

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES—PREPARING PASTORS IN AN AGE OF CHANGING MODELS OF PASTORAL EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Firstly, I would like to say that I am honoured to have received your invitation to take part in this theological conference with a paper. I am thankful for the invitation and for the honour it has brought to me.

At the same time it is an honour, it is also a huge challenge that needed to be confronted among the 'turbulences' that were so typical in the beginning of my work as President of the Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil. It demanded from me some well-defined actions. These are: first of all, I had to overcome the fear to present something to such a qualified, recognised and respected group of theologians; second, I had to develop a proper reflection over things to position myself on a theme that demands a straight line to follow confidently, because a Seminary cannot be in doubt about the pastoral formation model it aims for; third, I had to structure the content to be presented in a way that shows the result of my reflection over this theme.

Take this paper as the result of the reflection of someone who played a key role in theological education at IELB for 14 years and a half (there were two Lutheran Seminaries up to 2002, now it is only one). During 10 of these 14½ years, I was principal of Seminário Concórdia of São Leopoldo. My colleagues (the professors of the Faculty of Theology in that Seminary) and I have always been worried about models for pastoral formation. By the way, this concern never ends, and cannot depend on who is in charge of the Seminary, or on professors that may be currently teaching. People come and go, but the concern remains with the institution and also with the whole church. What I will present, therefore, has got to be quite a lot with the experience I gathered throughout these years of intrinsically connected work for pastoral formation. I would like to humbly share it with the illustrious theologians in this conference. I would be very glad if, in a way or another, my presentation is useful to the great purpose of our vocation as our Lord's servants within theological education.

CHAPTER 1

Reason of the existence of theological teaching institutions

It is from the comprehension of the value of the *Sola Gratia* that we can understand the reason why teaching institutions exist. Among them, one may also find Seminaries for the formation of pastors. But we can only fully perceive the reason of their existence as long as the *Sola Gratia* gives the motivation, guidance and direction to the activities that promote theological education.

Is there any reason for a church to look carefully for its theological education? Doing Theology is not a mere intellectual exercise to quench the desires of a group of people. The church thinks and discusses Theology to faithfully understand the meaning of the Word of God to the world, in order to justify its presence in the world. According to Luther, (*Luther's Works, Vol. 12 : Selected Psalms I*. Saint Louis : Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1955 - Luther's Works 12 - , S. 12:311)

This is the twofold theological knowledge which David teaches in this psalm, so that the content of the psalm is the theological knowledge of man and

also the theological knowledge of God. Let no one, therefore, ponder the Divine Majesty, what God has done and how mighty He is; or think of man as the master of his property, the way the lawyer does; or of his health, the way the physician does. But let him think of man as sinner. The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner. Whatever is asked or discussed in theology outside this subject, is error and poison. All Scripture points to this, that God commends His kindness to us and in His Son restores to righteousness and life the nature that has fallen into sin and condemnation. The issue here is not this physical life—what we should eat, what work we should undertake, how we should rule our family, how we should till the soil. All these things were created before man in Paradise and were put into man's hands when God said (Gen. 1:28), "Have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air." The issue here is the future and eternal life; the God who justifies, repairs, and makes alive; and man, who fell from righteousness and life into sin and eternal death. Whoever follows this aim in reading the Holy Scriptures will read holy things fruitfully.

Theological education cannot exist, therefore, as a separate world, hidden in the facilities of a Seminary. It is a task of the church, which is inserted in a world that represents, at the same time, two facts. Firstly, the world is the 'stage' where the church 'acts', because it is neither higher nor out of the world, but in the world. Secondly, the world imposes constant, mutable challenges and opportunities to the church, which demand permanent skill to face and react to. These challenges and opportunities are mutable, so we need to be properly prepared to face them. What education strategies can we follow in an ever changing world? Are they most appropriate? Do they eventually belong to ages lost in a distant past? To be a responsible church does not have to be with only following a certain programme, or a series of previously planned actions zealously. It is more than that: it has to be with analyzing the extent and applicability of a programme constantly, within the context to which it is directed.

There is an example from Luther. After noticing the spiritual misery of the people and also of the ones who should teach, he did not only express his sorrow towards the terrible situation. The reformer left the example of a man of action in a scenario that required courage, dedication, determination and skill: he wrote the Catechisms and put them in people's hands. It was the strategic decision he had found appropriate for the time. The pedagogical value of the Catechisms is immutable, because it exposes an immutable doctrine. One can, however, question about how, about the way such extraordinary content reaches the eyes and ears of Christians. Following the same argument, one may as well question the entire message that the church is called to proclaim.

We are, thus, challenged to think about what was, is, should and will be done in theological education for the formation of pastors, which is the point of this presentation. The motivation for a serious reflection is evangelical. Because of this, it does not come from men, is not born with men and cannot be kept only in men's good intentions, since it would not go far; it is not created with dramatic and emotional appeal. It is evangelical in the very meaning of the term, because it is good news brought to mankind by who truly knows it: God. Only He is able to bring effective motivation out, which is stronger than the opposite movements towards God's issues, produced in us by sin. Such motivation is not natural to us because, as all other human beings, we also do not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God naturally (1 Co 2:14).

Where can we find motivation? The Formula of Concord shows it in Article III (*Concerning the Righteousness of Faith Before God*), in the Solid Declaration, section 7, and Epitome, section 10. It belongs to the so called *particulae exclusivae*. It is all about the *Sola Gratia* or, more precisely, about the *Gratia*, since *Sola* qualifies the function of *Gratia* as one of the three pillars of the Reformation.

Sola Gratia relates to needy human beings. Who are such human beings? Where are they? They are not represented only by the students who are before their professor at a Seminary classroom. The same way, we cannot see them only in the people trusted to pastoral care. They are those people who look for an answer to the existential, ever challenging question: "Who am I?" The answer to this question will not come from another source but the Creator. It is the very theme of Theology, since it deals with the relationship between a human being, creature, lost and condemned sinner, and his Creator, the God who comes for the damned to save him. After all, who am I before the judgment of the One who created me?

Who am I? What is our original existential situation in the relationship creature/Creator? Under divine inspiration, the apostle Paul affirms that the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Co 2:14). Talking to Nicodemus, Jesus said that no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (Jo 3:3), because our first birth separates us from our Lord. The cause of this is exposed by, among others, David, in the Psalm 51:5. Based on biblical testimony, the confessors of Augsburg declared that "*it [human will] does not have the power to produce the righteousness of God or spiritual righteousness without the Holy Spirit, because 'those who are natural do not receive the gifts of God's Holy Spirit'*" (*Book of Concord, Augsburg Confession, XVIII, 2*), because "*from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God.*" (*Book of Concord, Augsburg Confession, II, 1*)

Now that we know the answer for 'who I am', a new search begins. It aims at finding out what the reaction of the Creator towards the situation of His creature is. Even though the Word of God reveals to us that the Lord is holy and fair, and does not tolerate sin at His presence - on the very contrary, He demands punishment to sin, a serious demand (not only make-believe) - the same Word also takes us to a God that provides us with *Gratia*. The entire greatness of divine grace shines when contrasted to our misery. Melancthon summarises this as he writes: "*For we cannot know the magnitude of God's grace unless we first recognise our malady*". (*Book of Concord, Apology of the Augsburg Confession, II, 33*)

In Melancthon's affirmation, one could highlight an aspect of divine grace that is very impressive: its extent. Why would it be impressive? It is so because it covers everything naturally missing in us because of our original necessity. We lack permission to reach God directly; then He comes to us through His grace. We lack justice to be close to Him; then He covers us with Christ's justice through His grace. We lack any chance of escaping from the deserved condemnation because of our sin; then He gives us forgiveness through Christ in His grace. We lack power, because of the old man, to live faithfully even after being converted; then He never rejects us when, regretful, we seek his mercy, through His grace. We lack, finally, merit to even dare to receive any kindness from Him; then He, because of Christ (*favor Dei propter Christum*), receives us, in spite of our lack of merit, since he gives us the merit of His holy Son, in his grace.

Propter Christum Sola Gratia God has made me bold and dignified me, rehabilitating me, making me be born again, waking me up from death and exalting me by allowing me to take part in a life in which he adopts me as His beloved son. By grace, He has connected me with Him again, through the faith in Jesus Christ. Where this connection happens, He commissions me to a certain special activity in His kingdom, this is, to take part in the task that is, actually, the theme of Theology: to show the God that justifies and saves to the guilty, lost human being.

Knowing all that, we can look forward and trace a path where we go as educators in theological education. Educators know that their mission is to share a gift from God's love with their neighbours. Pastors are formed so as to have it happen. This is the reason why theological education institutions exist. Knowing the reason, people working at these institutions will always do, in any time, what serves to the purpose of God's grace to all mankind.

CHAPTER 2

Theological education institutions in the Church

A successful marriage depends on a clear and correct understanding from husband and wife of which roles to be performed by each one. Knowing what comes to be the husband's task in a matrimonial relationship and vice-versa is crucial for a healthy and God-driven marriage.

Even though I do not see the relationship between the church and Seminaries as a marriage, I use this example to highlight what is crucial for the success of such a relationship, too. So, which is the role of the Church, and which is the Seminaries'?

What does it really mean to be a Seminary for the formation of pastors within a church? There is not even a biblical order to establish any specific form of theological education. Theological education is developed within the scope of Christian freedom. Theological schools like Seminaries aren't absolutely necessary, even though we believe they are highly appreciated and recommended. The presence of a formal Theology course is not a mark of the church. It is there to serve the church. It is an agency that provides with resources that are indispensable to the church, so that it can fulfil its mission in the world. The formation of pastors is a means (not an end) so that, through ministry, the justifying Gospel may be announced in the church and in the world. That is why, whenever there is a seminary, one cannot see the church and the Seminaries walking apart from each other. One may get, then, to a conclusion: if the church opts out for an action that it judges to be a good strategy to have its mission in the world fulfilled, such a fact should also be of interest of a Seminary, since it is a task of the Seminary to serve as a resource agency to the service of the church. A Seminary will not also wait from the church but, attentive to challenges and opportunities for the work of the church in different times, it will always provide with pastoral formation that allows students to take the challenges and opportunities in the name of the church they will serve. Taking that into consideration, we can understand the question "up to what extent the human resources formed by Seminaries are identified with the policies established by the church in its mission and pastoral work?" It is an appropriate question for all times, in my understanding of the relationship between the church and the Seminaries. If the action of the church in the world, aiming at announcing the Gospel of Jesus so that people know God's grace towards them, demands changes in the models of pastoral formation, the Seminaries cannot omit themselves to such demand. As

seen before, theological education institutions exist because of *Sola Gratia*. Motivated by *Sola Gratia*, those people in charge of and those who work at Seminaries wish that God's grace may transform other lives through the work of the church. They need, thus, do whatever possible to serve the church with men who are prepared for the necessities and opportunities of their time.

The church has the responsibility to be attentive to the changes in the world to which it is sent. Only then it will be able to diagnose correctly the causes of the illnesses that afflict men in a certain time, without hitting the air, wasting time, gifts and money. That is why theological formation is a never-ending, dynamic process, because a theologian will always be challenged to have answers to the most unusual questions that erode from a world full of constant changes in the way of seeing the dearest values of human existence. And the history of the church shows flexibility, creativity and integration in the field of theological education. The church has been flexible, knowing there is not a single model for theological formation, which works for all times. It has also been creative, creating new models in different historical moments. Besides that, the church has been trying to be inserted in its cultural context, this is, the cultural context of each time has influenced the church up to a certain point.

Is there, then, an ideal theological formation within this relationship between the church and its Seminaries? Trying to define any ideal situation is always dangerous, because not everything will be taken into consideration. I would dare to risk myself into giving my personal opinion. An ideal pastoral formation will, at least, allow a pastor to have the necessary skill to proclaim the Gospel accordingly to the illnesses of a man of his time, and properly applied to them. It is true that the world changes; however, it is not less true that the Gospel does not lose its power to meet special needs of each person. Our institutions cannot wish less than that, because to announce God's grace means to present it in a Gospel that truly means good news to all who are needy of the content of its message.

Such scenario demands a pastoral ministry that is aware in what it is supposed to do. Part of the necessary culture is acquired in the Seminaries, but the search for it continues after the graduation ceremony. It is a culture that gives room for a pastor to announce the Christ to all. The universality mission received from Jesus in Mt 28:19 cannot be conveyed only in its geographical meaning. Christ to all is not fulfilled when the church has missionaries in its country and in other countries, but when these missionaries take the Saviour to men of their country, in the forest or in cities, in small houses or skyscrapers, in literate or illiterate contexts. We cannot be afraid of announcing Christ to people who stand for a bigger challenge. We are not allowed from the Lord to exclude anyone from the reach of his net, because it is our mission to fish all men. The preparation of pastors should highlight it. They will be messengers of a Christ that is for all. Seminaries' curricula should be adequately prepared to get as close as such pastoral education. How should we prepare pastors to reach ALL the peoples with the Gospel? This is the indispensable question that precedes the elaboration of a curriculum, at any time.

I have affirmed that pastoral theological formation is a never-ending, dynamic process, since it needs to respond to the demands of each time. Such process is a permanent challenge to institutions. I would split the institutional challenges in two groups: mutable and immutable. A challenge that never changes is to form pastors for the church. The mutable ones are specially related to models of formation, with curricula that need to be revised and modified, with the search for financial resources and with the formation and keeping of professors. In the beginning of all is the will to do whatever serves to the purposes of God's grace

towards human beings. God wants to fulfil them through the action of the church. This does not allow us to theologise in vacuum, in total isolation from the voices around us, which arise questions and challenges. Let us remember the example given by Luther. Dr. Robert Rosin, in *Luther at Worms and the Wartburg: Still Confessing* (*Concordia Journal*, April 2006, volume 32, number 2, p. 169) highlights the value given by Luther to the tools that Renaissance humanism had to offer.

From his side, Luther valued the tools that Renaissance humanism had to offer—the stress on languages, for example. Luther also came to appreciate that humanism-approached learning with a different spirit and a different method. Method is very important for Luther! Even if you are not entirely clear on the outcome, if you approach with a new method, you will get a different product.

Luther, because of that, defended a change in the curriculum of Wittenberg very strongly. That university was facing a mutable challenge. New tools were available so as to enable them to fulfil their mission. If it ignored them, it would miss the opportunity to improve its work.

The Seminary of the Brazilian church is facing an interesting experience. It has a partnership with the Lutheran University of Brazil (Ulbra, acronym in Portuguese). Students from Seminário Concórdia study simultaneously at the Seminary and at Ulbra. After three and a half years of studies in both institutions, they graduate at Ulbra and receive the degree of BA in Theology, which, alone, does not enable anyone to be a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Brazil. After that, students remain at the Seminary for a year, have a year of vicarage and one more year of studies only at the Seminary, when they receive the degree of Specialist in Theology with Emphasis in Pastoral Ministry. It is a new model of pastoral education. The presence of students at the University provides them with an opportunity to take part in programmes and activities they can't find at Seminário Concórdia like, for example, Hospital Chaplaincy training, working together with students from Social Service, Medicine and Psychology, and also working with Ulbra's Chaplaincy Team. We also need to remember that campus life, though very hostile to Christian faith at times, is an excellent field to give testimony of the faith in our Saviour Jesus. Seminário Concórdia needs to be in conditions to follow its students in this new formation model. Among other things, the Seminary needed to get organized not to leave students alone and without guidance in such a new and different world that campus life represents. Personally speaking, I'm convinced that the experience of living and studying at a University has helped students in their preparation to announce Christ to all. Seminário Concórdia has tried to form pastors for the Church as well as possible within this new model of pastoral education.

CHAPTER 3

The preparation of pastors in a time of changes of pastoral education models

When the Lutheran Reformation insisted on theological formation of pastors, the newborn church understood it needed well-formed pastors, who were 'able to teach'. And this ability to teach implies in more than simply knowing (abstract knowledge) or simply doing (to go through the liturgy, for instance). It was not possible to have in ministry only people with a minimum formation - what is allowed to happen only in cases of emergency. Even if pastoral education models

are changed, we have to remember that the church will always need well-formed pastors, who are 'able to teach'.

How to prepare pastors in a time of changes in formation models? We need to be careful to act appropriately towards the word 'changes'. Why change? What changes? These are basic questions that need to be answered before any action begins. Why all the caution? The reason is simple: changes always affect the preparation of a pastor. What we can't just ignore is the extension of the influence from changes to a preparation of a pastor. The church can't lose sight of a pastor based in the biblical model, whether he is formed in a big, traditional Seminary, or in a Seminary with a different model. It is good to remember that new churches, with a smaller amount of members usually opt for Seminaries with a different model, with less operational costs, but very close to local churches. A pastor, according to a biblical model, is that prophet who is not conformed to the world but, if needed, will be 'the voice of who claims in the desert' to announce God's purpose.

In the first chapter, I introduce *Sola Gratia* as a reason for the existence of theological teaching institutions. The *Sola Gratia*, however, also gives a straight direction to the development of theological education. It commits the church to follow a biblical, confessional line, typical of the Lutheranism that follows the Reformation, which was kept among battles and controversies that threatened the purity and integrity of the Gospel rediscovered by Luther. Theological education from *Sola Gratia* does not allow us to plunge into pure error and futility (according to Luther), because it does not let us forget our condition of sinners and lost who are graciously uplifted by the wonderful initiative of our Creator. The theology under the *Sola Gratia* does not look forward to promoting men and their alleged strength and capacity of self-affirmation as a creature apart from the Creator, though many are the attempts for such a thing to happen, made by people who defend an *aliquid in homine* no matter how hard. These will always be frustrated attempts, because who is dead is not able to take part in anything to become something. He will keep dead, which means to say that he will keep apart from his Creator. *Sola Gratia propter Christum per fidem* keeps firm the truth that cannot cede towards the wish of many to find other ways to solve the problem of men before the Creator. Any change in pastoral education models that wave to other forms of salvation other but *Sola Gratia propter Christum per fidem* runs the risk of forming a pastor not accordingly to biblical principles: he is going to be a false prophet. Pastoral formation, in a time of changing models, will be always attentive so as to allow the future pastor to place himself and to act correctly with the new tools he has to work with, and with the questions and challenges the world casts, as well as before the many opportunities that show up to serve God and our neighbour in the church he belongs to. Gerhard Grasel says in his article "*Reading the times: challenges for the Brazilian church in a secular context*" (not yet published in English) (*Igreja Luterana*, volume 53, June 1994, no. 1, p. 5) that "*a Christian student, especially a future pastor and preacher, needs to know social facts to make a good reading of his time. A pastor of souls should have a sharp contemporaneous mind.*" But, at the same time, pastoral formation in a time of changing models will be always attentive to the fact that a future pastor should be a pastor according to the biblical model. According to Dr. L. Dean Hempelmann (*Pastoral Education—A newsletter for those interested in the ministry of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*, September 2006),

Pastors are mission leaders with a deep passion for Christ and His mission. They are instruments of the Holy Spirit to bring the lost to Christ and Christ to

the lost. Also, pastors who are knowledgeable in the Word and confident in their Lutheran theology must be able to apply the Word of God to contemporary contexts and culture. They need to be able to engage societal issues theologically and practically. ... pastoral education today must provide options by evaluating routes to pastoral ministry, discerning proper pedagogical approaches, using distance education, incorporating useful technology, training men to serve as mentors, and engaging in continuous curricular review.

We know well how important our Confessions are for us to have pastors who are prophets of God, who announce the will of God in all times, to all peoples. Because of this, the changes that occur in pastoral education models cannot diminish the importance and the value of our confessionality. When it is not given value any more, we run the risk of having an 'identity crisis'. It is terrible! Imagine the practical results of a ministry of a Lutheran pastor with a confessional identity crisis! Will his preaching, his teaching, his testimony, still be Lutheran? Only through lots of divine mercy! Dr. John Frederick Johnson, in *Still a Place for Our Confessions* (*Concordia Journal*, October 2006, Volume 32, Number 4, p. 396) affirms

Lutherans have always been occupied, some say neurotically preoccupied, with twin concerns of confession and proclamation. That, of course, is what gave primary impetus to confessional formulae on the part of the very early church. That is what has guaranteed our Symbols a rightful and continuing presence in theological expression and witness. In such a context C. F. W. Walther is usually cited. He is purported to have uttered the opinion that if he were remiss in studying the Confessions regularly and systematically he should soon find himself bereft of the clearest expression of Lutheranism and a truly devout spirit of biblical loyalty.

The value of our confessionality needs to be held very dear by any Lutheran pastor, so as to let him walk boldly in an ecumenical religious world. It is a world that emphasizes more the *FIDES QUA* and holds to it, while it does not see the *FIDES QUAE* with good eyes. There are people who wait and wish that pastoral formation makes pastors that, in the name of love, act 'pastorally' only through *FIDES QUA*, because *FIDES QUAE* hinders more than helps. We cannot admit such pastoral formation, even if we are considering different pastoral education models. If we admit it, we will have a ministry full of symptoms of confessional identity crisis.

Institutions that form pastors are also challenged not to let the product of the formation under a new model be a merely professional of ministry. We have here an issue that deserves to be seen with a little more reflection. Is a pastor really a professional? Henry J. M. Nouwen affirms the following:

Profession as we conceive of it today primarily suggests training, skill, expertise, and a certain specialization. Theological education in recent decades has made a major contribution toward establishing the ministry as a profession in a highly professionalized world. But "profession" also refers to professing, witnessing, proclaiming, announcing. This professing side of our ministerial life, which is deeply rooted in our biblical heritage, requires formation as well. Profession as expertise and profession as proclamation can never be separated without harm.

I think Nouwen makes us think about the distinction between ministry as a 'profession' and any other profession. Such fact stimulates pastor to take care of their intimacy with God. Our spirituality precedes any professional skill. To be able to confess, witness, one needs to have what to confess and what to witness first. *"The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks."* (Lk 6:45)

John, chapter 10, presents the difference between a pastor and a mercenary. Verses 12 and 13 declare: (quote) He is a mercenary and does not take care of the sheep. He is not interested in the well-being of the sheep. He only wants his salary for what he does. There is no other kind of commitment between the mercenary and the sheep. He is not worried about the destiny of the flock. He sees a wolf coming, then abandons the sheep and runs away. There is a sharp trace of cruelty in his attitude. He is only a pastor to himself. He is, in fact, an example of a bad professional. The problem, then, lies on the relationship between the mercenary and the flock. He does not think it is his occupation to take care of the flock's life. How does he see his flock? As a source of financial gain, only. He needs the sheep, but he does not want to serve them. His expectations are focused in the advantages that come from his occupation. The destiny of his sheep is not important at all.

A good professional has Jesus as a standard of his pastoral ministry. Jesus says: (Jo 10:14). There is an important verb here: **to know**. This verb makes the whole difference between a professional and a mercenary. The meaning of '**to know**' in that text is described by the Latin theological expression *noscere cum affectu et effectu*. It means to know with love. One should not only know that someone exists, but one should also love this person. Such person should be precious. One should not ignore what happens to this person. We see all these things in Jesus and are happy because He knows us. Jesus knows us *cum affectu* and also *cum effectu*. His love makes Him do things for us. His love is not only contemplative, but takes Him to action. It is the type of love that creates a strong bond between the one who loves and the one who is loved. The initiative belongs to the lover, Jesus. The beloved one does not have anything to present as a reason to be loved. But Jesus comes to him to transform him completely, in a saving transformation. Jesus' attitude shows what is to know *cum affectu et cum effectu*.

A professional pastor should follow Jesus' model. Motivated by Christ's love and doings to his benefit, a professional also knows his flock *cum affectu et cum effectu*. *"We love because He loved us first"* (1 Jo 4:19) and we don't love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth (1 Jo 3:18), this is, *cum effectu*. Because of this, according to Jonathan F. Grothe (*Patterns of Pastoral Ministry: Jesus and Paul*, p. 67-68):

The minister of the Gospel and servant of Jesus Christ is a professional in the tradition of the old town doctor: the person who does what he does because he is who he is and happens to get paid for it (more or less), even though he would do all the same things even if he did not get paid.

A pastor should take seriously the high nature of his vocation as a response to God. The response to God benefits our neighbour. Consequently, our main responsibility as pastors consists in do whatever we can to help a needy person, whatever is the nature of his or her need. Once the decision of being or not a minister of the Gospel is taken, a pastor cannot choose between getting involved with people who suffer from depression, pain, anguish, as well as other problems,

anymore. There is only one thing to do: know what we will put into practice for the benefit of others.

A pastor, as a professional, is also an amateur in his attitudes to accomplish his task. Amateur comes from Latin *amator*, one who loves, one who does something because he loves it. Even though he is a professional, if he also does things as an amateur, in love, a pastor will have with him people who trust him.

Lastly, the changing models of pastoral formation, it does not matter their nature, they will always have to be followed by *Sola Gratia* within a context that I haven't mentioned yet. Pastors face, many times, crucial moments in their existence and ministry. Men of God are not free from moments of weakness, anguish or suffering. This is not just eligible to 'mere mortals' only. The Holy Scripture allows us to find out the existence of such moments also in the life of those we consider giants, if compared to us. We can remember John, Peter, Paul, without the need to mention others, and we will have enough examples of people whose faith and doings didn't hinder them from being struck by disturb, fear, sadness, suffering and tribulations. They were also very human; they were not in a 'superior state of existence' where there would be exemption from what could afflict humans.

Among a series of things that can disturb who teaches in the Word, it doesn't matter in what level and position, there is the constant awareness of our limitations and imperfections before the enormous challenges imposed by the world in the walk of theological education, and even in the existence of the Word. Of course, there is always an effort and dedication from our side, looking for a better preparation to do our mission. However, the more we do, we will always have feel too small and unworthy of doing such a task. What sustains us, then? What can make us go on, despite the many gaps we could pose in our existence? What sustained the men of God shown in the Bible?

To a suffering Paul, due to a thorn in his flesh, the Lord spoke: "My grace is sufficient to you" (2 Co 12:9). Supported by this conviction, in the same verse the apostle confesses the transformation made in his soul as he knew he was sustained by divine grace, and says: "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me". Men at God's service, in all times and also today, have found out that divine grace is enough to keep them standing in moments of weakness. By the way, in God's pedagogy, there is permission for such moments to come to us, because it is exactly in these moments that we recognize who has got real power. There are situations in which it runs away from all our skills, abilities, creativity or whatever we allegedly have, and in which we fall in the undeniable reality of our weakness. There is room, then, for God's power, coming to our help *Sola Gratia*, improve our actions. Such help has its origin in the acquiescent *favor Dei* only. How good it is to know it and how necessary it is that discovery is remembered frequently in us!

CONCLUSION

The motivation for our work comes from the Lord's grace (*Sola Gratia*). Grace moves us to work the best way we can so as to make the purposes of God's grace reach many other people, too. What should our pastoral formation institutions do? Professors, principals, students, people at Seminaries are also moved by God's grace. Because of this, institutions are also challenged to, at least, keep 3 indispensable attitudes:

1—Keep remembering what it means to be a pastor according to the biblical model, and always recognise its confessional identity. A pastor will know, through his identity, how to use his formation as a basis for his ministry, no matter when;

2—Be always attentive to difficulties typical of a certain time for pastoral ministry, which leads institutions to be creative in the search and creation of new models for pastoral education, so that difficulties don't become unbridgeable obstacles for pastoral ministry in that certain context;

3—Be always attentive to opportunities and resources existing in a certain time, to use them as appropriate tools for a contextualised formation.

Before all that, we always have to have a humble attitude, which makes us recognise that one needs to seek continuously the answer for the basic, disturbing question: "How can we do our best for God's work?" May His grace keep us looking for this answer! When God keeps this willingness in the ones who are called to form preachers of Jesus' Gospel, He is blessing the churches richly.

Thank you for listening to me.

Paulo Moisés Nervas

*The translation of the Bible used in this text is the NIV - New International Version.