

DEVELOPING DOGMATIC COURSES ON VARIOUS LEVELS OF INSTRUCTION

OUTLINE

- Introduction: A) The importance of doctrinal training
- 1) For personal justification and sanctification
 - 2) For the spreading of God's Word
 - 3) For the defense of the truth
- B) The levels of doctrinal training
- 1) Lay leadership
 - 2) Evangelists
 - 3) Pastors
- I) What type of men will we train?
- A) What is their cultural background?
 - B) What is their educational background?
 - 1) Their knowledge
 - 2) The learning ability and capacity
 - C) What is their religious background?
 - D) What is their doctrinal background?
- II) What knowledge must each one have for his new role in the public ministry?
- A) As a lay leader
 - B) As an evangelist
 - C) As a pastor
 - 1) As an ordained pastor
 - 2) As a national church leader or professor
- III) What must we provide at each level for his specific duty?
- A) On the lay-leadership level
 - B) On the Bible Institute level
 - C) On the Seminary level

LIMANNS, ERNST H
Developing Dogmatic Courses on Various Levels
of Instruction
Er 101

DEVELOPING DOGMATIC COURSES ON VARIOUS LEVELS OF INSTRUCTION

Fourth World Seminary Conference
Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary
June 21-25, 1976

Ernest Zimdars

Since this paper is to deal with the development of courses in doctrine, dogmatics, systematic theology, or however one chooses to call it, and since this development of courses is for different levels of instruction for the preparation of men for different roles in the public ministry, it must first be established what the role of doctrine or dogmatics plays in the public ministry.

There is no doubt that dogmatics is one of the fundamental disciplines, if not the fundamental discipline, of our entire ministry. Doctrinal knowledge is the tool of each and every Christian, whether he be a layman or a church leader, not only for his personal justification and sanctification, but also for the proclamation of the Gospel in all the world according to Christ's command in the great commission. He stated it quite clearly when he said: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:20). But besides being a tool to be used for personal salvation and for the proclamation of the Gospel, the doctrines also are a weapon to be used to combat all errorists and false teachers, who consciously or unconsciously seek to pervert and destroy the Church of Christ. Therefore we have no other choice but to stand fast and "having our loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:14-17).

In order to stand fast we must have a base, a solid foundation, not only on the pastoral level, but on all levels of the church as far as our doctrines are concerned. This foundation must be laid with each member of our church, so that each one has the sufficient knowledge to accept and trust in his personal justification, which then will make him a fitting tool for the Holy Spirit in sanctification. This foundation of doctrinal knowledge we have already laid in the thorough instruction of Dr. Luther's Small Catechism. So often we hear remarks in our mission in Colombia to the effect that we Lutherans take so long to prepare someone for confirmation and membership in the church, while others

take only a very limited time, with an absolute minimum of doctrinal knowledge. At that even our thorough instruction does not always remove all the implanted errors that one finds on the religious "left" or "right." It does build for a solid foundation and it does strengthen our church.

Once this foundation has been laid, then the great commission can be heeded by those that have been instructed in our midst. On a personal level we hope that all will be witnesses and evangelists, who will use their doctrinal knowledge as the tool and weapon or defense it was intended to be. This we expect from each and every Christian, whether young or old, that he be a fitting witness of his own salvation.

But today we are speaking of levels that are above that of the ordinary layman, beyond the stage of Catechism instruction. We are talking of those who in some way will serve in the church as ministers of the Gospel. These levels can be divided into three phases. 1) The lay leadership level. 2) The evangelist level. 3) The pastoral level.

We will now briefly define these levels, since in a later section we will speak about the role of each man in the public ministry, or what his duty should be at each level. The level of lay leadership for biblical reasons will confine itself almost exclusively to that of men in the congregation, although in a few cases, women may also be included, such as their participation in the Sunday School on various levels or in certain organizations such as the L.W.M.S. in the States.

For the men of the congregation there are different activities in which they can participate as lay leaders. There are the offices of elders, congregational leaders and membership in the church council. There is also on the lay leader level the participation in the Sunday School, either as teachers or as superintendents. We also would expect some lay leadership as far as the instruction in adult Bible classes, and the periodic leading of the congregation in the service, in the absence of a pastor or evangelist. Finally we speak of lay leadership also on a national church level, as far as national councils or national advisory councils, such as is found in our church in Africa. Both of these are certainly very important functions, and should entail a more thorough and deeper doctrinal knowledge than that of the average layman. The entire lay leadership level should be carried on under the guidance and supervision of a pastor.

The second level, also carried on under pastoral supervision and guidance, is that level, which is the product of a Bible Institute, which we can loosely

classify as the evangelist level. This level will include all those that are studying in the Bible Institute, preparing for the office of evangelist, or that have finished the two or three year course and are either in charge of a specific area or congregation or are ready to enter the seminary.

The third level is the seminary and upon completion the graduation into the ministry, whereby after a number of years of vicaring follows the ordination into the Holy Ministry, when we assume or hope that a pastor is fully responsible to work without direct supervision, although this may not always be the case. This level may then lead into leadership on a national scale as officials in the national church, or professors in the Bible Institute or Seminary.

I.

We now proceed to point No. 1 of our outline. The question we hope to answer is this: What type of men will we train?

This question may seem unimportant at first, especially to those that are faced with one culture, where there is not much difference between a rural and urban upbringing and education. But for instance in our field in Colombia, where the background is so varied, not just between the rural and urban areas, but in the urban areas themselves with their great division of classes, this question assumes a greater importance.

The cultural background has a direct relationship to their future usefulness in the public ministry. A rural man, who will best serve in a rural area, even though living in the same country, may have a completely different cultural heritage than an upper class man, whose culture is based more and more on materialism, where spiritual values no longer have a deep-rooted meaning. Without going into detail on this point, it should be taken into consideration that culture plays an important role in a man's attitude and values as far as the family, the church, the country and the world is concerned. Of course, we have the objective as instructors to form and train them so that whatever in their culture was objectionable to the goal of the church be redefined or a different value put on it. Cultural differences should in the long run have nothing to do with their doctrinal knowledge and application, since the Gospel remains the same Gospel and the Law the same Law in all cultures and all nations.

The second point is a direct outflow of their cultural background, and that is, what is their educational background? Here even to a greater degree can one note the difference, as for instance in Colombia, in the completely different background of a rural and urban area, of rich and poor. In some countries this may not be of great significance, but in ours in South America it

certainly is. First of all we must know what their knowledge is upon coming to us. A rural man very likely has not gone beyond the primary level of education. He knows how to read and write, but beyond a few basic skills his knowledge is nearly nil. And if his knowledge is low, then very likely his capacity to absorb more facts is also low. On the other hand a city bred, and college educated man has an equal ability to learn and to absorb facts as any other educated person in the world. This is a benefit, but there is also a detriment. A rural trained person will not be full of modern ideas about philosophy, socialism, etc. We have an empty glass that we can fill with the truth. The educated and college trained man will have received a liberal dose of modern thought, and to remove this may take some doing and time. Philosophy and religion do not mix, at least not as far as we are concerned. First the glass has to be emptied and then filled with God's Word. Exactly this problem we have encountered in Colombia.

We now come specifically to the religious background of each student. Each country will vary considerably on this point. In some countries animism is the main background. In others it is a strong influence of ancestor worship. In others it is a very liberal background where all religions are considered equal. In Colombia we again have a cross section of all of these. We have a liberal tendency; we have animism and worship of celestial bodies. We have fanatical Catholicism and a liberal Catholicism. On the other extreme we have a fanatical sectarianism.

Digressing briefly we can mention the problems we have encountered in our Bible Institute in Colombia. One man has a Catholic background and the other two have a sectarian background. The one has little biblical knowledge and stumbles on the most insignificant word, trying to read into it much more than God ever intended. The others have a greater biblical knowledge, but their doctrines are quite often faulty or weak. They put a great emphasis on points of adiaphora, the works of the Holy Spirit and faith, but a solid doctrinal foundation is lacking. And so we have a double task. First we must remove the errors of any earlier training, and secondly we must teach them what the Word of God actually says.

The cultural, educational and religious backgrounds will vary greatly from field to field. But we must take them into account upon training our men, and certainly upon drawing up a doctrinal course. This does not mean that we will give some men less doctrine than others, or that we will change our doctrine to suit their needs, but it does tell us on what points we should put more

emphasis and stress when teaching them. Their background may not necessarily help them in the training, but it can certainly hinder our efforts. For that reason it is worthwhile to know what their different backgrounds are so that we can be prepared in our training, and take them into consideration when it is time to employ them in the ministry.

II.

The second important question before us is: What will each man have to do at each level? This question, once answered, will then be directly related to the last important question which concerns itself with the knowledge that we must provide. According to the outline we have divided this into three levels. At the lay leadership level there are many different tasks in which we hope to employ the men of the congregation. They can be useful as elders or members of the church council. Besides being leaders in the congregations, they will also have the responsibility to make sure that the pastors continue in the true doctrine. In order to do that they will have to know it quite thoroughly. The lay leader will also share in the responsibility of helping the pastor in applying church discipline, and exhorting those that are weak in the faith. There is also the responsibility over against the Sunday school. In order to teach doctrine, even on a scale designed for children, he will have to know it and be firm in it, and correct if necessary whenever an error creeps in. This is a double responsibility of a Sunday school superintendent.

In certain cases a lay leader may be called upon to conduct an adult Bible class. In such a case quite a bit of knowledge will be necessary, depending on the area and the congregation where he will teach. Even if he does not have all the answers, he certainly should be able to give most of them. On a national level, as a member of a church or synodical council, he will have to be responsible and knowledgeable in order to keep the teachings of the church pure and defend them against errors. This could happen in any foreign field, if the expatriates for one reason or other would suddenly have to leave, and leave the field in the hands of lay leaders and evangelists.

From the lay leadership level we go to the evangelist level, which is the product of the Bible Institute. This ministry likewise will be carried out, wherever possible, under supervision. It includes the two to three years that the men are studying under us in the Bible Institute, when they will work in different churches, and the several years after graduation before they enter the seminary. On this level we will expect the men to handle most doctrinal problems on their own, to prepare their own classes, unless a difficult question

arises, and to write their own sermons to a limited degree, even though they may also be prepared for them as is the case in Africa, and as we are now also trying in Colombia and Mexico. These men will have to be able to give answers to most doctrinal questions in the field. All this requires a fairly basic but thorough knowledge of all the doctrines of the church.

The final level is that of the seminary student and graduate, and the ordained minister. What will their responsibility be, especially upon being ordained? There really should be no difference between an ordained pastor in the States and those anywhere else. They should be able to stand on their own feet as far as doctrine is concerned. Each pastor will have to handle the problems in the congregation according to the doctrines he has learned. He will not only have to know the truth in order to teach it, but at the same time defend it against false doctrine, and to do it authoritatively.

We may add two subpoints under this level. A man who has proven himself in his work as an ordained minister, certainly some day may be called to teach at the Bible Institute or Seminary. In order to teach he will have to know, and if possible have tried his knowledge in the field for some time. He may also be required to lead the church on a national level, something which has to happen sooner or later on every field. We want the church to be indigenous, and the leaders able to stand on their own feet, so that the church remains truthful to God's Word.

III.

Now we come to the last point of our outline: What must we provide at each level for each specific duty? It is well to keep in mind the advice of Pastor Wendland when it comes to preparing materials for instruction. Don't take anything for granted, and always aim low! Time and again we are discovering that what we thought was common knowledge by our students, in reality was completely unknown.

We do hope, on the lay leader level, that those who will want to serve the church will have studied the catechism to a sufficient degree to know these basic doctrines without doubt and hesitation. The doctrines explained in Luther's Small Catechism are already in most cases deeper than those taught in other churches. But we do not expect a man to be able to supervise or teach in the church with just this basis. On the lay leader level the catechism instruction should be supplemented at least with a study of the booklet "This We Believe." This booklet will give a layman a basic understanding of the doctrines of our church, especially as they show the errors that are quite prevalent today. The

use of this booklet can be augmented with study guides and simple review tests on each chapter.

At the Bible Institute level, which at times can also be shared with lay leaders who show a capability for handling some of these courses, we can divide the studies into two years. At the first year level an emphasis should be put on a thorough knowledge of the Bible verses as they apply to certain doctrines. Various courses are already available either in English or Spanish, such as the course "Search the Scriptures," and the course used in Africa "Go and Teach," and finally Notes on the Catechism by Studtman, as translated by Melendez into the Spanish language. These courses on the first year level of the Bible Institute are prepared in such a way that they have frequent study guides to help the student pick out the salient facts from each lesson, and also include continual review questions to make sure that the facts are indeed being absorbed by the student.

On the second year Bible Institute level, which at times may also correspond to the first year according to the educational background of the students, major emphasis is placed on the study of Professor Schuetze's book "Basic Doctrines of the Bible." This course likewise puts the stress on the basic doctrines necessary for an evangelist. It is sufficient in depth on most points to provide the student with a needed textbook on the main points of doctrine. At times an emphasis is put on certain doctrines by the teacher according to the needs of the specific field. Each chapter, of which there are sixteen, is augmented with review questions and study guides to pick out the important points. The student during the second year should also learn the meaning of specific words used in systematic theology, and especially required for further study in the seminary. The study of such terminology should be added as the words occur in the course, or can be studied separately. Again, it should be remembered that the Bible Institute is the time for learning the basics, and therefore we should not assume that the student knows too much, nor that he should get the idea that what he is learning is too simple and easy for him. Surprisingly even the teacher or professor learns quite a bit when teaching a certain course on the Bible Institute level.

Finally we come to the seminary level, which for us in Colombia is still in the future, but something we must still think about because no national church is complete without a seminary. As far as dogmatics is concerned, our best guide at present is the course or courses offered in Africa. In the first year a review of certain points of doctrine as taught in the Bible

Institute is certainly warranted, especially after the student has been absent for a number of years.

As a text "A Summary of Christian Doctrine" by E.W.A. Koehler can be used, or as in the case of our Spanish field, the Christian Doctrines by John T. Mueller may also be used, which is available in the Spanish language. It is somewhat deep, and the basic facts must be sifted out for use in the seminary. Finally, we have tried on a partial basis, the use of Professor Johannes P. Meyer's seminary dogmatic notes. They are partially translated into the Spanish language, being shortened to some degree with the omission of the Latin quotes and some negative or counter arguments to certain Christian doctrines. This course may hold promise on the seminary level, especially since every point of doctrine is backed up by many Scripture passages. This course again will have to be augmented with many review questions and tests. Finally the student at the seminary level should have more research material available and be able to make use of it. such as commentaries, if they are available in his language.

Although the title of this paper is listed as the development of courses on dogmatics on various levels, in the long run the best way of getting a solid idea of what we should prepare and teach, is to put our heads together and share our ideas, our results and failures, so that the others may benefit by them. Only in this way can a truly unified development take place, taking into account the difference of our fields, that will make our students in our national churches the theologians we want and need. ✓

Ernst
Zinders