

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE JOINT LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN
TAIWAN: ITS VISION AND CHALLENGES IN 1990'S

I. Introduction

This consultation is a follow-up of the previous one held here in April 15-16, 1987. The purpose of the previous consultation was mainly an open forum for sharing of concerns, questions, and recommendations related to the viability of a joint Lutheran theological education in Taiwan. And the purpose of this consultation focuses on what we can do in order to strengthen and upgrade the theological training of the present China Lutheran Seminary in Hsinchu. In between these two consultations three years had lapsed, and much had happened. We thank God for the path of cooperation into which He had led us so far, and for the task He lays before us to offer better Lutheran theological education in the 1990's.

In the following I would like to divide my presentation into three parts. First, I will give a brief review of the Lutheran theological education until 1986. Second, I will discuss the vision of the Joint Lutheran Theological Education Program (JLTEP) and its accomplishments. And lastly, I will talk about the challenges of the joint Lutheran theological education which confront us in this new decade.

II. Lutheran Theological Education in Taiwan until 1986

Lutheran theological training began in 1952 when the Lutheran Bible Institute was established in Kaoshiung. The LBI was a cooperative institution which supported by Lutheran missions from the U.S. and Scandinavia. As time went on both missionaries and national workers felt the need of upgrading theological training. They decided to establish Taiwan Lutheran Seminary, first located in Taipei, and later moved into a new campus in Taichung in 1960. The LBI was closed shortly after the opening of TLS. Many of the TLS students were former graduates of the LBI. TLS offered a four year B.Th. program, and graduated three classes. Like the LBI, TLS was also a cooperative effort in which many missions participated.

Unfortunately a few years after the birth of the TLS a serious conflict broke out between the leader of the Taiwan Lutheran Church and the chairman of the Lutheran missionary association. Both of them were teaching in the TLS. As a result, the spirit of cooperation in theological education was greatly dampened. Finally, TLS was closed after the graduation of the third class in June, 1965. This suspension of the TLS was tragic. Since then the Taiwan Lutheran Church had no theological training center of its own for a quarter of a century.

After the close of the TLS, the Lutheran Brethren China Mission, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church of Norway, and the Norwegian

Lutheran Mission founded the China Lutheran Seminary in 1966 in Hsinchu. In 1977 the four national synods related to the above four missions joined the CLS' board of directors.

The China Evangelical Lutheran Church established Concordia Theological Seminary in Chiayi in 1951. Up to 1966 a total of 23 students were graduated: 18 pastors (11 in 1959, 1 in 1960, 5 in 1964, 1 in 1965) and 6 evangelists (1966). After 1966 Concordia Theological Seminary ceased in offering any degree program.

In 1970 the Federated Lutheran Seminary was organized by the Taiwan Lutheran Church and the China Evangelical Lutheran Church. Due to a limited faculty and student body, the curriculum was run in conjunction with Tainan Theological College. There Lutheran faculty members taught courses of their expertise in the general curriculum as well as courses of specifically Lutheran content. The FLS had functioned only for four years.

After 1974, the Taiwan Lutheran Church ceased to send their theological students to Tainan Theological College, cooperating instead with the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong, and with the inter-denominational China Evangelical Seminary. Partly due to the geographical distance of the LTS in Hong Kong, but mainly due to the CES' admission requirement of a college degree for its M.Div. program, and its aggressive emphasis on evangelism, the CES has been far more appealing to the TLC students than the LTS in Hong Kong. As a result, the CES graduates now represent about 33% of the total of TLC church workers. This percentage is rising rapidly as the older pastors are retiring, and more CES graduates are filling their places. In CES four Lutheran courses taught by two Lutheran tutors are required of all TLC students. These are the History of the Lutheran Church, the Theology of Martin Luther, Lutheran Symbolics, and Lutheran Worship.

In 1982 a Pan-Lutheran Theological Education Committee was formed under the umbrella of the Chinese Lutheran Churches Association. A survey was done to find out the expectations of the various Lutheran synods and church workers concerning the need for joint Lutheran theological education program in Taiwan. The survey revealed that the great majority of Lutheran church workers were convinced of the importance of Pan-Lutheran cooperation in theological education. However, they were also aware of the difficulties involved.

The above is a brief sketch of the three strands of Lutheran theological education in Taiwan until 1986. One strand was related to the TLC, another to the CELC, and still another to China Lutheran Seminary. Among the three strands the first two merged only for a few years, and then parted their way. The third was not related to the first two at all until 1986.

III. The Vision of the JLTEP and Its Work

The year 1986 was a turning point for the history of the Lutheran theological education in Taiwan. In December 1986 Rev. Satoru Kishii, the Asia Secretary of the DCC/LWF invited six Lutheran church leaders and those who were responsible for the theological education in their respective synods for an informal meeting to discuss their concerns about the needs of Lutheran theological education in Taiwan. During the meeting almost all participants agreed on the urgent need of pooling all available Lutheran resources to establish a united Lutheran seminary. As a result of that meeting, the Consultation on the Joint Lutheran Theological Education in Taiwan was held April 15-16, 1987 with representatives from the six Lutheran synods, overseas partner churches and missions, and the DCC/LWF. After the Consultation, the Joint Lutheran Theological Education Program Committee was organized by the six Lutheran church leaders.

The chief task of this committee was to work toward the establishment of a new united Lutheran seminary. Since July 30, 1987 the JLTEPC has met 21 times. In the past 2 years and 9 months the committee members, together with the CLS board members and faculty prayed earnestly and worked diligently to realize the vision of a new united Lutheran seminary. Though the work of the JLTEPC had its ups and downs, twists and turns, we give thanks to God for His constant assurance and guidance.

On October 31, 1989 the Agreement for the Enlarged Cooperation in China Lutheran Seminary was signed by the five Lutheran church presidents. The CELC was not ready then for the signing because their annual assembly was postponed, and they did not have the chance to put the JLTEPC's invitation for cooperation in the CLS into their assembly agenda.

Furthermore, on April 11, 1990 the new board of directors of the CLS was organized and had their first meeting in the CLS' campus. And the Rev. Stanley Tung, President of the Taiwan Lutheran Church was elected the President of the new board. Though the mission representatives are no longer the voting board members, they are genuinely welcome to take an active supportive roles in assisting the CLS to upgrade its theological training program.

IV. The Challenges Confronting the Joint Lutheran Theological Education in the 1990's

The formation of the new board of directors by the five Lutheran synods is only a new beginning. The Lutheran theological education in Taiwan has about 40 years of history. In the past 40 years we had experienced much pain and encountered many obstacles in the attempts of offering a united and strong Lutheran theological education program. Without a solid and dynamic theological education the Lutheran churches here will not be able to root firmly in their evangelical heritage and to keep themselves on the growing edge. This is why it is so crucial

that we must cherish what God has graciously led us so far and seek to unite all our available resources in order to establish a Lutheran seminary which pursues excellency in the ministerial and lay training, and cooperates closely with all the Lutheran congregations in the mission of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Theological education is an important task. However, it is also a costly and complicated endeavor. While we need a vision for the future of the Lutheran theological education in Taiwan, we must seriously examine our priority and commitment, and count the costs. Unless we are clear of our commitment and willing to bear the costs of offering quality Lutheran theological education, we are less likely to make much headway. This is the reason why we hold this consultation to discuss concretely what we can do together to develop the theological training program of the CLS in this new decade.

In the following we will try to identify some of the major challenges which confront the development of the joint Lutheran theological education in the 1990's:

1. THE BROAD AND STRONG SUPPORT OF THE LUTHERAN CLERGY AND LAITY FOR THE CLS.

The Lutheran church has altogether 132 congregations with about 12,000 members. To build up the CLS we need the support of every Lutheran congregation and every member who is concerned about the important task of our theological education. In our context the seminary can never be an isolated academic institution which exists for its own interests and pursues its own course. Rather, we see the CLS as a theological community which seeks to understand and transmit the Gospel of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and to equip the people of God to live out their faith through witness and service.

We can not take it for granted that because the CLS is a Lutheran institution it will automatically have the support of the Lutheran congregation and its members. On the contrary, the CLS should work hard to broaden its local support through the faithful and dynamic transmission of the Word of God and through the winsome service of its graduates.

2. THE STRENGTHENING OF THE FACULTY

The aim of forming a new united seminary is to upgrade the level of our theological education. One of the essential tasks to achieve such upgrading is to strengthen the CLS faculty. The present CLS faculty have five full-time teachers. Among them two are nationals, and three expatriates. In terms of their specialized fields, one is in New Testament, two in Historical Theology, and the other two in Christian Education. As far as the ratio between the nationals and the expatriates is concerned, we should first seek to reach 1:1, and later 2:1. The adequate

number of the competent national faculty is essential to the indigenization of the theological training.

Meanwhile, we are badly in need of the full-time teachers in the biblical, systematic, and practical fields. As the Lutheran churches in Taiwan have suffered a serious identity crisis, it is imperative that we search for the competent Lutheran teachers whose specialty is either systematics or biblical theology. These teachers can either be guest professors from the first or third world, or the ones we send for advanced training in these fields. To meet the present and future needs for teachers in different fields we must have a long range faculty development plan for training the faculty we need at each stage.

After many discussions with the Lutheran church leaders, the faculty of the present CLS, and the members of the JLTEPC we agree that the CLS seeks to offer M.Div. Degree program in addition to, rather than at the expense of, the present B.Th. and B.R.E. Degree programs. This means that by the time we are ready to offer these two levels of programs we will need at least 8 to 10 full-time faculty to bear the teaching load for both degree programs.

3. THE STABILITY OF THE FINANCE

Theological education is always a costly enterprise. If we expect quality theological education, we must count the cost. Without a careful analysis of the cost and a clear commitment to bear it the quality of theological education will be constantly threatened because of its weak and unstable financial support. Here we would like to underline that expensiveness is not necessary an insurance for quality. However, if a seminary is only struggling for its bare survival, it can not be expected to be a strong arm of the church for the carrying out its mission. On the contrary, if a seminary is enhancing the ministry of the church through its dynamic training programs it is most likely have a firm financial support from the church.

Since the bulk of the seminary budget will have to do with the salaries of the full-time national teachers, and since we now have five, hopefully six in the very near future, participating member churches, we propose that if each member church can be responsible for the salary of one full-time national teacher, it will shoulder much of the seminary's budget burden. Unless this sharing of the faculty salaries is too heavy a burden for the smaller member church, then the seminary may find other means to meet this particular need.

While I was visiting the Japan Lutheran Theological Seminary last March, I was very interested in knowing that the JLTS had a very active lay support league which seek to uphold the JLTS through its prayers and fund-raising for the seminary. The JLTS board and its faculty work closely with this lay support league. By so doing, the JLTS is able to broaden its lay support through

the work of this league.

The CLS new board of directors have ten members from the five participating churches. Among the ten members, nine of them are clergy and only one is laity. Because the active involvement of the laity is crucial to the development of the theological education, I will venture to make two proposals. First, when the term of the present board is expired in 1993, should we request each participating member church to select one clergy and one lay person to form the new board for 1993-96? Second, can we begin right away to get together those Lutheran lay members who believe in the important task of theological education and to discuss with them the formation and strategy of the CLS lay support league? If the CLS has the broad and strong support from the Lutheran clergy as well as the laity, it will have less difficulty in maintaining its financial stability.

4. THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

One of the main reasons for the existence of the seminary is to supply the need of the congregations for shepherds and church planting workers. Negatively speaking, the seminary trains workers to fill the vacant parishes. Positively speaking, the seminary serves to supply the workers needed for the continuing demand of church planting.

All the Lutheran churches experienced phenomenal growth from the early 1950's through the mid 1960. After that period of rapid expansion the membership of the Lutheran churches either stood still or dropped significantly. Generally speaking, the total growth of the Lutheran churches in Taiwan in the last 25 years has not been encouraging. For this reason, I hope there will be a study which is geared to the survey of the rate of growth among the six Lutheran churches in the past quarter of a century. A realistic picture of the gains and losses of the Lutheran membership in each period will help us to learn from the past failure and to plan for the future growth.

As indicated earlier, a vigorous theological training program will supply the church with the needed workers for the expansion in mission. Conversely, the ever-deepening commitment of the church to mission will undoubtedly add a tremendous impetus to the seminary to be a dynamic mission partner with the church.

It is my prayer that as the five Lutheran member churches will soon meet to discuss how to give their respective support for the new seminary, they will also turn their thought to what growth they target for their church as a whole in the 1990's, and how many CLS graduates they anticipate to make use of them in the next ten years.

Meanwhile, the Chinese churches in Taiwan has organized across the denominations the AD 2000 Gospel Movement Committee.

The objective of this movement is to encourage the churches over the island to get involved in the ten-year evangelism plan so that by the year AD 2000 there will be 2 million Christians and 20,000 congregations in Taiwan. Hopfully, in the next ten years the expansion of the CLS and its training of the increasing number of the mission-minded church workers can make a significant contribution to AD 2000 Movement.

5. BEING CONFESSIONAL AND ECUMENICAL

Since Reformation the Lutheran church has been conscious of its being a confessing church. We hold and teach the Gospel of justification by grace through faith. In order to preach the Gospel in all purity and clarity we maintain the necessity of distinguishing grace and merits, faith and works, justification and sanctification. To be a Lutheran means to stand under the authority of the Scripture, and to be an unashamed witness to the power of the Gospel that justifies the sinners who put their trust in Jesus Christ.

As heirs of Reformation we need to examine our witness and teaching from time to time in the light of the Scripture whether or not the Gospel has been clouded, misunderstood, watered down, or even distorted. Furthermore, we also need to scrutinize ourselves whether or not there is a tendency (or subtle tendency) in us to idolize achievement. If so, we do not stand under grace, but on works. In this respect, the doctrine of justification serves as a good antidote against any tint of self-righteousness.

Being a Lutheran theological community, the CLS will serve the Lutheran churches and other sister churches in Taiwan with its faithful study of the Scripture and judicious interpretation of the Lutheran heritage.

To be confessional does not at all mean to be narrow, self-inflated, or close-minded. To the contrary, it means being faithful to the Gospel we confess, and yet being humble to listen and learn from the other sister churches their insights of the Scriptural truth and ways of doing ministry.

Moreover, because each existing seminary in Taiwan is limited in its resources, therefore it is advisable that the CLS be open to share its resources with other sister theological institutions, and to explore with them about the mutually enriching exchange programs and the creative ways of being together in mission.

6. BEING CONTEXTUAL AND GLOBAL

Theological education is not an education which can be conducted in either abstraction or isolation. Rather, it is always done in a specific historical, cultural, and socio-political context. As a theological community, the faculty and

students of the CLS must not only concentrate on the study of the Word of God, but also be keenly aware of the cultural and religious obstacles which keep the Chinese from accepting the Gospel, and of the rapid changes which are undergoing in our society. Unless we are keeping in close touch with the struggle and pain of people in Taiwan and the other parts of the world, we can hardly relate the Good News of Jesus Christ to where they are and what they are longing for. The task of contextualization is not the bringing of the fragmented Gospel into the compartmentalized human existence. No, it is the attempt of bringing the whole Gospel to the whole persons in their whole environment.

Because Christians represent only slightly less than 4% of the total population in Taiwan, we are inclined to limit our mission concern in the confine of this island. Often we give ourselves an excuse that because the discipling of the rest of the population here is already too vast a task, it is extravagant to think about engaging mission in other parts of the world. But Christ calls His disciples not just to make disciples of Palastine only, but of all nations. Meanwhile, the work of the mission is always God's mission, rather than our mission. It is not that we are doing our mission, but that God is carrying out His mission through us. For this reason, as the CLS is training workers in the 1990's, let us ask God to enlarge our hearts and to send our graduates to many provinces in China and other countries in the world to proclaim the Gospel of God's wonderous love in Jesus Christ.

V. CONCLUSION

This presentation began with the review of the history of the Lutheran theological education in Taiwan, and concludes with the challenges that confront the joint Lutheran theological education in the 1990's. We trace the winding path we had travelled, and somewhere stumbled in order that we may draw a better map to reach our destination and realize our 40-year dream of a strong united Lutheran seminary. I am firmly convinced that a confessionally solid and missionally dynamic Lutheran seminary is vital to the renewal and growth of the Lutheran churches in Taiwan.

With this conviction in mind I sincerely urge all Lutheran churches in Taiwan and overseas partner churches to unite our hearts and prayers together and to share unselfishly our God-given resources in order to build the CLS to meet the mission challenges in the 1990's and even into the twenty-first century.