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# Theological Education in East Asia

ARTHUR M. AHLSCHEDE AND ARTHUR C. REPP

## INTRODUCTION

In response to the 1962 All-Asia Conference of missions affiliated with The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, the Synod in convention in Cleveland, Ohio, encouraged the Board for World Missions to "upgrade its seminaries" in Asia and to "bring recommendations on the establishment of a graduate seminary in the Orient to the next convention of the Synod" (Resolution 2-22, 1963 *Proceedings*, p.98). The Board for World Missions, therefore, sponsored a second All-Asia Conference at Baguio City Philippines (Oct. 19—29, 1964), to which 26 persons were invited, including representatives from six Asia countries and training centers, the India Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Board for World Missions. Nineteen study papers dealing with various aspects of theological education in Asia were presented by participants from the Asian church.

In preparation for this conference the Board for World Missions invited Arthur M. Ahlschwede, executive secretary for the Board for Higher Education, and Arthur C. Repp, academic dean of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, to visit the Asian seminaries and on the basis of their findings lead a series of panel discussions at the conference with representatives of the respective seminaries. At the conclusion of the meeting the study team made a report to the Board for World Missions to assist it in making its recommendations

to the 1965 convention of the Synod to be held at Detroit, June 16—26. The following is a summary of the team's report.

## OBSERVATIONS

We arrived in India on Oct. 5 and left the Philippines on Nov. 1. During the four full weeks on the field we visited our five Asian seminaries, three other Lutheran seminaries, and four Protestant seminaries — three in India (Trivandrum, Bangalore, Serampore) and a fourth in Baguio City. Because of a typhoon in Hong Kong we were forced to reroute our plans, and with the change we found it impossible to visit the seminary at Taiwan as a team. However, Ahlschwede left the Baguio City conference before it was over and, accompanied by Walter Wolbrecht, Executive Director of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, made a brief visit to the seminary in Taiwan. Prior to this, both Ahlschwede and Repp went over the extensive Taiwan seminary report with President Halamka during the conference days at Baguio.

During the course of our visit we met with the administrators, the faculties, the boards of control, and the students of our seminaries. In several instances we were able to meet with local missionaries who were not affiliated with the seminaries. In India, the Philippines, and Hong Kong, discussions with missionaries were quite extensive. Where possible, we attended classes and had conversations with students outside of classes. In addition we had the privilege of attending public worship with



the brethren in India, Hong Kong, and the Philippines.

We were impressed more than ever with the essential importance of theological education for our foreign fields, an evaluation which is presumably shared by the board and is one of its working principles. The conviction that a national clergy is a necessity for a national church, which we gained through prior study, was confirmed over and over again. The church cannot hope to become firmly established in any country unless it arises out of the soil with a national ministry. The missionary at his very best is only a passing herald and at his worst reflects the image of a colonialist or a foreign interloper. Obviously a missionary is needed to start the work. He will continue as a sort of stopgap only until the time is ripe when the national church can take over. Since the national church can gain a sense of responsibility only when it has been given responsibility, the home base must, through its missionaries, be ready to deliver itself of its responsibilities as soon as possible, even at the risk of cost in time, money, and efficiency. The foreign missionary continues to be different even where he has mastered the national language, for he is never quite able to bridge the gap in communications with the people, the national clergy, and the community. Even more critical is the inability of any foreign church and its representative to cross the culture gap between East and West. The missionary's dress, standard of living, and thought pattern are constant reminders that he and his "church" are different and foreign. The culture lag manifests itself not only in the living and the thought patterns but also in the religious pattern of the country.

Furthermore, the missionary is always tempted to put a value judgment on the differences, even when they do not impinge upon the Gospel, as though his thought patterns, his social structure, and his way of life were better. The awareness of the religious pattern is particularly important when dealing with western theological formulations whose stated or unstated antitheses always deal with a Western situation often totally irrelevant to the Eastern mind or culture.

Where the church recognizes the fact that theological education is not an option but a must, it will be prepared to accept the high price tag attached to the task in terms of patience, time, energy, and money. The Board for World Missions is therefore to be commended for its concern to upgrade its theological seminaries, for it is ultimately a question whether we will continue to have the responsibility to preach the Gospel in Asia tomorrow.

By the nature of the case this report will be somewhat critical of theological education in Asia. We understand that this was our responsibility when we were invited to make the study. A critical but constructive report will enable the board to make recommendations to the Synod in the hope of strengthening the Synod's theological education program as soon as possible. Although our report is critical, it should not be regarded as a personal reflection on anyone involved in our foreign seminaries. We were repeatedly impressed with the consecration of all the men who have been called to serve at our seminaries and are fully aware that no human effort is being spared in the work assigned to them. Furthermore, our theological teachers and missionaries have gained tremendous in-



sights in their study and application of certain doctrines. As a whole they seem to have a much better grasp of the Biblical meaning of the church and its ministry than is found in the States. By the nature of their work and their isolation they have been forced to wrestle directly with the issues and by and large have come up with clear, New Testament concepts. As a result they have now in their possession an explosive Scriptural truth which has far-reaching implications for the Synod and for the organization of national churches. It is our hope that the home church will not frustrate their Biblical vision because of an apparent lag on its part. The men, one and all, have proved their loyalty to the Word and to the Lutheran Confessions, even though the latter cannot be truly relevant for the Asian church in their present form.

#### *Faculty*

At all the seminaries one of the major problems is the matter of staffing. There are only two national professors on all our staffs who are teaching theological subjects (India and Japan). Presently there are only three full-time instructors in each of the seminaries in India, Japan, and the Philippines. Neither Hong Kong nor Taiwan has a single full-time faculty member. There are eight different persons teaching at Hong Kong with a teaching load equivalent to 1.8 full-time professors. Part-time instructors are academically valid only if they represent a small percentage of the teaching staff. A school that has eight different part-time instructors not only lacks in stability and single-minded direction, but presents an impossible situation, especially when there is a continuous staff turnover. It is even questionable whether a

small conference such as that at Hong Kong can be expected to have eight men who are qualified to teach at a theological seminary. The minimum staff should normally consist of four professors. While this may not be attainable at first, it must remain the minimum goal for which all seminaries should strive.

#### *Language*

One of the major handicaps in theological training in Asia, is, of course, the inability to provide enough men who can speak a national language. This handicap is increased by the fact that in all places except Japan more than one national language is in use. Hence most of the seminaries are multilingual. However, English is frequently a common denominator, and this makes it possible to do some teaching in that language. This fact is both an advantage and an additional handicap. The use of English may discourage a more general use of a national language and become a contributing cause in the failure to recognize that, at best, English is a second language. Even those who can use English reasonably well are constantly struggling with language and thought patterns which make communication very difficult. One can never be certain whether a theological professor is communicating to his students in a reasonably precise manner. While a national will also have a language problem with another national language or dialect, the thought and culture patterns will be much the same. Hong Kong and Taiwan have additional problems. Most of the work is done with Chinese who have come in from the mainland and who speak Mandarin. However, the local people in Hong Kong speak Cantonese, and the nationals of Taiwan,



Taiwanese. Assuming that the children of the refugees will become assimilated with the new country, it would seem that the seminaries should place an ever greater emphasis on Cantonese and Taiwanese.

### *Objectives of the Field*

However, there is an even more important consideration that must be met and solved if any of the other solutions are to have long range meaning. In a few instances it became apparent that the objectives of the Synod's work in a given field do not seem to be clearly spelled out. Unless the objectives are clear it remains difficult to determine just what kind of clergy are needed.

It is an oversimplification to say that we are in the Philippines, for example, to preach the Gospel to the heathen, when theoretically ten elevenths of the population is nominally Christian. Are we there to "invade the nine elevenths who are Roman Catholic, who are admittedly often quite pagan? Are we to take cognizance of the fact that a change is taking place in the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines? Or are we there to reach the one eleventh who are still outside of the church's influence? Or are we there, perhaps, to undergird or to strengthen the existing churches? If so, our theological education will have to take a different direction. Since the Filipinos are so hungry for education, it would seem that one defensible objective might be to try to reach the future leaders of the Philippines by concentrating on campus work. Other options recommend themselves, such as mass communications, lay training, and the like. Similar problems face us in other national areas. Furthermore, the Synod's

objectives will have to come to grips with the implications of the doctrine of the church. Even where a defensible objective may be set up in terms of preaching the Gospel to the heathen rather than on proselytizing or on capitalizing on the defections from other Christian churches, each mission field needs a clear set of objectives. Formulating acceptable objectives is not the task only of the missionaries already called to a field. It remains primarily the responsibility of the Board for World Missions, who must help the missionaries chart their course.

### *Curriculum*

Since the curriculum cannot be better than its objectives, it became obvious that curriculum planning remains as one of the unsolved problems at most of the schools. The tendency very often is to make the seminary into a replica of the seminaries in St. Louis or Springfield. This becomes apparent in some of the courses which have been developed. There is further evidence that planning and coordination is sometimes lacking. This is to be expected when a school is staffed by a faculty composed largely of part-time teachers.

Serious study of the curriculum is necessary, particularly in the field of systematic theology, since the Lutheran Confessions play such an important part in this area of theology. While we recognize that the place of the confessions is part of a larger problem of the church, it is essential that the Lutheran Confessions be evaluated in the light of the local situation. In some instances the confessions have not even been translated into the national language, or they have been translated in an unsatisfactory manner. A more important prob-



lem is that the confessions to a large degree address themselves to Western conditions arising out of the Reformation, which are not always relevant in 20th-century Asia. Conceivably one could, even with understanding, accept the Lutheran Confessions and still not come to grips in a confessional way with the far more important religious situation which confronts the Asian churches in terms of animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.

There is a tremendous need for good theological texts, especially in systematic and practical theology. Some of the texts commonly used in the Lutheran Church in the United States are usually inadequate in Asia. The occasional practice of translating homiletical studies originally intended for German Lutherans during the early part of the 20th century for use by Asian nationals today seems to be highly questionable.

#### *Students*

As far as one could tell, the students seemed to be a consecrated group of individuals highly desirous of serving the Lord. The schools are to be commended in their effort to maintain high academic standards. Since the East is seething everywhere with a desire for higher standards of education, it is most important that high levels will also be sought after in the development of the clergy of a national Lutheran church. In several of the countries the image of the Christian clergy is not attractive to the average or better-than-average educated national. Japan has the enviable record in that all its students are graduated from accredited colleges or universities. The program is evidently on solid footing, primarily because of the outstanding pioneer work of Dr. O. H. Theiss.

Getting high-level trained students may prove to be increasingly difficult as the years go on in view of the fact that industry and government are able to make such attractive offers even to students on the secondary level. Some caution needs to be expressed against admitting colloquy students who do not have the necessary academic background.

#### *Administration*

Sound administrative principles are certainly not followed when in some of the seminaries members of the faculty serve on the board of control. We realize this may be necessary when almost half of the conference is represented on the faculty, but this practice is not conducive to good administration. We are convinced that the Synod must continue to take a long and hard look at those who are suggested as possible candidates to head a seminary. The men must not only be acquainted with the kind of work necessary in the field but must have administrative ability and more than a surface understanding of theological training.

Administration is bound to suffer where there are many part-time instructors, since this practice fosters disorganization in the normal course of events. There were instances where a knowledge of the course content of the various classes was lacking on the part of the responsible administrator. Often course outlines or syllabi were unavailable for a new professor or part-time instructor. Occasionally the academic and financial records were poorly kept or a weak relationship existed between the seminary and the area business office.

We understand that in some cases appointments to the faculty are made by the



local conferences without a voice or veto power by the board of control or the president. This, again, is a division of authority and adds to the difficulties of maintaining efficient administration.

### *Location and Facilities*

The facilities in India are undoubtedly the most outstanding of all seminaries. The Philippine seminary seems to be ideally located in many respects, although there might still be a question whether it is advisable to have this school so far off center from Manila, where the important libraries and schools are now located. Looking to the future, it is, of course, very possible that Baguio City may also develop into a more important educational center.

The location of the Hong Kong seminary appears to be somewhat unfortunate, especially since it was indicated that "this property was chosen only when we lost hope of obtaining full-time men for a seminary and resigned ourselves to the need for getting along with part-time men." The cramped quarters leave much to be desired for healthy student life. The same, of course, may also be said of the location in Japan.

In every instance the libraries proved to be inadequate. This was the case particularly in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan, and to some degree also in the Philippines. The library collection in India looks good only by contrast. In one instance the book collection comprised less than 200 lineal feet. Every seminary should be expected to include the library in its operating budget. Since the academic level of any school is so dependent on its library facilities for faculty and students, the need for improving the libraries is very urgent.

### *Contact with Other Lutherans*

We believe that a major effort toward upgrading our seminaries can be made by closer cooperation with other Lutheran seminaries in the field. We were very pleased to hear of the steps planned in India and Japan. Since the Philippine seminary is the only Lutheran seminary in the country, it does not have the advantage of the others in this respect.

We were disturbed by the fact that the two seminaries which need the most help have not made any important effort to work toward a better understanding with their Lutheran neighbors, and, in a beginning way, plan for some future cooperative work. While the Hong Kong seminary is making use of one of the staff members of the Sha Tin seminary, this is not a change of policy but a move of desperation to get someone to teach Koine Greek. There have been no theological discussions between the two seminaries. The facilities and the staff of Sha Tin are certainly much better than our own facilities, and we could only gain by any kind of cooperative endeavor that may be devised. It is unfortunate that the Taiwan seminary is located at such a distance from the other Lutheran seminary at Taichung, which for the moment makes continued contact difficult, if not impossible.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of our study and observation we respectfully *recommend* the following to the Board for World Missions:

1. That where it has not as yet been done, field objectives be formulated as soon as possible, not only to guide the missionaries in the respective areas but



also to make it possible for the seminaries to formulate their objectives;

2. That a planned and concerted effort be made on the part of the Board for World Missions to give the various seminaries continued professional help in order to lay a strong foundation for good theological education. We hope that the board will be able to give the recommendations of the Second All-Asia Conference serious consideration by the appointment of an administrator whose special concern will be the development of theological education in the foreign fields, and if possible, at an early date supply the seminaries with a consultant who can give them on-the-field assistance;
3. That it provide the necessary trained personnel for effective theological education. This may mean that the board will have to postpone entering new fields and concentrate on the work already begun. No one knows how much time there is left for the Western church to give direct help to its brethren in Asia, but the international situation is of such a nature that promise of an extended period of time seems quite dim. This is true not only in New Guinea but also in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The present turmoil in Viet Nam may easily affect India, the Philippines, and Japan;
4. That it supply the field with short-term help until long-term professionals can be called into the field. Such short-term help may be given particularly in the field of exegetical theology and perhaps in early church history. It is much more difficult to supply help in the area of systematic theology and

practical theology due to the vast differences in the thought patterns and social structure of the fields. However, in-service training may be given to missionaries and faculty members by offering lecture series through the use of personnel from the States. The board is to be commended for engaging Thomas Coates for Japan and Karl Rutz for the Philippines;

5. That a large grant be obtained to establish a crash program for the purchase of books, serials, and periodicals for the seminary libraries. This should be done through a special grant of not less than \$50,000, and preferably \$75,000, part of the fund to be used to give the schools professional help in the purchase of books and the maintenance of good library studies;
6. That the fields be encouraged to provide literature suitable for the training of theological students and the continued education of its ministry. Such work must not be done merely through the translation of standard works but by producing original material in the vernacular, preferably written by nationals;
7. That every effort be made to make use of the facilities of other Lutheran theological seminaries in the countries where this can be done without compromising any Scriptural principles. The seminary in India should be encouraged to proceed in its plans for closer cooperation with Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in Madras. The Tokyo seminary should be encouraged to continue working with the seminary of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church and, if possible, to cooperate with them in the establish-



ment of a seminary on the campus of International Christian University. Our seminary in Hong Kong should be strongly urged to coordinate its facilities with the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong (Sha Tin). The board may wish to reconsider the location of the seminary in Chia Yi, Taiwan, or find a way to cooperate with the Lutheran seminary in Taichung. Some thought may still be given to whether it is necessary to have two struggling seminaries, one in Hong Kong and the other in Taiwan, but this question may best be resolved by closer coordination with existing Lutheran facilities. The Board for World Missions should strongly urge the Synod to adopt the "Theological Principles to Guide the Development of Missions and the Relationship Between the Synod and Various Dependent Churches" formulated by the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations. (See the article by Carl A.

Gaertner in this issue.) The Board for World Missions is further urged to recommend an extension of these principles in line with sound Scriptural and Confessional principles so that the work of the Gospel may not be hindered by human restrictions;

8. That it encourage gifted young nationals to continue their theological education in graduate study and thereby supply the national churches with a pool of theologically trained men who may be used as its future professors, administrators, writers, and conference leaders.

We do not feel that an all-Asia graduate school should be considered at this time. Closer cooperation with existing facilities may soon make this possible in Japan and India. If graduate work is necessary for Hong Kong and Taiwan, this can perhaps be best done for the present by sending students to a seminary located in a somewhat related culture, such as Japan or India.

St. Louis, Mo.