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# Christmas and Our Seminaries

The God of Christmas Eve didn't worry much about marketing strategies. He used shepherds to first proclaim the Good News out of Bethlehem. The Prime Minister of Canada would never appoint guys like that as press secretaries. Banks, businesses, and advertisers wouldn't, either. Shepherds don't look the part! They're just too earthy. They're unlikely to charm the socks off the public nor run circles around critics.

It's not only modern-day institutions who would refuse to use shepherds for an assignment as important as spreading the news of God's promised Saviour, come down to earth. Religious leaders in Jesus' own time wouldn't have used them, either. After all, they worked in open country, putting in long days keeping sheep together in a land without fences. As a result, they didn't get to worship services much. They weren't soaking up a lot of Biblical teaching from the town synagogues. They were even considered unacceptable as witnesses often, because the authorities felt you couldn't trust them. It was clear: you don't use people like that as your spokesmen!

The Lord went ahead and used them anyway. After the angel appeared in the night sky and told the shepherds the Christ-Child had come to earth in Bethlehem, they rushed to town and checked it out. They "found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child" (Luke 2:16-17 NIV).

The Lord's choice to use ordinary people as His spokesmen has gotten

me thinking about our beloved Concordia seminaries in Edmonton and St. Catharines. Our seminaries are not imposing, Ivy League-looking places. They are modest and served by small faculties. Those who teach and learn in them are not identical to Bethlehem's shepherds; for one thing, they get to church fairly often! But they are like shepherds in that they tend not to be the sort of people society's movers and shakers choose as their spokesmen. They're not out to "schmooze," as many public relations experts do. Nor do they pretend to be smarter than everybody else, supposing they can argue their listeners into trusting the true God.

Of course, there's something more that ties them closely to the shepherds of Christmas Eve; they believe the shepherds' report from Bethlehem. They are persuaded that God's rescue of the fallen human race is wrapped up in the Child the shepherds found wriggling on the straw that night. They have come to believe that this Jesus—by His living, dying and rising—has brought salvation to them personally, and that this Jesus is the ultimate hope of needy people everywhere.

When the risen Christ was reunited with His apostles the evening of Easter Sunday, He told them, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). In other words, "I came to win salvation for people; I'm now sending you to deliver that salvation I have won." Before the apostles themselves passed from the scene years later, they entrusted this message to a new generation of reliable witnesses. And so it has gone through the

centuries, leaping over boundaries, crossing oceans, moving from one language to another, and embracing people from every conceivable social standing and race.

This is the glory in the work of our seminaries. Pious teachers who trust Christ are studying and praying to bring treasures up from the depths of God's revealed Word, just as miners bring gold to the surface of the earth. They are dedicated, not merely to push students through an academic program, but to transmit the treasure of Christ's salvation to a new generation of servants who can bring Jesus to others. All of them—those who teach and those who learn—are, in one way, quite ordinary people. The glory is not in them. It is in the Christ they are honoured to proclaim. Our seminary teachers and students would be the first to tell you this.

Very soon these students will become the Christmas messengers in our churches, as others of us pass from the scene. They will carry forth the work of the Bethlehem shepherds, those first human witnesses of the Good News. They may not seem like marketing experts to today's society. Still, as they hold out Christ to anyone who will listen, they will perform the one service the world desperately needs as long as it endures.

The Lord is preparing them right now for Christmases to come. I hope you'll take time this Christmas—and throughout the year—to pray every blessing on our seminaries, to support their work with your gifts, and to rejoice that God is using them to keep the shepherds' message alive and strong!