

## **EDITORIAL**

### **AVOIDING THE UNAVOIDABLE: PROTECTING THE MASTER’S SEMINARY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS**

You “have kept My Word, and have not denied My name.” When the church in Philadelphia heard this commendation from the Lord Jesus (Rev 3:8), I can only imagine how thrilling it must have been for this small band of believers. Yet they were the exception to the rule. In Christ’s messages to seven churches in Revelation 2–3, five receive strong rebukes. Ephesus forgot their love for Christ. Pergamum entertained false teaching. Thyatira tolerated sin. Sardis was spiritually dead. Laodicea became self-righteous.

I remember my favorite professor, Dr. John Whitcomb, being concerned about the future of the seminary that I attended. He sent me an article recalling the first graduate seminary in America, Andover (now Andover Newton). Begun in 1807 as a beacon of doctrinally sound pastoral training, Andover produced graduates like Adoniram Judson, the nineteenth-century missionary whom God used mightily to preach the gospel in Myanmar (Burma). Andover long ago began abandoning the Christian faith, and just this year formed a sweeping interfaith education program, offering training in multiple religions. In fact, their student body now represents over thirty different faiths.

This is a sobering thought as we look to protect the future integrity of The Master’s Seminary. Seminaries are almost unavoidably corrupted by doctrinal error and sin within several generations. Given the bleak forecast from history, our challenge is to obey Christ’s command to Philadelphia, “I am coming quickly; hold fast to what you have.” The mission is clear: Avoid the unavoidable.

The life-expectancy of integrity in Bible-believing seminaries is usually brief, so we have given great thought for years as to what might threaten The Master’s Seminary. What flaming arrows in his packed arsenal will Satan try to use? With Scripture guiding us, we have identified (a) two broad threats, (b) six examples of specific threats, (c) ten specific shields of protection, and (d) one shield of shields.

Knowing Satan’s ploys from Scripture, I’ve asked myself, “If I were Satan, how would I try to ruin The Master’s Seminary?”

Overall, I would bring two broad, deviously subtle threats. I would try to slowly change the mission and the doctrine of TMS. I would create tiny fissures and

weaknesses, so imperceptible that they would cause no alarm. After a sufficiently weakened structure, then would I launch a bold offensive to detonate one fatal explosion.

If I were Satan, what specific threats would I slowly introduce? First, I would encourage hiring the wrong faculty. History shows that one wrong faculty member can lead to the eventual demise of a seminary by his subtle altering of the seminary's mission.

Second, I would encourage neglecting commitment to the local church. TMS exists to serve the church by training qualified shepherds. Once we forget our dedication to Christ's bride, we become a self-serving institution instead of an instrument in the hands of God to bless His people.

Third, I would encourage neglecting finances. As a 40-year student of seminary history, the foot-high stack of articles in my office proves that a seminary's approach to money has staggering implications. The Master's Seminary is a spiritual enterprise, but pragmatically fueled by finances. Economic pressure can tempt a seminary to slide down the icy slope of increasing enrollment at all costs. Typically, this includes relaxing doctrinal standards, lowering admission requirements, accepting unsaved students, and broadening degree programs to widen overall marketing appeal. For the sake of money, the seminary abandons its roots.

Fourth, if I were Satan, I would erode a focused curriculum. The curriculum at TMS, designed to mold Bible expositors and shepherds, is the expression of our mission. As Andover has done, I would replace Hermeneutics, Greek, Hebrew, Apologetics, and Evangelism with World Religions, Interfaith Engagement, The Arts, and Ethics in Society.

Fifth, I would distract the board of directors, the leadership, and the faculty away from the importance of vibrant relationships with one another. While love for God, the Scriptures, and the church motivates these men, it is their love for each other that provides encouragement and accountability.

Finally, if I were Satan and wanted to ruin TMS, I would overemphasize the intellectual and undermine the spiritual. Devotion to God would become devotion to research. Vast numbers of self-labeled evangelical seminaries have venerated scholarship ahead of the "simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Cor 11:3). Scholarship is a vital tool, but not the goal. The goal is to love and obey God more fully in order to be equipped to shepherd others into Christ-likeness.

Clearly, Satan has formidable weapons. Seeing history's poor record, we could embrace an Elijah complex and simply give up. Or we could conclude that TMS has arrived as the best seminary ever, thus testing the Lord by taking human credit. With either extreme, God could easily snatch away His abundant grace that He has bestowed upon us.

We have a solemn responsibility to protect The Master's Seminary, which I take extremely seriously and personally. We have identified ten shields that serve in harmony to defend the Lord's work here. We can hope that if the enemy makes a massive attack, all ten would be employed, particularly if it seemed that the seminary was retreating in mission and doctrine.

The first shield involves the history, mission statement, and doctrinal statement of TMS. We have a founding mission, and we have an extensive doctrinal statement. These are the metrics, the benchmarks by which we evaluate ourselves. Each year we ask, “Is our core mission and doctrine today what it was when we started?” We also scrutinize possible changes to make us more biblical and help us more effectively carry out our fundamental purpose.

The second shield is the Board of Directors for The Master’s College and Seminary. Comprised of godly men in ministry and business, they sign annual statements of agreement with the mission and doctrine of TMS. They are passionate about the Lord’s work and will faithfully guard our integrity.

The third shield is the current faculty and leadership. Our president, John MacArthur, is passionate for the long-range consistency of The Master’s Seminary. Our faculty is charged with the careful and prayer-filled protection of TMS. As an officer in the United States Navy, I learned a simple axiom: If you are in charge, you are responsible. You are accountable. And now, as the dean at TMS, I apply the same lesson. I not only adhere to the classic motto, “Not on my watch,” but hope to build enough strength and protection into the seminary that will serve future deans well. Then I would prayerfully add, “Not after my watch either.”

The fourth shield is our former faculty. Now in our 25th year, we are just at the point where we have faculty members who have either moved into a new ministry or retired, but maintain commitment to The Master’s Seminary. If they saw an actual breach of uprightness, I think they would unite with the board, faculty, and leadership in addressing this.

Possibly the most vital defense, the fifth shield, is careful new faculty hiring. History demonstrates that one wrong man will, often sooner than later, disrupt the classroom and the faculty. Since the beginning, we have utilized an extensive screening process. Prior to an invitation to visit, the candidate is reviewed thoroughly. When invited to visit, he stays for a week or longer, giving us ample opportunity to get to know him, his wife, his doctrine, and his giftedness. He may be a good guy, but not right for TMS or not at this time. Or he may be a wolf in sheep’s clothing and not good for TMS at any time. Consequently, to hire a new faculty member, we must have the agreement of the entire faculty, leadership, and board. This serves us well now and in the future, and serves the candidate well whether hired or not.

The sixth formidable shield is our alumni. The vast majority of over 1,100 graduates stay well-connected to the seminary. They stay in contact with faculty, receive the Journal, support us financially, attend the Shepherds’ Conference, and return to preach in chapel. They are a tight group of guys, staying in close contact with each other, whether here in America or overseas. If TMS were to deviate from our mission or doctrine, the response of this army of God’s men would be astounding.

Similarly, the seventh shield is our current student body. Our students came to TMS to learn under the faculty’s unified doctrinal stands, so I am certain that if one of our faculty said something in class even remotely off-base, such as suggesting

that Jesus was not fully God and fully man concurrently, I would have a line of students at my door the minute class dismissed.

The eighth shield involves our supporters and donors, standing almost 15,000 strong. We have deep affection for their ministry to us. Although most are not intimately acquainted with the daily operation of the seminary, our major donors have a highly keen interest. These men, having worked hard for a lifetime and sacrificially given generously to TMS, are wise stewards of wealth and want to see a return on their investment. They want to see doctrinally sound men of God trained to rise to the challenge of ministry. We love all our supporters, but we particularly try to stay close to those who make such deep sacrifices to help us keep tuition down and pay decent salaries to our staff and faculty. We want to bless them with good reports of God's work even as they bless us by holding us accountable to our mission.

The ninth shield is Grace Community Church. As I look out my office window, I see the campus of our first and dearest partner in ministry. The elders and thousands of worshippers at Grace Church stand as sentinels over TMS, having been invested since day one. Each May we hold graduation in the worship center. Though graduation almost always falls on Mother's Day, it is invariably packed with thousands of members and all the elders of Grace Community Church, in addition to the families of the graduates. Grace Church members have loved our students, being actively involved in their lives in countless ways. And since the doctrinal statements of the church and seminary are the same, we are bound together in love and belief.

Finally, keeping a watchful eye is the shield of Grace to You. The GTY leadership is very concerned with perpetuating the ministry and Bible teaching of John MacArthur, which is doctrinally what we teach at TMS. If it looks like we are going off-track, they will certainly ask tough questions and get involved with correcting the course.

While these ten shields are effective, the overarching shield of shields is prayer: humble, constant, grateful, faith-filled, God-centered prayer. John MacArthur writes in his book, *Lord, Teach Me to Pray*, "Believers are in a spiritual war, and we ought to be praying constantly for victory." Our faculty gathers regularly to intercede on behalf of TMS. Many of our students gather twice weekly to pray for the seminary and for one another at our Associated Student Body prayer time. We cherish the faithful prayers of you, our faithful friends and supporters. Yes, we have thought carefully about the possible threats to TMS and our defenses, but it is only the merciful power of God, sought in prayer, that neutralizes the threats and empowers the defenses.

Can we avoid the unavoidable? Philadelphia is proof that by God's grace and our faithfulness, we can. Our president, our board, our leadership, our faculty, our alumni, our students, and I have a common yearning: to stand with Philadelphia and hear from our King, "You have kept My Word and have not denied My name."

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