

World Mission Seminary Conference
Leland, Michigan
May 31 - June 4, 1982
Day three: *Setting our sights.*

THE WORLD MISSION SEMINARY CURRICULUM,
TO WHAT EXTENT SHOULD IT MATCH THE MEQUON PROGRAM?

The assigned title of this paper makes it obvious that, at least to some degree, we will be using the curriculum of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon as a guide for the establishment, revision or evaluation of the curricula in our various world mission seminaries. The question, of course, is to what degree is this necessary or desirable. The theme for day three of this conference "setting our sights" suggests that we are looking for the ideal in our curricula. But how to go about determining what that ideal curriculum should be?

The function of a seminary will, to a large extent, determine what its curriculum should be. But to determine its function the establishment and acceptance of goals, or purpose or objectives are necessary. This necessity has been recognized by the seminary at Mequon as well as by the mission seminaries in our foreign fields. This necessity was also discussed at previous World Mission Seminary Conferences. In the last such conference in El Paso, 1978, a paper dealing with guidelines for worker training programs presented the following purpose for said programs:

The PURPOSE of our worker training programs in world mission fields is to prepare men for the public ministry who will preach and teach the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ and carry out their pastoral ministrations in accordance with the Holy Scriptures as the verbally inspired, inerrant Word of God and in full agreement with the historic Confessions of the Lutheran Church.¹

And in a footnote the author acknowledges that "the wording of this PURPOSE follows almost verbatim the statement of purpose appearing in the Catalog of the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary...." If our world mission seminaries have established and accepted the above mentioned PURPOSE as their own it should be clear that the function of the WLS is identical with the function of our various mission seminaries. Therefore it is also worthwhile to note what objectives WLS has stated as the means whereby it hopes

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to carry out its purpose. "To help the student 1) to apprehend God's Word clearly, and 2) to apply it faithfully."² Certainly all recognize that these objectives also state clearly our own objectives.

This sameness in our purpose and objectives is based on the sameness of the work of the church, because "to prepare men for the public ministry" is to prepare them for the work of the church. The work of the church is one work: that given to it by Jesus, MAKE DISCIPLES. It is not based "on regional or passing circumstances but upon the nature of the church and the nature of the ministry."³ The Gospel has the same story regardless of what language announces it. The same Holy Spirit works through it. The men that hear it all have the same problem, sin; all live in the same condition of condemnation; all are afflicted by the same sinful flesh; and all have the same enemy, Satan. And God's love for their lost souls knows no national, linguistic or cultural boundaries. Mankind the world over, whether in the USA, Africa, Japan, etc., has ^{same} one great, foremost need: The need of a Savior from sin and hell. God has provided them with that Savior and our one work is to be His witnesses. That is also the one work for which all our seminaries must prepare national pastors.

The necessity for fully prepared pastors is also the same for our foreign fields as it is in Wisconsin. It might even be argued that there is more need on a foreign field than in the US for thorough training of pastors. The same doctrinal dangers exist for them as for our pastors in the States. Their isolation contributes to the attractiveness of many ecumenical ideas. The hostility of the native culture against sound Biblical Christianity can be much more severe. Setbacks often appear more devastating, especially since the numbers we are working with in national churches ~~is~~ ^{are} less.

The WELS has established these national churches in foreign fields through much effort. The WELS expects the national churches to maintain a staunch, sound, Biblical confessional basis. The WELS expects to remain in fellowship with the national churches it has established. Can these expectations be met unless we have a thoroughly trained pastorate serving the national churches? Prof. Lawrenz in a paper delivered at

the very first world seminary conference ~~in which he~~ spoke of this concern. "If they are to be true sister churches, however, it will be necessary to train indigenous public servants of the Word who will be *thoroughly grounded* in a sound Scripture-based confessional position and who will be *well prepared and equipped* to carry out the tasks of Christ's ministry...."⁴ (emphasis mine).

Because the seminary of the WELS has the same purpose and objectives as do our world mission seminaries, because the work of the pastors of the WELS is the same work that we expect to be carried out by pastors of the national churches (compare the standard call form used by WELS with the call forms used in the various fields. Were they perhaps even translated directly?) and because of the concern of the WELS, and of us as well, for fidelity to God's Word we must set the same standards for our pastors of the national churches as we expect from our pastors in the U.S. This will necessitate some serious re-evaluation on our part. In the past much has been said and written about "auxillary forms of the public ministry"⁵ including evangelists, catechists, and lay leaders who work under ~~the~~ supervision of a pastor. In fact in the "Guidelines" mentioned above it is even supposed that such auxillary forms will "play a more important role in foreign situations than in the United States."⁶ (The "Guidelines" assume that this is true but the only reason hinted at is lack of financial support for a more fully trained ministry.) Why have we had this lowered expectation in the past? Was it because we did not yet have time or manpower to establish a seminary program? Was it because we subconsciously felt that our national churches would never be able to take over the complete and full work of the church on their own? Were we merely following what was the popular mission philosophy of the time? I do not ask with tongue in cheek, I'm looking for answers. I was not a part of the team at that time, nor have I seen any rationale in writing. Unless we harbor some notions of racial inferiority there is no reason to assume that our students can't be educated sufficiently to meet the higher standards required of fully trained pastors.

If we are going to expect the same standards of our foreign pastors as we do of pastors in the U.S. the answer to the question proposed by the title of this paper should be obvious. Our world mission seminary curriculum should match the Mequon program to the fullest extent possible. Perhaps the single factor that will most hinder our ability to reach this ideal is the chronic manpower shortage experienced on our mission fields. Even if a field is operating with its full complement of workers there is always more to be done than can be handled. And in the majority of cases where our seminary professors have to divide their time between congregational work, administration of the national church, and seminary classes there never seems to be enough time. Perhaps more thought should be given to calling men solely for theological education? But difficulties in meeting our high standards should not cause us to lower the standards. St. Paul also fell short of his goals in his sanctified life. But he didn't lower his standards, rather he said, "I press on toward the goal." (Phil.4:14) We too must press on to the goal of the high standards for our national pastors, which standards can be best attained through a thorough seminary training, such as that set forth in the Mequon program.

Prof. Lawrenz very ably defined what that seminary training must be. "Diligent and prayerful study of God's Word is the very heart of seminary training. It is the main portion of such training. The rest consists in learning to present all of these truths clearly to others in teaching and preaching, in public worship, and in the private care of souls."⁷ The various theological disciplines taught at Mequon certainly contribute to "diligent and prayerful study of God's Word" and then give a very practical application of that Word so that the student can "present these truths clearly to others". World mission seminaries that follow Mequon's curriculum of exegetical, systematic, practical and historical theology will certainly produce national pastors of the calibre that their high calling demands. If we don't want to have second-class Christians, nor second-class pastors we cannot have second-class seminaries.

Obviously cultural differences, especially in societal norms, will occasion modifications in the courses in practical

theology. However the Scriptural bases are absolute, they are not subject to modification. Obviously a thorough knowledge of such cultural differences on the part of the professor is mandatory. It might well be suggested that the man with the most experience on the field be the logical choice for professor of practical theology, better yet, a national pastor, who understands the intricacies of his culture better than any expatriate will, even after twenty years on the field.

Another modification from the ideal curriculum that has been discussed has to do with the use of the original Biblical languages. It has been said that some (many?) of the students in our mission seminaries are unable to work with the Hebrew and Greek. I have not found that to be the case, but my own experience is limited. So in this regard I would simply like to ask some questions. How many times have we actually tried to teach either Hebrew or Greek when the student has been "unable" to learn it? How do we teach exegesis to students who can't work with the original languages? What meaning will a thorough study of hermeneutics have for the student who can't use Hebrew or Greek? I saw a note in the Quarterly (vol. 71, p.306) that Prof Wendland presented a paper to the 1974 world mission seminary conference in Japan entitled "Exegetical work with students who have no thorough knowledge of Hebrew and Greek", but I was unable to find a copy of that paper. (Suggestion: copies of all these sem conference papers should be filed at each mission seminary and copies sent to all newer fields which did not yet have theol. educ. and consequently did not participate in the conferences. Another paper I learned about, but did not have, also by Wendland, "Minimal standards in our seminaries" presented in Japan 1974, may have saved some duplication in this present effort.)

The role of the vicar program in a seminary curriculum must also be given consideration, but I will leave that for a separate paper on the topic scheduled for later today.

Finally, a comment about evaluation. The above mentioned "Guidelines" suggest, "requiring oral and written tests before a Board of Examiners before the calling and ordaining of candidates for the holy ministry."⁸ Since the WELS does not demand such an examination of the pastoral candidates graduated from

WLS, the question "why?" is in order. What is the difference? It is understood that the WELS expects high standards of its pastors, so it can not be that it doesn't care what calibre candidates are turned out. Neither would we suggest that North Americans of German extraction are innately more suitable to be pastors. The obvious answer must be that the high standards of the seminary are known and accepted. Obviously some type of evaluation was carried out prior to graduation and prior to the seminary offering those students as candidates. We are all aware that the evaluation done by the WLS is an on-going process. Why should it be any different on the mission field, in the national church? What purpose will a final examination before a Board of Examiners serve? If a student has satisfactorily completed all the courses of the seminary curriculum, is the Board of Examiners to serve as a judge of the capability of the seminary? There are better ways of evaluating that. And if the student has not completed the required courses and can somehow get by the Board of Examiners, will he be called and ordained anyway? But perhaps the Board was envisioned as checking on morals or motives for entering the ministry? There is no way that a Board can determine motive in only one meeting. No candidate is going to admit he wants to be a pastor so he can receive a regular paycheck. Morals, motives, character and all the rest have to be evaluated during the student's years of study and practice. In eight years (2 years BI, 2 years training and practice as evangelist, 4 years of sem.) we had better have a pretty good idea of what kind of student we have. The evaluation must be an on-going process.

CONCLUSION

The curriculum of the WLS has been developed and tested over more than a century. It has served Christ's church very well. It includes the Biblical and doctrinal courses to enable the student to "apprehend the Word of God clearly," and includes the practical courses to enable him to "apply it faithfully".⁹ Faithfulness to the inspired, inerrant Word motivates us to seek the same results in our world mission seminaries. And if we are seeking the same results, why not use the same means?

End Notes

- ¹ Author not given, "Guidelines for a Worker Training Program to Establish a National Ministry" printed in Missiological Perspectives: E.H.Wendland, Mequon (1981) p.249.
- ² A Self Study of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary: Mequon (1978) p.10*
- ³ Missionary Poetter "The value of the Seminary Conference for world missions" quoted in WLQ vol.68 (1971) p.262.
- ⁴ Prof. Lawrenz "The Importance of Our Mission Seminary Conference And Its Important Basic Concerns" printed in Missiological Perspectives, p.213.*
- ⁵ "Guidelines" Missiological Perspectives p.250.
- ⁶ Loc. Cit. pt.4, p.251.
- ⁷ Prof. Lawrenz "The importance of our mission seminary conference" Missiological Perspectives, p.217.
- ⁸ "Guidelines" Missiological Perspectives, pt. 1.f. p.251.
- ⁹ Self Study, p.10.

* Must reading for all of us involved with seminary work.

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