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The Relationship Between the Church's Program for Ministerial Training and Her Mission Program*

By W. C. BIRKNER

THE formulation of the theme to which I am to address myself indicates that our Church has become aware that the relationship of two vital parts of her program, namely, Missions and Ministerial Training, deserves some attention and a closer scrutiny at this time. The fact that occasionally the expressions "problem," or "dilemma," or "difficulty," or even "rivalry" are heard when the relationship of these two areas of activity is under discussion, is in itself an admission that this question has not always been clearly defined and a confession that not all members of the Church have arrived at the same answer.

Certainly it would be presumptuous for anyone to claim that a thorough analysis of the relationship between missions and ministerial training can be made within a very limited time. Nor will the Church wish to grant authority to any individual on an occasion of this kind to make a formal pronouncement on such a far-reaching question. To speak *officially* is not our intention, much less our ambition. We shall confine ourselves to some general observations.

1. It is evident that the Head of the Church, who gave unto His Church "some, Apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers" (Eph. 4:11), sees no conflict between the activity of proclaiming His Word and the activity of training men who are to be the public proclaimers of Law and Gospel. In the Sacred Scriptures we have the great missionary command in many variations. These range from the majestic "Arise, Shine," which Isaiah was moved by the Spirit of God to cry out and which we quote with great regularity during the season

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of Epiphany, to the parting command of the ascending Savior: "Go ye into all the world" (Mark 16:15), which has formed the basis of innumerable mission sermons. Certainly no Christian will deny that God desires most ardently that His Church be mission-minded and that every one of her members have a passion for souls, a fervor and a zeal to bear personal witness, a sense of obligation that the Word indeed is carried out to the ends of the earth. But that same God and Savior also shows His concern that well-qualified and properly trained persons are to be sent out as His public spokesmen. The admonitions "Apt to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2), "Reprove, rebuke, exhort" (2 Tim. 4:2), and "That he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9) — all of these statements reflect the will of our Lord that His spokesmen, who are to discharge a holy responsibility, should approach their tasks not unprepared, but as also professionally equipped, competent men of deep spirituality. A passion for souls and a theologically well-disciplined mind are certainly not mutually exclusive.

2. The truth of this last statement finds its undeniable proof in the revered Apostle Paul. Here is a man who deserves to be called "the greatest missionary of all times." He blazed the trail for Christianity on three great missionary journeys that took him into many parts of the world. No informed person will question the stature of Paul as the ranking missionary. But this remarkable man, "an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God," was also an outstanding scholar of his day and was known and accepted as such by his contemporaries. The fact that he was highly schooled, that he was a man with an academic background, proved no hindrance to him and did not handicap his mission expansion program of organizing Christian congregations throughout Asia and Europe. The very opposite is true. It is extremely doubtful whether the Gospel would have been granted a hearing by the group which Paul addresses as "ye men of Athens" on Mars Hill if Paul had not been professionally equipped to present the message of the Word to philosophers, men of deep learning.

3. That scholarship and missionary zeal are not incompatible becomes apparent also when we review the life and activity of the man whose name our Church proudly carries. Admittedly

Martin Luther was an eminent scholar, university-trained. The enormous literary output of this sixteenth-century reformer reveals a many-sided man—a linguist of no mean ability, a formidable theologian, a skilled debater, a lover of the fine arts and sciences, a person quite at ease in the company of men of high and low degree. But his professional training, his vast learning, did not blind him to the duties that rested upon him to spread the Gospel of God's salvation through the atonement which is in Christ and in Christ only.

It is quite true that Luther did not become renowned as a missionary in the sense in which we use that word today. There are valid reasons for this fact. Luther was preoccupied with the prodigious task that immediately confronted him. Besides, the conditions in the world at that time made extensive mission journeys—in the pattern of the Apostle Paul—quite impossible. And yet Luther, too—degree man that he was—clearly understood the missionary obligation that rests upon the Church. Listen to the *missionary* Luther: "After we have recognized God in His Son," he writes, "and have received the forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit, who endues hearts with joy and with that peace of souls in the strength of which we look with contempt upon sin and death, what remains to be done? Go and do not be silent so that you are not the only ones to be saved, but that also the remaining multitude of men may be preserved." And again: "The noblest and the greatest work, and the most important service we can render God on earth, is bringing other people, and especially those who are entrusted to us, to the knowledge of God by the Holy Gospel."

4. This same combination—profound scholarship that delved deep into theology and a yearning desire to spread the Gospel—stands out as a characteristic also among some of the founding fathers of our own Church. Walther, Craemer, Sihler, Wyneken, and others, who emigrated from Europe to the United States more than a century ago and who co-operated in organizing the Church that owns and operates Concordia Seminary, where these commencement exercises are being conducted, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, were not illiterates or men who had received only an elementary education. They had enjoyed the advantages of

a liberal education in European universities and had professional standing in their circles. They brought to the study of theology a scholarly background. But this scholarly background did not prevent them from becoming pioneer missionaries. Few of them have personified the romance of missions as did Friedrich Konrad Dietrich Wyneken, who has become almost a legendary figure riding through the forests of Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan in his well-publicized yellow trousers. And few among the Fathers have captured the imagination of their parishioners as did Craemer in establishing a mission among the Chippewa Indians in the wilds of Michigan. The rank and file of the Fathers were missionaries in a less spectacular manner. They searched the communities of the Midwest and the wilderness that surrounded newly developed towns for men and women and children from among their own countrymen who had come into this blessed land of unlimited opportunity and who all too often had lost God and their faith under the stress and strain of pioneer life. The Fathers never claimed sainthood, or perfection, for themselves; but they did establish an enviable record as sturdy and resourceful missionaries who bent themselves to their immediate task with great zeal.

5. It seems quite apparent from what has been said up to this point that there is no inherent conflict or incompatibility between the professional training of a theologian and his acceptance of missions as a divinely ordained activity of the Church, between ministerial training and missions. God Himself issues the great missionary command and stipulates that the missionaries shall possess aptness to teach and ability to convince the gainsayers, which certainly calls for a high degree of professional competence. Paul stands out as the world-renowned example of a great missionary and an eminent scholar, Luther is acknowledged to be a great theological intellectual and a man who at the same time fully understood the duties of the Christian to witness and to bring strangers and pilgrims into the family of God. And the fathers of our Church in the United States rate high as theologians with a professional and university background and as exemplary missionaries.

Under these circumstances one might be pardoned for expressing a feeling of mild surprise that it should be necessary at this time

even to refer to the relationship between the Church's program for ministerial training and her mission program. Yet the fact is undeniable that during recent years particularly this relationship has been made a matter of discussion. There are several reasons why the attention of our Church is being focused on this matter today.

6. The past two decades have seen an unparalleled expansion of our mission program. Numerous areas beyond the boundaries of our country have been occupied by our missionaries. No longer is it true that foreign missions by our Church are limited to only three countries—India, China, Africa—as had been the case for many years, and that we are occupying only Argentina and Brazil in South America. Today our Church has gained a toehold in Mexico, in the Hawaiian Islands, in the Philippine Islands, in New Guinea, in Japan, in Korea, in Formosa, in Cuba, in Guatemala, in Venezuela, in Chile, in Paraguay, in Uruguay. The fact that our Board for Foreign Missions requested a sizable number of candidates from this graduating class indicates very clearly that this Mission Expansion Program in Foreign Lands has not come to an end. Unless the rising tide of nationalism slows the tempo of our penetration of foreign countries, there is no reason to anticipate that workers will not be needed in the years to come, despite the emphasis on an indigenous ministry. This same intensification of effort is also observed on the home-mission front at this time. We are acquainted with the target goal of 120 new missions a year in the 32 North American Districts of our Church, with the demands of our Church's Armed Services Commission for capable men to serve as chaplains, with the necessity of staffing more adequately our larger congregations and our parochial schools. Obviously this situation has made it necessary to call upon our people to increase their offerings substantially. Of this expansion all of us must be aware.

7. While this mission-forward movement was being developed, our ministerial training program was also being expanded. This expansion included construction of new buildings, modernization of old buildings, purchase of additional real estate, erection of dwellings for faculty members. The total cost involved more than ten million dollars during the past decade. It was inevitable that the Church would face such a situation as a result of the policy,

perhaps dictated by dire necessity, of marking time during the depression years and permitting our properties to deteriorate, only to discover that during the subsequent war years building restrictions forced continued delay in proceeding with the urgent building program, until finally we had accumulated a staggering backlog of required building facilities that has been met only in part. There is much, very much, unfinished business facing the Church in this category. The decision to establish an entirely new school, the first one incidentally since 1926—the Fort Wayne Senior College—constitutes an important part of the expansion program for ministerial training.

But more was involved in the ministerial training program than the construction and reconstruction of buildings on the 14 campuses on which Synod operates her two theological Seminaries, her two teachers colleges, and her ten preparatory schools. The prayer "God give us men," which ascended to the Throne of Grace as our constituency became aware how desperately more workers were needed, that prayer was answered. God *did* give us more men and women who were dedicated to the task of preaching and teaching in our churches and schools. Enrollments increased from 2,960 to 4,479 within the decade; classes were divided; faculties at our schools were enlarged; more faculty housing was required; the compensation of our faculty members was adjusted in keeping with the economic conditions of our country. All of this added up to the inescapable fact that also for the program of ministerial training our people were called upon to place their material resources at the disposal of the Church in a more generous fashion. The emphasis definitely was upon a better stewardship of treasure. Or, as the fiscal officers of our Church would express themselves: the budget was increased very decidedly, from \$2,500,000 in 1944 to \$8,100,000 in 1954, with mission expansion and ministerial training leading the way. Mission expansion made necessary increased appropriations from \$1,241,000 to \$3,223,000 (or 160%) within the decade (not counting the funds made available for buildings from special collections and not counting the funds set aside by every District of Synod for mission expansion). Budget appropriations for ministerial training advanced from \$560,000 to

\$2,615,000 (or 367%) within the decade (again not including the amounts that had been expended for capital investments).

8. With this background in mind we can understand quite readily that the uninitiated might form the opinion—and express it—that missions and ministerial training were vying with each other, that they had become rivals, as it were, for the bounty and for the hand of a fair lady called Synodalia, or the Synodical Budget. It is not too surprising that those who emphasize "Go and tell!" should ask themselves with a degree of alarm whether the rapidly increasing expenditures for ministerial training are justified, or whether the formal education of pastors and teachers could not be based upon less-exacting professional requirements in the interest of gaining more workers more quickly and releasing more funds to maintain this larger group of missionaries. And it is also understandable that those who emphasize "apt to teach" as an essential for every professional Kingdom worker might experience a feeling of uneasiness and apprehension at the mounting costs of conducting a far-flung mission expansion program which develops new and costly patterns, thereby placing a possible limitation on the training of men at a time when other denominations are stressing the professional competence of their workers and when our position as leaders in ministerial training is not as secure as it was in former years.

9. Probably it is an oversimplification to say that the relationship between the Church's program for ministerial training and her mission program is one of absolute interdependence. In a healthy and functioning Church a strong mission program *and* a strong program for ministerial training are basic and essential. It can never be an "either—or" proposition—either we concentrate on missions or we concentrate on ministerial training. *That* path would lead to confusion and disaster, to the development of a Church satisfied with a ministerial training program that stresses only the fundamentals in a day when the demands made upon the ministry call for high technical competence in addition to the deep spirituality that must always characterize the servant of God. Or it would lead to the development of a Church preoccupied only with the scholastic attainments of its clergy, a stagnant Church, unmindful of its obligation to be active and to reach out to help men

who are slaves of sin and who can be released from the bondage of their slavery and made free men in the sight of God only through the means of grace carried to men by a mission-minded Church. No, the "either — or" approach is not the answer.

Let us visualize a Church that emphasizes missions and minimizes an adequate ministerial training program from the standpoint of recruitment, of providing modern physical facilities, of assembling capable faculties, of preparing an adequate curriculum. As the doors of missionary opportunity open and as plans are made to occupy the fields and to staff congregations, the cry goes out for men. But where are the men? The plain answer would be that the number of men is too small, that their professional training is so inadequate that even a deep spirituality cannot compensate for its inadequacy, and that in the final analysis the mission program is not carried out effectively. What a tragedy that would be!

Or let us visualize a Church that emphasizes her program of ministerial training quantitatively and qualitatively, but has given scant thought to her mission opportunities. A multitude of young men and women, deeply consecrated and professionally well trained, eager to go as ambassadors of the living God—but where are the mission fields? No thought has been given by the Church to locate the areas of mission opportunities, and no advanced planning has been done as to how they are to be occupied. Workers standing idle in the market place because the Church was short-sighted, lacked missionary vision, was unbalanced in arranging her over-all program. What a tragedy that would be!

10. Both of these tragedies can be avoided when there is a clear and sympathetic understanding of the fact that mission expansion is dependent on an adequate program of ministerial training and that the ministerial training department must rely upon the mission departments to provide placement opportunities for the graduates of our theological seminaries and teachers colleges. United they stand, divided they suffer and finally fall. In the very nature of the case it cannot be otherwise.

This interdependence upon each other, this fact that mission expansion relies on the ministerial training department to furnish the necessary workers and that the ministerial training program is

indispensable for the successful operation of the department of missions (and missions is here being used in its widest sense) is basic. The relationship between the two must be one of mutual confidence of sympathetic understanding, of readiness to make every reasonable adjustment to secure a well-functioning balanced church program. This fact must be fully understood and appreciated by the leaders in the Church. And we, who occupy positions of leadership, owe it to our constituency to explain with great patience that missions and ministerial training can never be rivals, that rather they are partners in the building of a great Church, a Church that has been favored by God beyond measure, a Church that is determined to dare great things for her God, a Church that relies on His guidance, a Church that pledges continued allegiance to her Lord and His Word as she faces resolutely the tasks to which she is dedicated.

"O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain. O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid. Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" (Is. 40:9.)

Fort Wayne, Ind.