Lutheran Mission Matters

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Theological Education in the Missionary Age

The heart of *Lutheran Mission Matters* beats in rhythm with the eternal and all-encompassing love that our God has for the world. No greater love can be found than in God sending His only Son into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it. His love is only matched by His Son freely laying down His life for all people of all times so that their relationship with their Father—broken by sin—might be healed. All of God's revelation in Word and deed proceeds from His deep compassion for us who by nature are separated from Him. He describes us as sheep, harassed and helpless, without the presence, protection, and provision of the Good Shepherd (Mt 9:37–38). In the context of the Lord's missionary compassion, He raised the issue of theological education, the need for the Lord of the harvest to raise up laborers for the harvest—which naturally assumes that they be well equipped for the missionary work set before them.

I was asked some months ago to serve as guest editor for this issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters*. The honor was extended, no doubt due to my suggestion to the editorial committee that we dedicate at least one issue to the theme, "Theological Education in the Missionary Age." I was delighted to find unanimous approval of the topic by the other members of the editorial committee. These members not only share a passion for Christ's mission to and for the world, but most of them have dedicated their lives as theological educators, preparing workers for the harvest around the world. It is a double honor to share this issue with them.

An obvious question emerges to the discerning reader, "When has Christ's Church and, therefore, the equipping of her leaders *not* been in the Missionary Age?" That age, after all, began with the Lord's ascension into heaven and continues until His glorious return. Our Lord intrinsically attached His mission to the business of theological education. So the real question is not whether we are in the missionary age, but rather, "How are we responding to it? How well are theological education systems informed by, dedicated to, and organized around our Lord's global mission?"

The focus, design, and effectiveness of theological education programs, particularly on historic "mission fields" have been widely discussed, even debated, for decades especially since the 1970s with the advent of the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) movement. Seminal essays such as Bergquist's and Manickam's in *The Crisis of Dependency in Third World Ministries*,[1] and Harvie Conn's "Theological Education and the Search for Excellence"[2] raised several critical questions that still invite thoughtful responses that reflect sound educational, contextual, and biblical understanding.

These once "mission field" conversations have returned across the seas to be taken up by churches and seminaries in the West as they face profound challenges posed by

"post-Christendom" realities. Residential seminaries are experiencing reductions in students preparing for pastoral ministry; many have closed or consolidated. Seminary graduates, seemingly well-equipped for parish ministry *(as it once was)*, express woeful inadequacy in serving the ever-increasing mission fields surrounding their congregations. Can theological education models that have proven highly effective on once and current foreign mission fields shed helpful and hopeful light on these challenges?

The answer to that question is mixed. As the first article, "The Institutionalization of Theological Education Overseas and at Home," points out long-standing ideas and practices of theological education in the West strongly resist the changes needed to address adequately and faithfully the mission and ministry contexts into which their graduates are sent. This resistance further increases as the once stable colleges and seminaries face challenges of institutional survival. Matthew Borrasso in his essay, "Repentance and Hope," thoughtfully recounts how certain cultural and ethnic presuppositions of the Western institutional church impacted missionary outreach among Black Americans in the United States, resulting, eventually, in the closure of three Lutheran colleges and seminaries dedicated to raising up Black American missionaries and pastors.

Christ's church must always serve from repentance and hope, especially, as she engages with her Lord in His mission. Douglas Rutt calls us to both as he reminds us that the goal of theology, and, therefore, training in theology, is the salvation of souls. He opens both Scripture and the Lutheran Confession to show that ministers of the church carry out their calling for one divine purpose: to bring all people to salvation through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Theological education must be wholly committed to that endeavor. He shows the intrinsic union God intended between theological education and mission, with examples of the educational ministry of our Lord, His apostles, the Early Church, and centuries later, the Lutheran Reformers.

Robert Kolb expands the conversation regarding Luther and colleagues demonstrating how the evangelical character of their theology produced great flexibility and creativity as they utilized the contemporary media of their time to make Gospel-centered theological education available to all who were unable to attend the residential program at the university in Wittenberg. Kolb explores the various theological education models Luther employed including distance education to assist those already serving to grow in their ability to proclaim the Gospel.

Andrew Bartelt and Joel Okamoto offer companion accounts of two curriculum revisions Concordia Seminary St. Louis undertook over the past thirty years, demonstrating that, like Luther, theological leaders in the LCMS are able to maintain an unswerving commitment to the missionary Gospel and at the same time adapt their long-standing curricula to meet the dramatic shifts taking place in the cultural and

social contexts into which the Lord is sending us. Both men write from the vantage point of North America being a vast mission field which necessitates revising the programs to prepare mission-minded workers. Both brothers affirm the need for theological educators to listen to the broader church, especially those engaged in frontline mission work. The most significant takeaway from Andy's article is, "The most important statement we made, to ourselves as much as to the church, is that it is all right to change—in fact, it is necessary to adapt and adjust to changing contexts. . . . [It] was a major reminder that seminary curriculum and pastoral formation are anchored in the unchanging truth of God's Word of life and connected to the changing contexts of ministry and mission." Among the several curriculum adjustments that Joel notes in the seminary's most recent review is the move from focusing primarily on the accurate transmission of course content to something deeper—the intentional formation of the student as a man of God and apt minister of the Gospel. The goal is not informing students by their instruction but forming them in the heart and mind of Christ who seeks to save all people.

Ongoing conversation regarding theological education and missions requires global participation. We no longer serve in the missional or educational paradigm of the "West reaches the rest." Lessons from the "mission field" (including the perspectives of expatriate missionaries and church leaders indigenous to the Majority World) have much to offer as we in the West wrestle with Lutheran missional and theological education challenges. Rudy Blank, a veteran missionary in Latin America for over forty years, offers a compelling endorsement for Theological Education by Extension (TEE) in preparing pastors, teachers, and missionaries for the twenty-first century here and abroad. He chronicles the development of the TEE movement from its beginning in Guatemala, providing both the rationale for its inception and the theological and educational understandings undergirding the model. Rudy goes on to explain how LCMS missionaries utilized the TEE model to develop robust theological education programs throughout Latin America.

In a companion article, Marcos Kempff, the son of one of the early pioneers of non-residential theological education in Latin America traces the origins of "Lutheran TEE" back seventy-one years, suggesting that distance education models were in widespread use by Lutheran missionaries in Latin America years prior to the formal inauguration of TEE by Presbyterian missionaries in Guatemala. Marcos goes on to explain the impact Lutheran TEE programs in Latin America have made on LCMS theological education programs in the United States, especially among Latinos and other non-Anglo people groups.

Bartelt, in his article on the Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program, moves the TEE conversation forward by providing an account of the collaborative development and eventual endorsement by the LCMS in convention of the Specific Ministry Pastor Program—a non-residential model for pastoral and missionary preparation for North

American congregations and mission contexts. By listening and learning from each other, theological educators harness the strengths of both residential and extension education models to develop a faithful response to the need for laborers.

Our issue rounds out with contributions from missionaries and theological educators from around the world. Anselmo Graff of Brazil and Herbert Hoefer, a veteran missionary to India, each offer insights critical to the development of theological education curricula that meet the missional challenges of the age. Carlos Walter Winterle, President Emeritus of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil, reflects on two very different theological education programs in which he participates in Southern Africa—one in Pretoria, RSA, the other in the bush in Mozambique—and how each prepares harvesters who faithfully proclaim the saving Gospel. He concludes with an exhortation to all teachers of the Gospel—not only seminary professors, but parents, Sunday School teachers, and Christians who pass the faith on to others—to teach with the authority and conviction that the Lord bestowed on His baptized as He called them into His mission. Which brings us to the question posed by Miriam Carter writing from Hong Kong, "For Whom Is Theological Education?" Perhaps the answer is summed up best in the hopeful sigh of Moses millennia ago, "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" (Nm 11:29).

Robert Newton, guest editor, *Lutheran Mission Matters*

Endnotes

[1] James A. Bergquist and P. Kambar Manickam, *The Crisis of Dependency in Third World Ministries: A Critique of Inherited Missionary Forms in India* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1974).
[2] Harvie M. Conn, "Theological Education and the Search for Excellence," *Westminster Theological Journal* 41, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 311–363.