

The Post-Graduate Professional Growth of Our National Workers

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by Harold Johnne

While preparing this paper, I have been thinking primarily of pastors. I believe, however, that most of the basic ideas expressed here can be applied to Evangelists as well.

As we look toward promoting the post-graduate professional growth of our national workers, I believe there are three areas that need to be considered. They are: 1) The post-graduate professional growth of the seminary instructors themselves. 2) Instilling the desire for post-graduate professional growth in our men while they still are students in the seminary program, 3) Methods of furthering professional growth that can be employed after our nationals have graduated. Of these three, I believe that the first is of most critical importance. If the first is there, the other two will come quite naturally, not easily, but naturally. If the first is not there, the other two will tend to fall flat.

I.

The seminary program instructors need to be involved in post-graduate professional growth themselves.

Essential for such growth is a state of mind and heart, the desire for such growth. I believe that it is the opposite of feeling that you have arrived.

I believe that the kind of growth we need, is the kind that Paul desired for the Ephesians when he prayed, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better." I believe there is no end to learning to know Him better in this life, and I wonder whether perhaps, learning to know Him better, may also be one of the on-going blessed experiences awaiting us on the other side of the grave as well.

Paul prays, "Also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe." Professional growth means growing in awareness of what already is ours and what awaits us in the eternal mansions above, by virtue of our Savior's death on the cross. Professional growth, I believe, is, above all, growing in this kind of knowledge.

In the third chapter of this letter Paul prays, "That out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Professional growth means, among other things, growing in love through Christ who dwells in our hearts through faith.

This is not what the world thinks of as professional growth, but we are not talking about worldly education. We are talking about the professional growth of men in His Kingdom, men who are called by the King to proclaim a Gospel that is foolishness to this world. Our pastors are men who have been called by Him Who was rejected by just about every scholar, especially every religious scholar who met Him. Our concept of post-graduate professional growth must needs be basically different, wondrously different, from that of the worldly scholars around us, different also from that of the worldly scholars who happen to be within the organized church. I believe that our concept of professional growth must be basically growth in the Gospel. Otherwise instead of being growth *in* Him, it will tend to be growth *away from* Him.

The seminary program instructor who by the power of the Holy Spirit has the desire for this kind of personal growth for himself, should, or perhaps you can say, will, strive to be a student of the entire Bible as long as he lives. If our work for the church keeps us from reading the entire Bible, then I think we had better try harder to examine our own priorities the way the Lord is examining them, and the way He shall examine them when He returns.

Striving to be a student of the entire Bible involves making the best use we can of professional skills acquired in student days, such as skills in Hebrew and/or Greek, skills in hermeneutics, isagogics, exegesis.

It involves continuing to acquire books and subscribing to and reading journals which will help our growth in the Gospel. Permit me to list just a few authors and journals that I feel help to promote growth in the Gospel: Aug. Pieper, J. P. Koehler, Luther, A. Edersheim, A. Sitz, M. Franzmann, C. F. W. Walther, E. Schlink, H. Sasse, *Wis. Luth. Quarterly*, *Lutherische Blätter*, *The Lutheran Theological Journal* (Australia). Devotional literature is, of course, of great benefit for growth in the Gospel. I feel that Concordia's *The Daily Office* is outstanding.

Striving to be a student of the entire Bible may involve challenging yourself. For example, it may involve challenging yourself to write at least one sermon on a text from every book of the Bible, so as to force yourself more deeply into the whole message of God and into an appreciation of the specific facet of the Gospel offered in each separate book. It may involve accepting the challenge of writing, and again and again rewriting your own class notes or expanding on the teaching materials you have received from others. If you are growing in the Gospel yourself, I think you will find that you can't help accepting challenges of this sort, because there is so much you want to learn.

Growing professionally obviously involves striving to grow in our teaching skills. This is not only a matter of learning teaching techniques. When I think back to student days, professors who made the deepest impressions were, for the most part, those who were most enthused about their subject, perhaps in love with their subject. The instructor's own enthusiasm certainly makes for effective teaching. When the teacher is excited about what he has learned, the students tend to get excited about what they are learning from him.

We need to try hard to establish good rapport with our students and national pastors. If we take our own sanctification seriously, if we daily examine our own deeds, thoughts, words, feelings in the light of His word, if we continue to honestly examine our own spiritual growth, I think that we will have no trouble in keeping rapport with our students and fellow pastors. Genuine humility and concern for their physical well-being, their sanctification and spiritual growth, will keep us close to them, influencing them, teaching them as well as receiving the same blessings from them.

In regard to actual techniques for communicating the Gospel, there is so much that we can and need to learn from our Lord's Word. We can learn from the methods used by our Savior, the Master Teacher Himself. We can learn from the methods used by men like Paul, Peter, John. We can learn from the methods used by the Holy Spirit. I believe that He not only determined the content of the Holy Scriptures, but that He also selected the literary forms (Letters, biographies, poems, etc.) which He knows are best for transmitting the Gospel to men. Do we perhaps need to take the forms which the Holy Spirit chose for His message more seriously? So often the forms we choose for transmitting the Gospel seem so different from His. For example, how do the literary forms used in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit compare in form with the catechism or our adult instruction manuals? The difference may not be bad, but I think we need to ask seriously whether we can justify the difference.

I believe that striving for professional growth means striving to use and benefit by the best that others have written in the field of pedagogy. A book that really impressed me recently is *The Art of Teaching* by Gilbert Highet, Random House, Vintage Books.

Striving to grow professionally will also affect the way we listen to and read others' sermons. We will not only try to take the message to heart, but will also be looking for ideas on how to proclaim the Gospel. We will be watching also for books in homiletics that can help us in our growth.

If you look at our organizational structure, it appears that this whole blessed process of professional growth, growth in the Gospel, growth in communicating the Gospel, must be in us, and receive strong stimulation from us, the men who have been given top responsibility for our various seminary programs. If you and I, by the power of the Holy Spirit, are experiencing such personal, professional growth, then there is good reason to hope that the Holy Spirit will use us to transmit the eager desire for such growth to the men who graduate from our seminaries.

II.

The desire for continuing professional growth should be instilled in our men and encouraged during their student days.

A man needs to graduate from the seminary recognizing the fact that he has hardly begun to appreciate the full measure of God's grace in Christ Jesus. He needs to realize that after graduation there will still be a lot of growing to do, the kind of growing that Paul desired for the Ephesians. What can we do during those Bible Institute and seminary years to stimulate the desire for professional growth after graduation?

If the instructors themselves are growing professionally as described in part one of this paper, I think much of that desire for growth in the Gospel, and growth in ability to communicate the Gospel, will simply rub off on the students. In addition to this there are many things that we can consciously do to stimulate that desire.

I think we need to give our students practice in searching the Scriptures for themselves. For example we can challenge them to write their own outline of a book of the Bible, such as Romans. The instructor needs to do the same and then students and instructor should discuss their outlines together. Thus we can grow together with our students.

I think we need to use seminar methods for teaching some courses. The instructor will, for the most part, offer questions, verbally or in writing and then discuss the students' answers with them. I think we should not be afraid, especially in the students' senior year, to ask questions for which we ourselves have not as yet found a satisfying answer.

When a new book of seeming merit appears, we can have one or more students check it out at the same time as we do and then discuss it with them.

We can give assignments that will stimulate the student to use the seminary library.

I feel that during their student years we also need to do all that we can to prevent distorted professional growth in the future. We are a conservative church body, so we need especially to point out and warn against the dangers to which a conservative church body is apt to be vulnerable. I am thinking of dangers such as: Phariseism, Doctrinal externalism, Explaining away or failing to see the mysteries of our faith. Centering our attention so totally on objective truth that we tend to drift away from the Person Who gives us the truth and is the truth, Living more by regulations deduced from the Scriptures than by the Scriptures themselves, Limiting our use of the Bible to a source book for proof-passages and pericopes. Taking discipleship lightly because all is covered by the warm blanket of grace. I believe that this is the type of danger to which we may be especially vulnerable. I believe that rather than repeatedly emphasizing dangers for which we have built up a strong defense, we should give much thought and concern to those dangers to which we as a conservative body might be particularly vulnerable.

There is another matter which I feel is very important for trying to prevent false or distorted professional growth. I feel that we need to impart to our students an abhorrence for Reformed thinking, the thinking of the Reformed churches. Our students must have an understanding of Reformed thinking. They need to know not only the surface differences, such as those in regard to the sacraments. They need to know the differences that cause these differences. Our students need to know that we may not be in agreement with Reformed teachers even when we appear to agree. For example their doctrine regarding the Scriptures is very different from ours even though we may use some of the same words such as, "Inerrant, plenary, verbal inspiration." Knowing the basic differences, knowing that they are devastating, is, I believe, very important. Because we are a conservative church body, I believe that a great threat to our Biblical, Lutheran theology comes from that quarter, from the conservative Reformed churches.

Our seminary libraries and, what is worse, our students' and pastors' personal libraries probably have all too many books written by Reformed teachers, men of faith, but grossly distorted faith. I believe that having and using books written by Reformed men is something we have to live with. I think we should, however, be keenly aware of the danger, do all we can to equip ourselves, our students, our national pastors to cope with this danger. I think that we need to strive hard to keep our professional growth and theirs from becoming professional growth that is distorted by Reformed thinking.

III.

A variety of methods and programs can be used to stimulate professional growth after graduation.

Before discussing specific methods and programs, I want to emphasize that in our personal contacts with our national workers, in or outside of these programmed events, in our personal contacts with them we can exert the greatest influence. If we are excited about what we are learning, excited about our own professional growth, we can't help but talk to our nationals about these things and thus pass the excitement on to them. Remember that it works the other way around too. The national workers can, and will, stimulate us too.

Now in regard to specific programs and methods:

1. *Pastoral Conferences*: Our conferences need to be geared to growth in the Gospel. They need to be geared also to improving our skills in proclaiming and applying the Gospel to our people. Our nationals need to be participants, not just listeners in these conferences. Let them delve into the Scriptures themselves and give us their findings in exegetical papers. There is always so much that we need to learn from them in how to communicate with the people of their culture. Pastoral conferences should be geared to be experiences in professional growth for nationals and expatriates alike.

2. *Seminars*: I think that post-graduate seminars are effective for stimulating in-depth study. If there is some area of understanding, some treasure of the Gospel that you really want your fellow workers to acquire, a two or three day seminar gives you the opportunity to make a deep impression. If papers, reports, discussion topics are assigned months ahead of time, and then discussed from time to time as the seminar date approaches, you will probably find your fellow pastors really "Digging in," growing in the Gospel, growing professionally as they prepare for the seminar.

So far we in Japan have had three seminars. The first was a three-day seminar. It involved trying to discuss all the passages in the New Testament that have reference to the Apostle Peter, as well as discussing his letters. Finally we developed sermon outlines for texts from Peter's letters.

The second seminar was on Isaiah. Among other things it involved rapidly going through and underlining Aug. Pieper's *Isaiah II*. The object of the seminar was to enrich our appreciation of the wonders of the Gospel revealed in Isaiah, especially as brought to light by Pieper. Sermon studies were included.

For our third seminar I had suggested a subject in church history, but our men, nationals and expatriates, voiced their preference for Biblical study. I then decided, and received their approval to make a special study of books which other denominations tend to misuse, and we tend to not use, namely, the captivity prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel. As you might expect, a good portion of time was also given to Revelation. You have a copy of the agenda for this seminar. Note that again it includes sermon study. I feel strongly that our Biblical studies should be geared not only to understanding the Scriptures, but must also be geared to bringing what we learn to our people.

These seminars have been held once a year. The last two lasted for two days each.

3. *Books*: Developing our seminary libraries is an important part of our work. The books we place into the seminary library will probably be there, and some will continue to shape the thinking of national pastors, long after we are gone. We need to make our pastors aware of what is available to them in the library. This can be done for example, by giving them lists of new acquisitions, or by displaying books new and old at pastoral conferences. We can discuss new acquisitions with them informally. We should also encourage our nationals to recommend books for acquisition. In some mission fields we most likely need to rely very heavily on our national pastors to tell us what is being published in their language.

Our national pastors should be encouraged to purchase books for their own professional libraries. I think it is good to help them financially in this matter whenever proper. A number of years ago the national LWMS granted funds for this purpose. When some particular gem, such as Pieper's *Isaiah II* comes out, you or I might be able to find ways to give each national pastor a copy as a gift.

4. *Theological Journal* If your men are able to handle English well, certainly the *Northwestern Lutheran* and the *Wis. Luth. Quarterly* will help their professional growth.

I think we as individuals should be doing what we can in this area for our own nationals. When you discover something of special value in a book or journal, pass it on. If you develop a new sermon series for Lent or Advent, pass it on. To begin with it doesn't have to be a professional looking publication. Just

duplicated notes from the seminary to the pastors in the field will do. In this way, as you grow yourself, you will be helping your fellow pastors grow by sharing such “Growth materials” with them.

5. *Involving Nationals in Teaching in the Seminary Program:* On a mission field, at least some graduates will probably come back to teach at the seminary much sooner than they would in a large, established church body. This isn't all bad. The teaching will most likely be part-time, perhaps just a few hours a week, perhaps only one, possibly two subjects. It goes without saying that involvement in the seminary program will stimulate the professional growth of the national pastors who are doing the part-time teaching. Especially in the area of teaching seminary students to communicate the Gospel, we need to lean as heavily as we can on our graduates to show future pastors the way. I don't think we should limit their teaching activity to practical theology, however. Don't sell the Lord short. He may provide us with a national who, for example knows more church history or more Hebrew than you or I do. Remember too that we are working toward the eventual goal of having nationals take over the seminary program completely.

6. *Outside Courses:* There may at times be the need and the opportunity for a graduate from one of our seminaries to take a course or more outside our circles for the advancement of his professional growth. For example, we have not taught Hebrew in our Japan seminary program so far. Our most recent graduate, however, is now taking a Hebrew course by correspondence from a Japanese professor who does not belong to our church body.

7. *Involving Nationals in the Work of the Church Body:* Permit me to simply use Japan as an example. We have a church council which is responsible for carrying on the work of our church body between conventions. We also have standing committees and commissions for education, doctrine, literature, radio, liturgics, and constitutional matters. There also is an auditing committee and a committee which annually makes recommendations regarding national pastors' salaries. National pastors and/or lawmen are represented on all of these committees and Commissions. Membership in some of these committees is totally or almost totally national. Most committees have three members: a national pastor, a national layman, and an expatriate missionary. Our constitution, by the way, says nothing about national or expatriate membership on any of these committees. As we work together on these committees, we and our national pastors can't help but grow professionally.

This paper doesn't begin to exhaust the subject of professional growth for our national workers. I, personally, would very much appreciate a frank exchange of ideas in this subject.

I realize too, that to a great extent, I am speaking from the narrow base of my experience in Japan. In Japan we have several factors which I believe tend to favor professional growth. The over-all standard of education in Japan is very high. The social and economic conditions in the country tend to keep any opportunists from studying for the ministry. I realize that these conditions are rather unique. The challenges with regard to professional growth that others face in other countries will, of course, in some respects be quite different from those in Japan.

Finally I would like to say that I think it is important to consider what we are doing in this kind of a study. “Professional growth,” is not a Scriptural term. This is not a study in exegesis as such. “Professional growth,” is a human term. You and I need to look to the Scriptures to see what concept or concepts our Lord would want us to have in mind when we use this term. There will be some area of freedom in the meaning we give to this term. There will be some area of overlap with what the world means with this term. For us who are followers of Jesus of Nazareth, however, I am convinced that the essential element in “Professional Growth,” must be growth in the Gospel.