

At the beginning of my tenure as President of the Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, I have the privilege and responsibility to articulate my theological understanding of ministry. I come to this assignment with some very definite convictions about theological education. You have a right to know the framework within which I operate. You will understand me – my leadership style, curriculum commitments, plans and programs – when you recognize the convictions to which I am captive. I take this occasion to outline for you my prospective on “Theological Education for a God–Called Ministry.”

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR A GOD-CALLED MINISTRY

E. LeBron Fairbanks

Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary

March, 1985

Taytay, Rizal, Philippines

INTRODUCTION:

The 20th General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene in 1980 created a commission to study the nature of “A God – Called Ministry.” The commission will present its conclusions to the 21st General Assembly, scheduled to meet in Anaheim, California in June, 1985.

I want to affirm the centrality of the “God – Called Ministry’ in theological education at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, and identify “Ministry” as the organizing principle around which the whole of the Seminary life and learning revolves.

Dr. Edward Farley, in his book, Theologia and in an article written for the publication, “Ministerial Formation”, blames many of the problems in theological education today on the lack of a self – evident rationale in its curricular pattern producing a loss of coherence and resulting in a “clerical paradigm.” The excessive focus of theological education on the clergy, Farley believes, is unnecessary and creates a model that views the laity as junior grade clergy.

Identifying “Ministry” as the organizing principle or rationale around which all of theological education revolves brings a sense of coherence to the curriculum of the Seminary and resolves numerous problems presently experienced in theological education.

I. What is “Ministry”?

In its briefest and most general understanding, ministry is diakonia or service to others in Jesus’ name. Certain words like caring, sharing, relating, teaching and confronting help us understand the various definitions of Christian ministry. Ministry in New Testament perspective takes the form of supporting someone on need, crying with

another person, and embracing the individual who is grieving. It may include cutting grass for an elderly couple, taking them to the store for groceries, confronting the lack of discipline in a friend, or sharing the Christian faith and meaningful scriptures with others who are in need.

Ministry is the extension of Jesus in the world, incarnating the healing, guiding, sustaining and reconciling work of Jesus in the lives of those with whom we work and live. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you." Jesus came not to lord over people but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many.

Bonhoeffer, in Life Together, lists seven expressions of ministry by which the Christian community must be judged and characterized.

1. The Ministry of Holding One's Tongue. "He who holds his tongue in check controls both mind and body," James tells us. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth..." is another admonishment from the Ephesian epistle. When this is done, we will be able to cease from constantly criticizing the other person, judging him and condemning her, putting the individual in his or her particular place. We can allow the other to exist as a completely free person.
2. The ministry of Meekness. This implies caring more for others than for self. "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought," Paul admonishes us in Romans 12:3. John tells us to make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God. He who serves must learn to think first of others.
3. The Ministry of Listening. The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to others. Listening can be a greater service to a people than speaking.
4. The Ministry of Active Helpfulness. Simple assistance to others within the Christian community in trifling, external matter is the thrust of this Christian ministry.
5. The Ministry of Bearing Another's Burdens. "Carry each other's burden" is the challenge of Galatians 6:2. Ephesians 4:2 commands us to be humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Bearing means sustaining and supporting.
6. The Ministry of Proclaiming the Word of God. Bonhoeffer does not mean proclaiming the message of Scripture in a formal setting such as in the worship service. He is referring to free communication of the word of God from person to person. He is referring to that unique situation in which one person becomes a witness in human words to another with Christian consolation.
7. The Ministry of Authority. Leadership for Bonhoeffer is summarized Jesus' statement in Mark 10:43, "Whosoever wants to be a great among you must first be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave" Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service. A servant is one who gets excited about helping another person succeed.

To Christian ministry, we are all called. In this ministry we all share. All Christians are called to give witness to the Christian gospel through our words and deeds in the secular world. For Bonhoeffer, the Christian ministry of holding one's tongue, meekness,

listening, active helpfulness, bearing, proclaiming and servant leadership is the context within which our primary ministries must function.

In addition to the general call to serve others in Jesus' name, God calls and gifts each believer with a primary ministry to develop and use in his or her vocational setting and through which that person's general call to ministry will most often be expressed. Historically in the Church of the Nazarene, a distinction has been made between ordained elders who clearly testify to a call to "preach the word" and all others called to and gifted for particular expressions for ministry.

While strongly reaffirming this distinction, I wish to locate the call to preach and all other primary ministries within the broader calling of every Christian to serve others in Jesus' name. This is both the context and motivation for our specific ministry. It gives direction and understanding to "why" we preach or express our unique calling in numerous other ways.

The basic purpose of all Christian ministries is evangelism, leading persons into the kingdom of God, and bringing the world under the Lordship of Christ, as well as nurturing the family of God's people. The call of every Christian to the ministry of Christ is a call to participate in the great mission of God to reconcile the world to himself. The minister of God, lay and ordained, must understand God's purpose and will for the world and must be a partner in the divine mission He revealed in Jesus Christ, His son.

Ministry, then, is not the exclusive domain of the ordained clergy; rather, it is the summons of every person who professes faith in Jesus

II. What is the "Theological Education"

Theological education means the equipping of the people of God for ministry and mission. The assignment of theological education is to define, clarify, and prepare the Christian for his or her God – called ministry. The underlying assumption is that theological education is vital to the life and witness of the churches, and that the theological education of the believer for ministry is an important channel for the renewal and witness of the church.

The nature of theological education is outlined in Ephesians 4:11-16. This passage provides the basic framework for education in the church that equips the Christians for ministry.

A. The context of theological education is "God's People," or "ministry participation" (Ephesians 4:11).

Since all Christians are called to ministry, all the people of God are participants in theological education. In this sense, all Christians are theologians. Some from within the Body of Christ, however, are uniquely called and gifted to equip the other believers to understand and develop their callings. The pastor should view himself or herself primarily as the theological educator to the congregation.

Ephesians 4:11-12 identifies prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers as those Christians uniquely called to and gifted for the specific role of equipping the people of God for their ministry. This equipping ministry is performed primarily through the preaching ministry and is to enable the believers to understand what it means to be the

people of God's people –the equippers and the equipped, provide the context for theological education.

B. The task of theological education is to “prepare God's people,” or “ministry formation” (Ephesians 4:12).

“Ministry formation” means enabling the Christian to grow in Christlikeness. The essential element in all ministry is the life and self offering of Christ which perfectly expressed what it means to serve God and man. Ministry finds its source and authority in Christ who said to his apostles, “as the Father sent me, so send I you.” The ministry of Christ was essentially one of reconciling human-kind to the Creator, which was made possible by His death and resurrection. The task of theological education is to enable the church to live as an extension of Christ in the contemporary world.

A. Study of the ministry of Christ reveals three salient features;

1. His ministry was a servant ministry. “The Son of man came not to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many.” He demonstrated His service to His Father by doing the will of Him who sent Him, and to the people by accepting them as they were and meeting their needs, whether by curing the sick, feeding the hungry, or simply by making himself at home with the sinner, the outcast, or the respectable member of society.

2. He was known as Rabbi, teacher. He taught with authority. The proclamation of the gospel, the announcement of the kingdom to all who had ears to hear was conducted not only in word but also in deed. It was clear teaching, adapted to the mentality of the listeners, and delivered in the living words.

3. He was the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world by His sacrifice on the cross. He laid His life by His own free will in obedience to His father. His ministry was essentially sacrificial and priestly.

If all Christians are called to be extensions of Christ in their contemporary setting, then the ministry of the people of God will be characterized by service, teaching, and sacrifice oriented to the people with whom we come in contact.

The central motivating factor in theological education is commitment of Christ. This commitment to Christ is nurturing through worship, quiet days, and retreats, prayer cells, and private devotions, and the daily life of the Christian family or larger Christian community.

The ministry formation task of theological education is accomplished in the local church primarily through preaching, worship, teaching, service and fellowship. It demands an acquaintance with the Christian tradition, an awareness of world issues, formation of personal faith, competence in skills required for ministry, sharing in worship and prayer, and personal growth in community life. Christians need to be taught what it means to be the people of God with a history, mission, and future. They need guidance in developing a lifestyle of devotion to Christ, caring for the world, nurturing one's own spiritual life, and relating to other believers.

Since ministry is primarily being rather than doing, ministerial formation must be person centered. The development of personal qualities and the inculcation of values are of primary importance. Formation must be seen as a process not only in growing closer to God, but also in acquiring knowledge and skills necessary for the minister of Christ to provide effective service in terms of changing needs, to be adaptable and to meet new

solutions in new ways without feeling threatened or afraid that to do so might compromise his or her fidelity to Christ.

Forming “little Christs” is the task of theological education.

C. The goal of theological education is “works of service,” or “ministry expression” (Ephesians 4:12)

Our theology of ministry is one of mission. Theological education aims at preparing God’s people of God, and serves the whole human community. Through the clergy, the Church is taught not only to discuss the purpose and style of God’s ministry, but to participate in it!

Ministry, like mission, is a function and expression of the entire church. The goal of theological education is ministry expression helping the entire body of Christ to see God acting in His world and challenging them to participate in His activities in His ways.

If the theological education of the people of God has been successful, Christians will be engaged in proclaiming the gospel in word and in deed, living a holiness lifestyle by serving within the Christian community and the wider community within which he or she lives.

We must be captured by His vision which transcends ministry to the people and ministry for the people, to ministry with the people, and ministry by the people.

D. The dynamic of theological education is “love with in the Body of Christ,” or “ministry interaction” (Ephesians 4:15-16)

The term “ministry interaction” is defined as an intimacy of relationship between members within the Body of Christ. In every passage where the Body of Christ is discussed, close attention is paid to the relational context in which this kind of mutual nurture and ministry takes place.

In Romans 12, Paul encourages believers to open their heart and minds to transformation, moves on to the role of the Body of Christ. In every passage where the Body of Christ is discussed, close attention is paid to the relational context in which this kind of mutual nurture and ministry takes place.

In Romans 12, Paul encourages believers to open their heart and minds to transformation, moves on to the role of the Body and spiritual gifts, and immediately focuses attention on interpersonal relationship by insisting “love must be sincere.”

Passing on information cannot by itself produce a minister of Christ. To be concerned about ministry development and formation within the Body of Christ demands that we give priority attention to the love relationship between pastor and congregation, and teacher and student. Scripture needs both to be explained and demonstrated as a lived reality. An intimate relationship context, where love and trust frees us to know and reveal ourselves to one another is important because we need to model for one another the process of service, teaching and “priesting.” Modeling, rather than indoctrinating, is the method of theological education for ministry formation.

The Christian principle at work in ministry interaction is “speaking truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). The implications of this principle are outlined in verses 25 to 52. Christians are told to be honest and to put off falsehood because we are members of one Body; to deal with anger immediately and to not let anger become sin, because thereby Satan gets a foothold in our lives; to be affirming in our words about others, and not to let the unwholesome talk come out of our mouth, because of the power of words to heal and affirm or to tear down and destroy; to be forgiving us. God is grieved when Christians do

not relate to one another in this manner. The Spirit of God is vitally concerned with relationships among His people.

When we do “imitate God” and “live a life of love” (Ephesians 5:2), we not only please God but grow together within the Body of Christ and become mature in Him.

E. The purpose of theological education is a “holiness life-style,” or a “Christlike Ministry” (Ephesians 4:13)

The purpose or “why” of theological education has already been suggested. The Body of Christ is equipped for ministry so that a Christ-like lifestyle will increasingly characterize every member.

Second Corinthians 3:18 identifies this “progressiveness” of the Christian life. We are being “transformed.” “Transformed” is defined as a life fully committed to Christ and consists in growing from immaturity to maturity, from self-centeredness to Christlikeness.

Ministers of Christ are to become increasingly like Christ, characterized by a “Christlike” ministry of service, teaching, and sacrifice. This is a holiness lifestyle set free for growth towards maturity when one has fully committed his life to Christ and has been cleansed from the divisive inner nature of carnality.

A holiness lifestyle focuses on the progressive transformation of the sanctified person toward the character, values, motives, attitudes and understanding of God Himself.

Christ came to do the will of the Father, which was to reconcile the world unto Himself. If Christ says to His disciples, “as the Father has sent me, so send I you,” then, the purpose of theological education is to equip the saints for a Christlike ministry.

III. The role of Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary in the theological education of Christians for their God-called ministry,

Theological education, we have concluded, is necessary for every believer if he or she is prepared for ministry. However, every Christian cannot, nor should not attend a theological seminary for training. What then is the role of the seminary—more specifically, APNTS, in the theological education of every Christian for his or her God-called ministry?

A. Maintain a stringent residential academic program.

APNTS must view itself as a center for a training of theological educators who see as their primary task the equipping of the Christians with whom they work for their ministry.

Theological education in the seminary must focus on the formation of bold and imaginative personalities who through their service in full time ministry will participate in the shaping of congregations that are excitingly involved in mission.

To prepare theological educators for their task, however, demands a strenuous graduate level residential program. At the heart of the academic program is objective biblical, theological, and historical reflection on the nature of the Church and his or her ministry.

The seminary must develop in students a breadth and depth of biblical faith, theological perspective, and pastoral practice. Theological scholarship has a responsibility to uncover and renew in each historical era the witness of the apostles, and to interpret their witness intelligible and present the gospel claims and ethical implications clearly for the lives of the churches and contemporary culture.

APNTS must view itself as a center of theological and ethical reflection for the local churches, and the Church of the Nazarene in the Asian and South Pacific regions. It should be, to use H. R. Niebuhr's descriptions, the intellectual center of the church's life.

To equip believers with an understanding of what it means to be the People of God demands a thorough knowledge of the Old and new Testaments. To help the congregation properly interpret the scripture implies a sound grounding in biblical hermeneutics. If theology is "faith seeking understanding", then Christians need a developing awareness of the theological underpinnings for all our doctrinal beliefs.

Preaching classes must go beyond techniques to raise the issue of purpose. Why do we preach? If preaching is understood as the primary means by which a pastor teaches our faith in God and the implications of that faith for ministry and mission, then preaching deserves a primary role in pastors local church ministry.

There must be a greater integration between classical theological understanding and the practice of ministry. We must provide theological foundations for pastoral and ethical decisions.

James Denny wrote, "Our evangelists must be theologians, and our theologians evangelists." Likewise, if pastors are theologians, and our theologians are pastors, then the criticism that seminarians are removed too far for too long time from daily contact with the non-Christian world can be averted.

The orientation of studies is always toward ministry formation of the people of God whom the students will serve.

B. Develop a vital ongoing extension and continuing education program.

With an educational zone encompassing the South Pacific and Asia, including the sub-continent of India, it is obvious that not all persons in local church leadership roles can travel to Manila for a two or three year program. Nor should many of them try to uproot their families, or quit their secular jobs to study full time at the Seminary.

This does not deny the affirmation made earlier that their primary responsibility in the local congregation is a teaching ministry. How, then, will these persons be prepared for their ministry preparation assignment?

The answer is in an ongoing extension and continuing education program where theological education of the laity, ministerial training for minorities and continuing education of the clergy runs concurrently with secular employment. The leaders can continue in the occupational assignment and/or fulfill local church responsibilities while at the same time be involved in theological training. Workshops, seminars, video-taped lectures, and other extension and education types of programs are necessary for the leaders who are already serving in local congregations, and for the growing interest among lay persons interested in theological studies. Some of these programs will be conducted on the main campus; many of them off campus in extension sites..

Universities around the world have demonstrated the relevance and effectiveness of external studies for twenty-five years. Contextualization of learning seems more likely among those students since they will be coming to their extension or continuing

education experience with their minds already fully involved in secular situations where Christians have to find and do the will of God from day to day.

The curriculum component of flexibility will characterize our academic program so that many more people can engage in theological studies and ministry—lay people and ordained ministers, people of different levels of schooling, representations from ethnic minorities as dominant groups.

C. Structure and intensive field education/ministry intern program.

Students studying at the seminary need the integration of classroom learning to the realities of contemporary society. There must be a greater integration between the classical theological understandings and the practice of ministry. Engagement in ministry and mission, long treated as an adjunct or a department of the curriculum will be regarded as an integral dimension of all theological learning.

The basic thrust of the curriculum is integrating between the word and the world, study and involvement, theology and ministry, the seminary and society, the seminary and the churches. In all of its programs, therefore, the seminary seeks to integrate effectively personal development, spiritual growth, theological sensitivity, cultural awareness, social consciousness and practical skills. This can only be accomplished through a cluster of study, worship, community and engagement programs.

D. Create a “Center for Pan-Asia Church Growth and Ministry Studies.”

APNTS can develop a Center for Pan-Asia Church Growth and Ministry Studies with a full time director to gather information, including vital statistics related to the people and cultures of the Asia and South Pacific countries, and data on the religious, economic, political and social situation of the countries within our education region. The research material would be related to the people and cultures of the Asia and South Pacific countries, and data on the religious, economic, political and social situation of the countries within our educational region. The research material would be related to the planting and growing of churches in the countries on our educational region.

Theological education should focus on the interaction in theological disciplines of faith with culture and on the need to discern theological issues out of that interaction.

The Center would serve as a laboratory to try out new forms of worship, evangelism, theology and Christian lifestyle. It would organize seminars and propose projects to be carried out in cooperation with evangelical churches. Short term courses in leadership training related to church growth would result. Opportunities will arise for church and community leaders to meet students, faculty, and active participants in church planning in order to engage in the process of discovering new forms of mission and witness.

We have not taken seriously enough the increased marginality of the Church in our cultures and the likelihood that in the not too distant future we will have to rely on people in tent-making ministries for the exercise of essential ministries in the community.

The seminary can develop a “Center for Pan-Asia Church Growth Studies,” thereby providing the structure and organization for the dialogue between church and culture to take place so that our church growth strategies in the twenty-first century are maximized.

E. View the seminary family as a community of faith.

If the task of the seminary is ministry formation so that the graduates will see their primary assignment as the ministry formation of the Christians with whom they

work, then there must be a self – conscious identity among faculty, staff, and students that we are a community of God’s People participating in theological reflection. Ultimately, seminaries are more than degrees, libraries, faculties, or students. None of these alone justify a seminary’s existence or explain its spirit. A seminary is a place where under God a community of learners explores what it means to be the People of God and how to live together as the family of God, and try to understand the call that God has given to them.

The seminary teaches in everything it does. The way teachers interact with students in their office is sometimes more powerful than what the teachers say in classrooms.

Chapel services serve as integral parts of the Seminary’s life, nurturing the Spirit within the community of faith. The Seminary must balance the cognitive side of formation with the affective side. Opportunities need to be offered to the commitment to the Christian faith. These are needed to shape the affective side of theological formation.

Since the participants on the campus are children of God, relationships with each other – in class and outside class, with students, faculty, staff, construction workers or yard maintenance personnel – are always within the context of the People of God.

The theme of my chapel messages this year is “Living Together in Christian Community.” The question addressed is, “How can we live together in Christian community so that our relationships are redemptive and a witness to unbelievers of the reconciling word of God in Christ?” Ephesians chapter four has been the primary biblical passage for the sermons. The Holy Spirit of God is grieved when the speech of His people does not reflect their common identity in Christ.

Ultimately, authentic ministerial formation is the work of Jesus Christ and His Spirit. True theology can be done only in a community which is committed to faithful discipleship, including both worship and practical obedience.

F. Reaffirm a commitment to local churches.

The central concern of the seminary is the preparation of leaders who can foster a new vision of theological education for every believer in the local church. Ultimately, the seminary exists to enable the children of God to witness more effectively today and tomorrow in a world of vast needs and complex crises.

At the heart of this address is a desire to shift the focus in seminary curriculum from the development of the student to the development of the local congregation. We must move beyond the clerical paradigm with its promotion of an individualistic understanding of ministry to see the transformation of the community of faith into ministering servants of Christ as the primary focus of seminary training.

The role of the Seminary should be to prepare leaders who understand their responsibility to guide particular groups of people gathered in the name and power of Christ in becoming a redemptive community.

Theologically trained personnel are essential to the church but they are to serve the congregation by linking effectively theological foundations with ministry expression.

Ernst Troeltsch sought to discover the redemptive presence of Christ in the life of specific worshipping communities for whom Christ was the support and center.

We must rediscover the truth that the essence of Christianity is not philosophical reflection or in mystical encounter, but in the ongoing existence of believers who seek to

authenticate the person of Christ in the world by incarnating the healing, guiding, sustaining and reconciling work of Jesus.

Conclusion:

The key issue addressed in this paper is the need to prepare the People of God for their God-Called Ministry to serve others in Jesus' name, proclaiming in word and deed the call to reconciliation with God made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Pastors and full time teachers in the local churches are primarily theological educators equipping the community of faith for ministry to one another and to the world.

My underlying concern is that Christians be called to and equipped for a holiness lifestyle. A Christlike ministry will be the result of effective theological education for ministry.

For this to happen, the seminary leadership must train students to be spiritually committed, theologically competent and professionally qualified. We will develop strong leadership among men and women whose ultimate objective is to accomplish the mission task of the church.

The next steps for the seminary leadership are to clarify the basic elements of ministerial formation, define its theology of ministry, and pursue the implications of a theology of ministry for curriculum reform and structural changes, and identify the theory of education which undergirds the task.

We are committed to new styles of theological education which may include new approaches to learning, ministry, living, and spirituality.

The Seminary has a pivotal role in the theological education for the God-called ministry of every believer. Through awed by the assignment, we acknowledge the responsibility, and affirm that, through the Spirit of God and the prayers of His people, we will accomplish the task.

May it be so Lord, Amen.