

THE PRACTICAL THEOLOGY EXPERIENCE
IN LATIN AMERICA

I.

WHERE WE WERE
(history of the program)

Theological education has been a part of the work and planning of our missions in Mexico and Colombia almost from the day those missions were established.

The work in Mexico got started when Dr. D. Orea L. left the ALC mission church in Mexico and his position as seminary professor and requested a colloquy with the WELS. He kept on teaching seminary students but no record remains as to what practical theology courses he taught nor what materials he used. An interview with a former student reveals that what pastoral theology work there was consisted mostly of personal example, informal conversations and random reading from available PT texts of mostly Baptist persuasion. (To my knowledge there still are no Lutheran PT books available in Spanish.) His students were all former pastors of one sort or another and therefore had had some experience with teaching and preaching and apparently he was satisfied to leave it at that.

Only a very few months after the work started in Colombia a former Roman Catholic seminarian (only a few months away from ordination) began attending services at our mission. Soon he expressed the desire to be a Bible-believing pastor and the mission team scrambled to start up a Bible institute and to plan for seminary training.

The African mission, which already had a well established Bible Institute program, was consulted. A theological education committee was established with men from all three Latin American missions under the supervision of our Executive Committee. At the Latin American conference of 1976 a basic course was outlined for the Bible Institute. The following is the section of that outline pertaining to practical theology:

E. Practical Theology: (The courses include the use of prepared materials.)

1. How to preach a prepared sermon.
2. How to teach a S. S. lesson with prepared materials
3. How to make visits to sick people
4. How to teach people to become communicant members or prepare them for baptism using prepared materials.
5. Evangelism and Stewardship

F. Liturgics: The purpose of the course is to:

1. Teach content and use of the liturgy for worship service
2. Give practical training in this
3. To familiarize the student with hymns that are available and being used in our churches.
4. Teach the student to know how to use the hymnal as a service book.

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Men were then assigned to write the above courses. The first to be written were a Sunday school teachers course (similar to what would be used for lay people in a stateside congregation); a teacher's manual to go along with "Escudriñad", an adult information course, with a separate teacher's lesson for each lesson of "Escudriñad"; and a brief course covering the four points listed under "liturgics" above. The other courses were taught without the use of a prepared written course.

The Bible Institute curriculum was gradually revised to presently include: How to teach Sunday school and show the Bible filmstrip (still using the original written course), Evangelism (using a translation of the TAS materials, adapted), pastoral visits (sick calls, etc. for which there still is no written course), How to give the liturgy (which course has been rewritten and amplified to the point that it probably is too much for BI level and has much material that should be seminary level), and Spanish grammar (as an aid to learning Biblical languages and to improve present skills for preaching and teaching - only a brief outline of a course has been written.), the above for year 1 of the Bible Institute. The second year then has: How to teach an adult instruction class (still using the former materials for "Escudriñad"), Practical aspects of an evangelist's ministry (no course written as yet, this primarily dealt with the personal life of the evangelist and in this connection "Family life under Christ" by Prof. Schuetze was translated.), How to use a written sermon (course has been written), Lutheran music and hymn singing (no written course), and Spanish composition (an emphasis on outlining - no written course).

The present Bible Institute curriculum has moved away from the idea of simply preparing men to be full-time evangelists, to preparing them for future study in the seminary (although the two ideas are not mutually exclusive, and the change is not yet complete.)

At the above mentioned meeting of the Latin American conference in 1976 an outline of courses proposed for practical theology on the seminary level was also adopted. In this outline the discipline was divided into its four parts of homiletics, pastoral theology, liturgics, and Christian education as follows:

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Homiletics: The theory of sermon writing with special attention to the analytical sermon presented on the basis of the Jr. Seminary Notes. Together with the theory, stress is placed on practice of the following: 1. Study of texts (Old Testament, Gospel, Epistle, Parables, Psalms etc.) to give practice and to indicate the special features, treatment and use of these different types of texts. 2. Practice in preparing outlines both simple and detailed. 3. Special attention should be given to preaching the text and how and when to use material from other sources. Attention should be given to the special features of the sermon: The introduction, use of illustrations, conclusion etc. 4. Practice in writing and presentation, form, style, vocabulary, level etc. 5. Practice in delivery using recordings and playback. special attention to different sermon types: regular, festival funeral, evangelism, doctrinal etc. Also preparation of devotions for children, for sick and shut-ins.

Pastoral Theology: Pastoral Theology course follows SHEPHERD UNDER CHRIST with adaptation and addition or omissions as the case may require. Special attention to be given to making calls for testimony, evangelism, prospects, sick, regular pastoral calls etc. Special attention also to the areas of Evangelism and Stewardship.

Liturgics: Some study as to the history and purpose of the liturgy, but more emphasis on the practical aspects. Study of the Oficio Mayor. (Morning Service) with or without communion noting the parts of the service, their relation to one another, their meaning, their function, their source etc. Also give attention to conduct in conducting a service, robe, why? when? where? when not? etc. Possibilities for variation in the service etc. Study of the hymnal for other services, also study of the RITUAL CRISTIANA (Agenda) Study of hymns to become familiar with the music and the texts. uses, changes in melody etc. A study of the music for the liturgy and especially the chants so that the service may be sung. Attention to special services such as children's services (programs) in connection with the Sunday School, the V. B. S. Other kinds of services: Evangelistic.

Christian Education: The catechism. A good review of the content and the use of the same. Emphasis on teaching the catechism to the young in preparation for confirmation, to the older people for the same purpose. use as a devotional tool in the home and basis for study courses. Sunday School: Teaching Sunday School and preparing teachers to teach, The organization of the Sunday School, recruitment, operation, records, follow-up. divisions, equipment, etc. The same for V. B. S.

The first two of the above divisions, homiletics and pastoral theology, were evidently planned to be structured more or less on a par with the same courses given at Mequon. However the section on liturgics has a more practical thrust rather than theoretical, and much more attention is given to tradition and adiaphora.

The greatest divergence from the courses at Mequon is seen in the description of the division of Christian education. Here we see a decided emphasis on the small catechism, even for the instruction of adults as well as children and for home devotions and Bible classes. The section dealing with Sunday school really does not go much farther than what was already presented on the Bible Institute level.

A decided disadvantage of this last point (emphasis on the catechism) is still evident among our Mexican national pastors. Up until very recently all of their work in instructing adults for confirmation was based on a study of the catechism (with memorization and all) generally taking at least two years to finish, even though other adult instruction manuals have existed for years (notably "Escudriñad"; "What Does the Bible Say?" and "The Wonderful Works of God" were also later translated). It is perhaps easier to understand, then, why so few adults have been confirmed in that field, few ever lasted out the required course. (This problem is being dealt with on a continuing basis, and much improvement has been noted. Although this, of course, is not the only

problem we face in the field.)

The entire seminary curriculum, also the portion dealing with practical theology, has developed somewhat since that time, especially in Colombia as we began to teach on that level. (Mexico, at the same time, was plagued by a lack of seminary students and a severe man-power shortage.) The Colombian seminary curriculum was developed into a four-year course of study; four days per week, slightly surpassing the number of hours of course-work offered at Mequon. (In Mexico presently we offer the same courses in a three-year, five day per week schedule. The hours come out close to the same.) The Colombian curriculum is as follows: Year I, homiletics; Year II, homiletics, pastoral theology (I, II Timothy and Titus), and pedagogics; Year III, homiletics, pastoral theology, pedagogics, and liturgics & church music; Year IV, homiletics and pastoral theology.

A copy of the pertinent page of the translation of the catalog for our seminary in El Paso shows the following curriculum for practical theology:

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

- I. HOMILETICS (The theory and practice of preaching): Training for the work in the pulpit begins in the first year. The first year is devoted to the study of homiletic principles, exercises in writing outlines and the entire sermon. In the other two years there is always more practice to sharpen the skills of the preacher.
- II. PASTORAL THEOLOGY: These courses present the biblical principles and practical methods by which the Lutheran pastor wants to guide his congregation, minister to the sick and dying, and counsel the despairing, the tempted and the erring.
 - NT B22-3 Pastoral Epistles (I + II Tim. and Titus)
 - PT A81 evangelism calls
 - PT B81-3 Vicar/Pastor, church discipline, special services
 - PT C81-3 Admin. of the means of grace: baptism and Holy Communion, Counseling, Marriage, stewardship, Admin. of the parish.
- III. LITURGICS: Here are studied the history and forms of the service, and the practical and doctrinal aspects of their use.
 - LIT A91-3
 - CM B91-3 Church Music: the purpose of this course is to familiarize the student with church music and its proper use in the life of the congregation.
- IV. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: (catechetics and general pedagogy) Since a great part of the ministry is taken up with teaching of both children and adults, it is easy to see the necessity of these courses.
 - ED A31-3 Principles and methods
 - ED B31-3 exercises and practice
 - ED C31-3 exercises and practice

The homiletics courses are taught from an outline written by L. Retberg and include a large amount of practice with actual writing and preaching of sermons (as many as one a month is possible due to the student teacher ratio). Several portions of the text "Preach the Gospel" by Balge and Gerlach have also been translated, and more is planned, to be used as collateral reading.

The pastoral theology courses are taught from a detailed outline made of the text "Shepherd Under Christ" by Schuetze and Habeck, which is presently being expanded as translation is made of the several chapters as time and man-power permit.

A liturgics course has been written, but is in need of amplification; nothing has yet been written for church music.

The Christian education courses are taught from a detailed outline written by L. Retberg based on the seminary notes from Mequon. In this area, also, the student receives a large amount of practical experience under supervision. The course material itself is taught in the first year with review and practice in the remaining years.

II.

WHERE WE ARE (evaluation)

A. Lessons Learned In the Development of the Curriculum and Courses.

In my opinion the need for, and the great importance of adequate strategy planning looms large in this respect. Our original system of a two-level theological education (Bible Institute and Seminary) takes several things for granted. One, that there will be two kinds of students, either those whose intelligence marks them as future seminary candidates and those less gifted who can not handle the academic load of seminary studies, or those whose superior dedication moves us to recommend them for further study. Another is that the use of full- or part-time evangelists is both feasible and desirable. Culture, average educational level of the people with which we work, literacy rate, and economic factors will all play a part in a discussion of this point. Also, limited funds to pay the nationals' salaries may indicate that the money would be more wisely spent on a pastor's salary rather than on an evangelist's. (Experience shows that our national workers are paid only a minimum, subsistence salary so there cannot be much difference between the salaries for evangelists and pastors. The impossibility of obtaining part-time work may also be a factor, a worker may not be able to get a part-time job and work half-time for the church on a reduced salary.) Our Mexican field has never used evangelists and the Colombian field has moved away from training evangelists to using the same courses to train lay-people for work in their own congregations and neighborhoods as Sunday school teachers, Bible class leaders and in evangelism. Our Mexican pastors are also using the Bible Institute materials in their congregations to train their people for service.

A further observation of the curriculum development shows some unnecessary duplication between the Bible Institute courses and those of the seminary during the early stages. Even when the duplication has become evident several problems inhibit the developing and writing of new or different courses, among these problems are inertia and lack of time/man-power. Adequate planning in the beginning could have avoided this extra work.

Another lesson seen is that we need to do more to free up men to write or translate adequate course materials when the courses are first taught. Ideally such men would have no duties other than their seminary work. Weekly conferences with other missionaries and/or the field counselor would serve to keep them in touch with the day-to-day ministry without robbing them of

valuable time needed for course work. Such contact would be especially important for work on practical theology courses. Two problems are evident from failure to do this in the past. One is that due to lack of time and other pressing duties, substandard courses were written (personal experience says the authors would agree). The next time the course is taught the same material is used without much change because the professor still lacks the time necessary to do a major revision and anyway something already prepared is better than nothing. The second problem is that some courses have been taught from old English seminary notes and no Spanish course was ever written and so the next man to teach the course had to start from scratch. (I realize we live in an imperfect world and man-power shortages will be with us for a long time.)

A final lesson learned is to share course materials in whatever form they are first produced. Go ahead and print up or copy courses even though the author thinks they need to be "corrected", tidied up, amplified or what ever. Early experiences indicate that much material was never shared or made available to other Latin American fields because of this hesitancy to share "less-than-perfect" materials. Of course we want well written, complete courses, but others can benefit from the work already done, even though it be incomplete.

B. Strengths and Weaknesses Perceived.

Homiletics: The strengths of our homiletics courses include a very low student to teacher ratio; sometimes one-on-one. A related strength is the possibility for students to preach regularly (once per month) in a congregational setting under the guidance and supervision of his professor. Another is the very good course material prepared by L. Retberg in the form of a very detailed outline.

One of our weaknesses in this area also has to do with the low student to teacher ratio. The students have little opportunity to observe and critique other students and learn from the mistakes and strong points of a variety of preachers. Another weakness that I see, or better, difficulty, is that the three year rotating course being used in El Paso makes extra hours necessary should a new student begin in either Year B or Year C.

Pastoral Theology: I detect two strong points in our course work in this area. First, much of "Shepherd Under Christ" has been fully translated (it is nearing completion) and since the book presents such solidly biblical advice it is of much value also in Latin America. The second is that a special one semester course on evangelism has been added to what we had at Mequon. During this semester the student not only studies the theory and basis of evangelism but also accompanies the professor in making many evangelism calls (more than the two or three times with a stranger that I had at Mequon).

A major weakness in this area is that available man-power is critical, especially in pastoral theology where the professor should have several years of experience in the pastoral ministry in the foreign culture. Missionary turn-over and the difficulty in freeing up an experienced missionary to do the teaching are key aspects of this problem.

A special Mexican difficulty (it will also be a problem in those other fields closed to resident missionaries) is that the professor is prohibited - by law - to do pastoral work in the culture and society of his students. Therefore it can be difficult to even be aware of cultural differences that require adaptations in our pastoral theology courses.

Liturgy: A positive aspect of this course work is that our students are familiar with a liturgical church service because of their Roman Catholic culture or background. A definite weakness is the fact that we have no musicians on the faculty no have we yet written the course for church music.

Christian Education: What was noted about the strengths and weaknesses of our homiletics program could be said here in regard to our Christian education courses as well. Worth repeating is the positive aspect of the many opportunities for hands-on practice under supervision. Perhaps a danger rather than a weakness is the ease of letting a student take over a regular class on a more or less permanent basis because of heavy time demands on the pastor. That then ceases to be practice (not much new will be learned) and the time pressure on the student can mount as well.

I am not sure if the following question really belongs here, but I see it as a past (and probably present) weakness of our work in practical theology. How do you teach attitude? By the very nature of the work in a mission field, especially a foreign mission field, our students have no experience, no observations, no traditions of what parsonage life is like, or of what a pastor's life and schedule is. All he does see is the life of a rich foreigner. We have seen less than desirable attitudes regarding salary support and living conditions (always asking for more), and regarding some of the course work in pastoral theology, "I already know enough about that" or "that won't work here" and general negativism. Does the answer lie in more careful selection of students (we have so few as it is) or in more emphasis on the chapters of the pastoral theology course that deal with the pastor's life, personal stewardship, etc.? Or does it lie in getting closer to our students, more informal talks with them or is there some other answer? Help, anyone?

III.

WHERE WE SHOULD BE (goals)

Important among our goals is to finish the translation of the two books "Shepherd Under Christ" and "Preach the Gospel" for use as classroom texts and resource material. Their usefulness has already been commented on. To facilitate this I will be making specific translation assignments at our upcoming Latin American Missioners conference in November.

Another goal is to concentrate on learning what should be, and then making, the necessary adaptations or additions to the pastoral theology course that are required because of cultural differences. No specific plan of action has yet been established in this regard. Some possibilities that come to mind are to plan a series of conference papers prepared by the Mexican pastors, whose themes are designed to bring out the cultural differences that have an impact on our ministry among their compatriotas. Another possibility is to have a two or three-day seminar to discuss possible problem areas in pastoral theology with the purpose of identifying such areas and reaching some accord about how to handle them. Such information would then be included in the appropriate chapters of the pastoral theology course.

An additional goal is to improve and amplify all courses where needed, especially the material for liturgics and church music. To that end we plan to work over all courses as they are being taught this time around with a view to

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improve the language (Spanish idiom), amplify where needed and correct any omissions. Having the courses entered on the word-processor greatly facilitates any additions, deletions and changes, so it is hoped that time can be found for the original key-board work.

A final goal is to build up our seminary library in the area of practical theology. The great difficulty here is the lack of Lutheran works written in Spanish, and even the paucity of reformed books on the subject.

Where should we be? I think we are pretty close to where we want to be regarding our curriculum for practical theology and for the rest of our seminary program as well. The individual courses too are coming into shape, as mentioned above. Perhaps the most beneficial move we could make at this point would be additional training and education for our world mission seminary professors. Our sinful human nature is not a recent acquisition. Some of us did not benefit as fully as we might have at Mequon during our own studies of these same courses. Perhaps also, professors of practical theology in a foreign setting could benefit from studies or courses on cross-cultural differences or on the sociology of the host country. Hopefully this does not sound like a request for personal advancement. Rather let it be a simple desire to do the utmost to train the best possible future leaders of our national churches for the glory of our Lord Jesus.

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