

THE THEOLOGICAL TRAINING OF INSTITUTIONAL MISSIONARIES¹

By Frederic E. Blume

Dear Brethren in the Lord's Work:

As I understand the assignment given to me, you are not asking for a discussion of theological training in general. We shall take for granted that the institutional missionary as well as the parish pastor, the teacher in one of our church schools, the professor at college and seminary, is to be thoroughly grounded in the teachings of the Word of God. We shall as we proceed, of course, likewise assume that whatsoever is finally accomplished by the institutional missionary is done by means of the Gospel and by that alone. As I understand your assignment, however, you are asking rather specifically how I would conceive of my assignment as teacher in the course in Pastoral Theology, and in particular in that department of the discipline which is to prepare the pastor for work with the individual soul. In this matter we of the faculty of the Seminary at Thiensville do not think of preparing, specifically, institutional missionaries. However the portion of the course in Pastoral Theology that deals with the general problem of pastoral counseling would also be that part of the work at the Seminary that would be of a special interest to those who are doing the work which we commonly designate as that of the institutional missionary.

Permit me also to remind you that our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary at Thiensville is a theoretical, not a practical, seminary. That is to say, we aim in the first place at imparting those basic insights and those fundamental skills which the individual then will apply in his call in his particular place. It is fundamental points of view that we are interested in, rather than the imparting of certain skills, methods of approach, direct and practical solutions of problems and answers to the questions that may arise in whatever form of the ministry it is that the students before us will some day find themselves. When I say this, I do not want to be understood as implying that it would be the ideal procedure, or even a good one, to discuss the problems of the ministry as it were in a vacuum without constant reference to the practical questions confronting the pastor and the missionary. But there is a basic difference between trying to anticipate the sort of problem that the student in the future will have to meet and then giving him the answer to all possible questions that might arise, and the effort to lead, guide, and help that student to realize what the basic problems of his ministry will most probably be, what his basic attitudes in them on the basis of the teachings of the Gospel ought to be, and then making the attempt to show that student at the hand of specific concrete examples how the situations that will confront him in the ministry have in the past been met and how the questions that will be raised for him have been answered by others.

Although we do not have a specific course in the work of the institutional missionary, certainly what is taught at the Seminary concerning the pastoral care of the individual is that part of the course that should in particular prepare the future institutional missionary for his life's calling.

I do not have any illusions about how complete or satisfactory our preparation of students in this most difficult aspect of pastoral work will be. Anything like proficiency in helping the individual with his problems can come only with considerable maturity. I cannot help recalling the answer given to a question directed to a lecturer at the Milwaukee County Hospital for Mental Diseases as to the means by which a pastor might best prepare himself for work with the individual. The lecturer answered, "Get about fifteen years of experience under your belt as quickly as possible!" Yet, while I know that there can be no substitute for experience in this matter, I still believe that the student's years at the Seminary ought also specifically prepare him for work with the individual soul so that his early experiences in the parish ministry may be as meaningful as possible for him.

¹ An essay presented to the Conference of Institutional Missionaries at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on October 24, 1958, and here published at the request of the Conference.

I also feel that certain things should be pointed out to him that could possibly prevent him from committing disastrous blunders in his dealings with the individual just because he is not fully aware of the nature of the problems involved.

What I shall have to say therefore about the theological training of institutional missionaries will be but an outline of that part of my course in Pastoral Theology that has to do with the pastoral care of the individual, *Privatseelsorge* as our fathers used to call this part of the theological discipline. I shall in the first place try to point out to you what I conceive to be the basic attitudes and insights necessary for the pastor in his dealings with the individual and his problems, and then I shall try to describe for you how I go about making the attempt to help the student acquire these basic insights and elementary skills so important for every minister of the Gospel as well as for the institutional missionary.

What then are some of the basic attitudes that I as the teacher in the course in Pastoral Theology attempt to inculcate on our students? In the first place I try to bring it home to them that the pastor has the God-given responsibility of caring for the spiritual welfare of his people in this way that he, as need and occasion arise, seeks to bring the word of God close to the heart of the individual. The budding theologian is shown what are the prerequisites for this part of his work: in the first place, a thoroughly evangelical spirit (call it pastoral tact if you will); secondly, there is the need of individualizing the problem according to the age, sex, temperament, social standing, and education of the person whom the pastor is trying to help with his problem. In the third place it is pointed out that every department of human knowledge is here grist for the pastor's mill, especially those disciplines or subjects of study that have to do with the complex problem of the human personality. An attempt is made to show the student that nowhere else but in the Gospel ministry will he be able to make use of everything that he knows. And finally stress is laid upon this that much can be learned about the necessary insights, methods, and techniques from the vast literature that has built up around the study of the individual and the individual's problems. For the minister of the Gospel any indebtedness in this matter will certainly be only a formal one, but there is still much that he can learn from the insights that derive from present day psychiatry, psychotherapy, psychosomatic medicine, and the like.

In developing a sound approach to the problems of pastoral counseling the pastor or the missionary will consciously develop a willingness to be accessible at all times. The people whom he is to help will have to feel that their pastor is the kind of person who is willing to listen to them and to hear them out whatever may be the sort of thing that they wish to tell him. The pastoral counselor's attitude over against the individual will above all have to be an evangelical one, for such an attitude is the only kind that will instill confidence. Here a critical and discerning study of some of the modern works bearing on the subject should be of help to almost every worker in the field. Surely, we shall have to deny the basic assumptions of much of present-day psychiatry. We cannot share its view that sin is but a moral weakness common to us all; we will commonly be irked by the utilitarian and materialistic attitude of many of the present-day workers and writers in this field, and we certainly cannot share their mechanistic view of the human spirit and its workings. But what can commonly be learned from contemporary literature in the field² is the realization that the person before us is an individual and that we have never before dealt with precisely the same kind of case and most likely will never do so again. The methods employed by people working in secular areas in arriving at an understanding of the individual's problem will very often be of help to us engaged in the Gospel ministry. More often than not the problem is not understood and not realized by the individual before us. As preachers and theologians we all have much to learn here. Our first and most natural inclination is to mount the pulpit and to declaim on the nature of the situation and on the remedies called for as we see them. Everyone with even a little experience in this field will realize that the prime requisite here is that we get the other person to talk and that we listen. For only thus can we come to a full realization of the nature of the problem confronting him and only thus will be able to help that individual solve his own problem. Here is where the stress must lie: the individual whom I am counseling must

² A few items out of the bibliography may be of interest here: Bergsten, Göte *Pastoral Psychology* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1948); Bonnell, J. S. *Psychology for Pastor and People* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1948); Rogers, Carl *Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1942). The work of such writers as Adler, Menninger, Mulder, Overstreet, and Oliver in this area is also often valuable.

come to the solution of his own problem. I cannot provide that solution for him, but I can do much toward helping him arrive at that solution.

In this connection the problems of the human personality are commonly discussed on the basis of a group of recognized emotional needs, call them instincts or urges if you will. Almost every writer on the subject has his own selection and his own groupings, and while we, of course, admit that there is no divinely revealed psychology, that is to say, no outline in Scripture telling us precisely how the human spirit works in all matters of detail, still a study of the basic needs of people who have problems will be of help to us too. William E. Hulme³ for instance speaks of our need for a listener, our need for maturity, our need for understanding, and our need for confession. When these needs, whatever we may call them, are met in a satisfactory way, a well-adjusted personality results so far as this is possible for sinful man in this sin-ridden world. And yet we must be quick to note that all attempts at placing the emotional needs of people into special classes will be only partially successful. The human spirit has depths that cannot be fathomed; emotions are generally not simple but are of a mixed nature. We will, however, realize that the person who is facing life and the world, time and eternity with trust in God and love toward God and his neighbor will develop an increasingly outgoing, unselfish point of view. Nevertheless the Christian too may because of the imperfection of his sanctification, in times of stress, and under the influence of his sinful nature, develop a seclusive locked-up-tight personality. In such times especially he needs the instruction and comfort of the Word of God and the understanding and guidance of his pastor or the missionary. Above all he needs to pray. His locked-up-tightness may result from a number of situations: grief, which he has not borne in the spirit of Job; disappointment and failure, which he does not meet in the spirit of Romans 8:18–23 so that he may continue to reproach himself for not having reached complete success; the individual may suppress conflicting emotions and simply refuse to recognize the fact that he is at war with himself (cf. the example of Saul, of whom we read in I Samuel, chapters 15, 18, and 19); the individual may suffer from the retention of useless fears, worries and rages, a primary cause of what we today commonly call psychosomatic illness. Luther already displayed remarkable insight into these matters, for he once said of a noted individual who was taken ill, “That is a result of sorrow, which is often a cause of such disorders; for when the heart is troubled and sorrowful, then follows also weakness of the body. The diseases of the heart are the real diseases, such as sorrow, temptation, etc.”⁴ It ought to be noted here that psychosomatic medicine today has made no essential advance over Luther’s insight.

How now can we meet the basic needs of people who have problems? I do not believe that we as pastors need go one step beyond four major doctrines of Holy Writ that deal with the problem. There is first of all the Scriptural doctrine of man. Man, who was created in the image of God, fell into sin; thereby the evil which had formerly been external to him now became a part of his being, Genesis 6:3. Man’s conscience however remains with him, and in the Christian a terrific tension develops between these two elements in man’s being, Romans 7:18–25. Of himself man finds no salvation. Instead he seeks an escape rather than a solution: after the fall Adam in the garden hid himself. It is only by faith in Christ’s atonement that the individual finds his guilt removed and the tensions relaxed in the restored fellowship with God. After faith has accepted the blessings of Christ’s work, the Christian has restored to him a sense of confidence and security (imperfect though this will be because of sin), for he rests in the wounds of Christ.

The second doctrine of which we as counselors ought to make abundant use is the Bible doctrine of the priesthood of the believer. The basis of this doctrine is the reconciliation between man and God. The believer is now a priest of the most high God, and it behooves us as pastors to seek to develop every believer’s priestly capacities. The third doctrine of Holy Writ that we must keep constantly before us in our work as counselors is the doctrine of Christian liberty. The reverse of Christian liberty is legalism, which is actually an escape into the righteousness of externals. The righteousness of the legalist is really a front. He cannot face reality; so he cannot mature. The basis of sin is pride which makes the sinner a competitor with God. Christian love, the opposite of pride, breaks down our wall of ego-centricity and joins us in the spirit of fellowship with our fellow believers.

³ “The Theology of Counseling” in *Theology Today*, Vol. IX, No. 2 (July 1952) pp. 189–196.

⁴ Quoted in Kemp, Charles F. *Physicians of the Soul: A History of Pastoral Counseling* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947) p. 40.

The Christian, with the image of God partially restored to him and because the Holy Spirit enables him, brings his activities and his motives into line with the Will of God. His doing so is of course likewise entirely a gift of God's grace, but the believer's love of God makes him want to do the Will of God. Here is Christian liberty in its deepest meaning (John 8:32). The fourth doctrine that needs to be stressed by us in our work as counselors is the doctrine of the Church. We need constantly apply it to the case of the depressed individual. Let us remind him that every Christian is a member of the body of Christ. The Lord himself is its glorious head. This body of Christ, the true Church of God, has a firm foundation; hence a Christian is never alone, and even in this life he may be certain of the love, the understanding, and the fellowship of those in whom the Spirit of Christ also dwells.

When the problems of the individual go beyond the range of normalcy, then we have before us a case of mental illness. The institutional missionary will, of course, have to face these problems directly. Often his work will be in a mental institution. But every pastor, too, needs to know enough of mental illness to realize its nature and to see that cases of mental illness require the attention of a medical worker in the field and are definitely not the pastor's business. It would be unwise to say the least for an individual who would not presume to prescribe in the case of a king-size headache to attempt diagnosis and treatment in a case of mental illness, certainly the most complex and difficult to handle of all the disabilities known to man. Our Seminary students have impressed upon them that mental illness is not that spiritual illness which is the pastor's primary concern. That is, mental illness is not in and of itself sin, and yet it is a real illness, as real as a case of appendicitis or a broken leg. Very often it will be the pastor who first realizes that what he has before him is a disturbed personality, one out of touch with reality. Because of the nature of his work it will be the pastor who first realizes that a marked change in personality has occurred in the person with whom he is dealing. Then it becomes his God-given duty to impress upon the family concerned that mental illness is no disgrace but a trial sent by God like any other serious illness. He will also ever bear in mind that every mental case bears with it the perpetual possibility of homicide and suicide. He must know that delay in seeking proper diagnosis and treatment can only be dangerous and expensive, and at the same time the pastor must know enough about mental illness so that the words he uses to the patient do not of themselves bring mental and emotional reactions that may retard recovery.

But whatever may be the nature of the human ill with which the pastor is confronted he has the obligation to apply the most fitting words of admonition and comfort from Scripture. His people can expect this of him as their pastor. He comes as one who cares for their souls, not merely as a family friend. Naturally he will have to oppose the notion that his prayers are to serve the primary purpose of a physical cure. Rather he will strive to make the patient and his family see that physical recovery is after all not the main objective of his ministrations but rather that the main objective is submission in faith to the Will of God. The pastor and missionary will, on the other hand, also have occasion to combat fatalism.

What has just been said is at best but a sketchy outline of the insights and attitudes that we today aim at in the course in Pastoral Counseling. I am sure that you realize that not everything could be touched on here, but I am trying to dwell on those aspects of our work that are today perhaps somewhat different from what they have been in times past.

I am sure that you will also be interested in knowing how we today go about trying to accomplish the goals which we have set for ourselves. In the first place we ought to note here that the entire course in Pastoral Theology has undergone a realignment in the last several years. Since many of our men go out for a year of vicarage after their Middler year at the Seminary, it seemed advisable in the main to shift the material that had been treated in the Senior year into the Middler year of the course. Today we discuss the pastor in his work with the individual in the Middler year and then consider the pastor in his relation to the congregation as a whole during the Senior year. There are, of course, slight modifications of this general plan. What we do now is this. During the first semester of the Middler year Paul's First Epistle to Timothy is read in the original Greek. Not much time can be spent on the technical problems of exegesis because of the limitations of time, but stress is laid on the practical aspects and the application of the truths set forth in First Timothy. Then in the second semester of the Middler year the pastor in his work with the individual is considered. Two phases of that work

are, however, reserved for consideration during the Senior year. These two are: first the problems of pastoral counseling which have just been outlined; and secondly matters that have to do with church discipline. Two periods a week are given to the subject throughout the year with both the Middlers and the Seniors. The Seniors then discuss the pastor in his relations with the congregation as such and also the matters that have to do with personal guidance and church discipline.

In teaching the courses in Pastoral Theology I am also following the practice of turning the course into a seminar wherever possible. This means simply that most of the time the students are listening to a fellow student lecture rather than the instructor. For instance, First Timothy is divided up into as many sections as there are members in the class, and each member is held to give his exegesis of the section assigned to him, to note how it was practically applied in the days of Paul and what practical applications we are to make of the truths set forth in this particular passage. You can well imagine that some pretty lively discussions ensue. In the second semester of the Middler year where much of the time is taken up with the consideration of the problems of the sick call I have finally come to the point where I venture to have a sick call demonstrated before the class. At first I hesitated to try anything like such a demonstration. Frankly I was afraid that the attitude of the class toward what would be done there might not be as wholesome as it could be. But I find that here too I have underestimated our students. I have felt that the plan would work best if I would be the patient in the case. Our sick call demonstration has been anything but farcical. Many students have individually assured me that the time and the effort expended in this direction has been very helpful to them and very worthwhile. Naturally the literature in this area⁵ is studied, and exercises are assigned to the students. During the Middler year there is hardly time for any more work of a practical nature than that dealing with the matter of the sick call. In the Senior year, however, I have of late been following quite a different policy and find it extremely satisfactory. In this year as in the Middler year we have two hours a week in Pastoral Theology. In one of these we do the normal class work of studying a prepared outline, considering the literature of the subject, and dealing with questions and problems as they present themselves. In the second period of the week, however, the class is again turned into a seminar. During this year the seminar portion of the course includes the following: to each one of the twenty-three members of the Senior class there is assigned a general topic for a seminar report by him. You may be interested in the nature of these topics. Here they are: Baptism—Starting a Christian Day School—Maintaining and Expanding a Christian Day School—Pastor-Teacher Relations—Pastoral Problems of the Instruction Class—Confirmation—Holy Communion—Dealing With Lodge Members—Keeping What We Have (the lapsed Lutheran)—Work With Young People—Ladies' and Men's Societies—Enlisting our Members in Church Work (Evangelism)—The Pastoral Call—The Sick Call, with demonstration—The Pastor and the Mentally and Emotionally Ill—Institutional Mission Work—The Pastor as Organizer Within the Congregation—The Pastor as Missionary (canvassing)—Founding a Congregation as Organization—The Congregation and the Synod—Collecting Money for Local, Synodical, and Charitable Purposes—Adult Instruction and Bible Classes—and finally, Burial. One of these topics is assigned to each Senior, and he has received the following instructions: "1. Read what literature is available on the subject; 2. Consult with at least three men in the active work on the problem. Observe them in action wherever possible. Discuss with them methods, pitfalls, successes, etc.; 3. Report to the class on the day assigned. Here be concrete and practical. Demonstrate wherever possible." In preparing his report the student is invited to consult with me the instructor on the nature and scope of the work. If he needs any help and advice, we commonly discuss the problem in advance quite thoroughly. Then he reads what literature he can find and makes his visits to the people in the active work, discussing with them the various aspects of the problem assigned. Then he draws up his report. He may do this in outline form, but I insist on this that I see the outline and have the opportunity to discuss it with him before he presents his report to the class. Each student in the class is given a duplicate copy of the outline, and there is to be sufficient time after the report during the class period for a discussion of the report and of the topic in general. I find that the students get a great deal of help from the men in the practical work with whom they are thus consulting. In addition to this purely academic work we try to bring into the course in Pastoral

5 For example: Lauterbach, William A. *Ministering to the Sick* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955).

Theology just as much as we can of what I like to think of as laboratory work in the subject. On the one hand we bring to the Seminary wherever possible men who have specialized information to give to the students. Sometimes this occurs on the basis of student initiative and an outside speaker is invited to a student forum. But I as instructor in Pastoral Theology also make it a point to bring representative men to speak to the students on their particular field of interest. Our Institutional Missionary, Pastor Arnold Schroeder, has been with us quite regularly in the past. We hear one pastor who has had a great deal of experience in counseling in matters of marital difficulty, and every year I like to get a professional psychiatrist whose basic point of view I believe I can trust to speak especially to the Seniors on what he feels a pastor should know about the field of psychiatry. In addition to bringing these experts to us, we as a class are in the habit of going to them. Wherever it is feasible to do so, we take what we might call field trips. We have annually, for instance, been visiting Bethesda Lutheran Home at Watertown. There we hear lectures by the professional staff on the work of the institution and then make a tour of the various wards and sections of the home. Pastor Schroeder has been kind enough to arrange for us an annual visit to the Hospital for Mental Diseases, and here too we hear lectures by the Professional staff and are directly introduced to the various types of mental illness being treated at that institution. This phase of the work is in its infancy among us, but I believe that it can and should be considerably expanded.⁶ That there will be many practical difficulties in this respect you, of course, will appreciate.

What has so far been said will, I believe, give all of you an insight into what our policy and what our practice is at the Seminary in the matter of preparing our theologians for the work of the institutional missionary. My own philosophy on the subject I might sum up by saying that while I am convinced that there is no substitute for experience, I do believe that it is good that our students get, as it were, a certain amount of experience by proxy, either by way of reading and study or by means of these various laboratory experiences in the field. Such proxy experience will have the wholesome effect of making this whole aspect of their future work less strange to them. It should warn them where the dangers and pitfalls lie. It should enable them to gain the greatest amount of good out of their practical experience when the opportunity to have such becomes theirs. And above all it is my prayer that there may be instilled into the hearts of our future pastors and missionaries and teachers the God-given grace of humility that will enable them, no matter how long or how varied their experience may be, to remain humble learners and simple pupils of the Word of Him who in all truth could call Himself the good shepherd of the sheep.

⁶ Since this essay was prepared and delivered, the Senior Class has visited the Wisconsin State Prison at Waupun and Central State Hospital at the same place; a visit to the Milwaukee County Hospital for Mental Diseases is being planned for January, 1959.