Lutheran Mission Matters

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Articles

The Institutionalization of Theological Education Overseas and at Home

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Abstract: World mission realities have shifted radically over the last fifty years and with those changes have come an ever-increasing need to raise up missionary laborers around the world. Our traditional Western models of training missionaries and pastors, however, have not kept pace with the demand for laborers here in the United States or abroad. The author argues that this dilemma is due in large measure to the institutionalized system of "centers and peripheries" in higher education and the continued inequality that system maintains between the Western and Majority World institutions involved in international higher education. Though focused specifically on global university education, the issues and concerns raised parallel those experienced within our Lutheran systems of international theological education. At the end, the author raises several questions intended to assist those responsible for the theological education programming in Lutheran churches here and overseas to adapt and develop theological education practices that meet the growing missional challenges of this age.

Dr. Timothy Tennent, in his insightful publication, *Invitation to World Missions,*[1] identified seven mega-trends impacting the Christian missionary movement around the world. The mega-trend that leads the list, and most impacts my church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), he titled "The Collapse of Christendom."

> The Western world can no longer be characterized as a Christian society/culture in either its dominant ethos or worldview. Christendom has collapsed and twenty-first century missions must be reconceptualized on new assumptions.[2]

He explains that Christendom operates from the assumption that the Christian

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Church is central, in this case, to the dominant society in America, exercising considerable influence over the cultural norms and values of our nation. Non-Christian cultures—mission fields—are viewed as peripheral, outside the boundaries of the dominant culture and, therefore, exercising precious little influence upon American faith and life. Most Christians in America today, including those in my own church body, would agree that the reverse of that assumption is more accurate[3]: the norms and values of the Christian Church have been deliberately and effectively pushed to edges of our society while non-Christian thought, particularly that of secular humanism, has assumed the center or pole position. America, as a result, has become a vast post-Christendom mission field.

A second trend closely following the first is the collapse of the "West-Reaches-the-Rest" paradigm of Christian mission.[4]

> One has to go back many centuries in church history to discover a dominant mission-sending program that did not have the Western world at its center. Protestants have never known a dominant non-Western mission sending program and we are at a loss as to how to make the transition to something different. Indeed, the "West-Reaches-the-Rest" parading was the unchallenged assumption behind the famous "white man's burden" of nineteenth century [world missions]. The notion that areas that were once traditional "mission field" could become, over time, the new heartland of Christian vitality was hardly contemplated by Western Christians. . . . Furthermore, the idea that North America and Western Europe, which for centuries represented the center of Christian gravity and the most prolific mission-sending church in history, could lose the very faith they once espoused seemed remote.[5]

These trends have required that we radically adjust our understanding and participation in Christ's global mission. They concomitantly require that we adjust our understanding and practice of how we raise up and equip laborers in His mission. That requires re-thinking and designing theological education from a mission context perspective. Given our Lord's exhortation in Matthew 9:37–38[6] one might argue that theological education should be designed primarily with the mission field in mind. However, such has not been the case for our Lutheran churches. Seventeen centuries of Christendom subtly and unintentionally shifted the focus of many, if not most, of our Christian churches in the West from the business of *propagating* the true faith to those outside the church to *preserving* the true faith for those within.

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Thus, re-thinking theological education for mission contexts presents enormous challenges for our institutional churches and the theological education systems they developed and refined over the centuries in which Christendom reigned. These challenges effect great debate and no small amount of tension in the hearts and minds of those tasked by their LCMS churches for the theological education of their missionaries, pastors, and teachers as well as the church and missionary leaders tasked with developing biblically sound and culturally appropriate theological education for the church and the mission fields of the Majority World.[7] These tensions fall along the lines of the long-standing tug-of-war between "Church Preservation and Missionary Outreach."

Preservation and Mission offer two different, but not necessarily contradictory, perspectives on many questions in the church: Worship style, leadership roles, ministry priorities—to name a few. Preservation intends to keep or maintain something good or right from changing to something bad or wrong. Thus St. Paul commends the Corinthian Christians for "[maintaining] the traditions even as [he] delivered them" (1 Cor 11:2). We must always be vigilant in keeping our Gospel-centered doctrine right and true. The salvation of the world depends upon it. But it is especially critical now in a time when society's move away from all things godly puts extraordinary pressure on the church to accommodate herself to the world at the expense of the faith once delivered. Many who vigorously promote our traditional four-year residential seminary model do so from this valid concern. They reason that in order to keep the true faith and to pass it on faithfully, it must be entrusted principally to academically well-prepared and properly called shepherds. They do not intend to ignore the mission side of the equation; they often fear, however, that the preservation of the faith will be sacrificed if we "water down" the quality of our theological education by employing models such as Theological Education by Extension (TEE) or other programs born and flourishing in the mission field.

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Those arguing for the development of theological education programs alternative to the residential seminary model do so from a mission outreach perspective. They have no intention of compromising the true faith or depreciating the need to maintain it. However, they hold that preserving the true faith is not meant to be an end in itself, but, rather, is to serve faithfully God's ultimate *missional* intention in sending His Son into the world: "in order that the world might be saved" (Jn 3:17). They would

challenge, on the basis of the Gospel, any practices or programs of the church (even well intended ones), that in the end frustrate or impede the proclamation of the pure Gospel to a broken world, for God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:4).

This tension between church preservation and mission outreach priorities has been especially detrimental to mission work overseas, especially as regards the ability of emerging national churches to develop theological education programs that faithfully respond to the need to raise up workers for the harvest in their non-Western contexts. The problem of Western paternalism and foreign missions is centuries old and even to this day fuels frustrations on the part of national church leaders and expatriate missionaries over the unequal relationship maintained between our parent church in the United States and the daughter (now changed to *sister* or *partner*) churches. The frustration is nowhere more pronounced than in the area of theological education. Our missionary experience in the Philippines some forty years ago is but one example. The primary theological education system serving the Lutheran Church in the Philippines was modeled after the residential seminary programs here in the United States. Despite the education level of many of those being raised up as indigenous missionaries and pastors, entrance to the seminary required at least a high school education if not completion of a college degree. Furthermore, the fact that all instruction was conducted in the English language precluded potential church leaders from various language groups in the Philippines from participating. As a result, the residential model proved ineffective in its ability to provide a sufficient number of national pastors and missionaries for the rapidly multiplying churches. Yet no one was in a position to change or adjust the system to bring it in line with mission field realities and the increasing demands for missionary laborers. National leaders seemed hopelessly bound to a system designed for a different world, inadequate for present and future needs, and mysteriously controlled by powers beyond the reach of the Filipino churches and mission stations.

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Years later and far from the traditional "mission field," I witnessed similar tensions emerging over what theological education models might best serve Christ's churches and mission here in America. During my tenure as a professor of missions at Concordia Theological Seminary, the faculty and administration continually wrestled with the challenges of how best to form pastors and missionaries serving mission contexts here in the United States, especially among people groups whose language and culture were exotic to our English-speaking church body with its cultural roots in Northern Europe. Once again, the debate pitted the traditional four-year residential

seminary model against all other models of theological education. This debate both here in the United States and abroad is fueled and maintained primarily by the international institutionalization of Western models of higher education within which theological education finds its place.

Centers and Peripheries in Higher Education

During my graduate studies in the field of missiology, I ran across an article by Philip Altbach entitled, "The University as Center and Periphery."[8] The article brought several significant education problems into investigative light, all of them springing from the same common dilemma—continued inequality between the Western and Majority World institutions involved in international higher education. Though focused specifically on the global system of university education, the concerns raised parallel those we experienced within our system of international theological education. Altbach summarized these concerns as follows,

> The basic point of this discussion is that universities in the Third World find themselves at a disadvantage in the international knowledge network while at the same time playing a key role in their own societies. . . . This article indicates that the inequalities of the international knowledge system run very deep, have strong institutional support and significant historical roots, and are often in the interests of those who wield power, whether that power is military, economic, intellectual, or technological.[9]

Altbach's thesis, simply stated, is that international education can be understood as a relationship between institutional and intellectual "centers" residing in Western nations, and their peripheral counterparts in Majority World countries. These centers, "give direction, provide models, produce research and in general function as the pinnacles of the academic system."[10] The Majority World universities function as periphery institutions in that they "copy developments from abroad, produce little that is original, and are generally not at the frontiers of knowledge."[11] This unbalanced relationship of dependency on the part of the Majority World nations is indicated by the following: (1) Research facilities—including libraries, prestigious faculties, and necessary funding for research—for the most part lie in the West. This means that students who aspire to study at advanced levels in their particular disciplines are required to pursue their education in Western schools, far removed from their own world context. (2) The "vectors" of knowledge (including underlying or worldview assumptions) proceed from the West to the Majority World. This is evidenced by the locations of the producers and publishers of academic journals, reference works, and primary textbooks in any given field. The languages of research and scholarship are Western. Even the divisions and subdivisions within academic disciplines are based on a Western view of the universe. (3) When practical or theoretical problems arise within a given discipline the subsequent understanding, analysis, and resultant

solution(s) to the problems take place in the arena of Western presuppositions about reality and priority.[12]

A second element in Altbach's thesis is that while the Majority World educational institutions function as periphery at the international level, they serve as centers in their own countries. They are depended upon by their people to provide direction and leadership for their nations. It is good that Majority World nations can look within their own borders for well-trained leaders and develop training institutions that will guarantee sufficient supply of capable leaders for the future. However, what kind of national institutions of higher education have been developed in these nations? Unfortunately, they more reflect the cultural assumptions, values, and priorities of Western nations than they do their own. This means that the graduates of these schools (the leaders being looked to for direction) are often out of touch with the cultural contexts in which they reside. The result is that a form of neocolonialism in Western-Majority World relations is maintained via the systems of higher education at international and national levels.

Missiological Inquiry and Critique

Educational concerns, similar to those voiced by the secular researchers have been the topics of missiological discussion for nearly sixty years, at least since the advent of TEE in the early 1960s on the mission field of Guatemala.[13] Since then, issues of neocolonialism in theological education, economic and cultural imperialism, developing elitism and meritocracy, etc. have been addressed by missiologists from around the world. Because Western seminaries play the "center" role in international theological education, their influence over the church and mission fields of the Majority World have been and continue to be evaluated from an international perspective.

In 1979, the late Harvie Conn, then professor of mission at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, wrote a seminal article[14] that insightfully captured the growing concerns of theological educators around the world with the theological education institutions of the West (primarily the residential seminary) serving as the theological education center for the world—determining the standards for excellence in theological education and dominating the development of theological education programs in their countries. "Everywhere," he wrote, "the key question has become: how can Third World theological education discover and develop forms of theological training and ministry authentic to particular cultural contexts within Asia, Africa, and Latin America?" Conn summarized the growing international discontent in the thoughts and words of Hugo Zorilla,

> "The seminaries go in one direction while the church wrestles in another. Non-contextualized churches carry out a ministry not suited to their reality while seminaries perpetuate theologies, methods, and strategies best suited to

> churches in an opulent and wealthy society." Zorilla traces much of this to the importation of borrowed theological content, "an implantation of academic and theological systems by the mission boards" that results in a "people of God passive in the education of their leaders and helping to perpetuate the dependency of the local church," maintaining "forms of worship, stereotyped theological categories, and 'prepackaged' models of irrelevant ministries."[15]

Writing at about the same time, Ted Ward remarked that the overall enterprise of international theological education has been marked by "unexamined and unchallenged ethnocentrism."

> In the name of theology and theological education we have visited on the non-Western world the historic issues and debates of Western Christianity. Yet the real theological issues that emerged as Christianity confronted the Orient's elaborate religious systems and Africa's animism have been answered more by the impositions of American lifestyle than by sharing theological inquiry.[16]

He goes on in the article to identify the policies governing Western Christianity's service in the Majority World as nothing short of "colonialistic" (both ideological and economical) that parallel the "imperialistic" practices by secular agencies in the West.

> If colonialism survives in the imposed institutions, its near kinsman, paternalism, lives on in money itself. . . . The money that mission and missionaries have at their disposal will engender paternalism in missions so long as stewardship is defined as authority for control. Gifts are given provisionally, grants have strings attached, and all too often the other quasi-generous bequests that we might think up have one cannon flaw: they fall short of real trust. In the accepting of such gifts the beneficiary becomes more beholden to the giver, more dependent, more humiliated. [17]

Forty years have passed since these scholars offered their analyses regarding the institutionalization of Western theological education. Nevertheless, the force of "center-periphery" phenomena in theological education remains strong. My own church body, as an example, seems to have stepped backward in time to an era of Western missionary colonialism characterized by the "great white man's burden" of the nineteenth century especially as regards the institutionalization of educational systems and programs for missionary and pastoral formation here in the United States and abroad.

Institutionalizing Theological Education among LCMS Partner Churches

The LCMS in its 2013 national convention launched the Global Seminary Initiative (GSI). Dr. James Baneck, LCMS Director of Pastoral Education, explained in a recent article the purpose of the GSI.

> As part of the response to this Great Commission, the LCMS developed and implemented the Global Seminary Initiative (GSI). GSI has a twofold purpose: 1) To provide graduate-level scholarships to international students studying at either of the [LCMS] seminaries, and 2) To provide financial support for sending seminary faculty overseas for temporary teaching assignments (to partner seminaries and emerging church-partner seminaries).[18]

The Rev. Daniel J. McMiller, Executive Director, LCMS Office of International Mission, provided rationale for the program. He wrote in the same article,

> The goal of GSI is to provide the most gifted from these church bodies the opportunity to become better teachers in their home churches for the next generation. Each church needs good teachers. The tools for that aren't easily acquired outside of our own [Western LCMS] seminaries. So we're looking for those with good pastoral skills and academics to return and teach. We have to have pastors who are very well-equipped to stand for the truth—that's even more profoundly needed in small, emerging church bodies in places where Lutheranism is totally unknown, where people in the name of the Gospel are teaching a lot of heresy. Christianity does exist in many places around the globe, but not with a clear teaching of sin and grace. . . . So the challenges of our partner churches are tremendous, and they need good teachers from their own people who can communicate the truth better than even any missionary. Right now, the best place to teach these men is our own [LCMS] seminaries, without a doubt.[19]

This author applauds the effort and sacrifice of the LCMS in assisting our partner churches in raising up well equipped leaders for their mission and ministry contexts. These church bodies benefit greatly from the expertise and experience of Western theologians and practitioners who willingly give of their time and talent both to teach international leaders privileged to study at one of our LCMS seminaries and to travel abroad for considerable lengths of time to teach in the residential seminaries of these churches.

At the same time, concern needs to be raised that as well-meaning as the Global Seminary Initiative is for the expansion of international theological education, it may very well be perpetuating the institutionalization of Western theological education in both contextual content and delivery systems—both of which will prove disastrous for

our partner churches' ability to provide leaders well equipped to meet the needs for missionary outreach and concomitant pastoral oversight of their congregations. The question must be asked whether the Global Seminary Initiative continues to maintain the crisis of dependency upon Western churches and their resources including the reinforcement of particular assumptions regarding excellence in theological education. This question holds many complicating factors that deserve further exploration and conversation beyond the scope of this article. The concern being raised here, however, is whether leaders from Majority World churches are being socialized or "captivated" by methodologies, tastes, values, programs, ministry priorities, etc. of Western churches and how such "socialization" impacts their abilities to develop appropriate theological education programs in their own church bodies. The uncritical acceptance of the traditional Western system of theological education (residential seminary) as superior to any other currently predominates the thinking in both the Western and the Majority World churches to the detriment of developing the theological education programs needed for faithful missionary outreach here and abroad. This concern becomes all the more significant as we look briefly at recent developments in theological education taking place within the LCMS.

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Institutionalizing Theological Education within the LCMS

Since the 1980s with its historic *Mission Blueprint for the Nineties*[20], the LCMS has considered North America a vast mission field to be included among the more traditional mission fields of the Majority World. That not only challenged the church body to raise up missionaries for North American contexts (especially across cultural and linguistic boundaries), but also to develop theological education models and programs that have the capacity to equip those leaders to serve faithfully.[21] Thus began an era of robust development of mission training programs at our two residential seminaries as well as the development of non-residential, in-ministry programs designed to equip pastors and missionaries in their mission field contexts. Other

articles in this issue of *Lutheran Mission Matters* chronicle the development of several of these programs.

The tide shifted dramatically in 2010 with a change in the administrative leadership of the LCMS. It is this author's opinion that the change came primarily from two concerns. The first is a reaction to the waning of Christendom's influence among the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture of America (which describes 98% of the LCMS). Feeling besieged by the dominant influence of secular humanism in our society and its generally hostile posture toward the Christian Church, LCMS leaders tipped the balance between missionary outreach and church preservation toward the latter. Secondly, the dramatic shift in the religious landscape of the United States threw the LCMS off balance as to how to interface with the unchurched world around us. One part of the LCMS strongly advocates for the need to be more fully engaged with the unchurched populations, taking a more visible and active role in proclaiming the true Gospel in civic events and other social contexts outside the protective purview of the LCMS. Another portion of the synod equally advocates the need to avoid religious engagement (public proclamation) in these contexts for fear that such participation will dilute the clear truth of the Gospel message. These shifts have greatly shaped our self-perception and consequent role of the LCMS in the mission fields of North America, along with profoundly impacting our understanding and development of theological education programs here and abroad.

In its 2019 National Convention, the LCMS doubled-down on its commitment to the priority of the traditional residential model despite the Synod in its 2016 national convention ~~e~~establishing a task force specifically to study critical ministry needs and "to explore alternative methods for ministerial preparation in light of changing needs."[22] Rather than explore alternative methods, the task force seized the convention assignment as opportunity to assert the superiority of residential TE programs over non-residential.

> The Bible encourages high quality education for clergy in the qualifications for ministry in both Timothy (1 Tim 3:1–13) and Titus (Titus 1:5–9). And again, while this does not demand a specific kind of residential educational program, it certainly commends to those who are educating and those who are educated the quality that is consistently achieved *only in a residential program.* (italics added)
>
> There were times when this [residential education] model could not be followed, either because of the pressures put on the church by persecution or in unique mission situations where the need ruled out any possibility of anything more than "on-the-fly" instruction. However, such liminal circumstances, as important as they are, should not define normal practice for the church. *They are by definition exceptions.* (italics added)[23]

These assertions regarding both residential and non-residential programs cannot be biblically nor educationally substantiated. By focusing simply on the concept of "residential" or "in-residence," the report suggested that a strong link exists between the preparation of apostles, prophets, pastors, and teachers of the Scriptures and the preparation of LCMS pastors at our residential seminaries. Such a link can only be established by imposing a contemporary understanding of "residential pastoral formation" on the biblical texts, which results in grossly misapplying God's Word. At all times we must remain cautious in our attempts to draw strong parallels between our contemporary models of theological education and those of the Bible. Harvie Conn offers collegial admonition regarding our desire to use God's Word to defend or promote our present theological education models.

> The formulas for the ministry and its training that we work with now are not built simply out of biblical data. That data is filtered through sociological, philosophical, anthropological, and cultural mindsets too often uncritically assumed. And behind our mindsets are past generations, a synchronic history of presuppositions whose influence we often do not feel. . . [We] are not dealing with what should be [biblically] but with some of those synchronic features of the model which shaped by the history of our enculturated presuppositions, mould our definitions of excellence in ministerial preparation.[24]

It's commendable that we look to the Scriptures to provide understanding and direction in the development of our theological education programs. To do that well, however, requires a careful exegesis of the biblical texts (thus our emphasis on biblical languages) and an accurate understanding of various models of theological education employed in the ancient world as well as today. To be fair, *residential education* (personal interaction with fellow students and teachers within an intentionally formed learning community) is the biblical norm. Given the scarcity and expense of written materials in biblical times, instruction, secular or religious, was primarily oral. And the fact that telecommunication is of recent origin, such instruction took place immediately and generally in community. A deeper dig into the biblical texts, however, reveals a variety of sound theological educational models that *challenge more than affirm* the assertions made in the task force report and affirmed by the 2019 Synod in Convention.[25]

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One cannot overstate the importance or urgency of the assignment given the 13-03 task force regarding theological education for mission contexts. LCMS congregations,

as well as the Synod as a whole, stand at a critical juncture in our walk together. Profound opportunities and challenges lie before us as the United States ranks as the third largest mission field in the world, surpassed only by China and India. At the same time, hundreds of LCMS congregations continue to struggle to provide a regular ministry of Word and Sacrament for their members.

Unfortunately, the urgent needs identified in LCMS 2016 Res 13-03—to prepare laborers for the harvest field as well as shepherds for our small, rural, urban, ethnic, immigrant, financially challenged, and geographically isolated congregations were left unaddressed by the 2019 Convention. Rather than directing the Synod to seek a variety of ways to equip harvesters and shepherds through biblically and confessionally sound theological education programs, the floor committee responsible for matters regarding theological education focused on preserving the priority of the residential seminary. While commending the non-residential theological education programs of the Synod, the thrust of its Resolution 6-03 aimed at strengthening the non-residential Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP) program by aligning it more closely with our residential models through changes to the SMP curriculum.[26]

The SMP program and its precursors[27] were well received by our congregations and mission stations. They came under fire from critics who claimed such programs to be insufficient for the training needs of our pastors and missionaries. The concern was twofold: (1) the supposed and unsubstantiated assumption that the non-residential programs are fundamentally "inferior" to the residential model, and (2) the perceived threat these programs pose to our residential seminary populations.[28] It must be noted here that the institutional viability of our residential programs was already facing challenges by a variety of factors independent from the development of these non-residential programs. While not explicitly stated in either the Res 13-03 Task Force Report or the resultant resolutions, these fears seem to drive much of the concern over the utilization of non-residential TE programs.

The task force's and subsequently the convention floor committee's determination to defend and promote the classical residential seminary[29] intentionally limited their ability to explore other models of pastoral and missionary formation that are theologically sound (rooted solidly in our Gospel-centered Lutheran theology), vocationally responsive to the various ministry and missionary climates and contexts of our United States, and economically sustainable. The pressing needs for church leadership (especially pastoral and missionary) that the LCMS raised in Res 13-03 of its 2016 convention continue to increase. The institutional force of our traditional seminary program greatly hampered our ability to determine how best to prepare missionaries for our twenty-first-century ministry contexts as well as provide regular Word and Sacrament ministry for our struggling congregations.

Center-Periphery Phenomena and Theological Education in Mission Contexts

Altbach's 1981 article aimed at the educational inequities within the international arena of secular universities, so it did not address the challenges facing theological education in mission contexts here or abroad. Yet, the phenomena and problems discussed in his article are analogous to the challenges my church body faces in developing sound theological education for the ever-increasing mission contexts here and around the world. My article has only touched the tip of the iceberg as there are other issues rising from the "center-periphery hypothesis" that we need to better understand if we hope to address faithfully the call of our Lord to "raise up laborers for the [global] harvest." Four come to mind.

(1) A study needs to be made of the historical development of the processes that led to the current dependency of Majority World churches upon the theological educational institutions of the West. Such a study offers important implications for our international church relations as we attempt to address the pattern of Western dependency in which many Majority World churches find themselves.

A similar historical study is needed for the American front. For example, my own church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, intentionally developed two different theological education programs in its beginning years of nineteenth century America. One seminary—Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, IN, then Springfield, IL—was specifically designed to raise up laborers to meet the demands of the vast and growing mission field in America. It was known as the practical seminary with less demand placed on theological academics and more on actual ministry experience, especially among those populations without Christ. Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO, on the other hand, followed the more academically oriented programs of Lutheran universities in Europe and aimed at preparing pastor/theologians able to establish and preserve the solid theological foundation upon which to build faithful Lutheran congregations for generations to come. Both were viewed by the LCMS as essential to answering the prayer of "Laborers for the Harvest." Over time, however, the mission focus of the Springfield seminary began waning in favor of its more academically directed counterpart; and for at least the last fifty years, the two seminaries have, with minor curricular differences, shared the same focus.

(2) Partner church relations within the International Lutheran Council (ILC) between Western and Majority World church bodies should be studied, especially as they concern global theological education. Of concern here is the potential domination of Western church bodies in the theological education programing. The relations as they exist today—with the direction of aid (financial), information (specifically systematic theology) and expertise (expatriate professors teaching in overseas seminaries) coming almost exclusively from the West rather than bilaterally between Western and Majority World churches—foster neocolonialistic attitudes[30]

perpetuating the centuries-old crisis of dependency upon Western churches. How do these relationships impact the theological and cultural presuppositions underlying program and curricular development?

(3) A study needs to be made regarding the worldwide institutionalization of overseas theological education (Majority World leaders coming to the Western seminaries for advanced training). International students attend American seminaries in order to receive the training necessary to return home and set up viable[31] training programs that will provide the faithful laborers needed for the spiritual harvest in their own countries. The question must be asked whether these international students are adequately equipped to develop the theological education programs their ministry and mission contexts need. Or does this strategy subtly support the already prevailing attitude that theological education in Western nations, regardless of quality, content, or cultural appropriateness, is superior to the theological education they are able to receive or provide in their own country? A concomitant question is whether the training of national Majority World church leaders in US seminaries has increased or decreased the dependency these churches have on US seminaries for leadership training. Is there a greater or lesser flow of international students to the United States to be trained for church leadership positions back in their home countries? If there is an increase, what are some of the primary reasons behind such a trend?

(4) The above questions might be summarized in the mega-question of whether the seminaries of our partner churches in the Majority World function as "centers" of theological education or primarily remain "peripheral" institutions. The key concern here is how our partner church seminaries function as theological "centers" within their own ministry contexts with particular attention given to the national church leaders—trained in the West—overseeing those institutions. Are the church leaders or professors trained in the United States still sensitive to the theological concerns and challenges of their people and the ministry priorities of their own contexts? Have we created an elite who have distanced (elevated) themselves from those they were trained to serve? This concern not only involves the national leaders and professors that studied in the West, but ultimately extends to the graduates of the national seminaries, as they assume ministry responsibilities in their local contexts. One would need to investigate the ministry priorities and direction the national churches take with these leaders at the tiller. They were trained in Western institutions which, for better or worse, find their roots in middle or upper middle-class US society. Having studied in such an environment, to which strata of society in their home nations do the professors and their students in Majority World seminaries direct their interests?

I began this article with two critical observations made by Timothy Tennent: (1) The collapse of Christendom, at least its influence over people groups with roots in Northern Europe, and (2) the collapse of "the West reaches the rest" paradigm in world missions with the emergence of strong Christian churches in the Majority World

concomitant with the ever-growing mission field realities of our once Christendom dominated West. These twin phenomena signal the need for a radical change in our understanding and participation in Christ's mission in both the sending and receiving of evangelistic missionaries and pastors around the world and, just as significantly, in the theological education processes by which they are formed and equipped. Holding fast (in seeming desperation) to traditional Western models of theological education at the expense of models that emerged on the mission fields of the Majority World will not serve us well. Suppressing models born on the mission field will not secure the continuation of the traditional Western models here or abroad nor provide the sufficient numbers of workers needed for the growing mission fields. At the same time jettisoning the traditional Western models as vestiges of a colonialistic past in world mission is short sighted, not conscious of the long-term needs of the church. The Lord of the harvest has brought us to a time and place where the strength and longevity of the institutional church must join forces with the vibrancy and suppleness of the missionary enterprise to work symbiotically in raising up laborers for the vast mission fields that lie before us.

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Endnotes

[1] Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2010).
[2] Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 18.
[3] Assuming the complete collapse of Christendom in America overstates the matter. Christendom, with its roots in the Roman Catholic Church, continues to enjoy great cultural and social significance in Latin America, including Latino churches here in the United States. The collapse of Christendom is most keenly felt among churches born in Northern Europe, particularly of white Protestant traditions.
[4] Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 31–33.
[5] Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 31.
[6] Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."
[7] Many different phrases are used to refer to people groups and nations from Asia, Africa, and Latin America such as Third World, Two-Thirds World, non-Western world, and Global South. Following Timothy Tennent's recommendation in his 2007 publication *Theology in the*

Context of World Christianity, I will use the term "Majority World" except where direct quotes are involved.
[8] Philip G. Altbach, "The University as Center and Periphery," *Teachers College Record* 82, no. 4 (Summer 1981): 601–21.
[9] Altbach, 601.
[10] Altbach, 602.
[11] Altbach, 602.
[12] A culture's presuppositions about reality (its worldview) integrate the various institutions (religion, technology, economics, etc.) characteristic of that society. They also inform the members of that society what its priorities are in the interplay between the various institutions (e.g., technological efficiency vis-a-vis interpersonal relationships or accumulation of material wealth vis-a-vis maintaining harmonious relationships between spiritual, human, and material entities). These institutional prioritizations differ widely from culture to culture, especially between the Western and Majority World nations. When problems arise on the national or international scene affecting the interplay within and between a culture's institutions, which set of cultural priorities are the "experts" or "problem solvers" going to honor—those of one's own culture or those of the West? Because international expertise is understood as emanating from the West, the agendas of its representative cultures tend to dominate.
[13] TEE was developed by Presbyterian missionaries serving in Guatemala in the late 1950s and early 1960s. According to one of the TEE architects, the late Ralph D. Winter, the Presbyterian Church in Guatemala had developed an excellent seminary—The Evangelical Presbyterian Seminary of Guatemala modeled after their traditional residential seminary in America. However, a survey revealed that in twenty-five years the seminary had prepared only ten pastors who were actively serving the denomination of over two hundred rapidly growing churches and church plants. Furthermore, only six students were enrolled at the seminary at the time (See Ralph D. Winter, ed., *Theological Education by Extension* [Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 1969]). Three missionaries—Ralph D. Winter, James H. Emery, and F. Ross Kinsler—in collaboration with Dr. Ted Ward of Michigan State University developed the non-formal program that incorporated academic preparation delivered through Programed Instructional Learning texts, ongoing ministry experience in mission contexts, and cohort gatherings for critical reflection and ministry application.
[14] Harvie M. Conn, "Theological Education and the Search for Excellence," *Westminster Theological Journal* 41, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 311–363. Though over forty years old, Conn's article raises questions and offers insights that speak clearly and wisely to contemporary theological education concerns with which we wrestle here and abroad.
[15] Conn, 319–320.
[16] Ted Ward, "The Future of Missions: Hangovers, Fallout, and Hope," in *New Horizons in World Mission: Evangelicals and the Christian Mission in the 1980s: Papers given at Trinity Consultation 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 21.
[17] Ward, 24. Ward's critique calls for research to be conducted on inter-church aid focusing particularly on that which comes in the form of program subsidies, scholarships for overseas training, and the policies governing the use of those resources. Insights for developing better strategies of resource sharing can be gleaned from reviewing studies that have been conducted for major international foundations.
[18] February 2020 Supplement to *Reporter*, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
[19] February 2020 Supplement to *Reporter*, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
[20] *Mission Blueprint for the Nineties* (St. Louis: Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1990).

[21] The *Mission Blueprint for the Nineties Summary* recommended fifteen goals to be achieved in order for the congregations and agencies of the LCMS to participate more fully in Christ's mission in the United States and abroad. The Sixth Goal called for the increase of "Mission and Ministry Through Theological Education by Extension" (*Mission Blueprint Summary*, p. 5). Noting that the "Synod's higher education institutions must reflect our changing mission" the report states the following: The ***Mission Blueprint*** calls for rethinking about the arrangement, packaging and delivery of seminary education. Almost every U.S. church body is grappling with the nature and form of theological education. Theological Education by Extension offers flexibility to the graduate seeking culture-specific ministries, while maintaining high standards, as modeled in overseas settings. The ***Mission Blueprint*** calls for Theological Education by Extension to become an integral part of our U.S. centripetal model. (*Mission Blueprint Summary*, p. 5)

[22] Resolution 13-03, "To Address Future Church Leadership Needs in Light of Current and Future Challenges." The Synod resolved that we should help it "address the needs of small, rural, urban, ethnic, immigrant, financially challenged, and geographically isolated congregations; To recommend ways to identify candidates to address future needs in the LCMS; To provide strategies for reaching the increasingly diverse population of the U.S. and Canada; To establish minimal standards for pastors (while keeping the optimum in view); *To explore alternative methods for ministerial preparation in light of changing needs;* To recommend avenues to finance preparation of pastors; To explore the possibility of providing free seminary education; To consider relevant recommendations in the 4-06A and 5-14A task force reports; To consider other matters relevant to their task as may be identified; That the task force provide a report to the next regular convention of the Synod; and, That in its work the task force encourage the ongoing work of the district lay training programs and the CUS programs for evangelism and outreach in order to identify, equip, encourage, and empower men and women for mission, witness, and service to Christ and His Church." (Italics added)

[23] Report and Recommendations: 13-03 Task Force, *Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures 2019*, 376.

[24] Conn, 325.

[25] Resolution 6-02: "WHEREAS, Jesus set an example of the importance of a robust theological education by teaching his disciples for nearly three uninterrupted years during which time he warned them to 'beware of the leaven of the Pharisees' (Matt. 16:6), along with many other admonitions to watch, pray, guard and then to baptize and teach all nations 'to observe all that I have commanded you' (Matt. 28:20); and
WHEREAS, After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul went away into Arabia to learn the Scriptures anew in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus and after three years went up to Jerusalem to present himself to Peter and to the other Apostles to be recognized as one called by God to preach and teach (Acts 9; Gal. 1:17–18); and
WHEREAS, The report of the 13-03 Task Force provides a useful endorsement of the place and priority of residential seminary education."

[26] Resolution 6-03: "WHEREAS, The 2016 Res. 13-03 Task Force report noted the existence of *Notprediger*, emergency pastors, in the early Reformation, which were seen as a temporary way of providing more men to serve in the ministry by abbreviating their training, with the full intention of preparing these men and future men with more comprehensive instruction in the future, so that when the church sends a man regularly to preach and teach and administer the sacraments he be called and ordained and thus clearly recognized as a pastor; and
Resolved, That the Pastoral Formation Committee work to enhance the curriculum and standards of the SMP program between the two seminaries, bringing them closer to the

curriculum and standards of the residential seminaries, including instruction in biblical languages; and be it further
Resolved, That the provisions of the SMP program as outlined in 2007 Res. 5-01B be modified to require students enrolling in the SMP programs after the 2020 academic year to finish all academic requirements of the SMP program before ordination and placement on the minister of religion–ordained roster of the Synod; and be it further
Resolved, That SMP vicars will remain in that role as long as they are enrolled and actively pursuing SMP ordination."

[27] The Synod in 1995, through its Board for Higher Education, requested Concordia Theological Seminary to develop a pilot four-year non-residential program for the Southern and Texas Districts. A year later that program expanded to include Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and all of the other districts of the Synod in what became known as DELTO (Distance Education Leading to Ordination). The faculties of the two residential seminaries collaborated to provide the best of our academic theological resources (including instruction in at least Greek) coupled with ongoing Word and Sacrament ministry experience throughout the four years of training.

[28] Oral response by President Harrison to the report by the Concordia Seminary faculty regarding the success of the SMP program and insights gained for ongoing development of residential and non-residential theological education. (Joint Meetings of the Council of Presidents and the faculty of Concordia Seminary, May 2011.)

[29] The recommendations of the task force were presented based on the following presupposition: With this biblical, confessional, and historical context as background, the 13-03 Task Force addresses the Synod's assignment and offers the following recommendations:

> "1. To help the Synod address the needs of small, rural, urban, ethnic, immigrant, financially challenged, and geographically isolated congregations Recommendation: There is one office of the holy ministry to which Christ calls His shepherds, who are the servants of the Word and of all of us as they proclaim God's Word with Law and Gospel rightly divided, and administer his sacraments. Insofar as possible, the synod should seek to equip these men with the highest and best education we can provide, *which the Task Force believes is delivered through the residential seminary model*." (Italics added) 13-03 Task Force Report, *Convention Workbook: Reports and Overtures 2019*, 381.

[30] Philip Altbach defines neocolonialism as "the conscious policies of the industrialized nations to maintain their influence and power of the Third World" (1977:190). What is important to note, according to Altbach, is that in this day and age, there's considerable choice on the part of both the West and the Majority World in this relationship. If this "mutual acceptance" is true (and from personal observation I believe it is), it may present serious obstacles to the development of genuinely international cooperation and the transcultural theologizing so necessary for the churches today. Both parties will remain severely crippled.

[31] "Viability" in theological education is defined as being able to provide training which is (1) theologically (biblically) sound; (2) contextually appropriate and credible (respectable) in the eyes of the churches receiving "graduates"; and (3) sustainable in terms of material and academic resources.