

Theological Education in Latin America

Four examples demonstrate the support and incentives, which MASA is giving for the theological education in Latin America.

Important assistance happens through MASA because

1. Through the financial aid excellent professional books for the libraries could be bought. MASA helps that also small schools could purchase good and therefore expensive theological literature and necessary educational materials. For many Latin American countries that have been shaken by economical crisis, this is very important.
2. It makes it financially possible for some native pastors to concentrate on full- or part-time teaching tasks. Normally, the theological teachers work as volunteers, which means that they have to fulfill their teaching tasks next to their service in the congregations.

In Argentina, there is a special decentralized education program for church workers in order keep the costs for the participants as low as possible. However, this means for the teachers a greater investment of time - not least because of the time to travel to the different cities and provinces. Without support, such important projects would no be possible.

3. In certain exceptional situations, theological teachers are sent from Europe. However, this only happens where a supplement of other theological ideas is wanted. In this context, there are above all three reason:
 - In Latin America, which is strongly influenced by Roman Catholicism (In many countries, 90 percent of the population is Roman Catholic.), teachers with a reformatory theology can give supplementary incentives. While Europe in the 16th century experienced a deeply influential reformation through Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, in Latin American countries this revolutionary experience is missing. For this reason, there is in many countries no constructive treatment of or fruitful dialog with protestant theologians.
 - European missionaries are also wanted because Anglo-American missionaries have influenced the theological profile of many Baptist schools in Latin America. The director of the “Instituto Teológico Bautista en Misiones”, Luis Cereza, wrote: “The work of European teachers in theology and church history helps us to maintain a theological balance.”

This theological balance is especially important in view of many ideological and theological currents. In past years, the congregations were strongly influenced by a “success theology”. This teaching maintains that a Christian with a strong faith cannot really be sick or poor. Rather the Christian life is characterized by success. A theology, which places the cross at the center and does not lose sight of the cross in discipleship, produces here a significant counterbalance in theological education. Such a theology protects future pastors, missionaries and church workers against false promises and corresponding frustration.

- European concepts of learning that encourage listening and analyzing could be very helpful here. Again and again, Latin American pastors and teachers express their wish that independent thinking and critical consciousness should be more stimulated. Not only in theological education but also generally in secular schools, great importance is attached to learning by heart and repetition of content. Evaluating, arguing and critical questioning come off the loser. Here teachers influenced in a different culture can help to become aware of wrong developments.
4. Educational programs are supported and its workers are encouraged. Last but not least, the support of MASA means recognition and strengthening of an educational program or a school.
- The concept to support a concrete and dynamic project for a specific time in order to give it gradually back to native responsibility, helps to reach goals without risking the negative consequences of a continuing dependence which often leads to minority. The co-operation with MASA is therefore highly valued in the concerned Latin American countries.

At this time MASA has the chance to invest increasingly in theological education in Latin America because many congregations that until recently demonstrated little interest, recognize now the urgent need. The one sided theology orientated towards experience of the past years has left much distress and frustration so that there is now a strong need for grounded biblical teaching.

It is important for MASA that all support is very closely evaluated that it comes to a fruitful co-operation and not to a one-sided European influence. Especially, support with personnel can only be understood as supplement. Only in this way mutual fertilization, correction and advancement is possible.

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