

# **The Importance of Our Mission Seminary Conference and Its Important Basic Concerns**

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We are gathered here at Hong Kong from July 20 to 22, 1971, in an initial conference involving all of our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod seminaries. The conference is held especially in the interest of our mission seminaries, all of which have been established rather recently. This conference can serve a very wholesome purpose. Our missions at Hong Kong, in Africa, in Japan, in Taiwan, in Indonesia, in Mexico, are all served by one or the other of these mission seminaries. Their training procedure may offer valuable suggestions even for our mission endeavor in India. All of these missions are very dear to us. We realize that it is our Savior's ardent desire that His faith-engendering Gospel of grace and forgiveness be brought to ever more people throughout the world. That, therefore, is also our wish and desire, insofar as we ourselves deeply cherish this Gospel as our supreme treasure, as the treasure which we will let nothing take from us. Our far-flung mission fields are wonderful opportunities for us to share this precious Gospel with others. We want these mission fields to prosper, to grow, to expand.

If they are to be true sister churches, however, it will be necessary to train indigenous public servants of the Word who will be thoroughly grounded in a sound Scripture-based confessional position, and who will be well prepared and equipped to carry out all the tasks of Christ's ministry, including the theological leadership, in complete harmony with such a confessional position. It is not enough that mission fields be opened in various parts of the world and merely labeled as affiliated churches of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. Such labeling would be meaningless if in their teaching and practice these mission churches would actually deviate greatly from the confessional position of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod as their mother church. We desire to see sister churches develop who through leadership from their own midst will uphold a sound confessional position.

This is what makes our mission seminaries so very vital. It is generally conceded that the soundness of a church body depends largely on the soundness and thoroughness of the seminary training which its public servants of the Word received and are receiving. The history of churches and missions offers abundant exemplifications of the fact that un-Scriptural positions in doctrine and practice generally have had their inception in the seminaries where the pastors and missionaries were trained. If we hope to remain in true unity as a group of Lutheran churches, we need to give earnest and careful attention to our ministerial training programs as they culminate in seminary work. It is our hope that this mission seminary conference may become an ongoing organizational structure which will make a vital contribution toward keeping our Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and all of its mission churches in continued unity of faith.

This conference can offer wholesome opportunity for the discussion of a common purpose and goal in our seminary work. It can enable us to make a joint evaluation of the curricula and programs which have been established and which are being pursued in the individual mission seminaries and also in the seminary of our parent church body. It can promote improved methods for training pastors and leaders in world mission fields, works toward closer collaboration of all the seminaries and eventual exchange programs. It can help to engage the World Board actively and understandingly in foreign field worker training.

It is inevitable, of course, that there will be considerable differences in the size of these seminaries, since this will be dependent upon the size of the individual mission field which they are trying to serve, on the number of workers which such a field may require, and on the ministerial students that can be recruited. The particular culture obtaining in a mission field, the educational level of the people being served, the manner in which pastoral ministrations can be carried out, are all things which will influence a seminary program and its curriculum. The basic purpose and goal of all sound, God-pleasing seminary work will remain the same, however, and must remain the same, since all seminary work involves training for the one ministry which our Lord Jesus Christ has ordained and which He would have His church establish wherever it is found. Great benefits ought therefore to be derived from a mission seminary conference where representatives from various seminaries are given the opportunity jointly to evaluate the individual programs and curricula and policies in the light of a common purpose and goal.

Such a conference can offer benefits not only to the smallest and the most informal of these seminaries, but also to the largest and most elaborately structured seminary program of the mother church. Special dangers arise for a seminary also when its enrollment and its teaching staff acquire a considerable size, and when the structure of its curriculum and its procedure in checking up on student work and student attitudes and viewpoints becomes more complicated. It is then that the basic purpose and goal of seminary training can be easily overshadowed by undue attention to academic regulations and procedures. Also such a seminary will profit by a conference discussion in which more simple seminary programs are evaluated in the light of the basic purpose and goal of all seminary work.

The very definite and specific purpose of all seminary work must always be that of offering theological training to men who desire to enter the public ministry of Christ's church. None of our seminaries can serve merely or even in part as a school of religion, furnishing opportunity to anyone for specialized study in the various fields of theology, no matter what his religious convictions may be or what use he may want to make of the truths presented. Our seminaries must purpose to train all of their students to preach and teach the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ and to carry out the pastoral ministrations of the Christian ministry in accordance with the Holy Scriptures as the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God and in conscious agreement with the historic Confessions of the Lutheran church as a true presentation of Scriptural truths which have been in great controversy. All the theoretical and practical courses of our seminaries, as well as its vicarship programs, must somehow serve this purpose.

It should be the goal of our seminaries in every phase of their training programs to manifest fidelity to the Holy Scriptures, to evidence thorough scholarship, and to effect professional proficiency. Reverent, thorough, and scholarly study of the Holy Scriptures and a

clear apprehension of its contents, especially of its basic messages of Law and Gospel, must be considered fundamental in realizing a seminary's practical purpose of training and equipping men for the public ministry of the church.

There are two vital points in these statements of the basic purpose and goal of seminary training to which we want to give special attention. The first of these is a true understanding of the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

That sound seminary training must be pursued under the full authority of the Holy Scriptures may seem to be so self-evident that you may be surprised that special mention should be made of it. Yet we need to be conscious of the fact that we are living in a day when this no longer can be taken for granted. Even in most Lutheran seminaries erroneous viewpoints concerning the nature of Biblical authority obtain, which range all the way from a limited concept of Scriptural inerrancy to the demythologized Scripture of Rudolph Bultmann. The absolute authority of the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God is generally brushed aside and dismissed as unacceptable reprintation of sixteenth and seventeenth century Lutheran orthodoxy. In our theological studies we cannot escape the task of keeping ourselves informed concerning all these false current viewpoints regarding the nature of Biblical authority. They are making a great impact upon Lutheran theology in our day; we cannot escape the task of analysing and evaluating these viewpoints. Otherwise we would remain blind to the actual battle that the confessional Lutheran church is waging. Yet just as surely we do not want to capitulate to any of these false viewpoints, but rather cling to the absolute authority which Scripture itself teaches, and which it claims for itself as the Word of God.

The inspired Psalmist says, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). In the midst of spiritual darkness the psalmist rejoices over the bright light which lights his way. This light is indispensable. Without it he could not press forward on the spiritual path of blessed fellowship with God which leads to eternal life in His heavenly presence. This is a path which is hidden to sinful man in the darkness of his depravity, his guilt, and his merited condemnation.

The blessed light in which the psalmist rejoices is the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. The Apostle Peter expresses this truth under the same figure in the New Testament, saying, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19). Until the break of Judgment Day the light of the Holy Scriptures has been given to us to guide us through the darkness of sin and death to eternal life. For, as St. Peter states, "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

St. Paul makes the same assertion concerning the apostolic New Testament Word committed to him. He tells the Corinthians, "We speak not the words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Ghost teaches" (1 Corinthians 2:13). And again: "The things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:37). Inasmuch as God's Old Testament and His New Testament Word are of one kind, the Savior's assertion in John 10:35, "The Scripture cannot be broken," applies to both. It is because they are God's inspired and

inerrant Word that the Holy Scriptures, and they alone, can serve as our true unerring light. We can do justice to the psalmist's confession, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet," only inasmuch as we look to the Holy Scriptures as the only light that can guide us on the path of blessed fellowship with God, as the only light by which we can safely and wholesomely guide others in all matters of Christian faith and life.

God's Word itself leads us to this confession. With Timothy we are all reminded that the Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. With Timothy every pastor, every professor, every prospective public servant of the Word is likewise reminded that it is Scripture that fits him out fully for every phase of the public ministry (2 Timothy 3:15-17). The Gospel comfort and assurance which Scripture bestows can give us strength to reject every false authority which would displace God's Word. It can induce us to reject every argument of human reason which presumes to contradict God's Word, every human authority which would exalt itself above Scripture in the church, every appeal to numbers or to the prestige of human wisdom whereby God's Word is disregarded, every assault whereby human reason seeks to discredit the Scriptures as verbally inspired and inerrant in all that they say.

First and foremost, the comfort and peace of the Gospel will induce us to wage an untiring battle against the presumptuous pride of our own fleshly reason, which is continually offended by the truths of God's Word and only too ready to correct them. With the word of the psalmist, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path," we, however, acknowledge the Holy Scriptures not only as the only light but also as a clear light in all matters of Christian faith and life. Let us also remember that everything that Scripture tells us is somehow to serve our Christian faith and life. Only because Holy Scripture is able to convey and to impart its enlightening messages, can the psalmist compare it to a light and to a lamp.

It is first of all an outward clarity which Scripture ascribes to itself. This clarity consists in this that in the words and sentences of intelligible, comprehensible human language, Scripture states all the truths which we need to know for our faith and life now, and for our salvation hereafter. The Scriptures do not, of course, answer every question that our human reason may raise, not even concerning the matters that it actually treats; yet it does state everything that God deems wholesome and necessary for our salvation. He who reads and studies the statements of Holy Scripture he who carefully notes the meaning of words which Scripture employs, the grammatical construction with which these words are joined together in sentences, the figures of speech, if any, in which the statements are found, will have to say: This and this alone is what God is stating in the Scriptures. Scripture is not a wax nose which can be turned to any direction that is desired.

The outward clarity is affirmed by every exhortation of Holy Writ that we use to recognize the truth, to ward off error and false doctrine, detect and reject false teachers. This is asserted in every earnest warning against adding to God's Word or subtracting from it.

In order that the Scriptures may be clear to us individually, this calls for careful, patient study, some parts more, others less. We need to let Scripture explain Scripture, considering all the texts in which it teaches any specific truth, considering them in their wider and closer

context. We need to ask the Lord in fervent prayer that He may overcome all of our human weaknesses and prejudices by which some of the truths might remain hidden to us. Such diligent and prayerful study of God's Word is the very heart of seminary training. It is the main portion of such training. The rest consists in learning to present all of these truths clearly to others in teaching and preaching, in public worship, and in the private care of souls. It consists in relating these clear truths of Scripture properly to all of man's thoughts, endeavors, and activities. The very assurance that Scripture is a clear light, that for all times it clearly presents and reveals all the truths that man needs for faith and life, is a constant encouragement for seminary work. These truths will remain certainties for us, certainties which we will want to teach and preach to others, only as long as we hold firmly to the outward clarity of Scripture, to this that God's inspired and infallible message is found in the very words of Scripture, in keeping with their full linguistic usage and contextual setting. Because so many seminaries have given up this truth of the clarity of Scripture, its graduates are often at a loss as to what they should preach and teach.

What can urge and encourage our seminarians even more fully to become public messengers of God's Word is the spiritual clarity which Scripture likewise asserts for itself. It, too, is embraced in the confession that God's Word is a lamp and a light. This spiritual clarity consists in this that Scripture has the power to effect in us and in others a spiritual understanding of these truths, a blessed comprehension of faith. Scripture and Scripture alone can make us wise unto salvation, and it does so by awakening faith in Jesus Christ. There is only one way of salvation for sinful man, and that is through the free gift of God's grace, the gift of the perfect righteousness which His dear Son has won for all through His vicarious life and death. All that the Holy Scriptures tell us somehow serves the purpose of imparting the gift of salvation to sinners through faith and of making us blessed, rich, and fruitful in its possession for time and eternity.

Natural man, though he may outwardly understand scripture's message of sin and grace, of himself rejects it. Vainly he wants to work out his own salvation. Yet Scripture has power through its message of the Law to reprove the sinner, to convict him of his guilt and condemnation before God. Yet even when thus reprovved and convicted, the sinner is still at enmity with God.

But Scripture through its Gospel message has power to awaken faith in the sinner's heart, and in such faith comforts him with the assurance of the forgiveness of his sins, of life and salvation. Scripture constantly nourishes, strengthens, and preserves the believer in such faith, fills his heart with thankful love, helps him to fight against sin, constrains, instructs, and guides him in striving after God's will. Scripture has that power because it is inspired, God-breathed from beginning to end, because it is the Word of God.

When you hear and study the Scriptures, it is as though God Himself were before you in person in all of His holy majesty, addressing you personally with the words of His love. The Scriptures are not merely a record of the past revelation of God; they are also His ever-present powerful revelation, ever full of the power of His Spirit. This understanding will guard against thinking of seminary training, steeped as it is in God's Word, as a mere academic routine, or as a purely intellectual matter. The comforting and sanctifying power of God's Word is meant first of all for the seminarian's own heart, for his own life and conduct. In the measure in which he

keeps that in mind in his seminary study, he will gain zeal and aptitude to hold it up as a guiding light and lamp for others.

The other vital point in our statement of the basic purpose and goal of seminary training is a true understanding of the mission of the church and thus of its ministry. The mission of the ministry is merely the public exercise of the specific mission entrusted by Christ to His church.

Today, probably more than ever, there is a great confusion concerning the need to which the Christian ministry ought to address itself in order to be relevant and to remain relevant for modern man. More and more are boldly asserting that man's greatest need in our day is to be freed from the ills and tensions of this life, to be freed from poverty, from boredom, from ignorance, from strife and oppression, from social injustice of every kind.

Consequently, more and more look to the Christian ministry to meet and to satisfy these supposed foremost needs of man. They look to the ministry to help provide equitable distribution of material benefits, to foster satisfying social relationships, to encourage general enlightenment, to supply a new kind of guidance for personal conduct which in a flexible way reckons with the alleged advanced insights of modern man. Others still include as basic in the ministry of Christ's church the message of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. Nevertheless, they also wish to broaden the mission of the church and include most of the things just mentioned. They do so by asserting that the mission of the church's ministry is to be directed to the whole man.

What arrogant folly that man should take the ministry which Christ has established and presume to re-define its purpose and function to his own liking, and nevertheless pass it off as still being the ministry of Christ's church! This redefinition or expansion of the mission of Christ's ministry is, however, one of the prominent features of the false ecumenical movement which is making its impact upon all Christian churches and thus also upon their seminaries. It is a result of the main feature of the prevailing ecumenical movement, its loss of understanding for the true authority of the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God in all that it says. With the loss of this understanding, many have lost their understanding for God's Law as His immutable holy will, and hence lost the true concept of sin, its guilt, and its condemnation. Hence, true appreciation for the Scriptural message of redemption and justification has been eroded.

Scripture, however, leaves no doubt about the fact that man's sin, his guilt, his condemnation before God are and ever remain man's greatest need. To men's plight of sin, to the guilt of sin, to the curse of sin, and to the bondage of sin, the Christian ministry is to address itself. Its one entrusted function is to solve man's plight of sin. It is able to do this by proclaiming the Gospel of the grace of God. The only task and function specifically entrusted to the church is that of proclaiming the Gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ Jesus, to men for their salvation.

To the unregenerate the church is to proclaim the Gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, in order to make disciples of them, that is, that through its testimony the Holy Spirit may bring more and more sinners to saving faith. To those who have already come to faith, the

church is to continue to proclaim the Gospel, the whole counsel of God in Christ, that they may be built up in Christian joy, comfort, understanding, hope, and a sanctified life.

As far as the unregenerate are concerned, the only express purpose for which the church is to proclaim the Law is that of bringing them to the knowledge of their sin in order to prepare them for the comforting proclamation of the Gospel. Though the church in preaching the Law may effect nothing more in some of its hearers than mere outward reform and civic righteousness, this is a by-product of its work and not a part of its actual mission. The establishment and maintenance of mere outward peace and order for good social, economic, and political relations among men is a function that God has assigned to the state. The state is to do this with its "human reason," namely, with the full scope of the abilities and endowments which, according to Scripture, belong to the natural man and which are sufficient for maintaining and promoting a measure of civic righteousness. Such "human reason" includes the inscribed Law and a natural knowledge of God, manifest especially in conscience.

The individual Christian has, of course, been placed by God both into the realm of the church and of the state. In carrying out their responsibilities in either realm the Christians will do so in accordance with the distinctive function and means which belong to each of those two realms. As the Christian participates in the functions of the state, he will, of course, do so with his Christian motivation and with his additional Scriptural insights concerning God's holy will. In all seminary training it is very vital, however, to impart clarity concerning the very specific functions and means which God has entrusted to each, to the church and to the state, lest confusion arise concerning the very specific and glorious mission of the church and of its seminary training.