

Lutheran Mission Matters



Volume XXVIII, No. 2 (Issue 57) November 2020

Encountering Mission

Theological Education/Pastoral Training in South Africa and in Mozambique

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Abstract: What is the link between theological training in a seminary in a provincial capital like Pretoria, RSA, and pastoral training in the bush in Mozambique?

The Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) in Tshwane receives students from various countries. They come prepared and are able to study Greek and Hebrew and all the other subjects of a traditional theological education program. The candidates of the Theological Education Program (TEP) in Mozambique have very little formal education due to the conditions of the country, level of education in the country, and the place where they live: in the bush. Most of them do not have electricity and running water at home, and do not have access to a library or to the internet.

The link is Christ and love for God's mission. The realities are very different. The level of training is different, but in both places, candidates have been trained to share God's free salvation by grace, by faith in Christ. And they are doing it well according to the report of one LTS student I share in this article, and as we can see with our own eyes in Mozambique.

We cannot disassociate theological education from the Great Commission. If we do so, we will be like the scribes of Jesus' time: Tremendous knowledge of the Scriptures, but only for those inside the walls of the Israelites. They did not have a mission vision, and this was one of the reasons why they clashed with Jesus, who accepted all who came to Him. To finalize His mission on earth, Jesus said to His disciples: "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . **and teaching** them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19, 20; emphasis added).



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This teaching has several levels. It begins with the Christian parents teaching their children; it continues with the Sunday School, with the Catechism Class—and here we have a big gap with our youth—with Bible studies, and eventually some are called to serve in the holy ministry. These people need special teaching that we call theological education, or pastoral training.

We cannot disassociate theological education from the Great Commission.

The Lutheran Church has always dedicated and still dedicates significant attention to theological education. At the time of the Reformation, especially after the Visitation of the churches, Luther saw the great need to improve the theological education of priests. The Small and the Large Catechisms are just the beginning of this education. The development of Lutheran theological education happened gradually, and now we basically have in most of the seminaries four main areas of study: Exegetic, Systematic, Church History, and Practical. The International Lutheran Council (ILC) World Seminaries Conference 2019 in the Philippines discussed, among other items, “A Lutheran Curriculum for Theological Education.”

I dealt with two very different situations in providing pastoral training:

- (1) As Rector of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Tshwane, Pretoria, South Africa for the past three years (2018–2020)
- (2) As head of the Pastoral Training in Mozambique since 2010.

Based on my experience, I would like to analyze both systems of theological education from the aspect of the mission of the church/the Great Commission.

The Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) in Tshwane, Pretoria, South Africa

The vision statement of the LTS is “To provide quality confessional Lutheran formation.”

The mission statement of the LTS is “The LTS is a mission agency seeking to graduate multipliers for the Lutheran church of Africa.”

It has a long tradition—since 1941 officially and even before, and was organized by the German missionaries to train local pastors. After beginning in a rural area, it moved to Pretoria, the capital, in 2000. It accomplished its goal well, and the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA) has around fifty (black) active pastors graduated from the LTS.

Gradually, the LTS opened its door to candidates from other Lutheran church bodies in South Africa and abroad. Candidates from Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda, Liberia, Congo (DRC), Botswana, and Zambia are coming to study at the LTS.

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Recently, the seminary accepts candidates from other denominations as well. As South Africa is the home of many refugees, some of them have organized churches based on their practices in their home countries and are looking for theological education for their leaders. The LTS sees this as an opportunity to influence these leaders with Lutheran theological education, hoping that, once graduated, they will preach and teach in their churches what they have learned in the LTS: Salvation by grace alone, through faith in Jesus.

The curriculum is a traditional one used in most of the Lutheran seminaries, taught by local professors and guest professors from abroad. Two-week intensive courses, led mainly by guest professors, take place four times a year, presented by two professors each time (a total of six hours per day). This provides a broad view of Lutheranism around the world to the students, as they are exposed to these guest professors with their background and experience.

The LTS is now changing its curriculum due to the ongoing accreditation process. Instead of the original five years, the diploma level has three years as required by local education laws. The plan is that once accreditation is achieved at this level, the seminary will add two years of study leading to a bachelor's degree.

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Unfortunately, we do not have LCSA congregations close to the seminary where the candidates can begin to practice what they are learning. But the three breaks during the year, and the summer holidays, give this opportunity to the students. Candidates from other churches go every weekend to their churches around Pretoria and help their pastors.

There is also the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC), Arcadia, which gathers in the LTS premises. It is associated with the Free Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa (FELSISA) (German-background church). The ELC congregation has a black majority and some students have the opportunity to practice there.

A good example of mission work during the holidays comes from candidate, Pierre Shukuru, and it shows what most of the students are doing during the holidays. In the last two years, I have asked all students to write a report about what they have done when they came back for a new academic year.

Shukuru is a Congolese refugee and has an Asylum Seeker Visa. He has a Pentecostal background and comes to LTS because of mission work done by a FELSISA pastor among refugees. When he came to the seminary, he and his wife were instructed by the ELC pastor and confirmed. After a while, they baptized their child. He is a very committed student, and his plan after graduation is to go back where he comes from and work with his people to bring them to the Lutheran faith. Read his witness below:

MY ACTIVITIES DURING HOLIDAYS (By Pierre Shukuru)

- *Preaching and teaching, this was my main point,*
- *Visiting some people who were no longer coming to Church,*
- *Doing Bible studies focusing on different parallel passages,*
- *Visiting even those who do not attend Churches and share with them the word of God,*
- *I was invited by some of the Church members whenever they needed some clarities*

Since the majority of the Church members in Harrismith has a Pentecostal background including myself, and because I have already been converted with my household to the Lutheran faith and therefore, with the knowledge which I am gaining at the seminary, it is my duty to share these benefits with others as well, especially people of Harrismith where I normally go during my holidays.

*In time of preaching and teaching, I really had opportunities of doing that in different occasions, and I thank God for that because I could see the interest of people in hearing the word of God during the services, especially when I was doing some Bible studies with them. This was very interesting for me and for them too. They were raising questions which I could not imagine, especially when it comes to the matter of **salvation by grace alone through faith in Christ, justification and sanctification**. These were the points that always make our discussions more interesting during our Bible study.*

*They really have different understanding concerning: **sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura** (especially salvation). They believe a lot in good work that one must do something to please God in order for him to be saved. The Bible studies which I was doing started to get interesting when I asked them to recite together the Ten Commandments. We did it even though most of them had some break down. After reciting them, I asked them a question if we can be saved by keeping the law? One of them stood up and **yes!** If we keep them very, very well. Then I quoted the story of a man who claimed to know the commandments since he was young, but later failed to love his neighbor when Jesus asked him to sell his properties and share with the poor.*

*I managed through the help of the Holy Spirit to provide answers from the Scripture and explained them according to what Scripture says as well as according to our Lutheran understanding of the Scripture. **Ephesians 2 was my main text reading in time of clarifying these confusions from them.** Thanks be to God, because after reading Ephesians 2 and the story that I have quoted, this person confessed that he now understands something about salvation. I can testify that it went well with us, because I could see some people coming to me after service and asking some extra questions then I had to explain again further, and others were booking a meeting with me so that we can talk more about the word of God.*

Visiting our Church members who were no longer coming to Church anymore, I took the opportunity to share with them the word of God and do some prayers with them, then speaking the word of encouragement to them, and then some of them started coming to Church again. It was really a blessing to me to see how the Holy Spirit is working in these people through the word. I also had an opportunity to visit one of our Church members who gave birth to a baby girl at the hospital of Harrismith; it was wonderful to see how the number of children is increasing in our Church.

Visiting those young people who do not attend Church services anymore was also part of my mission. Yes, we had some chats with them. I was always making myself like one of them, starting by supporting whatever kind of conversation they might have and later on I would introduce them to the word of God, sometimes it works sometimes it doesn't work, but that does not mean we should stop preaching and teaching of the gospel of Christ. When it works, they will be patient with me and listen to the message; if it did not work well with me they will start leaving one by one, but as servants of God we are told not to give up for we are not the ones that convert people but the Holy Spirit.

To conclude: *My holidays were really a blessing to me and my family, as well as to those whom we met and shared together the blessings and gifts from the word of God. I wish it would be like this in the future when we are called as ministers of the word of God to other people after we complete our studies here at the seminary. I pray that God will grant this unto us all in Your name Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit one God now and forever. Amen!*

Pastoral Training in Mozambique

Mozambique is a Portuguese-speaking country, a former Portuguese colony, like Brazil, from where I come. We can understand each other well, in spite of some accent differences and the meaning of some words—something similar to the case with British English and American English from different states of the US.

The Lutheran church in Mozambique began its work in 2006, when an ex-refugee who graduated as pastor in Canada came back to his village and began to preach, teach, and to do social work with the support of his congregation in Canada. I was a missionary in Kenya that time, and I had the opportunity to contact him when I went to a meeting in Mozambique.

He asked for help to prepare local leaders, and I offered him the Theological Education by Extension (TEE) managed by the *Seminário Concórdia* from Brazil. He accepted it, and after some negotiations with the *Seminário Concórdia* and the young church in Mozambique, I began to teach eight candidates once or twice a year in Intensive Courses, using the TEE program. The first eight candidates graduated in 2015, and immediately a new class began. The church is growing so fast that we have more than sixty candidates in our classes now. Twenty are almost ready to graduate, but due to the coronavirus and visa difficulties, I was not able to go to Mozambique to finish the class.

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Several pastors from Brazil are helping me in this training, especially Pastor André Plamer, who lost his heart to Mozambique. He and his family are planning to move to Mozambique, God willing. When possible, two pastors go together, and we have eight hours of classes per day, visiting the congregations and preaching on the weekends.

The pastoral training in Mozambique cannot be compared to theological education at a formal seminary. The candidates have a very low level of knowledge; half of the class do not understand Portuguese; and everything must be translated to the local language, *Chisena*.

Even so, they have a heart for the Gospel! When they grasp what it means to be loved by God and to be forgiven and saved by faith in Christ, this is a life-changing experience. And they share their faith with everyone! The church is growing amazingly! The candidates do not wait until they have homiletic classes to begin to preach. They just share what God has done for them, like the possessed Gerasene man from Mark 5:1–20. When he wanted to go with Jesus, he was not allowed; “but Jesus said to him, ‘Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled” (Mk 5:19–20).

What knowledge or study did this man have to teach and to witness about Jesus among his own people? Without theological training, he shared Christ. The same is

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seen in Mozambique. They feel free from the power of the devil and from the spirits of their ancestors, and they bring people together to share the Good News. And the more they learn, the more they share.

The Pastoral Training has seven modules, beginning with Bible stories, and going through doctrine, church history, catechisms, interpretation of the Bible, Augsburg Confession, homiletics, and several parallel courses. The current candidates are supervised by their pastors. The church has more than eighty congregations, and the pastors visit them from time to time, baptizing and offering the Holy Communion. They have services every Sunday, led by one of the candidates when the pastor is not available.

The ordained pastors also receive training when the Brazilian pastors/professors go there. This is part of a Continuing Education program.

Is There an Ideal Theological Education/Pastoral Training?

It is difficult to say what is the best theological education/pastoral training program if we compare several confessional seminaries' curricula. We need pastors who take care of the sheep inside the pen and reach out to those nearby. And we need missionaries who go outside to reach the unreached. Both need to be prepared, taking in consideration the local challenges and situations.

The traditional pastor cannot just feed his sheep inside the church. He must go and search for the lost sheep, searching as far as the dangerous places where they might be found. And, on his way, he needs to have open eyes for mission opportunities. He also must prepare the traditional sheep to accept the new sheep who did not come from that same fold (Jn 10:16). This is sometimes a difficult task for the pastor, for the traditional members, and for the new sheep. Some churches could grow if they looked around for opportunities to witness or if they at least welcomed the visitors, letting them feel at home.

The missionaries have to be very sensitive to the culture of the place where they are working, whether planting a church some place in their home country or going abroad. They cannot impose their own culture. They need to know the people with whom they are working, and they need to share Christ with words and deeds.

I have learned some lessons in my mission experience, since the beginning of my ministry, when I, as a twenty-two-year-old, was sent to plant a church in one of the

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townships of the huge city of São Paulo, all the way through my experience in Kenya, South Africa, and Mozambique: No matter how much you try to be one of them, you are a “foreigner,” sometimes in your own country.

Also: The parable of the sower (Matthew 13) is still a reality. Do not be frustrated if the fruits do not appear immediately. The power belongs to the Holy Spirit. We are His co-workers (1 Cor 3:9). Problems with leadership and finances will also be a threat to the church. Be humble and be a servant managing these and other problems. We are not the boss. Share responsibilities from the very beginning of the mission. Train new leadership. Trust people, even when you become frustrated with some. Trust God above all (First Commandment).

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The Magisterium of Jesus *versus* the Magisterium of the Scribes: How Is Our Magisterium?

The Gospels report that Jesus taught with authority. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, it is recorded: “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had **authority**, and not as their scribes” (Mt 7:28–29; emphasis added). The reaction of the people in the synagogue of Capernaum was no different when they heard the preaching of Jesus and saw Him cast out a demon: “they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed **authority**. . . . And they were all amazed and said to one another, ‘What is this word? For with **authority** and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!’” (Lk 4:32, 36; emphasis added).

What is the difference between the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of the scribes? After all, the scribes were the teachers of that time. They were in charge of teaching God’s Law to the people and explaining the Bible readings in the synagogues. Why this comparison, which ended up generating jealousy and hatred from the scribes and other religious groups?

Jesus had authority that came from the Father. He said to His disciples: “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own **authority**, but the Father who dwells in me does his works” (Jn 14:10; emphasis added).

The scribes usually just repeated what they read in God’s Law and interpreted it in their own way. They did not always speak to change lives, but they were concerned to transmit only knowledge and tradition.

The difference between the form and content of the scribes’ messages and Jesus’ message was significant. Jesus was recognized as a Rabbi, meaning Teacher (Jn 1:38) the highest level of authority in the Jewish faith. He Himself reaffirmed His position

as Teacher when He said on the night He was betrayed: “You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am” (Jn 13:13).

And just before He returned to heaven, He said: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:18–20).

The Teacher of teachers delegates the task of teaching to His church. We speak on the Teacher’s behalf, we are His spokesmen, according to His promise: “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me. . . . Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you” (Lk 10:16,19). And He promised us: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

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This authority of Jesus refers not only to the “apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers” (Eph 4:11), but we can apply it to all those who exercise Christian teaching at all levels, beginning with the parents at home when they educate their children (Eph 6:4), continuing with the kindergarten teachers, and passing through all classes and levels of teachers to the most senior doctors of the church.

I hope that people can notice in us at least a little of this authority delegated by Jesus to His Christians, and that we are not like the scribes of Jesus’ time, mere repeaters of truths and traditions, but without conviction. Let us look at some cases where this authority of Jesus should be noticed:

At home: Parents should be aware of their role as educators, not mere procreators. Do not delegate your children’s education only to nursery schools/kindergarten and later to other levels, or the religious education only to the Sunday School. Be educators by words and deeds, with authority and conviction, in the style of Jesus. Do not let yourselves be dominated by your children, nor by the influences of a permissive education without fear of God. Educate your children in the fear and love of the Lord.

At school, at all levels: Teachers must follow the curriculum adopted by schools. Christian teachers can make a difference. Without breaking the rules, put on your own spice and give your Christian testimony of love. When you are forced to teach the theory of evolution according to the class books, say that there is also the biblical version, and that the “theory of evolution” is still a theory that has not been proven yet, because there are still many wonders unknown. Have the courage to be authentic and confess your faith with authority, being ready to suffer the consequences. The

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same principle applies to other controversial topics, such as abortion, homosexuality, gender matters, and so on. Have the courage and authority to confess your faith.

In the church: First, to the Sunday School teachers: Do not be a mere repeater of some stories or doctrines, entertaining the children with activities while the parents are in the service. Prepare yourself well, see how you can extract the central points of Law and Gospel from the Bible stories. Assure those entrusted to you of the certainty of God’s love in Christ that you too have.

Second, to the pastors: Do not prepare your sermon as an academic document or a dissertation. Proclaim with conviction the divine truth: the law that condemns, the gospel that absolves and gives life. Do not celebrate the service by leading a “mournful” and monotonous liturgy but emphasize the various parts of the liturgy with authority and eloquence. Sing the hymns with vigor and conviction.

Above all, carry out your duties with the authority you have received from Jesus and with love for the people entrusted to you. People will notice a difference in your style of teaching and the teaching of others. Perhaps they will praise and acknowledge you today and criticize you tomorrow—as they did with Jesus. But be sure to witness with authority. Not with human authority. Know that behind and above your word and work is the authority of Jesus, who has all the power in heaven and on earth (Phil 2:9–11) and who wants to save people through our witness and teaching with authority.

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