

MISSIONS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION:

THE PRESENT SITUATION

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A DECADE OF CHANGE

The rapidly accelerating pace of change in our world is a useful framework in which to look at what has happened in our particular subject. Ten years ago John F. Kennedy was President of the United States, the Peace Corps was strong, a Freedom March for civil rights and integration was being planned. An optimistic, expansionist mood was strong in America; we had moved beyond some of the fright of the cold war and had been somewhat successful in the Cuban missile crisis. The Bay of Pigs was past but the Gulf of Tonkin incident was yet to come. We were regaining technological confidence in “catching up with the Russians” in the space race, and had few effective competitors in trade.

New nations were being formed and were joining the U. N. There was considerable hope for “development” through traditional patterns of power and philanthropy. The U.N. had tried to deal with Katanga’s secession from the Congo and the World Court was to consider Southwest Africa. The tragedies of Stanleyville, Biafra and Bangladesh were yet to come, as was the Six Day War.

Higher Education in America was still in an expanding phase, and theological schools were a part of this. The Church growth of the ‘50s was slowing down, there was some concern when seminary enrollment dropped 5% in 1960 but all was said to be well by 1962.¹ Sociological analysis and inner-city ministries were popular;² Many worked on the assumption that man was a problem which could be solved. It was 1968 before Black Power was vocal, theological students

1 *Christian Century*, 79:1360 (Nov. 7, 1962).

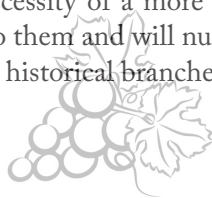
2 Wagoner, Walter D., *Bachelor of Divinity*, New York: Association Press, 1963, p. 18 ff.

often came to avoid the draft, and there was a desperate effort to re-structure the curriculum to be relevant and to give the student maximum freedom to do his own thing, thus reducing the required or core curriculum in missions and other disciplines. In the past two years there has been a severe economic drought in the churches as a whole which has been sharply present in the seminaries.³ A majority of seminaries are on a deficit budget and some are closing. At this same time some denominations are saying they need less pastors in American parishes, and are curtailing their general agencies and mission outreach. Those who think of missions as a “luxury”, or even as a specialty item to cater to a few students, may view with regret continued expenditures in this field.

For many denominations there has been more change in the style of missional involvement in the past decade than there was in the previous 25 years. Some speak of a “post-Latourette” style of mission in a post-colonial world. Third world churchmen are now in places of authority from which some call for particular stress on liberation and structural justice rather than the individualized service of a previous era. Foreigners come for brief terms of technical work rather than for lifelong involvement with a people. An indication of this trend occurred in missionary preparation about 12 years ago when a number of mission boards began to use short-term orientation at Stoney Point rather than the longer academic preparation available at some universities, theological schools and such specialized institutions as the Kennedy School of Missions and Scarritt College. Another measurable sign of change has been the intentional decrease by over 30% in overseas personnel sent by some of the “mainline” denominations. This has been counteracted by an increase of over 60% in the number of missionaries sent by more conservative groups.⁴

Few Protestant groups would claim to have changed more profoundly in this decade than the Roman Catholics. Ten years ago Pope John XXIII had completed his earthly ministry, having started the Second Vatican Council on its way. His successor had not been elected but new voices had been heard at the Council. *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* stressed the essential missiological thrust inherent in being the Church.

Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity stated that “seminary and college professors should teach young people the true state of the world and of the Church, so that the necessity of a more intense evangelization of non-Christians will become clear to them and will nurture their zeal. In teaching the dogmatic, Biblical, moral, and historical branches, they should bring to light the



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3 *Christian Century*, 88:91 (January 27, 1971), editorial.

4 The Missionary Retreat, editorial, *Christianity Today*, 16: 26 (Nov. 19, 1971).

missionary aspects contained therein. In this way a missionary awareness can be formed in future priests.”⁵

Unfortunately this call for a *general* concern with missions was not picked up in the *Decree on Priestly Formation*, which treated missions, ecumenics and other religions as specialist subjects which should be available somewhere for those who were interested.⁶ A similar attitude to missions as an “ancillary subject” was maintained in the “Basic Scheme for Priestly Training” developed by the Congregation for Catholic Education in 1970.⁷ The U.S. Bishops’ Conference directive on Priestly Formation lists “ecclesiology with its missiology” as one of the principal areas of faith to be included in a seminary curriculum and indicates that “all seminarians ... should be given a certain general knowledge of the missions, or an introduction to the more fundamental questions of missionary theology.”⁸ Available data suggests that this has yet to be implemented for this as for other ecclesial communities. Catholic seminaries are also caught with the large institutions built in the 1950s but very few vocations in the 70s, plus an acute problem of attrition as the trained priests leave the ministry at a rate of up to 4% per year.⁹

Clear signs of changing interests in specialized missionary training are to be seen in the rise and fall of institutions or departments devoted primarily to this task. Among those which have grown since 1962 are: the School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth at Fuller Seminary; the School of World Mission of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; and the School of World Mission of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Prominent institutions which have ended this type of program include the Hartford Seminary Foundation; Scarritt College and the Lutheran School of Theology at Maywood.

While the “Rationale for Missions in the Theological Curriculum” is the topic for another paper, it should be noted that an understanding of varied goals and developments during the past ten years indicates divergent points of view regarding the reason for teaching missions in American seminaries. For some it is to present the challenge to all, so that a few may be chosen and

5 *Ad Gentes*, 39. Many would caution, however, that what all are generally to do may be done by no one in particular. “Is it not when everybody has the task of closing a door that most often it is left open?” quoted in John Power, *Mission Theology Today*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1971, p. 203.

6 *Optatam Totius*, 16.

7 “Ratio Fundamentalibus Institutionis Sacerdotalis”, Articles 77, 80, 96, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, March 26, 1970; April 16 and 23, 1970.

8 *The Program of Priestly Formation of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, USA*, Washington, D.C.: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1971, pp. 16, 92.

9 James, Allix Bledsoe, “Theological Education 1972”, *Theological Education*, 9:34 (Autumn 1972).

prepared for their peculiar calling as overseas witnesses. This may be at least the rationalization of those who assure us that the challenge of mission is adequately covered by occasional chapel speakers, and the availability (somewhere else) of specific training for cross-cultural ministry. Provisions of this type are less satisfactory for those who believe that the church is One Body throughout the world which must have some self-awareness of its various parts; that the Great Commission requires all to share in the prayers and stewardship and concern for world evangelism; that our zeal for evangelism and social change in America will be enlightened by an understanding of similar tasks of mission elsewhere; and that our own faith will be challenged and our understanding deepened as we learn of God's work among peoples of other cultures and life styles. Those with this latter conviction will not be content to have missions as a peripheral elective or as a specialist subject available at a handful of post-graduate institutions.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE OF MISSIONS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The questionnaire was returned by 75 graduate seminaries and 20 additional colleges. While the 75 seminaries had a total of 59 full time missions faculty, there were 33 which had no full time persons and 11 which had no one at all in the field. During the decade this represented an increased faculty at 21 seminaries, a loss at 18 and a continuation of the same level (from none to three) at the other 36.

Eighteen seminaries offer no courses in mission at the present time. More courses are offered at 24 schools, less at 25, and the same number as in 1962 by 26. Missions is often a separate department but is frequently joined to Church History. It may also appear in the Biblical, Theological or Practical fields.

The continuation of an appointment in the field of missions was thought probable by 44 and unlikely by 26 professors. The subject seemed "secure" in the curriculum in the opinion of 43 and insecure to 20. The status of the missions (question 5) seemed to have improved in 27 institutions and there were 27 which reported increased student interest (question 6). The status seemed lower in 29 institutions while 35 reported less student interest.

The trend to "replace" world mission courses with those on World Christianity, History of Religions, Ecumenics or similar topics was admitted by 22 respondents while 19 said such matters had always been supplementary to Missions but there was no question of replacing the mission thrust. Of the 27 who answered "No" to this question, quite a few said "not in this institution" or some equivalent of the Pauline "God forbid!"

The cross-cultural sending emphasis was basic to 26 programs and was given considerable emphasis by 16 others. At least 5 respondents indicated that they did not understand the question.

In a day when some seminaries have absolutely no required courses, some exposure to mission (or in some cases ecumenics or world religions as an alternate) is required in 37 of the 75 seminaries. Most estimate that 10-15% of the students elect other courses but 3 say over 60% choose additional mission courses and a further 8 say over 30% take more in this field.

QUERIES for those tempted to put too much faith in such a tabulation:
(Numbered according to the Questionnaire)

1. One "full-time a person is actually a visiting assistant professor with other responsibilities. Another lists 3 in missions but one teaches Missions, another World Religions and the third handles Ecumenics.

2. Several remarked that their listings for 1972-73 were actually taught whereas those for 1962-63 were all those listed in the catalog. The number of courses offered means little when they are as diverse as First Aid, Buddhist Meditation, Linguistics and Roman Catholicism.

4. One answered that the position was secure but there was no full-time person in the field this year or ten years ago.

5. The status of missions is good enough for one school to offer a major in missions although they have no full-time staff.

10. Students must be interested in the seminary which brings in a different lecturer each year and still has 5% taking the electives. Even more remarkable is the seminary which offers no courses in missions but 10-15% of the students take them anyway! (And there is not even a cluster nearby)

11. A Dean who said the professor would not be replaced (Q.4) suggested that in the future the subject should somehow "continue to maintain itself and grow."



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