

CALVIN SEMINARY FORUM

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COVER ESSAY

GOD WHO CALLED YOU IS FAITHFUL.

My “ministry readiness group” that year was especially enjoyable and insightful. We met together every Monday morning, as the custom was, to form a spiritual fellowship that would better enable us to help one another prepare for ministry. At the beginning of the year, I asked each of them, in turn, to lead us in a discussion of some passage of Scripture or some scriptural idea that was especially meaningful for them. I must say that I had thought that more of them might talk about the love of God or the grace of Christ. Instead, somewhat to my surprise, **more than half of the students specified some aspect of God’s faithfulness as especially significant.**

Although the locution “God is faithful” does not

occur often in Scripture (only three times in the Old Testament and eight times in the New Testament), there are many integrally related ideas in Scripture, such as God who “remembers his covenant” or “keeps his covenant” or as the One “who does not change.” Indeed, the more I thought about it, the more appropriate it seemed that **those preparing for ministry should choose the truth of God’s faithfulness as especially significant.** The students all felt that God has called them to ministry; now they were saying that they believed that God would faithfully see them through their preparation for ministry and then into ministry itself.

In similar fashion, it is especially meaningful to celebrate God’s faithfulness as we

celebrate the 125 years of our existence as a seminary dedicated to preparing ministers of the gospel. This meditation is based on a New Testament text that speaks overtly of God’s faithfulness. The thanksgiving section of I Corinthians 1:4-9 ends with the reality that undergirds all of Paul’s thanksgiving for them: “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” (NIV). Paul reminds them that God’s faithfulness encompasses the past, present and future. It did so for the Corinthian church, and it does so for us today.

The Past

In our text Paul specifically reminds the Corinthians (and us) that our faithful God is the



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one “who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” This call of God is rooted in the gracious work of God in Christ: “the grace given you in Christ Jesus” (v.4). Grace defines all of God’s past activity towards them. Paul then connects that grace with their experience of it. In Christ, he says, “you have been enriched in every way” (v. 5). And that, in turn, is related to their response to Paul’s

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CALVIN SEMINARY:

An Historical Sketch 1876-2001.



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Theological Seminary

This issue of FORUM celebrates the seminary's 125th anniversary. The editorial committee asked me to write a brief history of the seminary. Calvin Seminary was established for one reason: to meet the Christian Reformed Church's (CRC) need for educated ministers.

Fledgling Beginnings

Education for the ministry in the CRC began when pastors privately tutored students. In 1869 Classis Michigan decided that from now on the training of students should be done by one teacher and in one place. The teacher was to be Rev. Douwe Vander Werp; the place, the parsonage of the Graafschaap, Michigan CRC. This was the "School in the Parsonage."

When Vander Werp accepted a call to Muskegon in 1872, the students followed him. In the fall of 1875, Vander Werp

resigned because he was incurably ill with throat cancer. Classis Michigan then transferred the students to Grand Rapids where they were taught by the Rev. Geert Egberts Boer, minister of the First Christian Reformed Church.

A special meeting of the general assembly (synod) was called to deal with the critical situation. It met early in February, 1876 in Chicago. At the meeting, Boer was appointed docent (Latin for "teacher") of the Theological School of the CRC. He accepted the appointment and was installed in office on March 15, 1876. This date marks the founding of what was to become Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary.

The First Church graciously offered the new school the



Rev. D. VanderWerp

use of part of the second floor of its parochial school on Williams Street. The rental fee was \$52.00 a year. The offer was accepted. Thus, the school in the "Upper Room" came

“ Education for the ministry in the CRC began when pastors privately tutored students...Today Calvin Seminary has 25 full-time professors. ”

into existence. From 1876-1892 classes were held in the Williams Street School. There docent Boer taught literary subjects such as languages, history, and philosophy as well as the theological disciplines. A second docent was added in 1883 and another in 1888. Before 1888 all instruction was in Dutch. That year some courses were first taught in English.

Growth and Development

The school grew. More room was soon needed. In 1892 the school moved into a new building, located on the corner of Madison Avenue and Franklin Street. Two years later, the CRC synod decided to allow students who did not wish to become ministers of the Word to take literary courses at the school. The same year, two instructors were appointed to teach exclusively in what was now being called the literary department of the school. By 1900 the literary department had become the equivalent of a four-year high school. In 1901 women students were first admitted. More courses and years of study were added to the literary department. By 1908 the first four years of study in the department were considered academy or high school studies. John Calvin Junior College was the name

given to the last two years of study in the department.

Again, the school outgrew its physical facilities. A ten-acre parcel of ground farther east on Franklin Street was given to the school. There a new building was erected. It was ready for use in the fall of 1917. In 1920 what was once the literary department of the Theological School had become Calvin College, a four-year degree-granting institution of Christian higher education. The same year the theological school building was sold to the Grand Rapids Christian School Association for a high school.

The Theological School also continued to grow. In 1926 the synod decided to expand and improve the curriculum and to appoint a sixth professor. That year the name of the school was also changed. What was previously "Theological School and Calvin College" became "Calvin College and Seminary."

Due to the generosity of



Graafschap Parsonage

the Hekman family, the seminary acquired a new building of its own. It was constructed in 1930 on the southwest corner of the Franklin Street campus. The Hekman building met the seminary's needs for 30 years. In 1930 the seminary also gave Bachelor of Theology (Th.B.) degrees to the graduates who earned them. The Th.B. degree was not required for candidacy for the ministry. A post-graduate Master of Theology (Th.M.) degree program was also introduced in 1930.

During World War II seminary enrollment declined precipitously. An accelerated course of studies was also introduced to help the students finish their studies as quickly as possible. After the war, things changed rapidly. Many veterans felt the call to the gospel ministry while in military service. Soon the seminary had record enrollments.

The growth was sustained over the next decades. The affluence of the post-war years made it possible for more students to prepare for the ministry. During these years, the CRC's expanding outreach at home and abroad made the call to the gospel ministry challenging and attractive to many.

In 1957 the CRC celebrated its 100th anniversary. The church decided to commemorate the event with the building of a new centennial memorial seminary to be constructed on the recently purchased Knollcrest Farm. The new seminary opened in the fall of 1960. That year, the seminary had a teaching staff of 10 professors. A single secretary provided the necessary supportive services.

Broadening the Horizons

A Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree program, especially designed to equip



Rev. Geert Egberts Boer and his first class of students.



The school in the "Upper Room".



Theological School, 1892. Madison & Franklin.

people for professional ministry, was introduced in 1973. The program has a large field-education component. It is now required for candidates for the ministry in the CRC. It and all other degree programs are now open to students from other denominations.

In 1974 a Master of Arts in Church Education was introduced and a Master of Arts in Theological Studies in 1978. CRC students who wish to study theology, but not necessarily to enter the ministry, often opt for the M.A. in Theological Studies as do students preparing for the ministry in other churches. A Master of Arts program in Missiology was added to the curriculum in 1987. In 1992 the seminary introduced a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree program in systematic and historical theology. This program is now about to be expanded to include philosophical and moral theology.

In 1991 Calvin College and Calvin Seminary were divided into two corporations. These two schools are now governed by separate boards of trustees, while remaining schools of the CRC.

In the fall of 2000, 264 students enrolled in Calvin Seminary. One hundred sixty-four of them were members of the CRC; 100 were members of other denominations. Of the latter, 55 were international students. Sixty-six students registered in graduate study programs, 36 of them for the Th.M. degree and 30 for the Ph.D. degree. There were a total of 61 women students in degree programs.

Today, Calvin Seminary's teaching staff has 25 full-time professors and 6 adjunct ones. The administrative staff has 7 full-time employees and two part-time ones. Additionally, 7 people serve the seminary full-time as supportive staff and one part-time. ■



ROGER S. GREENWAY

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CALVIN SEMINARY AND THE CRC: *Changes and Challenges.*

theological education for others to support and maintain is irresponsible according to Reformed tradition and teaching.

Changes in the Ecclesiastical Environment

In the last two decades, however, the ecclesiastical environment changed, not only in the CRC, but also in churches throughout North America. New expectations appeared as to what congregations wanted from their pastors. Church after church was polarized by changing tastes in music and worship styles. New approaches to evangelism were introduced. Some favored them and others opposed them. The issue of women in church leadership contributed to hemorrhages in membership in many denominations, the CRC included. Concerns arose over young people drifting from the church. This created a demand for youth ministries. As these changes hit home, they affected Calvin Seminary and its relation to the denomination. Some expected the seminary to solve the problems and put a quick end to the controversies. Others blamed the seminary for not agreeing with their point of view.

One of the evidences that these changes affected the seminary was the decline in the financial support for the seminary through ministry shares. They dropped from 90% of the school's budget in 1980 to around 55% in 1999. More serious yet was a change in attitude toward the traditional requirement that, with

few exceptions, candidates for the ordained ministry complete the M.Div. degree at Calvin Seminary. Evidence of this change is found in the "Alternate Routes" study committee report to Synod 2000. The report states that ***"the number of new entrants into CRC ministry who are not M.Div. graduates of Calvin Seminary increased from 8.5 percent in the 1970s to 25.3 percent in the 1980s, and then to 44.4 percent in the 1990s."*** The fact that classes and synods allowed this to happen points to a major change on the part of church leaders.

Related to both of these changes was a change of attitude among the rank and file of CRC members toward the importance of Reformed theology and what traditionally we called the Reformed world-

“Calvin: the seminary of choice”

and-life-view. Calvin College researcher, Corwin Schmidt, recently produced a survey report, indicating that one-third of the members of the CRC did not label themselves *Reformed*. Instead of *Reformed*, these members identified themselves as *fundamentalist, ecumenical, mainline, Kuyperian, or liberal*. Another third of the respondents said they were Reformed, but also evangelical. A last group identified themselves either solely

as *Reformed* or Reformed with additional labels such as *fundamentalist, ecumenical, mainline, Kuyperian, or liberal*.

Surveys like this can be interpreted in various ways. But the least that one can say is that ***there is a softening of theological identity among members of the CRC.*** The survey also sheds light on the tension the seminary feels coming from elements in the denomination that do not share the faculty's enthusiasm for values CRC members long held in common. Ironically, this softening of commitment to a Reformed identity happens at a time when North American Protestants show more interest than ever in Reformed perspectives, theology and scholarship.

A Challenge to Keep the "Symbiotic Relationship"

All this underscores the importance of maintaining and strengthening Calvin Seminary in its role of providing Reformed theological leadership to the denomination. This is not the time to discount the importance of quality Reformed theological education. Nor is it in the best interest of denominational unity that future pastors and leaders go to a variety of seminaries, good as some of them are. Rather, it is time to reflect on how God has led the CRC and on what unique contributions we make to Christ's kingdom overall. ***It is also time to recommit ourselves as a denomination to making Calvin Seminary the semi-***

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GREENWAY

nary of choice for a growing number of students.

Precisely because of the challenges, I plead for strengthening the symbiotic ties that have benefited both the church and seminary over the years. The membership of the denomination is becoming broad and more diversified. Consequently the need for Reformed leadership is greater than ever. The seminary student body is also more diverse. As men and women from different backgrounds come to be trained for a variety of church ministries, it is vital for the unity of the CRC and its mission in the world that its servants and leaders bear the stamp of the theology, church traditions, and Reformed perspectives that Calvin Seminary represents. There is no other way to preserve the Reformed identity of the denomination.

It ought not be expected that the seminary can or should be "everything to everybody." Inevitably there will be areas in the denomination that will sometimes feel the heat of the seminary's disfavor as well as its support. **Inherent in the calling of faculty members of a denominational seminary is the challenge to evaluate theologically what is occurring in the church and its ministries, and then humbly to say what they think on the issues.** This inevitably creates tensions and diminishes the seminary's popularity among some people. But the alternative is a disengaged seminary that ignores the responsibilities that are implicit in its covenant ties to the church.

Changes Needed



// Theological identity is softening. //

There are things at Calvin Seminary that need to be changed and improved. There needs to be a more even balance in the curriculum between the three essential qualities of Christian leadership, godly character, ministry skills, and knowledge of Scripture and theology. The faculty needs to learn from CRC churches and agencies. Besides, Calvin Seminary needs to become a happier, more loving place so that alumni will cherish the memory of their years in this community.

The seminary's accessibility to minority groups in the CRC needs to increase. Dr. Mariano Avila's appointment to the faculty is a major step toward meeting the needs of the growing Hispanic wing of the church. More women than ever before are receiving theological education at Calvin Seminary. Dr. Ruth Tucker has

now joined the faculty. Adjustments to the curriculum and the introduction of distance education are just two of the current challenges facing the seminary in the dynamic world of education. **But all of these are auxiliary to the number one challenge, which is the continued, vigorous promotion of the gospel from a Reformed perspective in the church's ministry.**

Suggestions for Churches and Classes

In conclusion, two practical suggestions for churches and classes: **First, investigate carefully the financial needs of the seminarians from your area.** During the nine years I served as Dean of Students, I came across too many cases of serious financial stress, especially among married students with children.

Some students are working far too many hours outside of school in order to support their families. Many depend heavily on the seminary's Food Pantry just to get by from week to week.

The Church Order requires that every classis maintain a fund for student assistance. My observation is that classical assistance is uneven, and in some cases grossly inadequate. Whatever your opinions are about the seminary in general, please support your students during their period of training. Seminarians' children ought not to be ill-clothed, undernourished or for lack of money unable to see a dentist. Nor should pastors begin their ministries overburdened by debt.

Second, remember that recruitment is primarily a local responsibility. The solution to the problem of a shortage of workers begins with prayer in homes and pulpits that God will lay upon believers' hearts his call to full-time ministry. Beyond that, it becomes the responsibility of parents, elders, pastors and teachers to challenge gifted men and women to serve the Lord with their lives and talents. Calvin Seminary's recruitment office works hard, but it is not intended to replace what churches should be doing. The best recruitment is done locally. **Seminaries function best when their students emerge out of congregations that are spiritually alive, sensitive to the needs of the church and the world, and supportive of those who are called to ministry.** ■

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES



JAMES A. DE JONG

President of Calvin Seminary.

these times of fellowship. Their closeness may be occasioned in part by the very troubling times they experienced as students. The seminary faculty was polarized, and synod made some wholesale changes the year they graduated. Realizing how fragile and how precious harmony in the school and in the church are may be a factor in keeping them together. They are also products of a time when denominational identity and cohesiveness were stronger than they are today. **Seminary and denomination are important to them.** Members of the class are generous supporters of the school, people who stop in to ask questions, offer advice, and volunteer time.

Korean alumni and other international students also identify strongly with the school, but for different reasons. Denominational identity is much more fragile in the Korean context, and seminaries—especially ones with solid academic reputations—play a more prominent role in the thinking of Korean graduates than is true among North Americans. On a trip to Korea

identity. Years after graduation, international students often remember with Christmas cards Calvin seminary faculty members who have deeply influenced or encouraged them. They also often maintain personal correspondence with them.

To flourish, the school needs the interest and support of all its alumni—in congregational prayers, at classis meetings, and with regard to



We are interested in admitting and in supporting students who will return to their homelands to serve in strategic positions as educators of their own pastors and church leaders.

faculty appointments and its future direction. Thankfully, many alumni from different eras show this involvement and support. Many more do not. The alumni have a scholarship program supported by fewer than 300 graduates, although close to 2000 are still living. The appointment of Rev. Richard Sytsma as director of alumni relations last summer may kin-

// What has not changed is the school's devotion to the eternal gospel... //

dle more interest among those who have not participated in this program.

Denominational identity is in decline, and this affects all of our denominational ministries. **Churches are more concerned with local issues and ministries than with what they are accomplishing together through their schools and agencies.** A diminished sense of responsibility for denominational ministries is seen in more erratic ministry-share support than was the case a generation ago. Student-fund committees also show less sense of responsibility for student support. Diminished denominational identity is also seen in the readiness of Christian Reformed students to attend other seminaries. The loosening of denominational cohesiveness erodes the sense of mutual accountability, invites the kind of congregationalism that diminishes our impact in the world, and certainly inflates CRC agency promotional-costs. In the last two decades, Calvin Seminary has initiated publications that keep churches informed on what is happening at the school and that offer instruction and analysis regarding contemporary issues. Judging from comments received, these publications are read and appreciated. Strong ties between the church

An anniversary presents the opportunity to gauge which way the winds are blowing in theological education. **Calvin Seminary today is affected by different forces than those that impinged on the school twenty-five or fifty years ago.** Some review of these forces may help us understand and guide the school in the years ahead.

Alumni identification with

// Denominational identity is in decline... //

Calvin Seminary is not what it used to be. Last year I was invited to speak at a luncheon of the class of 1952. That class is one of the most remarkable in the history of the school. Members still meet monthly. They include their wives in

four years ago, I was hosted by a number of our Korean alumni. After dinner they presented the seminary a "love gift" of \$3,000. We used it for scholarships. Their support stems more from professional appreciation than denominational

TRENDS...cont.

DE JONG

and the seminary are in the mutual interest of both. The faculty welcomes invitations to lead local seminars, to preach in area churches, and to engage pastors and other leaders in reflection on how the seminary can better serve our churches.

Students today are older than one or two generations ago. Over half are second career people with families. This is true at most seminaries. The numbers of ethnic minority students, international students, non-Christian Reformed students, and women students are higher. These demographic shifts affect the community. More breadth and depth of experience enrich everyone and enliven classroom discussions. **The seminary works hard to ensure that the various needs of its diverse population are met.** It also experiences greater blessings because of the diversity.

Technology has affected the way students learn and the faculty teaches. Resources for courses are available on websites and communication by e-mail supersedes memos. Technology also offers the opportunity to reach our churches with electronic seminars and resources. For several years the academic dean has been working toward making courses available on-line. When this is accomplished, **it will be possible for people to begin a degree program or to take individual courses without having to relocate.** This use of technology for instructional purposes poses significant issues and some problems. These issues and problems are being addressed. Modern education uses technology; Calvin Seminary cannot ignore it. Professor Bosma now makes materials available to pastors electronically; Rev.

Andrew Beunk of Hamilton, Ontario is helping creatively with this effort. Dr. Michael Williams and other professors teach courses enhanced by computer technology and the internet.

Theological seminaries have become more bureaucratic than they were in the past. Calvin Seminary has

imposed a number of direct and indirect costs on the seminary. So have the expectations of increasingly complex government, charitable foundations, and accrediting agencies. Like business, agriculture, medicine, and other sectors of society, the education community feels the burden of greater bureaucracy.

Globalization has been a

cators of their own pastors and church leaders. Some of these graduates return to places without sufficient resources to build libraries and pay faculty salaries. We try to provide training that will assist them deal with the realities they will face. In doing so, we learn from our students.

Globalization also means providing opportunity for the Calvin Seminary faculty and students to be exposed to the world-wide church. A decade ago steps were taken to create a missions institute in order to achieve this goal. The institute has been funded annually by a Christian Reformed family. The funding has allowed professors to teach short-term courses at seminaries in some twenty countries. A successful campaign ten years ago led to the creation of the Faculty Heritage Endowment. The endowment supports the publication in other languages of books written by our faculty members and allows them to participate in international conferences. This, too, has helped the faculty to see issues in a global context and to be stimulated by the faith of Christians elsewhere.

Like all organizations, Calvin Seminary faces changing circumstances. It has tried to do this self-consciously and responsibly. What has not changed is the school's devotion to the eternal gospel as delivered in the Holy Scriptures. The Reformed faith is prized and taught clearly and with enthusiasm. The changing needs of the churches are recognized and addressed in order to provide the best and most effective spiritual leaders possible. ■



Technology has affected the way students learn and the faculty teaches...Technology also offers the opportunity to reach our churches with electronic seminars and resources.

too. Annual, comparative reports of North American seminaries show that Calvin Seminary is among those with the lowest costs and the most efficient administrations. It puts a higher percentage of its annual budget into teaching and libraries than others do. Some credit for this must go to the CRC's ministry-share system. Diligent administrative attention to costs and efficiency is another factor. But there are forces at work escalating overhead. Denominational reorganization in the 1990s has

major theme recently discussed in the community of theological educators. No one is exactly sure what it means. Different seminaries have given it different spins. It does reflect that we live in a smaller, more inter-related world. At Calvin Seminary we have tried to be very intentional and responsible in dealing with a growing international student population. **We are interested in admitting and in supporting students who will return to their homelands to serve in strategic positions as edu-**

“ To flourish, the school needs the...support of all its alumni... ”

CALVIN SEMINARY FORUM

COVER ESSAY^{cont.}

BANDSTRA

gospel: "because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you" (v. 6). Their activity in the present and their hope for the future would only be significant if they recognized that their past was begun by the grace of God who is faithful.

It is no different in the celebration of our 125th anniversary. **Our seminary's beginnings, to be sure, were born out of believers' dedicated commitment and sacrifice.** There was sacrifice on the part of those who supported it with their finances and on the part of the lone professor and the students. That truth should not be disregarded. Nonetheless, our activity in the present and our hope for the future calls us to celebrate our beginnings as a gift of God's undeserving grace. Grace is difficult to define, as Philip Yancey reminds us in his insightful book, when he suggests that we think of it this way: "We are all oddballs, but God loves us anyhow" (*What's So Amazing About Grace?* p. 154). God's grace comes free of charge; it has no strings attached; we did not earn it; it is a gift. With Paul, we can only thank God for his grace as seen in our beginnings. A thankful heart is the basic ingredient for an appropriate 125th anniversary celebration.

The Present

God's faithfulness has implications for the present. Paul

reminds the Corinthians that they "had been enriched in Christ" so that in every way their spiritual gifts were evident: "in all your speaking and in all your knowledge" (v. 5). So much so that Paul could thank God "that you do not lack any spiritual gift" (v. 7).

Some scholars find an anomaly here in that Paul, in these beginning verses, thanks God for these gifts while in his letter that follows it is clear that it is just the abuses of these gifts that is causing trouble in the church and for Paul's ministry. But Paul recognizes that the spiritual gifts themselves are not to be impugned and that their proper use is to be applauded. It was not the use but the abuse of these gifts that was wrong. Abuse crept in when the Corinthians arrogantly failed to recognize them as gifts from God through Christ (see I Cor. 4:7). They were not meant for personal aggrandizement. Abuse also crept in when the Corinthians failed to use these gifts for the common good

and for the building up of the church (see 12:7; 14:5).

This truth has similar present implications for us in celebrating our anniversary. For example, we believe that God has gifted us so that we have been faithful to his Word, have proclaimed the sovereign grace of God, and have recognized some of the cosmic dimensions of the gospel. But

these gifts may be abused. ***Abuse creeps in if we use them for self-aggrandizement rather than to give glory to God and to build up and edify the church.***

The Future

Paul ties the past and present with the future. In verses 7 & 8 he says: "Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." He then ties in our text by proclaiming: "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."

This text is similar to the emphasis in I Thessalonians 5:23-24: "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of

our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." And it reminds us of the similar truth in Philippians 1:6. Speaking of the Philippians fellowship in the gospel, Paul says: "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

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So, too, in our celebration, if we celebrate God's gifts to us as gifts of his grace, and use them for his glory and the edification of the church, we can have confidence and hope for the future. If the program of preparing young men and women for gospel ministry depended upon us and our efforts, it would be doomed to failure. If we abuse or neglect his gifts, we are doomed to failure. But if with thankful hearts we received his gifts of grace and use them, appropriately, God in Christ will keep us strong to the end. Having begun in Christ, God will carry to completion our fellowship in the gospel until the day of Christ Jesus. God who called us is faithful and he will do it. ■

// He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion. //