

Comment

*Hauna Ondrey, assistant professor of church history,
North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois*

In his fiftieth-anniversary *History of North Park College* (1941), Leland Carlson wrote,

Of all the departments of North Park College, the Theological Seminary has the unique distinction of continuous existence from 1891 to the present day. The reason for this fact is that when the founders made plans for a Covenant school they thought primarily of an institution which would train ministers for the denomination. This purpose constitutes the *raison d'être* of North Park College. To understand fully the story of [North Park], the reader must keep in mind the place of the Theological Seminary as the very heart of the academic organism.

As we bring to a close a year of celebration, marking 125 years since North Park's founding, this double issue contributes focused reflection on the origin and future of our seminary, the "very heart" of North Park.

Philip J. Anderson, professor emeritus of church history, contextualizes North Park's origins within the competing educational ventures pursued by free church Swedish immigrants, 1885–1916, each advocating divergent pathways with respect to ethnic identity and American assimilation. Scott Erickson, seminary alumnus and current head of school at Phillips Brooks School, appraises founding president David Nyvall's vision of Christian higher education—a vision Nyvall pursued in the face of opposition and that has stood the test of time. John Weborg, professor emeritus of theology, reflects on his experience at the seminary, first as student and then as professor, encouraging the school to pursue a Christian identity both global and local, taking its place as a member

of the world church with a particular history worth telling.

The next three pieces point aspirationally to the seminary's future. On the "eschatological" premise of seeking to live into a desired future, Al Tizon, executive minister of serve globally for the Evangelical Covenant Church and affiliate associate professor of missional and global leadership at the seminary, describes the capacities needed in the seminary graduate who seeks to serve today's church and world. Both David Kersten and Gary Walter contribute in their roles as seminary dean and denominational president respectively. Each describes a present context of significant change in church and classroom and suggests ways North Park may adapt in order to form pastors for this changed reality. Kersten outlines strategic priorities toward North Park's offering the whole church theological education that is missional, sustainable, and mutually empowering across denominational and ecumenical partnerships. Walter calls on North Park to be a pace-setter in "missional theological education."

Neither our understanding of the past nor our attentiveness to the future can afford to operate without the other. As (then-ECC president) Paul Larsen wrote for this journal on the occasion of the school's centennial, "If the dream [for the future] is large, we must beware lest we imply that success arrived for the first time with us. If the future of North Park is large and bright, it does not follow that it is rising in our late-born shadow. The strength of the school is its long and noble history." Anderson, Erickson, and Weborg cast the compelling educational vision to which the seminary is heir—an inheritance worth carrying forward into the next 125 years. Tizon, Kersten, and Walter suggest ways we may do so within the particular challenges of the present context.