability and responsibility.

As an interdenominational, evangelical Seminary, Gordon-Conwell is in form a voluntary association; it is a community whose continued existence presupposes the willing consent of those who labor in the institution to continue its mission. The Seminary is not the creation of any ecclesiastical body nor of any particular denomination which is pledged to its survival, though it is rooted in and is loyal to the broad evangelical movement.

Unlike many of the non-religious voluntary associations in our society, Gordon-Conwell has achieved considerable definitional clarity as to the basis of membership, social control and common discipline. At the same time, its voluntary nature creates problems. For example, while the obligation to maintain discipline of various kinds is affirmed, it may be asked by what “right” this kind of authority operates when the structure in which that authority is exercised has no formal ecclesiastical validation.

In relation to such questions, it is important to note that there is, by commission and precedent, a biblical basis for a mission structure such as the Seminary is, even if its nature is also one of voluntary association. At several points the New Testament speaks of God’s action in raising up groups of Christians for specific tasks in support of the total redemptive mission of the Church (cf. Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 6:1-8; Acts 13:1-3; 11 Corinthians 3:1-6). We believe the Seminary has also been called into existence by the Lord of the Church to fulfill a task, namely, the training of leaders. The Seminary’s mission, then, derives from the work of the Holy Spirit and the perceived needs for leadership within the Church. That mission is mediated objectively through Scripture and the constitutional documents of the Seminary. It is mediated subjectively by the evangelical experience, and by the individual calling of those who comprise the Seminary at any given time. The resulting accountability to God is expressed internally by the faculty, administration and trustees in their annual written assent to the Basis of Faith. It is expressed externally in the daily lives of all members of the Seminary community. It flows from the covenant symbolized in Christian baptism, made visible in the Church and experienced in the life of faithful discipleship to Jesus Christ.

Our accountability to God requires a responsiveness both to those with whom we work as well as those whom we serve in the variety of Christian ministries. Internally, the exercise of responsibility occurs within the structure of authority established for the Seminary. Faculty and

staff, for example, are responsible to students by reason of their service relationship to those students; they are, at the same time, accountable to administrators and trustees by reason of the administrative structures of the Seminary. Externally, Gordon-Conwell is, as part of its mission and by its own deliberate choice, responsible both to the churches and the evangelical constituency which transcends church structures. In order for our graduates to find employment, for example, their training must be perceived as being of high quality. The Seminary, therefore, is responsible to its constituencies to maintain excellence in theological education. Not only so, but being deeply rooted in the evangelical movement, Gordon-Conwell is responsible for maintaining its orthodox character as defined by its Basis of Faith. Failure to do so would not only change the Seminary's identity but also sever the spiritual and material support provided by its evangelical constituency.

These relationships to God, the church and the evangelical constituency encompass all parts of the Seminary. Trustees, administrators, faculty, staff and students may and often do experience them in different ways. They may be experienced in some cases as merely an inarticulate sense of obligation or expectation. At other times they are very clearly defined, but this multifaceted responsibility is never absent.

## Article 1

*To encourage students to become knowledgeable of God's inerrant Word, competent in its interpretation, proclamation and application in the contemporary world.*

The nature and function of God's Word are inextricably linked. The Word of God will not be heard as God's Word unless its nature as inspired writing is recognized. Nor will it function as God intended - bringing instruction, giving comfort, issuing warnings, and unveiling his Christ in whom all of the divine promises are fulfilled - unless it is competently interpreted and applied by those who are filled by the Spirit and, as a result, preach, teach, and witness in his power. Both the processes by which the written Scriptures are interpreted as well as the attitude in which this work is undertaken need to be constantly examined.

The interpretive task described in this article covers both what God has said and how those words are to be applied in the twentieth century. The meaning of God's Word does not change though its application may. In its content, the Word of God is identical in all ages. It is nevertheless important that students become skilled in different stages which lead us from God's original revelation to its application today. They must be able to exegete his Word soundly, place the results of each exegetical labor in the larger framework of his total revelation and then make application of it such that clear connections are established between the truth of the divine Word and the substance of life as it is lived in the contemporary world.

The methodologies employed in understanding what God has said in his Word must be disciplined by the fact that this Word is divinely inspired. Methodologies may vary, depending upon the type of writing being interpreted, but the following principles should be observed.

First, interpretation should concern itself with the literary meaning of each text, the words of which are the tools for eliciting what the author intended to convey. Because Scripture was produced by confluent action, divine revelation occurring within and through human understanding, what is intended in any text or passage has both a divine and human dimension. In most cases, these two aspects coincide. What God wanted us to understand in Scripture is identical with what the authors believed would be understood by their words. In some instances, however, it is also possible that the divine intention, while not contradicting the human intention, nevertheless extends beyond it. This would be true, for example, in the giving of some prophecies where the understanding of the author may not have been identical with the full potential of the words which he was led to write. Implications the author may not have understood completely are always and in every

case made clear elsewhere in Scripture by the Spirit of God. In no instances are they to be ascertained from or decided by extra-biblical sources. It therefore follows that what Scripture says is never different from and is always identical with what God says.

By the same token, what any human author intended to say is not different from what the text of Scripture says. The words which the human authors employed and the structure they gave to their writings are the only legitimate means we have of discovering their intentions as authors. Grammatical-historical exegesis of Scripture, whereby the meaning of the text is to be discovered, therefore provides not only the foundation for but also the outer limits of our hermeneutic. No author intended a meaning not conveyed in his words; no words of Scripture can be understood aright except by ascertaining their grammatical meaning. In different cultures and contexts, a text of Scripture may have different specific applications but what any text says is what it means.

It is not appropriate, however, to deny to the authors of Scripture use of those conventions of language that we ourselves employ in the service of good communication. In some cases, for example, numbers may be rounded off. Likewise, speeches ascribed to various people are not always *verbatim* reproductions of what was said; they are always, however, *accurate* representations of the substance of what was said and, as such, can be ascribed directly to the speaker. Then, again, in arriving at what authors intended in their descriptions of the natural world it is necessary to distinguish between what it was they wished to assert and the terms, concepts, or poetic figures they employed in their writing. The authors occasionally speak of the earth as resting on pillars, for example, but we should not conclude from this that they were intending to teach a cosmology any more than we would from someone in our time using a pre-scientific expression such as the sun "rising." The proper use of language allows for such conventions, not only for ourselves, but also for those who wrote the Scriptures whose prime intention was to speak for God or about his relations to the world.

Second, it is appropriate to recognize that God's work of inspiration occurs within people whose consciousness and mental habits reflect the times and places in which they lived. The result of this is that authors think and write with distinctive idioms. These distinctives ought to be recognized and, in so doing, it is appropriate to speak of these disinctives

as representing the authors' "theologies." To speak, however, of an author's "theology" as if it were merely a human and therefore relative perspective is not appropriate. Nor is it appropriate to exegete Scripture on the assumption that the cultural context of each author in some way mitigates or distorts the revelation which God has given, for the revelation of Scripture is transcultural and is for all people and times. Consequently, it is necessary to interpret the particularity of each author within the context of the Bible's unity. If there is one God who has inspired the whole of Scripture and who has, in that process, provided an objective revelation which reflects a variety of cultures but is not bound to any of them, then it is appropriate to interpret Scripture by Scripture. This was the key hermeneutical principle of the Reformation hereby not only the inspiration but also the correct interpretation of the Bible was traced to God himself. Thus our authority does not depend on the interpretation of a church or a council, but on the Spirit of God.

Third, in both the Old Testament and New Testament there is ground for supposing that behind the finished text there is sometimes either an oral or a literary tradition. It would invert the facts, however, to suppose that this tradition is the primary and more authentic truth to which the Scripture is merely a clue; this tradition is at most only a clue to the truth that is in Scripture. It is mistaken to argue, for example, that the real meaning of Jesus' words and acts lies in an obscure history which it is now difficult to reconstruct and which is different from what we have in the gospel accounts. Nor is it possible, given the truthfulness of God, that the gospel writers placed on the lips of Jesus teaching that he never uttered. Undoubtedly the gospel authors have exercised their creativity, but it is a creativity of selection from extant material with a view to developing a particular presentation of the meaning of Jesus for a particular audience. It is not the creativity of invention. Since the Scriptures were given to the whole Church for its instruction, admonition and discipline it does not seem plausible that the meaning of this Word could be so entangled in the problem of its literary origins that only a small handful of scholars actually understand what God is saying. Whatever beneficial light background studies may throw on the biblical text, we are not restricted to that material for a good and workable understanding of the meaning of Scripture. In short, God's truth is not to be held captive to the findings of a scholarly magisterium.

Finally, sound interpretation should seek to discover the harmony and inter-relatedness of God's truth as it is revealed in his Word. It is therefore not appropriate to assume that texts are distorted or their authors mistaken until corroboration can be found in some external source. Nor is it appropriate to demean attempts at harmonization where these respect the integrity of the text. There may be residual problems even after the most diligent effort has been expended in evaluating parallel and apparently different perspectives on the same event. These should be recognized honestly and continue to be studied within the conviction that God does not contradict himself and that these problems have answers in terms of that Word which he himself has inspired.

The spirit in which this work is undertaken, like the methodology itself, must resonate with Scripture as God's inspired Word. Exegesis must be done in conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit who first inspired the Word, in the context of faith, and with a view to the spiritual growth and benefit of God's people.

It is true that the precise relationship that should pertain between Word and Spirit, the objective and the subjective, has not always been perceived clearly. Evangelical history does record misunderstandings in which the work of the Spirit's illumination has been disengaged from the text of Scripture. On the grounds of supposed personal illumination the teaching of Scripture has occasionally been denied, or a meaning has been imported into it that reasonable exegesis could not sustain, or Scripture has been discarded altogether as unnecessary. By the same token, others have disregarded the need for the Spirit's illumination and have imagined that personal spirituality was not a necessary ingredient for good biblical learning. These misunderstandings each reveal an insufficient awareness of the distinctive genius of evangelical theology. What they also reveal are the dangerous consequences which inevitably flow from handling the Word of God carelessly because of some supposed illumination or by ignoring the work of the Spirit on the ground that simply possessing the written Word of God is sufficient.

Word and Spirit, the objective and the subjective are joined - and of necessity joined - because there is only one Christ. It is through the biblical Word that Christ exercises his authority over us, by it that he addresses us in promise and through it that we answer in faith and obedience. And it is by the Spirit that Christ's work at Calvary is made effective in and contemporary to us. Christ died to secure our status as children of God; the Spirit is given that we might experience this. Christ is God manifest to us; by the Spirit is God's power made to work within us. Without our union with Christ, the Bible could not be fully understood; without that union with Christ, the Spirit could not be experienced.

The Church collectively and each Christian individually is therefore called to that radical discipleship in which every presupposition, value and judgment, every activity, relationship and pursuit is made subject to the continual reformation of God's written Word. The authority of Scripture, then, is not to be viewed merely as a static quality but it is to be seen as a functional relationship in which we structure our lives according to God's promises and express our gratitude by fully obeying all of his commandments.

## Article 2

*To maintain academic excellence in the highest tradition of Christian scholarship in the teaching of the biblical, historical and theological disciplines.*

The Seminary's commitment to "academic excellence" arises from two motivations. First, Gordon-Conwell recognizes that ours is an age of increased knowledge and professionalism. Students would therefore be ill-served if they were not provided with the means to become thoughtful about and proficient in their service for Christ. Second, the Seminary honors Christ through its dedication of mind, heart and energy to him and his Kingdom. This dedication would be incomplete if the mind in all of its capacities were not informed and developed. The Seminary today shares the conviction that an unlearned ministry is detrimental to the Church.

"Academic excellence" is understood to imply three levels of proficiency. First, it requires the mastery of cognitive content. Second, it aims to produce in students the ability to think cogently and creatively within the subject matter of each discipline. Third, it seeks to effect that most fundamental of all integrations between academic learning and life as it is encountered in the contemporary world.

This article also describes the context in which such academic excellence is to be pursued. It is, on the one side, studying and learning which is done "in the highest tradition of Christian scholarship" and, on the other, "for" and "within" the Church.

The presuppositions that underlie this academic learning are those of the truth of God's written Word and the centrality of Christ's saving work. It is these presuppositions that produce both the atmosphere in which vigorous examination of every question can occur and the criteria by which those questions are to be resolved.

The pursuit of "academic excellence" is undertaken "within" and "for" the Church. In this, the Seminary assumes both a general and a more specific responsibility.

In general, it seeks to provide intellectual leadership in biblical, historical and theological matters. The Seminary provides a strategic setting from which the faculty can address the broader evangelical movement. It also provides the climate for the discussion of difficult or important material, the results of which can be communicated to the scholarly world. It is a center of resources, human and educational, the purpose of which is to see the people of God come to clearer understanding of God's Word and a deeper commitment to the God of that Word. In order to achieve these purposes, the environment on campus and the conditions under which

faculty work must be conducive to producing "high levels of scholarly competence and research."

More narrowly, the Seminary assumes the responsibility, within a program of theological education of teaching the biblical, theological and historical disciplines in a manner that is consistent with the highest academic standards practiced in academia. This learning, however, is not an end in itself. Because Gordon-Conwell commits itself to function "for" and "within" the Church, as the servant of the people of God, it shapes its work and interest according to their needs. In this respect, all academic life is a means to realizing a greater faithfulness to Christ in the Church, a deeper understanding of what it means to be Christian in the modern world, and a greater effectiveness in serving Christ.

As a means to serving Christ, these disciplines and this education are not, however, without their limitations. It is important for those who teach as well as those who learn to recognize these limitations.

The seminary movement is part of a much broader movement in education in which learning of all sorts has been shifted from contexts of personal apprenticeship to centralized schools. The advantages of this development are principally those of greater expertise that can be gathered in a school. Professional schools are not omniscient. A business school can provide a comprehensive education but cannot of itself create successful business people. Likewise, a seminary can provide a comprehensive education in biblical, historical and theological expertise but cannot guarantee proficiency in application of the knowledge. Both personal and situational factors as well as individual gifts affect the fruitfulness of one's ministry. A wholeness in ministry requires not only education and skills, but also spiritual integrity and maturity.

This means, then, that the task of education at Gordon-Conwell is being considered as having several different aspects to it. If education is to be defined as the process by which people induct others into their knowledge, values, collected wisdom, and understanding of life such that what is being transmitted is actively appropriated and wisely applied to life, then it is clear that several different ways of teaching will have to be employed if such a complex goal is to be reached. The Mission Statement therefore balances cognitive mastery, which may be the dominant interest in Article 2 although it is not the exclusive interest, with the practical experience - almost along the lines of the older apprentice-

ship model - in Article 3, with the need for spiritual growth and development in Article 4. And throughout the Articles, the Church is seen as the co-trainer of Gordon-Conwell students, providing aspects of learning that the Seminary cannot effectively provide. This means that different models and modes of education exist side by side with one another but function together in their common task. Educational extremes are to be avoided. On the one hand, “academic excellence” does not negate other modes of learning on or off campus, such as practical knowledge and spiritual growth, which are not easily measured by those academic standards which are associated with the more cognitive disciplines. On the other hand, the more cognitive disciplines are not to

be invalidated in their substance or in the manner in which they have been traditionally taught, simply because they do not always have as their dominant object that of practical expertise. The Seminary chooses to allow different ways of education to coexist; it declines to reduce the whole process to one mode or model.

### Article 3

*To train and encourage students, in cooperation with the Church, to become skilled in ministry.*

Article I addresses skills essential to the preaching and teaching functions of ministry. Article 3 has these in view as well, while emphasizing skills essential to the pastoral care and administrative functions.

The academic disciplines which underlie these two sets of functions have traditionally been termed in the former case “theoretical” and in the latter, “practical.” This distinction has only a limited usefulness in differentiating content and methodology within these disciplines. Theoretical subjects should lead naturally to practice, and practical subjects should rest upon theoretical knowledge. The development of skills presupposes both a basic knowledge of the subject matter and actual practice.

Training in these skills should therefore include cognitive learning which provides the opportunity to observe a competent practitioner, experience in the task while being observed, and subsequent evaluation with a qualified supervisor. It is in this supervised context that the personal integration intended in this article best takes place.

The integration between knowledge and practice is effected in a number of ways. The relationship is formally defined, for example, by the Supervised Ministry program as well as in the urban training program or the Overseas Mission Practicum. Clinical pastoral education also stresses a relational method of learning. In each of these cases the relationship between the Church and the Seminary is individualized, centering in the dynamic of one-to-one or small group interaction.

This relationship between the Church and the Seminary is also expressed more structurally. As an interdenominational seminary, Gordon-Conwell welcomes students from many denominations and seeks to prepare their students for ministry in those denominations. Wherever possible, ordination requirements and denominational distinctives are dealt with in the curriculum through courses in denominational standards and distinctives. Church officials charged with overseeing candidates for ordination are always welcome on campus to meet with students to provide information or oversight.

Just as churches and para-church groups provide instruction and counsel to the Seminary, members of the Seminary community minister to churches and mission groups. The reciprocity of service should strengthen the educational process in several ways.

First, students seeking admission to the M.Div. program should normally seek church approval of their character, call and qualification for serving the Church in a pastoral role. An applicant with a serious deficiency may be delayed or refused admission.

It is important to recognize that the Seminary alone cannot prepare men and women for ministry. It can sharpen some tendencies and inhibit others in the student; it can affirm some attitudes and disapprove others. However, unless the call to serve, the desire to minister, the willingness to lead and the requisite character and spirituality for this ministry are present in the student who enters, they will probably not be present in the student at graduation. Nevertheless, the Seminary is committed to doing all that it can to ensure that students do not enter their ministries unless they are competent and qualified to do so.

Second, continual dialogue is needed to review and reform the understandings of ministry present in the churches and the Seminary. Included would be such issues of the relationships of leadership and service, authority and ministry, clergy and laity and the nature and function of ministry as a shared enterprise.

Third, the Seminary should work with the churches in coming to a common understanding as to what theological education should provide. In other words, those who receive the results of theological education should have something to contribute to the shape of that education. These expectations should be defined with reference to specific tasks such as evangelism, discipleship, preaching, teaching, worship and management.

Therefore, the development in students of what may be called “a pastoral identity” calls for a Church—Seminary partnership. Through active church participation, Supervised Ministry and an on-campus program of spiritual formation, the minister-in-training will have the opportunity to bring to maturity what is presumably already present in seminal form. In this way classroom exposure, ministry involvement and discipleship can be integrated in the lives of students and graduates.

Finally, beyond the instruction available in its basic degree programs, Gordon-Conwell also has the responsibility to make available its resources of learning and experience to ministers and other leaders in the Christian community, insofar as it is able, to assist in their bearing witness to Christ

and to the truth of his Word in the modern world.

In each of these ways, Church and Seminary share the same goals and each assists the other in reaching them. Without the Church, therefore, the Seminary cannot fully train men and women for ministry for this must be a cooperative venture between the Church and the Seminary.

By virtue of its location, Gordon-Conwell has a special interest in fostering, strengthening and encouraging evangelical church life within North America. As an expression of this interest, the Seminary has a role to play in support of renewal in the American church. Where faith and practice decline from biblical standards among groups served by the Seminary, renewal can be fostered with love and humility. This work cannot, however, be effected or sustained unless those who represent Gordon-Conwell themselves reflect the spiritual maturity they encourage in others. The Seminary and the churches are alike required to be continually under the authority of God's Word in faith and practice. The Seminary is to be a community marked by repentant faith and reforming obedience. Its viability as a source of renewal rests upon its credibility as a community in which biblical truth is believed and lived.

The traditional role of educating people for ministerial service remains central. In addition, however, to the M.Div. degree, the ministry-focused M.A. degrees, and the D.Min. degree, all geared to church vocations, there are new M.A.

programs intended for persons engaged in non-church vocations. Further, the Center for Urban Ministerial Education seeks to train those already engaged in bi-vocational ministries.

Yet, the partnership envisioned in Article 3 goes still further. Under the category of supervised learning, the traditional programs are linked more closely than ever to the active work of ministry. Through continuing and extension education, the resources of the Seminary are to be employed in the educational needs of individuals, churches, and ministry groups far removed from the campus. To do so effectively demands a partnership with churches and para-church groups that is defined in a new and more specific fashion. To sum up, the common interests and goals of both the Seminary and the churches force us to undertake theological education as a process for developing persons able to minister as representatives of the Church. A task so large and so demanding must be shared by both in order to be carried out responsibly.

## Article 4

*To work with the Churches towards the maturing of students so that their experiential knowledge of God in Christ is evidenced in their character, outlook, conduct, relationships and involvement in society.*

Biblical spirituality is the cultivation of a love toward God and neighbor. The development and maturing of these relationships is to be accomplished through obedience to the Word and in dependence on God's Spirit. Spirituality should affect everything that a Christian thinks, says and does.

In speaking, therefore, of spiritual maturation what is intended is a comprehensive understanding of what it means to be godly. Students need to develop a spiritual attitude about their bodies (which are temples of the Holy Spirit), their minds (which are made to serve and obey God), their moral lives (which are to reflect God's own character), and their emotions (which are to be expressed in conformity with being "in Christ").

This relation to God, involving the whole person, must also be expressed in culture and society. Spirituality cannot legitimately remain interiorized and privatized, isolated from concern for the world or excused from the personal costliness of discipleship. Being spiritual will therefore also, mean that those who are Christ's will view creation as his and will use their talents and gifts as a means of affirming him as creator and redeemer. They will articulate in the midst of their culture the values of the "age to come." In their life and involvement in society they will embody the demands of God's justice and compassion.

Spirituality is not a compartment of knowledge that is in addition to the other areas of learning encompassed in the curriculum. It is not a skill learned alongside the other skills. Rather, biblical spirituality is that which informs and fills all the knowledge learned and all the skills which are developed in seminary. It is what links the formation of Christian character to the development of Christian responsibility in society. Without it, knowledge is arid, skills are ineffective and the Christian presence in society is unnoticed.

This article speaks of spirituality as having both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. Vertically, spirituality entails "the experiential knowledge of God in Christ." This is the basis for the horizontal expression of biblical values in "character, outlook, conduct, relationships and involvement in society." This "experiential knowledge of God" cannot be divorced from but must always find expression in what a person is and in everything that he or she does.

This is important for understanding the basis and motivation for social responsibility. Social responsibility is not a task divorced from the life of biblical spirituality, nor can biblical

spirituality exist without concern for the world around it. The experience of God can never be an alibi for disengagement from this world. The elements mentioned in this horizontal sequence therefore form a natural and unbroken unity, the knowledge of God issuing in life and actions which embody his truth and character.

### The Vertical Dimension

Biblical spirituality is foundationally the right relationship to God the Father, through the Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit. This relationship cannot be deepened since the work of Christ is already finished. Our communion with God, however, is to be continually enriched and continually practiced in all places and situations.

This relationship is not automatic, nor is it self-sustaining. It goes even beyond knowledge about God. Being rightly related to God occurs objectively through the work of Christ but subjectively through repentance and commitment informed by God's Word and obedience to the teaching of that Word. The study of and meditation upon his Word, self-examination and confession of sin in the light of it, as well as the prayer and worship to which its teaching leads are therefore indispensable ingredients in the cultivation of this spirituality. It is these practices which lay the foundation for the corporate experience of being God's people which is essential for healthy community life.

Christian spirituality cannot be preserved unless, in conjunction with these practices, we are being "constantly filled by the Spirit." Undoubtedly the filling of the Spirit will be interpreted in different ways within the Seminary, but it is beyond dispute that it is the Holy Spirit who imparts to the people of God a sense of God's presence, who empowers them to become increasingly like Christ and to live in accordance with their new status and nature in him, and whose power and gifts are the *sine qua non* for effective service in the Church as well as in the world.

### The Horizontal Dimension

This article sees the vertical dimension, the experiential knowledge of God, as being the necessary basis on which character, conduct, and involvement in society are built.

Unless these horizontal expressions are evident, a professed vertical experience is open to serious question; unless the vertical experience is present, the horizontal will be deprived of reality and motivating power.

It is the Holy Spirit's work to produce Christian character and conduct. This occurs as the biblical norms are internalized, producing Christian character and conduct. This occurs as the biblical norms are internalized, producing patterns of godly behavior. The expression of these norms may sometimes be affected by personality type, but it is the aim of the Seminary to graduate students in whom the truth and character of God are consistently evident.

The cultivation of these values has both an individual and a corporate dimension. The love and holiness of God, especially as these are seen in Christ and mediated through the Spirit, are to be personally experienced. The chief characteristics of God's love, however, are sacrifice and service. God's love, therefore, also needs to be learned and lived in relation to others. Furthermore, in learning to give ourselves to others for his sake we begin to find ourselves. In this sense, self-denial is the basis for true self-discovery. And the self so discovered becomes increasingly freed from the egocentricity that is always a violation of God's law and holy character. Christian spirituality requires that the disciple actively and daily obey Christ's word about taking up the cross. By this action, security, comfort, status and life itself are rendered of secondary importance. Thus the disciple declares that life in the Kingdom and service of Christ requires values that are the antithesis of the search for worldly success because only those who humble themselves are exalted, only the last become first, and only those who lose themselves in Christ find themselves.

The campus community, therefore, needs to see itself not only as an academic institution but also as a means of spiritual growth, for it should provide challenge, support, and encouragement for each student. Increasingly, a large number of students come to the Seminary without an adequate history of personal spiritual nurture in home and church. Specific strategies to meet the special needs of such students must be developed. The spiritual nurture which the campus affords, for example, can help students to learn how to deal with life constructively and to cope with stress. Families can encourage each other in the deepening of marital bonds and in the raising of children within Christian faith. The content of what is taught should, wherever possible, provide stimulus for growth in the knowledge of God and his Word. Those who teach should model the values and concerns of Christian spirituality. And the spiritual climate which is established on campus should challenge students to deeper commitment and a more comprehensive realization of the claims of God upon their lives.

The institution itself, in its policies and practices, should embody the values it seeks in its students. This will mean, for example, that the Seminary's educational resources should remain open to all who are qualified, including those disadvantaged, without regard to sex, race, color, national origin, or handicap. It will mean that special attention will be given to the needs of urban and Third World peoples, to

the training of minority and international students, and to financial policies based on need. In these and other ways, the spiritual and social context which the Seminary provides - in which we learn to give, care and pray for one another - is a vital link in the formation of Christian character and conduct.

Finally, spirituality should be practiced with a joyful disposition because of the conviction that God is sovereign over his world. He is its creator, sustainer, and fulfillment. Developments in history, which give varying forms to culture and society, occur by his decree. God has raised up faithful people in all ages who exercise creative gifts and energies in efforts of renewal and transformation in a world that has stood under the curse of sin from the time of Adam. The locus of this human activity is the present world system, created in goodness by God and heading to an ultimate liberation along with the redemption of the children of God. In that conviction, peace and hope and joy must mark the outlook of Christian spirituality in the engagement with the world.

Nevertheless, there are defective values and aberrant practices of enormous power at work within society. They constitute what the Scriptures call, pejoratively, "the world." True spirituality must accept moral responsibility for the articulation of God's truth and advocacy of his standards of justice within the culture. Between the righteousness of God and the fallen standards of this world there can be neither peace nor reconciliation. Spiritual maturity will always show itself in boldness to confront the evil in the world while concurrently recognizing and affirming the redemptive forces leavening society and culture.

Worldliness is acceding to that system of values and those forms of social relationship in which human fallenness is collectively asserted, sin becomes the norm, and humanistic values displace God's revealed truth. In practice, it most commonly means thinking in secular ways, functioning by materialistic standards even to the point of imagining that affluence is a right, evaluating life solely from the perspective of self-interest and self-fulfillment, being pragmatic to the point of being unprincipled and considering injustice which others suffer an inevitable and irreversible fact of life. It is in this context that Christians are called to articulate the truth of God, cognitively and in action, so that his Kingdom is a powerful presence in the midst of the world.

Christian social responsibility is predicated on the assumption that each person as made in the image of God has intrinsic worth, that the laws which God has revealed regarding moral conduct are inviolable and that the penalty for breaking these laws will be exacted by God himself in judgment. Social responsibility also assumes that the prophetic actions of God's people as they stand in the breach between God's expressed will and the fallen norms in each society can bring about those changes which will restore greater recognition to the value of each person and overturn the injustices by which that value is threatened.

The expression of Christian spirituality in society is seen as it assumes the responsibility for advocating by word and by deed, the cause of the weakest and most defenseless members of the human race. To be mature in Christ is to be called to the side of the oppressed, the poor, and all who have difficulty

finding access to justice. It is to be drawn into opposition to all of those structures and institutions which regard people as expendable and act without regard to what is right. It is to strive to ensure that the policies which are pursued, nationally and internationally, embody a concern for justice and a recognition of the worth of human life. To be spiritual is to take to heart and be one with the cause of the weak, the poor, and the outcast; it is, at the same time, to oppose those who demean, exploit and oppress others in society.

Christian spirituality dies in the absence of a passion for what is right. Spirituality requires commitment to the God whom we know through Jesus Christ, living by his Word and Spirit, being his people and his witnesses in the midst of a fallen world, articulating in thought, word and deed, the values of the “age to come.”

By word and deed, by personal example and institutional practice, by community expectations and corporate involvements, spiritual values are taught. The Seminary is under obligation to ensure that in every aspect of its life what is taught or encouraged is that spiritual life which has communion with God at its center, his Word as its directing principle, his Spirit as its life, loving fellowship with his people as its context, and godliness as its end. This godli-

ness is to be strengthened, informed and deepened so that in every aspect of their lives students will manifest the fact that they are strangers and aliens in the fallen world and citizens in the “age to come” which is presently being established through Christ.

## Article 5

*To provide leadership and educational resources for shaping an effective evangelical presence in Church and society.*

The Christian community has a right to look to the Seminary to give cogency and effectiveness to the expression of evangelical faith, not only as it prepares students to become competent and faithful leaders, but also in a variety of other areas. Because of this, Gordon-Conwell has the opportunity, and it needs to accept the responsibility, to influence the Church's agenda, the direction in which evangelicalism is moving, and the way in which the evangelical presence is expressed.

There are two elements, fundamental to this leadership, which need to be considered. There are, first, the resources which Gordon-Conwell has in people and, second, what it has in facilities. The men and women who constitute the faculty, administration, trustees and staff form an interdependent body of Christian workers. The faculty in particular provide the intellectual leadership envisioned in this article. Their freedom to do so presupposes the competent support of the other groups.

The Seminary cannot provide direction to the evangelical movement unless it is successful in recruiting faculty who are able to speak, not only to the campus through their teaching activity, but also to the community of Christian faith through publication, consultation, preaching, staffing of workshops, leading of retreats, and a host of other comparable activities. Faculty members - both individually and collectively - are in a position to undertake the research and to formulate the proposals which will lead to a better understanding within the Church of the biblical Word and how it can be implemented. They are able to bring their expertise to educational, missionary, and evangelical enterprises. They have the responsibility to participate in professional societies and, in a variety of contexts, to give creative and incisive articulation to Christian orthodoxy. Meeting these responsibilities is the way in which leadership is exercised.

This leadership, however, overlaps with and is partly realized through the second of the two forms of resources mentioned, the institutional. The most tangible aspect of these resources are Gordon-Conwell's libraries, which provide centers for research, and its BookCentre, which is a distribution center for evangelical literature. In combination with the presence of a faculty deeply committed to using its learning in the cause of Christ and in seeing his people built up in their faith, these institutional resources - but especially its libraries - provide the basic ingredients for developing a research capacity on campus designed to function as a think tank for the Church. This research could easily be undertaken in conjunction with selected scholars and leaders from other institutions,

thereby also leading to a broader collegial relationship between Gordon-Conwell and other evangelical institutions. It should issue in bold strategies, formulations, and proposals for the implementation of God's truth in our time.

Gordon-Conwell's proximity to major medical centers as well as to areas of business and high technology provides it with the opportunities to become informed about the ethical issues arising in these fields and to offer biblical and theological perspectives in which they might be addressed. Indeed, all of those questions whose resolution is fundamental to the strengthening of evangelical belief and to the preservation of its spiritual integrity should find a place on the Seminary's agenda. Present and future leaders in many vocations work and study near the Seminary. We should offer to such people the opportunity and resources for disciplined Christian reflection on the theological implications of their activities.

The institutional resources, together with the Seminary's faculty, need to be put in the service of people in all walks of life. For example, numerous people in the professions who may not want to be in a degree program or may not be able to leave their employment seek a deeper understanding of Christian faith especially as this is related to their work. They could be helped by the Seminary.

This article does not in any sense diminish the importance of degree programs which are Gordon-Conwell's principle reason for existence. What is envisioned here is a broadened expression of the Seminary's commitment. It is obligatory that there be clear institutional support for those activities and for that productivity in which persons associated with the school engage while giving leadership to the evangelical community at large. It is important to affirm, however, that no dissipation of excellence in teaching and faculty relationships with students at the Seminary can be allowed to occur, nor can a de-emphasis of the crucial importance of skilled administration on campus take place. When properly balanced, however, efforts aimed at carrying out the mandate of Article 5 will almost invariably enhance the educational processes carried on in the degree programs.

## Article 6

*To develop in students a vision for God's redemptive work throughout the world and to formulate strategies that will lead to effective missions, evangelism and discipleship.*

God's "redemptive work" is what he does to bring men and women into a saving knowledge of himself through the substitutionary death of his Son, by the work of his Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit, and usually through evangelism. Evangelism, then, is the summons to repent of sin, believe on the incarnate Lord alone bore our guilt on the cross, thus making peace with God, and who was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures. It is the Father's will that his Son be acknowledged with gladness as Lord and Savior and be followed with obedience in all that he taught. This continues by identification with God's people in the Church and it issues, finally, in a view of the world as being God's such that willing and compassionate service becomes inevitable.

God, in his redeeming work, has provided us with both the model of and incentive for evangelism. God the Father called Abraham and promised through him to bless all of earth's families. Jesus Christ was sent by the Father into our fallen world and now he sends us out in his name to make disciples from among all peoples. And God the Holy Spirit was given to empower our witness when, as Christ's disciples, we take the gospel to the ends the of the earth. Thus the triune God - Father, Son and Spirit - is a God of missionary love, and those who are his are called to share his outlook and to identify themselves with his will. They must, therefore, commit themselves to evangelizing the world. To fail to do so is to disobey the Lord of the Great Commission, to be indifferent to his glory, and to ignore those who, without him, will perish.

Consequently, we can say that no evangelism will be effective, nor will it remain biblically faithful, unless it asserts both the uniqueness of Christ - as incarnate Son of God and sin-bearer at Calvary - and the universality of his claims. These beliefs have been the Church's historic confession.

This confession is today under assault but this is nothing new. Before us the apostles faced the same challenge from many competing religions and before them the prophets faced the same challenge to the uniqueness of God's redemptive acts in Israel's history from the many religions by which they were surrounded. It was the witness of the prophets that God is not savingly known in pagan religions and of the apostles that he is not savingly known outside of Christ. This should be our witness, too. Not only is our fallen human nature alienated from God and hostile to his truth, but aside from Christ there is no other mediator between God and the

sinners who are in rebellion against him. Christ is therefore not one prophet among many or one religious leader among many. He is unique and differs from the others, not only in degree, but also in kind. He has accomplished in his death and resurrection what no one else could do or has done and he could do this because he was God incarnate. In an age of growing pluralism and syncretism, the temptations to dilute these claims and to modify the biblical teaching that outside of Christ people are lost, are numerous and pressing. It would, then, be derogatory to Christ to assert of him less than he claimed for himself. He is uniquely the way, the truth, and the life. The church is commanded to preach, teach, and spread the unique evangel of his saving grace universally until he returns in glory.

Our evangelism will also be ineffective if as followers of Christ we do not exhibit the reality to which our evangel points. Personal authenticity attracts people and hypocrisy invariably repels them. An inconsistent witness is perhaps especially grievous in cultures which place less emphasis on truth as cognitive content than does the West and which think of truth more in terms of the whole person. In contexts of great economic deprivation or of dangerous social instability it becomes especially urgent, not only that evangelists themselves model the truth they proclaim, but that the invitation of the gospel is also seen to be an invitation to be part of a Christian community whose values really are an alternative to those in the culture.

Evangelism is not in nature political, nor is it to be confused with social or economic change. Societal change may issue from and it may accompany the bold proclamation of God's love and judgment, of his Word and of his Christ, but it is not itself evangelism. Evangelism and social action are separate but, in a Christian worldview, they should be inseparable. While evangelism and social action both are expressions of Christian discipleship and love, they should nevertheless function together in concert and in partnership with one another. With peoples' eternal condition at stake, however, priority must be placed on evangelism if we are to be in conformity with the whole of Scripture and in particular with the Great Commission. Whatever breaks down social barriers and provides a hearing for the gospel is therefore of particular importance. Not only so, but local churches should both declare the truth of the gospel and also model it. If we stand equally condemned before God in our sin,

then we cannot assume to have privileges of standing based on race, class, occupation or possessions in the Church. A faithful Church will both declare the gospel of Christ's saving grace and ensure that its central truth is also practiced in the destruction of these barriers because of which people are so often divided from one another in our fallen world and alienated from the message of Christ.

"Strategies" for evangelism are here being understood both broadly and narrowly. More narrowly, what is in view is the work of equipping students with the knowledge and developing in them the skills to do personal evangelism effectively. God's people belong in the world by creation and in the Church by redemption. They gather in their churches to worship and from there they are sent in to the world to witness. Our students need to know how to witness effectively and in so doing, to bring the Kingdom of Christ into his world.

The word "strategies" is also being used here more broadly. What is in view is that planning which takes account of developments in the modern world and which then seeks to deploy the Church's human and financial resources in the best possible way relative to these developments.

In the future, for example, evangelism will need to take account of the fact that urbanization has become a world phenomenon. In most countries in the world and especially in those where rapid industrialization has occurred or is presently occurring, population is shifting toward great urban centers. It is projected that by the year 2000, 94% of the population in the U.S.A. will be living within cities. In the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe the figure is 80%, Latin America 73%, Australia 85%, Asia 60% and Africa 45%. The impact of this development on Christian strategic thinking should be large. First of all, cities are where missionaries and evangelists will have to work primarily if they are to reach large numbers of people. Projected population figures for the larger cities are remarkable. Mexico City, it is anticipated, will have 31.6 million people by the year 2000. The figure for Calcutta is 19.7 million; Bombay, 19.1 million; Cairo, 16.4 million; Jakarta, 16.9 million; and Seoul, 18.7 million. Second, cities provide contexts, culturally and psychologically, which are quite different from those of the rural areas where most missionaries have worked, and the ways in which the gospel is presented will have to be adjusted accordingly. Cities create environments of anonymity and pluralism. They encourage sharp differentiation between ethnic groups, between different social groupings, and between those who are affluent and those who are not. This situation provides the context in which obedience to the Great Commission is to be realized, for cities have a multitude of their own people-groups to whom the gospel must be taken.

Evangelistic strategy must also reckon with the present overall decline in Christian numbers relative to world population. In some countries in the world, more are actually being added to the churches each year on a percentage basis than to the overall populations. This, however, is not true of the church in many of the Western countries. These

churches are, from a financial point of view, best equipped to support missionary programs but too many have been unenthusiastic about their responsibility. A major part of missionary strategy, therefore, must include consideration of how these churches can be strengthened theologically and spiritually to become a solid base of support for missionary work worldwide. In this connection, it needs to be noted that there are also many of God's people who support evangelism in principle but who need to be mobilized to pray more actively, to give more generously and to involve themselves more fully in the Church's missionary outreach. This mobilization is an indispensable part of any evangelistic strategy for without this concern and prayer, evangelism will surely falter.

Because of this concern for the health of the local church, the Seminary must inculcate in its students a sense of stewardship in missions. Prospective pastors especially must be made aware of the centrality of the Great Commission among the mandates which Jesus the Lord gives to his Church. The compassion of Jesus for the multitudes of the world should describe the attitude of both pastor and congregation. The pastor should have the ability to guide the missionary strategy of the local church, to preach the full biblical message of missions, to challenge parishioners in the stewardship of funds and to lead the church in intercessory prayer so that workers may be sent forth into the field white to harvest. This vision, of taking the gospel to all peoples, is one that should be shared by both the Seminary and the churches. For that reason, the Seminary also shares with the churches the responsibility of encouraging its students to offer themselves for missionary service either through one of the missionary agencies or in self-supporting roles.

The Great Commission remains unchanged; the world in which it is to be fulfilled is constantly changing. It is this world which provides the only context the Church has for obeying Christ's missionary mandate. Understanding this world is, therefore, essential to understanding what is entailed in the twentieth century in taking the gospel to every people-group. Without this knowledge, we will not be in a position to say why the Church has sometimes been ineffective in its outreach, where evangelistic effort should be concentrated, and how it should be done.

GORDON  CONWELL  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY