

IS THE TRADITIONAL SEMINARY TRAINING THE ANSWER

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Over the years, and more so recently, objections have been raised over against the traditional seminary training program in foreign missions. The pros and cons have been discussed in many gatherings of concerned Christians and laborers in the Kingdom, so what we are doing here is not really anything new. Neither is it just a matter of an academic question as if we were coming together to consider the merits of several types of training programs and then give them a grade or pick one of them out as being the best or most acceptable. I don't think there is just ONE best system of ministerial training because of the many variable factors that have to be considered. Not everyone has the same conditions under which the training must be done. Not everyone has the same idea as to what should or must be included in seminary training. Not every church group has the same resources or the manpower which can be counted on to get the job done. For these reasons, what may be the best type of seminary training in one place is not necessarily the best in another place, under different conditions, in a different culture or with another group. So who can say that one type of training or the other is the best. It is true, rather, that each system or type of training has its strong points and its weaknesses, its advantages and disadvantages.

My assignment, as I understand it is to present the case of the traditional type of seminary training. From what has already been and, it is obvious that I am not going to try to make an ironclad case for it over against the T.E.E. or some other system. I do, however, think that before we decide that the traditional system or training is not useful or suitable we should consider carefully the objections that have been raised against it; and be aware of some of its good points in spite of what may be against it.

It would be most difficult for any of us to take the position that the traditional seminary training is not a good system. To do so would be denying our own heritage. Obviously this is the right way for our synod at the present time, considering our program and the conditions under which we hope to carry it out. However, it is not true that this makes the same method good for all of our missions. Neither is it true that if it is not good for the missions at the present time, that this type of training will never serve the needs of the mission field. So if we should be led to decide that it won't work now, we should not discard it altogether.

It is a little difficult for us to make a judgment of the worth of the traditional system in foreign missions, or especially in our particular area of foreign mission work on the basis of experience because we don't have that kind of system in operation on our field. Others, however, can do this from experience and from the fact that they are searching for other methods seems to indicate that this type of training leaves something to be desired, but we must remember what has been said above. It may not be the system itself. The system could be good but not for the particular conditions or other factors mentioned that would make something else desirable. The Presb. Church has tried for about 50 years, without success, to implant a U.S. standard of theological education in Guatemala. None the less, some of the objections that have been raised against this system, in my estimation are too easily made and are not really valid. One of the easiest things to do is to find fault or criticize.

One of the principal objections, or one that usually finds itself on any list of objections against the traditional seminary system has to do with the matter of money. It is said that it is too costly to train ministers in this way or if it once becomes established, it can never be carried on by a national church. To say it is too costly is begging the question. On a dollar and cents basis, any mission program could be labeled as too costly. But who is going to place a dollar and cents value on the souls that have been redeemed with the holy precious blood of the sinless Son of God? You don't measure souls this way or decide completely on that basis unless there is some other less expensive way to do the job. The exploratory trips to the moon have certainly been costly, and some would say too costly. But once it was established that the goal was to get to the moon, the tremendous cost of the lunar rockets, the expensive equipment, to say nothing of all the many other related costs

were justified because there simply was no other way to get there THEN. Some day there may be a less expensive way to get to the moon, or there may be no compulsion or need to get there at all. Then such expenditures would be TOO costly. So also in a seminary training program, the cost alone dare not be the deciding factor. If this is the only way that the job can be done, we will have to bring up the money to do it. God has called us to a task. He has made us His own, we are to spend and to be spent for Him and his Kingdom.

Regarding the question that the national church will not be able to afford a continuation of the traditional seminary training program brings us into an area where we are usually to quick to say what we cannot do in place of considering what could be done with the consecrated effort of the people and the abundant blessings of the Lord. In Stewardship as in just about every area of the Church's work, much more can be done than is being done, and even much more is possible than we ever imagine. Closely connected with this matter is a solution that is entirely unacceptable to us. Those who favor the traditional seminary have sought to meet the cost problem through a joint effort, maintaining the seminary and operating it in conjunction with other church bodies who are working in the same area or among the same people. We don't have to say much about that kind of seminary program. Our position against unionism and liberalism in the church would certainly apply in the area of the seminary training. Not only is our position clear and well known, more importantly it is scripturally sound. We wouldn't even entertain the thought of saving the traditional type of seminary in this way. We wouldn't do it in the States, and we dare not for the sake of economy consider such an arrangement on the mission field where the brethren have less training and a more limited knowledge of theological matters. If we want to develop a strong scriptural, confessional position in our missions we dare not even entertain the thought of turning a part of the training of the leaders of our mission churches over to those who are of a different spirit.

Another argument against the traditional system has to do with numbers. It is said that this method cannot begin to provide the number of trained leaders needed to take care of the mission's needs to say nothing of having manpower available for the expansion of the work. Statistics and past performance records of those who have been active in this type of training in Latin America seem to indicate that this is a valid argument. A survey of seminary training programs would likely show that there are schools with declining enrollments, others which have been carrying on with a minimal number of students, others closed and abandoned and yet others which have been or are being replaced with some other type of training program. But all is not bad. Other seminaries are in operation and seemingly doing well. (In Colombia we were told that the Lutherans had abandoned their Bible Institute and Seminary for lack of students. In Cali the Baptist seminary was doing well. The Methodists in Bolivia have abandoned their seminary, thinking that they might join with the Baptists, but found them too conservative. In Santa Cruz the Brazilian Baptist Church was conducting the traditional type of training that they felt was meeting their needs. Likely there would be those who would have called it a failure since there were no students on campus. It happened that they were all out on vicarage at the time. In Buenos Aires the Lutheran sem is connected with the high school and college. I have no exact figures, but have the impression that the enrollment was quite low in the seminary department.

The statistics, however, do not tell the entire story. What might work for some might not work for us, and it would not be safe to say that we could succeed with a traditional type of program where others had failed. But let us not simply write this method off because of poor past performances of others. We should rather examine our whole program and decide what we expect of our seminary-training and it is likely that we will decide that the traditional method will serve us well in spite of failure by others and in spite of the fact that we might not be able to turn out large numbers of graduates of prepared people. More of this later.

But now we don't just want to present a number of straw men, knock them down and, try to prove by this method that the traditional type of seminary training is a good one and the one for us. There are certain positive aspects that would favor this type of training system aside from what has happened in the past, or what is being done at the present time, here, on the mission fields, by ourselves or others.

I don't think that we will have any argument against having as our goal the thorough training of those whom we will be using in our work. In theory, if not in fact, the traditional type of seminary program should be in a good position to provide that thorough training. This seems to be accepted in other areas without too much question. Consider the preparation of the doctor or the lawyer. We would find it hard to imagine a doctor being

trained by a correspondence course or an extension type of training. This is not to say that one can not learn a lot about medicine, sickness and healing by experience or observation or even by correspondence courses. But if you were really sick, would you be willing to entrust yourself to this kind of practitioner? How much more important it is to have our workers who are dealing with spiritual infirmities and with souls and not bodies. By common consent at least up to the present time the preparation of a barrister is done in much the same framework, that we use in the traditional seminary training, that is: intensive training in a specific field. We would accept the statement that the extension training program has the goal of a thorough preparation, but it is a little too early to see if this is possible. The nature of the extension program requires a lone period of times to cover the materials which are usually considered necessary for a full training. The traditional program with a concerted effort and concentrated studies in a certain area has already proved to be a workable system.

Another matter that we should consider is the long-range plan for our work. We do not want to be short-sighted and provide for our immediate needs only. We are stressing the indigenous church policy and for many valid reasons. But let us not lose sight of what a truly indigenous church policy includes, or what a truly indigenous church is. It is not just a matter of supporting the building programs of the church or to carry the load of financial support. An indigenous church is one that can take over its entire function and operation. In the early years of our synod's history we were not an indigenous church just because there was no support to build churches or pay the pastor's salary. In those early years we were depending on the mission societies and churches in Germany to train and provide our pastors. Our synod became truly indigenous and independent only when it began to prepare and produce its own pastors and teachers. So also in any mission field, the mission church becomes truly indigenous only when it also is able to provide for the training of its pastors who will be able to carry on the work of the church and extend itself to the borders of the land and in an outreaching mission program. Ministerial training is not only learning the academic facts of theology. A good portion of theology in the traditional system is learned by the process of absorption of the personal devotion of the professors to Christ Jesus as Lord and Saviour and to the Holy Scriptures as the only and infallible source of truth., We want the best for our mission churches and we would be selling them short if we did not intend to make it possible for them to have a ministry which is thoroughly trained, firmly indoctrinated and filled with a zeal and ability both to proclaim and defend the pure and saving Word of God. When we speak out in favor of the traditional training program this does not mean that we will want to commit ourselves to a program that will require that we send capable and suitable people for years on end to direct and carry on the program. We will want to train and develop leadership that will make it possible for the national ministry not only to receive the Word of God in its truth and purity as it has been preserved for us, but that they will be able by sound doctrine and practice direct the training of their own people to preserve the sound Lutheran confessional character which we by God's grace are passing along to them. We must not lose sight of the fact that our seminary training program, no matter what form it might take should not only seek to prepare church workers, but also craftsmen, theologians so that not only will the church be tended and expanded, but that provision will be made for the replacement of those who are in charge of the training program, be it of a traditional type or other, unless there is some other way, other than what we consider the traditional system which can and will fill this need. I don't think we can simply ignore all of the advantages of the system that was used to prepare all of us and which serves our Church.

That which follows may be a bit afield from what I should be presenting at this time, but in order to put into proper perspective what has been said, I think we should say that when we say the "traditional" system we are not thinking of trying to duplicate in Mexico, South America or any of our mission fields the facilities, the faculty, or the curriculum of the Mequon Seminary. We would have neither the resources or the need for that. It is the idea, the principle of thorough training the method of intensive study and instruction that should be held and adapted to the situations and the needs on the field. For example, we might think of the faculty as a limited number, perhaps three. One man could serve in or specialize in the OT and related areas. Another could be responsible in the New Testament field. Another could be responsible for the practical or applied areas and perhaps be in charge of the administration, or some similar arrangement which would fit the conditions and the needs of the field. At the beginning this would surely require expatriate personnel, but as soon as possible the staff should be replaced with competent, capable and proven nationals. In respect to the apparent lack of success

of the traditional system to produce a sufficient number of trained pastors to meet the needs of the mission church, there is the possibility of considering the structure of our work to be wrong rather than the training program. We should not have to assume that each congregation will have its own pastor. One trained pastor could care for a number of congregations and a large area with the help of competent helpers working together with him. This kind of program could expand his ministry and the helpers could receive further training and become one of the pastors working with a group of helpers in another area. In this way tested and tried candidates would be coming to the seminary. They would not be receiving just an academic training, but they would have experience when they came and the training program could include practical training in the form of more directed service.

Perhaps we are missing the mark if we are trying to decide which single method we should use for ministerial training in our missions. The answer likely is to use several methods, or even devise a new method which will combine the best of all of the methods or especially those in such method which will make it possible for us to meet our needs and reach our goals, a method which could change as the conditions under which we are working change and our needs vary.