THE VALUE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND PARTNERSHIP

By

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(Being a Paper Presented at the Launching of the Africa Baptist Theological Education Network

At Brackenhurst Center, Limuru, Nairobi, Kenya, from August 1st – 3rd, 2018.)

Introduction

The title of this paper seems to assume that we are agreed on the meaning of Theological Education.

This assumption is further fortified by the fact that most, if not all participants of this conference are Theological Educators. More so, that most of us here are descendants of the Anabaptist tradition of Theological Education further leverages this assumption. Yet, this assumption is not true. It is evident that there are different and even sometimes conflicting ideas of Theological

Education in circulation today. Some construe Theological Education (TE) as purely a matter of the mind that has nothing to do with moral formation; in other words, Theological Education has nothing to do with the moral character of the Theologian. Not all Theological Institutions take this view. While some are academic institutions devoted to "the critical study of religious traditions; others understand themselves to be training schools; yet others intend to be schools of formation for spiritual leadership."[i]

This conference may reflect some diversity on the meaning Theological Education even though it is expected that the diversities should not be too sharp because of our common historical ancestry. In this paper, Theological Education will be used to mean the teaching and learning about God with a view to know Him intimately and thus know how to respond to Him and relate to our fellow human beings created in His image, and to the rest of His creation. Theological education therefore, is not only an academic activity that prospers the mind but more so an engagement that informs a person's entire life. This refers to both formal Theological Education which is taught and learned in Theological institutions and the informal education which goes on in churches, Christian organizations and Christian homes.[ii] The key task of Theological education is to discern whether the life and work of the believing community truthfully correspond to the vision of God for His world.

The Nature and purpose of Theological Education
The focus of Theological Education is to form the Christian to be Christ-like (Galatians 4:19). The objective is spiritual formation rather than merely passing on biblical knowledge. Theological Institutions at graduate level assume that incoming students are spiritually mature and familiar enough with the Bible so they are left off the hook of spiritual formation. Graduate programs therefore become purely academic training. Reality has however always contradicted this assumption. Some schools wrongly assume that training in character is the work of the church and not academic institutions. The churches also have their assumptions: That Seminary graduates are spiritually mature enough to be church leaders. Both Seminaries and Churches should discard their

assumptions and partner together in the spiritual development of persons under their care. The purpose of Seminaries is to help the Church realize its purpose of building persons to the fullness of the status of Christ.

Theological Education would achieve its purpose for existence if it has these four-fold commitments:

1. Commitment to biblical truth,
2. Commitment to the Great Commission,
3. Commitment to holy living, and
4. Commitment to ministry formation.[iii]

All Christians are called to ministry, and this is usually understood as the ministry of the whole people of God. Some Christians are called to ordained ministry and are set apart to serve in the ministry of the word. Others are called to perform other forms of ministry in the church. Christian ministry, both lay and ordained involves particularity and distinctiveness. Particularity results from Christian identity. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ gives character to ministry and distinguishes the Christian community. The life of the Christian believer is shaped in community and is identifiable as such. The Christian faith evidences itself in the way one lives.[iv]

In view of the above, how are we to evaluate success and achievement in Theological Education? Success in Theological Education is not, accurately, or faithfully measured. Theological Educators are often tempted to import models of success from other areas of life; such models as the market model, the entertainment model, the management model, and even the celebrity model. These models, when applied to ministry or Theological Education are wrong; it is like using a ruler to measure temperature. Theological Education has an inherent moral dimension that must be presented in authentic ministry. Theological Education should be evaluated by the capacity of a school to help students come to terms with the "complex and multiple factors that make up the moral fabric of Christian ministry."[v] These factors include:

1. Understanding the divine call to the Christian ministry

2. Understanding the meaning and implications of ordination

3. Understanding the servant nature of Christian leadership.

4. Understanding the moral character of ordained ministry.

5. Understanding and solid grounding in the particular founding Christian tradition (e.g. Baptist founded schools must make sure students are grounded in the Baptist Theological tradition, etc), however there must be an openness and humility to learn from other traditions. Theological Education is therefore to be evaluated by its capacity to transform students towards Christ likeness.

The Value of Theological Education

Generally, education leads to the cultivation of the intellectual and moral faculties of persons and their highest proficiency level. Education enlightens the mind and strengthens the will and the nurturing of abilities to maturity.[vi] Theological Education equips the person for both a critical reflection on surrounding realities as well as for a more effective Christian living.

Theological Education, in the formal Institutional sense, opens students to religious tolerance and mutual appreciation and respect of other Christian denominations and other religions. J.A. Ilori has provided a list of values of Theological Education in Nigeria; some of these include the following:

- Helps students fulfill their aspirations for Theological Education.
- Serves the common good of their respective church denominations.
- Equips the new generation for effective ministerial service.
- Help solve the crisis of Christian leadership which is the greatest threat to an African renaissance.
- Serves as vehicle for addressing the great commission's cultural dimensions and develop educational models and partnerships with which to mount such efforts.
- Serves as a Mission strategy for recovering the lost vision.

- Creates more places in Christian education for the youth as church's contribution to the building of society.
- Helps Christian youth get biblical education in a Christian atmosphere.
- Assist the graduates to live their Christian faith in their professions and occupations.
- Builds upon the solid foundation begun by faithful churches and parents.
- Provides an ideal place for vigorous Christian intellectual engagement and character development.
- Makes consistent advances morally, culturally and theologically in the lives of coming generation.[vii]

Partnership in Theological Education

It is in the plan of God that His creation should exist in relation to Him and to itself as exemplified in the Trinity. God is in Himself what he intends His creation to be, that is community, fellowship or partnership. The creation accounts clearly express this partnership motif and the entire scriptures are replete with data supportive of the claim.

Christian ministry and Theological Education are most effectively executed in partnership. Zamani B. Kafang suggests a model of partnership that provides Theological Institutions a wide range of relationships. He insists that Theological Schools should maintain close relationship with communities where they are located by attending local community activities. Such as:

- Funerals of key community leaders
- Celebrations such as Coronations
- community development projects such as repair of roads, bridges and community schools
- Visitation of Chiefs, district heads
- Attend community local games
- Make the school campus available for community uses for certain events
- Invite community to some seminars.[viii]

kafang also suggests strongly that Theological Institutions should relate with the business sector of the community, secular schools, health Institutions, local churches, governments agencies and other theological Institutions.[ix]

Emiola Nihilola has also done an extensive work on the subject of partnership in Theological Education. He begins by giving biblical and theological basis for partnership and provides generous biblical support for this. He suggests the following by which Theological Institutions may fruitfully relate with one another:

- ✓ Accreditation: form joint accrediting bodies such as ACTEA, BACISIN to formulate and regulate standards.
- ✓ Affiliation: weak Institutions could affiliate their programs to stronger Institutions.
- ✓ Partnership
- ✓ Networking
- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Extension services.[x]

A Contextual Model of Partnership

A contextual model of partnership in Theological Education is provided by the Association of Theological Institutes in the Middle East (ATIME). The association was established in 1967 with the following goals:

1. Working to strengthen the brotherly relationships between the members.

2. Encouraging the spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding among the academic bodies and among the institutes themselves.

3. Exchanging information and creating forums for discussions between the members of the Association.

4. Studying the relationship between the Theological Education and the present situation of the churches and their growth.

5. Improving the Theological Education and supporting the Theological Institutes to achieve this goal.

6. Supporting and financing the publication of Theological material.

7. Establishing brotherly relationships with similar Associations outside of the Middle East.

The membership of the association is composed of Theological Institutions of the Christian churches in the Middle East. Its membership includes twenty theological institutes from Egypt (12), Lebanon (6), Syria (1), and Iraq (1).

The activities of the association include:

1. Regular meetings of Deans and Directors

2. Meeting of Professors (at local levels)

3. Students meetings

4. Meeting of Librarians: The association was very much aware of the important role of Librarians in the Theological Institutes. It worked on encouraging their participation within its life and activities for a better coordination and cooperation. This idea found a positive response from the Librarians in Lebanon and Egypt. Three meetings in Egypt and two in Lebanon resulted in the following:

   a. Introducing to all Librarians the cataloguing systems used by the different Institutes.

   b. Looking for ways to have more collaboration among Libraries.

   c. Emphasizing the exchange of bulletin and journals among the Libraries.

   d. Working on computerizing the Libraries in order to relate them by Internet.

   e. Facilitating the use of Libraries by all the students of Theology.

5. Publication

6. Week of Prayer for Unity

7. Visit to the Theological Institutes

8. Empowering Research and intellectual work within the Association

9. Vision of the Association:

a. Establishing a Post-Graduate research program common to all Institutes.

b. producing a single Library Card that can be used by the students of any of the member institutes to use the related libraries without restrictions.

c. Acquiring funds to allow the Theological Libraries to be connected on the Internet.

d. Working more effectively on the principle of professors' exchange among the different families of churches. This principle was established in the regular meeting of 1994. The Association has witnessed some positive experience in this regard.

e. Organizing Conference to discuss and to study the curriculum of the Institutes.

g. Intensify the number of meetings among professors with the same field of study.[xi]

Conclusion

The nature of Theological Education makes collaboration and partnership and imperative. No theological Institution has all the financial or human resources to do all that it desires to achieve therefore partnership should be a strategic approach to achieving desired goals. This gathering at Brackenhusrst center is momentous for Baptist Theological Education in Africa if we can harvest this opportunity.

End Notes

[i]Richard John Neuhaus, ed., <u>Theological Education and Moral Formation</u> (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992) p. vii.

[ii] M.A. Sowunmi, "A Keynote Address", in Protus O. Kemdirim and Mercy A. Oduyoye, eds. <u>Women, Culture and Theological Education</u> (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd, 1998) p. 20.

[iii]Larry J. Mc Kinney, "The Purpose of Theological Education".

[iv]Dennis M. Campbell, "Theological Education and Moral Formation: What's' Going on in Seminaries Today" in <u>Theological Education and Moral Formation</u>, Richard John Neuhaus, ed.

[v] Campbell, p. 2.

[vi]Mary Gerald Nwagwu, "Relevance of Theological education for Women" in Protus O. Kendirim and Mercy A. Oduyoye, eds. Women, culture and Theological Education. p.86

[vii] J. A. Ilori, "Governance of Theological Institutions in Nigeria" <u>Theological Education and Ministerial Training in the Nigerian Baptist Convention</u>, (Lagos: Fine Print, 2012), pp. 36-37

[viii]Zamani B. Kafang, <u>Higher Theological Education: An Overview of Six Protestant Theological Institutions in Nigeria</u>, (Pyla-Mark Services. 2009), pp. 131-133.

[ix] Kafang, pp. 133-140

[x]Emiola Nihilola, "Academic and Professional Relationships of Theological Institutions in Nigeria," in Theological and Ministerial Training in the Nigerian Baptist Convention (Lagos: Fine Print, 2012), pp. 119-131.

[xi]Michel Nseir, "Association of the Theological Institutes in the Middle East (ATIME) An Ecumenical Academic Partnership Experience in the Middle East," in Ministerial Formation (Geneva: WCC, 2000), pp. 27-31.