

October 15, 1962

Dr. Merrimon Cuninggim
Executive Director
Danforth Foundation
835 South 8th Street
St. Louis, Missouri

Dear Merrimon,

There have been many occasions in the last couple of years when I have wished to see you. I have not written because the things about which I would wish to talk with you seem too complex for the plodding pace of correspondence.

I do want to express my appreciation, however, for all that you have done for me. My teaching experience at Perkins was of great significance and value for me. My work at Phillips Seminary is most challenging and I think I have discovered a meaningful context for vocational self-fulfillment, however limited some of our resources here may remain.

The immediate purpose of my writing is to share with you a couple of projects on which I have been working: (1) Do you perhaps recall the last sermon I preached at Perkins upon which you commented in your last faculty meeting, the sermon which concerned the six categories of the human predicament and the gracious activity of God? Of course, I do not "expect" you to remember, but the reason I mention it is because I have spent the last two and a half years attempting to refine that proposal. Edrita says that I haven't had a new idea since I preached that sermon two and a half years ago. Anyway, I am sending you, should you be interested in the way these categories have been elaborated, a Bible study guide which is being used this year by the Methodist Student Movement, reflecting the core argument of that sermon. I would be grateful for any critical response you might have. (2) Perhaps the real reason for my writing to you at this time, however, is another project about which I would like to get your comment. You are probably familiar with such series in German theological circles as "Theologische Existenz Heute," "Theologische Studien," and "Christ Heute." These are ordinarily longer than journal articles and shorter than small books, inexpensively published and given circulation primarily in the academic communities. To my knowledge we do not have any similar publications in this country. We jump from the 5,000 word article to the 30,000 word book with almost nothing in between. It strikes me that these study series, irregularly published, encourage dialogue on live issues much better than our arrangement.

I would like to see a series of such medium length (10,000 to 20,000 words) studies developed in the rapidly emerging area of the renewal of the Church. Such a series would both stimulate critical discussion on the new shape of the Church in our time and provide a vehicle for new ideas. My hunch is that in the next five years a great deal of attention will be devoted in America both by theologians and by practical lay experimentation to the theme of the renewal of the Church in our time and the reappraisal of its mission to the world. I would envision these studies being written by the most competent individuals both in this country and abroad who are concerned with the reassessment of the position of the Church in the modern world. There is a great deal of excellent untranslated material in this area, some of which might go into such a study series.

I would be very grateful for any suggestion you might have on how such a series might be appropriately inaugurated. I will be attending the annual meeting of the American Society of Christian Social Ethics in January and would like to sound out some of my colleagues there on the matter. Do you have any ideas on where we might look for leadership and support in developing this project? Does it sound to you like a plausible and significant idea?

Cordially and sincerely yours,

Thomas C. Oden

c/jcl

