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**THE SELF-UNDERSTANDING OF THEOLOGICAL
EDUCATION FOR MISSION IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT**
The Role Of Dialogue And Education At China
Lutheran Seminary: A Case Study

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1. Introduction

It is my great pleasure to be able to participate in the ACTEAS 1998 Symposium. And it is also a great joy for me to be with colleagues who are committed to the vision and re-vision of Lutheran theological education in the Asia.

When I was invited to prepare for this presentation, part of me felt very much honored, but another part of me sensed the scope and complexity of a task far beyond my knowledge and expertise. Asia is in itself a big continent. Theological education, narrower the Lutheran theological education, in Asia, is too broad a topic to tackle with in a manageable way. For the sake of manageability I choose to limit myself, and thus narrow the original sub-topic down to “The Role of Dialogue and Education at China Lutheran Seminary: A Case Study.”

With this case study approach I intend to make use of the struggle and experience of China Lutheran Seminary (hereafter CLS) over the past decades to illustrate its dialogue with the religious, cultural, social and economic, educational and political realms in which it carries out its mission, and with the congregations that work together with CLS in that mission. It is my hope that such a reflective as well as self-critical case study will throw some light on the dialogical processes of our sister seminaries in Asia, kindle meaningful discussions in this symposium, and engender fruitful interaction among the members of the ACTEAS.

2. A Brief History of China Lutheran Seminary

For the past four decades Lutheran theological education in Taiwan had traveled a rough and frustrating path. In 1952 the Kaohsiung Lutheran Bible Institute (KLBI) was established by a number of Lutheran missions which began their new work and established congregations in Taiwan after their withdrawal from China. In 1957 the Taiwan Lutheran Seminary (TLS) was established in Taichung with a view to upgrading theological training. In 1954 the Missouri Synod related Concordia Seminary (CCS) was founded in Chiayi as a separate Lutheran institution for the training of the needed workers in the China Evangelical Lutheran Church (CELC).

Later, due to the slow-down of the growth of the church, the related drop in the number of enrolling students, and partly due to the leadership conflict between the expatriates and the nationals, both TLS and CCS were closed down in the mid-sixties. Shortly after, the two were merged as the United Lutheran Seminary which was a

short-lived operation for less than two years. Since then, the Taiwan Lutheran Church and the China Evangelical Lutheran Church have not attempted to reopen their respective seminaries again. Instead, they sought to cooperate either with the Presbyterian seminary or sent their students to the non-denominational one.

After the close of TLS and CCS the Lutheran Brethren China Mission, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway, and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission decided to establish the original China Lutheran Seminary (CLS) in 1966. CLS operated for twenty years more or less on the level of a Bible institute. Its B.Th. degree was only recognized by the Asia Theological Association as recently as 1987.

By the providence of God and through the mediation of the LWF the enlarged cooperation in CLS began with the participation of the Taiwan Lutheran Church in the Board of Directors in 1989. And in 1994 the China Evangelical Lutheran Church also decided to join the CLS Board. This made CLS the first theological institution which is sponsored by all six Lutheran synods in Taiwan, and supported by the related eight overseas mission partners. According to the new CLS Constitution, only the national board members have the right to vote whereas the mission representatives participate as honorary members who have right to speak, but not to vote. This means that the national board members shoulder all policy-making responsibilities.

3. The Vision and Mission of China Lutheran Seminary

As CLS enters into this new era of cooperation among the six national synods and eight related overseas missions, what is its self-understanding? How does it perceive its identity and mission? The self-understanding of CLS is indicated in its STATEMENT OF VISION AND MISSION. It is written: CLS is a community which inherits and transmits the Gospel of justification by faith, and which seeks to forge the servants of the cross for the Chinese churches. Its objective is to equip the servants of God with

- a) a deep understanding of the Gospel;
- b) a keen awareness of our times;
- c) a burning passion for mission;
- d) a genuine commitment to shepherding.

In the past nine years we have put all our efforts into strengthening and

renewing our theological education with these four tasks in mind.

4. Dialogue As a Vital Process in Theological Education

Within this presentation the term “dialogue” is understood as a way of reciprocal conversation which is marked by mutual listening and understanding. It is an ongoing process of inquisitive and interactive exchange. This meaning of dialogue includes four distinct spheres: a) dialogue between the human and the divine; b) dialogue between humans; c) dialogue between communities; d) dialogue between concepts, values, or ways of life. In the context of theological education the term “dialogue” includes all four of these spheres.

First of all, theological education has to do with the divine initiative of creation, revelation, and redemption, and with the human response of faith and worship. Within this sphere the dialogue is not that between equals. Rather, it is between the Creator and the creature, between the LORD and His servants, between the Father and His children. Though our relationship with God is not that between equals, God in His condescending love is willing to listen to us not only as Lord and Father, but also as Friend. It is by His grace that we are privileged to pray and to commune with Him. And by His love and mercy we are even allowed to express our innermost emotions such as complaints, bitterness, and despair.

The second sphere, the dialogue between humans, is a dialogue between equals. All human beings were created equal. We are all creatures before God. The people of God are God’s chosen, but not His favorite ones. The people of God do not stand above any other people. We do not monopolize God’s revealed truth. We are the stewards of His mystery. Therefore, though we are God’s people, we are in no way superior to the people of other faiths. To the contrary, we could even find ourselves weaker and more vulnerable than others. In a way, we are fools, but fools for Christ’s sake. Though we have our weaknesses, it is through these weaknesses that we come to know the strength and power of God.

Thirdly, there is the dialogue between communities. This includes the dialogue between the seminary and the congregation, the seminary and the synod, and the dialogue of the seminary or church with the other communities in society and with the other religious groups.

Fourthly, there is dialogue between concepts, values, and ways of life. Such

conceptual exchange and mutual exploration is, however, carried out by the human counterparts. The most meaningful exchange of such dialogue takes place not in the abstract concepts, but in the core of each other's deep-seated and innermost convictions.

If any dialogue is to be fruitful, it has to be non-evasive, non-defensive, and non-manipulative. In other words, it should be characterized by candidness, respect, integrity, sensitivity, empathy, and humility. Without these qualities the dialogue will be handicapped and even futile. With them it will be mutually enriching and edifying.

Theological education must by all means move itself away from monologue. When we are in monologue, we are not listening, understanding, and interacting with others. Monologue is defensive and self-deceiving. Monologue locks ourselves in. Monologue is a self-talk. It evades and resists challenges and changes. Consequently, it keeps us from growth and transformation. But the characteristic of dialogue is openness—openness to God, to fellow human beings, to new meaning and vision, and to new joy and hope.

As a Christian community it is imperative that we keep an ongoing and vigilant dialogue with God through prayer and worship. This vertical dialogue keeps the theological community in an unceasingly worshipful and ever-refreshing relationship with God. This relationship is the rock foundation of our identity, the power source of our mission, and the backbone of our integrity in dialogue.

Being a Lutheran community our dialogue with the confessions enables us to keep our hermeneutic tools sharp and our evangelical stance distinctive. This dialogue should not only be historical, but contextual. This means that the Asian Lutheran community should inherit the confessional traditions critically and contextually. As Asian Lutheran members we are obliged to engage in conscientious dialogue with our overseas mission partners, fellow Asian Lutheran churches, and, to a wider extent, with other confessional and non-confessional churches in Asia.

5. Dialogue with the Religious and Cultural Realm

Asia has been pluralistic in religion. Particularly in East Asia Christianity was a comparatively late comer. Christianity was brought into China by the Nestorian monks during the sixth century of our era. The Nestorians in China wore Buddhist cassocks and employed many Buddhist terms in the translation of the Bible into

Chinese. Regrettably, Nestorianism did not have much dialogue with the Chinese culture. Though it had some sparse activities in China for over three hundred years, it hardly made any impact upon the Chinese thought and way of life. The Nestorian Christianity's only remains in the Chinese soil were the inscription of a monument in Si-an, few writings found in Tun-huang Caves, and some tombstones found in southern China.

When the Jesuits came to China in the Ming dynasty (1360-1644), they decided to wear Confucian gowns, used the Confucian language to translate the Scriptures, and dialogued with the Confucian intelligentsia. They sought to introduce the Christian message by use of Confucian terms and concepts. In the matter of Chinese ancestral worship, the Dominicans and the Franciscans had treated it as idolatry, whereas the Jesuits saw it more as an ethical rite. Later, the controversy over this rite deteriorated to such an extent that the Emperor Kangsi (1654-1722) banned the Catholic missionary activities in China. Ever since, Christianity was stigmatized by the Chinese as a religion which urged its followers to desert their ancestors. As a result, it has been seen as an alien religion which propagates unfilial teachings. At present, such a misunderstanding still constitutes one of the biggest obstacles to bringing the Chinese people to Christ.

Conscious of the necessity to keep on the study of the important religious and cultural issues, and to dialogue with the people of other faiths, CLS decided in 1995 to establish the Research Center for the Traditional Chinese Religions and the New Religious Movements (hereafter RC). The purpose of the RC is, on the one hand, to engage in the objective study of other religions, and, on the other, to facilitate the seminary's dialogue with the people of other faiths. Like the churches in the other parts of Asia, the Chinese churches in Taiwan live and move in a religiously pluralistic environment. Our daily life is marked by frequent contacts with our family members, neighbors, and colleagues who belong to the faiths other than Christianity.

In many parts of Asia, Christians form only a very small percentage of the local population. Though small in number, Christians are the group of people who have been transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and are committed to the testimony and sharing of the Good News of God's atoning love. The testimony to the Gospel in the Asian context most often takes the form of daily dialogue within the family or in the work place. In view of this reality, theological education must not confine itself to the traditional academic questions only, but must also seek to equip the church workers and church members for a genuine dialogue with the people of other faiths, and for the

humble yet confident sharing of the Gospel of crucifixion and resurrection.

The Research Center of CLS currently employ two research members. One is specialized in Taoism and field research; the other, in Buddhism. Over the past few years we have participated seminars sponsored by other religious institutions. The RC had also sponsored various seminars for Christian workers and lay people. We invited a number of experts in the field of Chinese religions or the new religious movements to address different religious and theological issues with a purpose of enabling Christians to dialogue more effectively with their family members, friends, neighbors, and fellow factory or office workers of other faiths. So far, we have held the Wisdom of Life Seminar, and the Seminar on Christians and Folk Funeral Rites. This coming November we will sponsor a seminar on kneeling and worship. In the near future we hope to sponsor local and international seminars which will invite representatives of other faiths to make their contributions and to dialogue with each other.

The researchers in the RC offer a course on the comparative study of other religions. The students are encouraged to make use of the RC's library resources, and to take part in the field research. We will also invite the faculty to assist in the reflection of some particular issues which occur in the course of research and dialogue with other faiths. The resources of the RC are limited. However, as part of the Lutheran Communion we are able to link with the LWF's Department of Theology and Studies, particularly with its dialogue programs with the people of other faiths. In the study of the new religious movements we are working in cooperation with the Dialog Center International in Arhus, Denmark. Presently, we are looking for an additional researcher who has expertise in contact and dialogues with the new religious movements.

6. Dialogue with Social and Economic Realm

A. The Social Realm

CLS is located in Hsinchu and in the neighborhood of the famous Science-based Industrial Park (SIP), the so-called Silicon Valley of Taiwan, the National Chiaotung University, and the National Tsinghua University. Hsinchu is a high-tech city with a highly educated population. No other city in Taiwan claims as high of a percentage of the population which holds a Masters Degree or a higher degree. In 1998 the Science-based Industrial Park produced a little more than USD 11

billion worth of products. During this period of Asian-wide economic recession, the SIP is the single bright production sector which keeps the Taiwan economy going.

Taiwan is now a post-industrial and post-modern society. The traditional family structure is falling apart, and time-honored values are breaking down. The society is profit-oriented and pleasure seeking. The population of the aged is reaching 7%. The elders tend to be neglected. The young adults join the work force in the cities, and their main concerns are their livelihood and career development. The youth have heavy pressure in attaining good grades, and seek to crowd into the prestigious schools. Those youth who are not able to withstand this pressure and drop out of school, they often drift in the margin of society, and become the captives of drugs, violence, prostitution, and crime.

As the society becomes more democratized and liberalized, women have more access than before to key leadership positions, and to enjoy more of their constitutionally entitled rights. Even so, there are frequent cases of marital abuses and sexual aggressions. Since most parents are over-occupied with money-making business and career, they have spared very little attention for the needs and problems of their growing children. Consequently, the nurture and moral education of children are handed over to the schools. However, the school is no substitute for the home, and the teacher can not replace parents. In recent years the crime rate among the adolescents has increased drastically. This signals a serious alarm that the families in Taiwan are in deep trouble.

The goal of theological education is to equip students not only to preach faithfully the Word of God, but also to shepherd the flock effectively. Therefore it is important that the theological students should know well the Word of God, and that they should be competent to bring the Word of God to bear upon the crises and challenges of their parishioners. In this connection the dialogue of the seminary with society will keep its curriculum and instruction relevant and credible.

B. The Economic Realm

Every educational enterprise has to have a viable budget. Theological education is no exception. Without an adequate income theological education will be in many aspects handicapped. Formerly, CLS was entirely subsidized by the overseas missions. Presently, one third of CLS' income is from the overseas partners; one third from student tuition, and another one third from local contributions. The local

contributions include the Lutheran as well as the other sister congregations and individuals.

There are altogether 132 Lutheran congregations in Taiwan with a total membership of about 12,000. Most of the Lutheran congregations are of the middle class. Not very many members are in big business. Though Lutheran congregations are very willing to make contributions to CLS, the amount of their contributions can only cover a small portion of our annual budget. The overseas subsidies for the operational expenses are of a fixed amount. This is related to our long-term goal of self-support. Adding the factor of inflation, the annual subsidies from the overseas are decreasing.

This means that CLS must put more efforts into raising funds locally to cover the increase of the necessary expenditures. As we upgrade the quality of our theological education we do need to count the costs and to be a responsible steward of God's provision. Through our regular seminary bulletins, prayer letters, and other contacts with CLS supporters, we convey both our vision and needs to them, and solicit their prayers and financial support. The philosophy of our fund raising is that we first seek to serve them, and then solicit their support, rather than vice versa. In the past nine years we have discovered that as we hold fast to our vision and go forward in faith we find the unexpected richness of God's provision.

7. Dialogue with Educational and Political Realm

A. The Educational Realm

Education has been carried out using many kinds of models. For the data-orientated or knowledge-centered education, the most important task is, on the teacher's side, to share or transmit the necessary information clearly ; and, on the students' side, to learn and understand the taught materials adequately. This kind of learning includes reading, listening, or gathering information from videos or the internet, analysis, and integration.

Another kind of education has to do with the acquisition of skills. This often requires a certain degree of knowledge before the skills can be mastered. The third kind is related to the learning of values, such as attitudes, strategies for making decisions and setting priorities, the way of life, the way of handling issues, and the way of relating to people.

As can be seen, theological education is integrally related to the acquisition of knowledge, the mastery of skills, and the realization of values. To state that in another way, theological education must include the understanding of doctrines, the learning of ministerial and other related skills, and the formation of spirituality. All three categories are best learned through dialogue, rather than monologue. The interactive process facilitates mutual understanding between teacher and students, heightens the motivation in learning, and reward in teaching, and fosters the growth of both teacher and students.

If education is to be truly educative, it must avoid being monological. Monologue is monotonous. It does not stimulate learning or growth. Even so, we have to admit much of the theological instruction in the past was monological. The process of teaching was only an one-way street. And the presentations in the classroom were either too academic or too far removed from where the students are and live.

The faculty of CLS try our best to be dialogical. But we have to confess that many of us, including myself, have sometimes lapsed unwittingly into monologue. When that happened, there was little resonance with students. The teaching became “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” Because the Chinese students are more authority-oriented, and tend more to listen than to raise critical questions, it is important that the teachers encourage students to raise questions in and out of the classroom. To raise questions is the first step to finding answers and stimulating growth. Theological training should not be static and passive. It should seek to be dialogical and interactive. This is the only way to ensure that the students digest and appropriate what has been taught, and to apply what they have learned in the seminary.

B. The Political Realm

Theological education is, on the one hand, priestly; and, on the other, prophetic. God’s revelation and redemptive act in the Old and New Testaments took place in a specific political context. As to the proper relationship between theological training and politics there are varied views and understandings. Some take a dualistic view as if theology and politics are totally separated. Theological training has only to do with equipping students to be the savers and carers of souls. Others take an activist view that the goal of theological education is to prepare the kind of leadership which will

lead the people of God to engage in the transformation of the social and political structure, and to build up a just and humane society. The former view is too heavenly oriented whereas the latter is too earthly bound.

There is a more balanced and holistic view. It sees God's revelation and acts integrally and holistically. And it seeks to proclaim the whole Gospel to the whole person in his or her whole environment. The message of the Gospel addresses not only the predicament and needs of one's soul, but also the social, political, economic, and ecological issues which are integrally connected to people's day to day living. The partial gospel is only a truncated gospel. And the truncated gospel can never bring to the receivers the full hope and liberation.

More often than not, theology is explicitly and implicitly connected with ideology. And theological education operates in a specific political environment. In the case of Taiwan, theological education was carried out in a colonial context for its first half century. Later, it was conducted under the umbrella of the nationalist, anti-Communist ideology. During this period there were theological educators who resented the martial law whereas others explicitly showed allegiance to the nationalist ideology. For example, in the chancel of a number of Lutheran churches there stood two flags on the two sides of the altar: on one side, the church flag; and on the other, the national flag. Did this signify Luther's concept of two kingdoms, or the symbolic support of the Nationalist regime?

After the repeal of the martial law, some of the Presbyterian theologians espoused a "homeland theology", which supported either the independence of Taiwan or the process of self-determination. To my knowledge, there used to be courses taught in the Tainan Theological Seminary (TTS) which were geared to the raising of the Taiwanese national consciousness and the inculcation of the homeland theology. However, due to the turnover of the leadership of the TTS those courses were later either suspended or replaced by other ones.

In the case of CLS, though its supporting synods and congregations were formerly pro-Nationalist, recently, due to the sharp decline of the Nationalist influence and the relentless pressure from the People's Republic of China for reunification, most Mandarin-speaking Lutheran members tend to be more reserved and take the stance of "wait and see." Whatever the final outcome, one thing is clear: the majority of people would hesitate to opt for an independent Taiwan, or for a unification with the present PRC.

CLS does not have any political slant. We seek to expound truthfully the teaching of the Scriptures in accordance with the hermeneutical principles spelled out in the Lutheran confessions. Our intent is to equip our students to have a keen and up-to-date awareness of our present condition locally, regionally, and globally, and to train them to testify to the Gospel in our particular environment, and to be faithful, responsive shepherds, teachers, and prophets.

8. Dialogue with the Local Congregations

The basic rationale for theological education is to train the church workers needed for the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments in the local congregations. In principle, the very reason for the existence of the seminary is to facilitate and enhance the ministry of the congregation. But in practice many seminaries seem to have a rather loose relationship with their related congregations. The seminary is a teaching and training center which prepares the candidates for ministry in parish or para-church organizations. The real frontiers of ministry are not encountered at the seminary, but in the congregations. Thus the health and vitality of the congregation are closely connected with the quality of the ministers who serve them, and the kind of training those ministers have received in the seminary. In this sense, the performance of its graduates in the parish or para-church organizations becomes the testing stone of the seminary's credibility.

Though CLS is the only Lutheran seminary in Taiwan, it is still a long way from enjoying the full support of all the Lutheran congregations. The intent and commitment of CLS is to assist and enhance the ministry of the congregations. Thus we make it our aim to maintain a closer dialogue with the congregations in order to keep our theological education in touch with their needs and challenges. The contacts with the congregations are made through our publications, through the seminars we sponsor for church workers, elders and deacons, through Seminary Sunday visits and other opportunities to preach in the congregations, and through our grassroots ministry training courses.

In recent years an increasing number of the Lutheran congregations on Taiwan have joined the cell church movement. The movement stresses worship and praise, the priesthood of all believers, the cell group structure, the exercise of charismatic gifts, and the outreach in evangelism. The main thrust of the movement is to make the cell group itself a miniature church in which worship, pastoral care, evangelism, and

discipleship training are all enclosed. That means the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments are carried out in the group.

Moreover, the cell church, usually fast growing church, advocates church-based over against academy-centered ministerial training. The focus of its training is on the equipping of the cell group leaders for the performance of various tasks in the group. Because the church-based ministerial training is essentially task-oriented, and its trainees are usually quick to pick up the necessary skills and show good performance in the group, the academy-centered training is criticized for its over-emphasis on intellectual learning and the low performance in the actual ministry.

Rather than finding fault with each other, CLS feels both the academy-centered model and the church-based model have their respective strengths and weaknesses. Neither can accomplish the entire task without the other. We welcome the dialogue with the congregations as well as with the church-based model. It is our conviction that the two models are complementary. And we are open to find ways to balance the need for solid biblical studies and keen theological reflection with the existential needs and challenges of the congregation.

Actually, CLS' degree programs (B.Th. & M.Div.) are academy-centered whereas the Grassroots Ministry Training Program (GMTP) is church-based. However, the theological and educational rationale of the GMTP is somewhat different from that of the cell church. It is designed to enable the laity, particularly the grassroots Christians to bring the Gospel to their relatives and neighbors, acquaintances in the business contacts, or colleagues in the same work place. And it also equips them to engage in basic discipleship training and in church planting. This program has been broadly welcomed by a large number of congregations across the denominations. By this Fall, we will have already established ten teaching centers, extending from the very north of the island to the very south. By far it is CLS' fastest growing program, and a program that shows great potential.

9. Dialogue as a Way of Maturation and Transformation

In the foregoing we have stressed that dialogue is an open and interactive process. Theological education includes dialogue with God, with Scriptures, traditions (confessions), religions and cultures, with social, economical, educational, and political elements. And it also engages in frequent dialogue with the local congregations. To be open means to receive stimuli and responses, to meet questions

and critiques, and to face challenges with faith and courage. To be open can also make ourselves vulnerable. It takes the risk of having to face our own weaknesses and blind spots. In other words, dialogue keeps us humble, watchful, empathetic, and always on the growing edge. Dialogue pushes us forward to maturation and the possibility for transformation.

Asia is a pluralistic continent. Christianity in most regions of Asia represents only a very small minority. Small as we are, we are the ambassadors for Christ, who entreat people to take heed of the Good News of God's forgiving and reconciling love. We are the people of God who are in no way superior to any others. We are the unworthy recipients of God's justifying grace. And we see ourselves the servants of the Gospel which has the power to forgive sins and to make us truly the sons and daughters of God.

The crux of theological education is to forge the servants of the cross, to ensure that students have a clear understanding and firm grasp of the Gospel, and to enable the parishioners to testify to the Gospel in all vicissitudes and in the midst of various challenges. The Gospel is for proclamation at all times and in all circumstances. Our calling is not to protect it but to release it. It is the power of God for salvation and for bringing new life and hope to the persons who put their trust in Jesus Christ.

The preparation of this presentation had been much slower and rougher going than I anticipated. At times I was not sure whether my thoughts and observations were worth sharing with the fellow participants. As I bring the discussion to an end, a Chinese idiom, pao-chuan-yin-yu (casting a brick to attract a jade) comes to my mind.

The story behind this idiom has to do with Chao-ku, a highly accomplished poet of the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907). Once, while he was touring the beautiful city of Soo-chow, a local poet, Chang-jian, who admired his talent, wrote two lines on a wall of the city's Divine Rock Monastery in order to induce Chao-ku to write better sentences. When Chao-ku visited the monastery and found what Chang-jian wrote, he completed the poem by adding two fine lines. Later, people came to refer Chang-jian's act as "casting a brick to attract a piece of jade." What I have done here is only casting a crude brick out with an audacity to attract fine jades from you.

Response to the paper of Dr. Thomas Yu

Bishop Munib A. Younan

Introduction:

First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Thomas Yu for his paper that presents a case study on the China Lutheran Seminary. One can say that this is one of the illuminating papers that those who are ignorant like me can understand and comprehend. I have some remarks about this paper that are not necessarily critical but are essential for our common discussion.

1. First of all: It is true that Asia is the largest continent on this planet. One can not easily generalize on many things. It is also true that Christianity is a quality minority in the Asian continent. Our Churches are minorities. This fact drives the Church to be always in search of its identity. It also continues to focus the evangelical identity. This paper is but one example of that.

2. Being a minority or a Christian must not mean adapting the Western culture or putting a new patch on an old cloth. Rather, how can Christianity be contextual in our respective countries and keep our Christian Lutheran identity clear way? According to my perception, the Bible is a contextual book. I can also say that the Augsburg Confession and the Confessional books are also contextual. They teach us how to contextualize our Apostolic Catholic belief and heritage in our respective cultures and countries. For this very reason I think that if the Church will draw any mission opportunities, it must be contextual. I also believe that it is the task of our theological education not only to teach them the brand names of the good theologians, but to help them grow in understanding that the good theologian is the one that makes the Gospel fresh in his/her context. Thus, I ask, don't we need to write an Asia Contextual confessional theology? Don't we need to challenge our diverse grassroots with a contextualized spirituality?

3. The theology of dialogue that Dr. Yu is presenting represents the modern approach to theological education. Living in Asia, one is in dialogue with all aspects of life. Being in dialogue means we are different than those with whom we are living. It is not clear from his paper if he means that dialogue is one of the methods for mission. Or can dialogue remain, as such, a dialogue to understand and coexist with the other without converting or prosectizing the other? Or do we need both ways? Both mission and dialogue are a witness.

Can't we say that our mere presence I itself is a witness of mission and dialogue at the same time?

4. I really admire Dr. Yu's paper in that it touches many aspects in dialogue. This means that our future theologians must be well equipped. The quality of theological education must be enhanced by pluralistic nature. I mean, one needs to be informed in this modern society, but set the priorities. I fully agree that the Church should have the priestly and prophetic role in many aspects, especially in education. In my Church we do vast educational work; we do not only serve our people with high education. We are trying to involve ourselves in shaping the future educational work. Thus in our dialogue, we want to teach our society:
 - A) To move from monolithic way to a pluralistic way in a multi-religious society.
 - B) To objectively read the history in the method of deconstruction.

5. I also appreciate the approach of Dr. Yu to the grassroots and local congregations, which are often forgotten by theologians. Our good ideas and the future of the Church are dependent on the grassroots. No pastor or Bishop can be over the grassroots. We are to teach ourselves that a pastor or Bishop is one of the grassroots and they are called to be servants. This theology of humility is Christ's and is the one that creates dialogical approach and maturity in the grassroots, and brings a constant spiritual revival.

6. I miss in your paper, two essential emphases:

One: the ecumenical dialogue and cooperation with the other Churches and confessions that are existing in Asia. One can not live as a Christian without the others. We need to develop the theology of Communion in Asia on three respects:

 - A) The communion among the Churches that leads to a common witness. That They may be one means that we have a common witness. But at the same time, our education must be in dialogue both with the established and new Churches. Our agenda must be the good of Christ's mission in a responsible way and in a contextual expression.
 - B) The communion with our partner Churches or mission boards In the North. We are to dialogue with them that they may see our needs and not look at us from their standards of the North. Our agenda is different although our goal

is the same.

- C) The communion between the South and the South Churches are to be encouraged in order to enjoy a joint experience. I am encouraged by the Indian Church of Japanese or Chinese or Philippines or Indonesian or Malaysian etc., but usually we care about and copy the paradigm of the North and forget that the freshness of the Gospel is also in the South.
7. The dialogue with other religions. Our seminarians can not live in a vacuum nor in a ghetto. The fact is that they are to be equipped to understand, dialogue and coexist with the other. They are to see God in the other. Being able to live with other faiths is a good sign of the maturity of the Church. St. Paul dialogue is a source of spiritual revitalization in the Church. For this very reason my agenda for theological education for mission would be:
- A) To emphasize the significance dialogue with other religions. We must not call it comparative religion, because we do not compare for what is the rule of comparison. It is simply teaching about other religions. This demands a good knowledge of the other. We are to dare to teach Islam, Judaism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism and others in one seminaries education about these religions as they want themselves to be seen is essential. It helps us to look at the other in a realistic or perfect understanding of ourselves to a pluralistic way of thinking and living in a multi-cultural and multi-religious societies.
- B) Our self understanding of theological education for mission must allow us to teach our students the ways, methods and even the ingredients of our dialogue. For an Asian pastor is always in dialogue and cannot speak her/his spiritual terminology only, or it is a monologue. Equipping the Church to dialogue overcomes wrong understandings. I even propose that already in the seminary there must be practical dialogues where a seminarian is to meet the adherent of other religions and report for evaluation. Unless we do that, dialogue remains as mere intellectual practice.
- C) The theology of dialogue must lead the people to go beyond peaceful coexistence to a just coexistence to dialogue on life. I believe if we dialogue only for preserving our existence, then we are weak. As we dialogue, we are to present the common responsibility of all the religions for a just society. Social justice, human rights, religious freedom and pluralism must be high on our agenda. We are to equip our theological education in these things. This drives us toward a responsible, frank dialogue in which a joint effort will

be exerted for a just society in a just world.

- D) Theology of dialogue must also teach us how to dialogue with our governments. The new Palestinian constitution is stipulating that the religion of the state is Islam, with respect for other religions. With other Church leaders, I challenged this concept. Respect does not oblige a government to give you your rights. In an interview with president Arafat, I raised the issue. He appointed a committee to look into Christian rights in the Palestinian State. We are still insisting that legalizing Christian rights in the parliament is the lonely security for a multi-religious society. I am not afraid for my rights, but for the future of my state.

The strength of the Church is in dialogue. The Church is strong when it is involved in dialogue. Dialogue is the priestly and prophetic voice of the Church. So the Asia Church must be a Church of dialogue and in dialogue.