

# InSightsJournal

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# *InSights Journal for Global Theological Education*

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**Purpose:** The *InSights Journal for Global Theological Education* provides a forum for scholars and practitioners to address issues broadly related to theological education. We are particularly interested in engaging non-Western voices in the global conversation. The Journal's audience includes faculty, administrators, resource and funding agencies, accrediting bodies, and other researchers in the field of theological education.

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**Format:** The *InSights Journal* is published semiannually online. Articles focus on matters related to the theory and practice of theological education, including but not limited to teaching, curriculum design, educational models, sustainability, administrative and organizational issues, and theological and societal engagement.

Each issue features four to five articles, editorial essays, and book reviews. The *Journal* is published digitally, with all articles available for download in .pdf format. In addition, the website provides space for conversations and resources pertinent to global theological education.

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1. Recommended length: 2,000-5,000 words.
2. Authors should follow the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th Edition, using one-inch margins, left justification, and endnote citations. Convert all footnote citations to parenthetical citations.
3. Write in the third person whenever possible.
4. Where appropriate, utilize headings to organize text, following the style dictated by the Chicago Manual of Style.
5. When quoting Scripture, include the Bible translation with each reference.
6. Include a one-paragraph abstract (100 words max.) at the beginning of the article.
7. Include a one-paragraph biography at the end of the article that identifies the author's institution or organization, position, and relevant experience.
8. Submit as .doc files to facilitate the editing and formatting process.
9. Send all submissions to [editor@insightsjournal.org](mailto:editor@insightsjournal.org).

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4. Direct quotations from the book should include only page numbers in parentheses. Do not include "p./pp." or the author's name.
5. Cite additional references, if any, as endnotes.
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# Taking Action in a Context of Fragility and Volatility

EVAN HUNTER

EDITOR, INSIGHTS JOURNAL

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## Ministry in a Context of Fragility and Volatility

Nearly two years ago, I sat around a table with several seminary presidents from around the world. The countries they represented were facing intense sociopolitical turmoil: one had recently emerged from a decades-long civil war; two were engaged in protracted military conflict with one another; one was confronting an influx of refugees displaced by civil war; one had made headlines for atrocities committed by an extremist group; another was facing government pressure that could limit foreign funding or even the involvement of expatriate faculty. The most stable nation represented around the table, next to my own, has since come under martial law. For many seminaries in the world, the normal context of theological education is one of fragility and volatility.

By definition, schools of theology are called to engage the *missio Dei*. Institutional leaders step out in faith, with great trust in the God whom they serve. Despite all the planning and vision a leader may have, sociopolitical factors beyond anyone's control can cause destabilization that affects the school significantly. Leaders therefore operate with constant awareness of the fragile state of resources, human and financial, available to their institutions. The context of fragility and volatility calls not only for deep commitment to the school's mission, but also for action rooted in strategic planning, stewardship grounded in understanding the economics of theological education, and the sharing of ideas among a supportive network to accomplish the school's mission.

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## Facing Common Challenges

Theological education is under pressure in all contexts. As the Church has grown and changed, so also have the demands on leadership training for pastors, teachers, evangelists, and missionaries. Megachurch growth and shifting theological positions affect the role of the seminary in the formation of leaders.

Arriving with unclear vocational aspirations, younger students may have a need to sort out a calling to full-time ministry. They are often less biblically literate and theologically astute than previous generations. Older students often come to seminary in the midst of career changes, unable to enter into full-time residential programs designed under a different learning paradigm. In many places, seasoned pastors seek formal training for the first time, but do not want to pause from ministry or uproot their families in the pursuit of learning.

Educational delivery modes continue to evolve to meet these changing demands. Technology has created access to immense amounts of content, often available free of charge. Schools have scrambled to make courses available online, but often struggle with how to incorporate spiritual formation, mentoring, and service into the virtual curriculum. Pedagogical approaches that give greater attention to learner-centered approaches, mentoring, and service learning depart farther and farther from the traditional lecture hall.

Students who earn seminary degrees enter into an increasingly diverse array of vocations, including roles in traditional church ministry, as well as in areas of counseling, education, and other ministry and NGO leadership. As larger percentages of graduates pursue callings that do not involve weekly preaching, they want to develop leadership capacities in areas such as social justice and economic development. Schools must adjust curricula and degree offerings to meet these leadership needs, as well as the new set of theological issues that arises as the Church engages social and ethical issues within its context.

Finally, all schools face immense financial pressures as the costs of forming leaders for service in God's Kingdom often far surpass bearable tuition levels. Schools feel the impact of shifting church structures, denominational support, and outside funding sources. While common in North America, student loans are virtually unheard of in most of the world. The availability of scholarships and other student funding varies greatly, and funds often focus on targeted groups or areas of study. Because few students pay the full cost of their education, institutions must raise money for virtually every student who enrolls in their programs.

## Operating within Thin Margins

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Very few seminaries anywhere have an accumulated abundance of resources at their disposal. Rather, most schools have a missional vision that outpaces financial capacity. In addition, for most schools in the Majority World, human resources are also highly limited, meaning institutions often operate within even thinner margins than their counterparts in the West. Few fully credentialed, experienced candidates exist to fill job openings. Without deep pools of ready-to-work talent, schools must recruit and develop promising individuals from lower-level

programs. The process of faculty development is both time- and cost-intensive. From identification to recruitment to earning a degree, the process can often take five to ten years and cost tens of thousands of dollars – all without the guarantee that the individual will join the faculty.<sup>1</sup> Missionary and visiting faculty often help to address teaching needs and bring international presence to a faculty. However, they also introduce a new set of dynamics with regard to financial structures, responsibilities to agencies, and cultural and contextual differences.

Due to the similarly high need for executive leadership, many senior leaders find themselves quickly promoted into administrative positions. Starcher and Strick (2005) note that African scholars who have earned PhDs in the West find themselves in significant administrative leadership roles within two years of degree completion. For many, the promotion came within six months of their return. Generally, intensive time spent earning a doctorate in biblical and theological fields does not prepare adequately for the administrative responsibility of leading an institution. Consequently, many administrative leaders operate outside of their training and must seek additional help to enhance the skills required for executive leadership in the academic setting.<sup>2</sup> In addition, many school presidents remain among the school's senior academic faculty, often needing to teach advanced courses in addition to fulfilling administrative, fundraising duties. Furthermore, many have additional ecclesial responsibilities and serve in positions related to denominations, mission organizations, or regional academic associations. Few have adequate support, rest, and encouragement for the expense of their work.

Finally, support structures are often underdeveloped. As Ferenczi (2015) has noted, many governing boards provide only modest levels of support for executive leaders. In many instances, general infrastructure is also weak. Inconsistent electrical power requires the use of generators and purchase of fuel to keep lights and computers functional. Internet access often incurs significant cost for insufficient bandwidth, affecting both access to electronic resources, cloud-based

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<sup>1</sup> The Faculty in Training (FIT) program helps address these challenges by inviting potential faculty members to accept an FIT position, through which they will earn their doctorates while teaching part-time for the school. Most often, FIT candidates choose a PhD program that does not require long-term residence, so they can participate at a distance, perhaps traveling once or twice a year to take courses, access library resources, and interact with their supervisors. By design, the job description and course load for FIT candidates include their doctoral research and writing. Senior faculty members serve as mentors to FIT candidates, offering guidance and encouragement as they develop their teaching skills and work on their dissertations. Upon completion of the degree, the candidates can move into full-time faculty positions.

<sup>2</sup> Programs such as the Overseas Council Foundations for Leadership in Theological Education (FLTE) and the ICETE Program for Academic Leadership (IPAL) have developed to provide additional training for executive leaders.

data back-up, and plans for the use of technology in distributed education models.

Constricted by threadbare budgets and limited resources, most institutions and those who lead them must operate within the thinnest of margins. Thin margins leave little room for mistakes. Natural learning curves have an inherent cost, which many schools have not the luxury to pay. The lack of basic support and access increases the burden on leaders, contributing to burnout and high turnover rates. Left unattended, the costs of mistakes and leadership changes can weaken institutions and limit effectiveness in achieving their missions.

## Taking Action

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On account of theological education's vital role within the Church, its precarious state requires institutional action. Thin margins, volatility, and fragility mean leaders must place an even greater premium on planning, stewardship, and maximizing the resources available.

- Formulate a Strategic Plan:* Institutions in survival mode always succumb to the tyranny of the urgent. However, for long-term sustainability, institutions need clearly defined missions and holistic strategies – accounting for enrollment projections, student needs, program growth, faculty plans, board development, alumni relations, facilities, and finances – in order to achieve their missions. Each of the school's operational areas must be considered in accordance to the school's mission. Many leaders, focused on the immediacy of the tasks in front of them, find themselves in a mess as they accumulate resources like puzzle pieces. They need space to pause and review the picture on the box so they can place those pieces more strategically. A military term, strategy refers to the placement of assets prior to the battle. A proper plan increases efficiency, helps identify needs and coverage gaps, and allows for the proper sequencing of actions in ways that maximize impact and streamline costs. The Book of Proverbs describes the pathway to success as paved by planning and hard work (21:5). Diligence in planning is crucial to flourishing.
- Understand the Business of Theological Education:* In his comments about the cost of discipleship, Jesus draws on the real-world economics of building a tower (Luke 14:28). Yet, too often, institutional leaders do not understand the actual costs of theological education. Ferenczi (2016) lists a viable business plan as one of the key strategic documents that institutional leaders must develop. In similar fashion, Bellon (2017) insists on understanding both the business and mission of theological education. Unexamined use of inherited financial structures and the assumption of fixed costs only increase the gap between understanding and the real

expense of forming students for Kingdom service. Theological education is a costly endeavor, almost always requiring resources beyond what students can afford to pay. An understanding of the economic realities is crucial to both annual budget planning and long-term strategy as institutions must find supplemental income to close the tuition gap.

- *Develop a Robust Network:* Proverbs reminds us that many advisers lead to success (15:22). Leadership is often lonely, so leaders need others in whom they can confide, and from whom they can learn and draw support. Networks foster solidarity, creativity, and shared learning. Through conversations with peers, leaders can recognize the common nature of the struggles institutions face. The sharing of ideas prevents the reinventing of the wheel and promotes innovation, as well as better use of time and financial investment. Networks create opportunities for sharing, evaluating, and improving ideas. The Kamba proverb from Kenya observes that “one mouth cannot determine whether the food is well-cooked.” A Swahili proverb also reminds us that “one finger does not crush the louse” (Africa Study Bible 2017, 936). In theological education, as in life, God has given us the wisdom of each other. This wisdom is especially important when resources are limited, margins are thin, and contexts are fragile.

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# InResponse: Vision and Leadership: Vital to Sustaining the Faith in Sub-Saharan Africa

EMIOLA NIHINLOLA

PRESIDENT, NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

In his article, “Sustaining What Matters,” Jason Ferenczi presents a multifaceted understanding of the sustainability of theological institutions. Theological schools play a critical role in ensuring the future of Christianity, particularly in my own context of Africa. As President of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS),<sup>1</sup> I agree that human resources, especially executive leaders, play a critical role in sustaining schools. Most importantly, leaders need to convey a vision for both the institution and the individuals it forms. In Africa, leaders play a critical role in whether Christianity will continue to flourish in this century.

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## A Look at My Context: The Importance of Leaders

The vitality and growth of the Christian faith in Africa, Asia, and Latin America in the twenty-first century are certainly a joy to the Global Church. Though the decline of Christianity in the Western world is a matter of regret, it does call for critical reflection on the future of the Christian faith in the Majority World. What is the future of Christianity, which is now spreading like wildfire in Africa?

In the first century, the Christian faith flourished in both Asia Minor and North

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<sup>1</sup> By the grace of God, I am an emerging Christian leader in Africa. I serve as the Vice Chair of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa, Director of the International Council for Higher Education in West Africa and President of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary in Ogbomoṣo, Nigeria. My specialization is in Systematic Theology. For about thirty years, I have served as a theological educator and administrator. The NBTS, established in 1898, was the first degree-awarding institution in Nigeria. It became a postgraduate school in 2002 and is the first theological institution to offer doctoral degrees in theology, education, and church music in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Africa. Vibrant churches were planted by the Apostle Paul in Turkey and beyond. Will Sub-Saharan Africa become like North Africa in the future? Will Nigeria become another Turkey? What should we make of the painful observation that, despite the full presence of vibrant churches in some African nations, our societies still exhibit rampant social vices like materialism, corruption, poverty, kidnapping, armed robbery, and misgovernment? What do we make of the elements of truth in the popular, but painful joke that “African Christianity is one mile wide, but one inch deep”? Will that kind of Christian faith survive in Africa? Certainly, the growth trend mentioned earlier is a complex phenomenon, but the intention of this author is to call attention to just one aspect of the matter: the critical need to raise visionary, transformative leaders for the Church in Africa.

One presupposition of this article is that the future of the Christian faith will be guaranteed in Africa if the Church and Christian leaders of today are trained to make the Gospel of the Kingdom have transformative impact on African nations. The African Church is in dire need of theological institutions that can raise up and multiply transformative learners (church pastors, theological educators, and civil leaders) who are committed to living and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, in order to contribute to the transformation of African nations. These two issues of vision and leadership are closely interwoven and vital to sustaining the Christian faith in the African context.

## A Vision for Theological Education

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What type of theological education will guarantee the future of genuine Christian faith in Africa? Although Africa is known as a bright continent with a sunny climate, unfortunately and paradoxically, many African societies are in darkness because they lack leaders with visions for societal transformation. How true is the parable of the Lord Jesus Christ: when a blind man leads another blind man, both will fall into a pit (Lk. 6:39)! Evangelical theological educators in Africa need to work with clear and bright institutional visions. In recent ecclesiological parlance, African theological training programs need to be more purpose-driven. For the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, that means balancing the values of spiritual, scholarly, and ministerial development, and integrating them into every instructional activity. Theological relevance should not be taken for granted, but rather planned and pursued deliberately in ministerial formation programs. I wish to assert that the future of the Christian faith can be assured in Africa if we offer theological education that can equip learners to respond effectively to contextual societal realities.

My overarching burden now relates to how theological education can bring greater transformative impact to Sub-Saharan Africa. In February 2017 I led a spiritual reflection on Matthew 6:25-34 for the NBTS staff and students with

the theme “Wanted: Gospel Ministers who are Kingdom Workers.” I proposed that theological education must be revitalized in Africa, with a renewed vision for Kingdom leaders. Educational processes, including curriculum design and development of methodologies, are to be conducted with the goal of establishing the Kingdom of God in the hearts and lives of African students, who will then carry out Kingdom ministries in the Church and society. The curriculum of ministerial education should thus be focused to help students access the knowledge, secrets, mysteries, and keys of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:11, 16:19). This emphasis on preaching and living out the Gospel of the Kingdom is imperative for theological education to serve and enable the African Church to fulfill its prophetic and missionary roles on the continent.

Sadly, the Kingdom focus of the Gospel has been compromised in many places in Africa. Many African Christian religious activities have become utilitarian. I am inwardly troubled and disturbed. At the risk of sounding alarming I wish to state that many African preachers are deviating from the true Gospel. Rather than concentrating on the Gospel of redemption that will transform lives and societies, many are preoccupied with other “gospels” of material possessions and achievements – money, positions, pleasures (Gal. 1:6-7). When the Church abandons the authentic Gospel message and lifestyle, society is made poorer.

Theological education in Africa is crying out for the renewal of its mission to establish the fear of God in people and righteousness in the land (2 Chr. 7:14). I was privileged to attend the 50th Anniversary Thanksgiving Service of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa in November 2016; I pleaded that Evangelical theological education should remain committed to training in godliness (1 Tim. 4:8). Knowledge of academic theories and sharp ministerial skills cannot redeem souls, grow the Church, transform society, or expand God’s Kingdom unless the Church and Christian leaders are spiritually formed and buoyant. For the Christian faith to survive in Africa, theological education must recognize the priority of spiritual formation. Contextual application of global best practices in education and administration, improvement of facilities, and the acquisition and use of technology all become more significantly profitable to the extent that they are able to enrich and energize the Kingdom vision.

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## The Importance of Leadership

High-quality Christ-centered leadership, characterized by integrity, plays an essential part in preserving the Christian faith in Africa. Africa is bedeviled with many problems: social disharmony, cultural perversion, moral erosion, economic poverty, political disorientation, and religious deception. I align myself with Christian analysts who affirm the great need for leaders who can model Christian faithfulness, biblical obedience, and true discipleship to transform contemporary

African society. Many African nations lack exemplary, honest, purposeful, and sacrificial leadership. Africa needs more political leaders like Nelson Mandela of South Africa and religious leaders like Peter Jasper Akinola of Nigeria.<sup>2</sup>

The truth of the matter is that regrettably, with regard to leadership selection and performance, the African Church fares no better than the larger society. Churches, denominations, and organizations sometimes choose our top leaders via quarrels, intrigues, desperation, and even mud-slinging litigation. Too often, personality clashes that result from conflicts of interest, lack of team spirit, and other manifestations of poor leadership characterize church and parachurch organizations. Thus, high-quality church and societal leadership is desperately needed as a Christian witness in Africa. One way for theological educators to contribute to the survival of the Christian faith in Africa is to embody and exemplify principled, godly, Christ-centered, servant leadership. Only teachers who serve as role models can rightly train, equip, and transform learners who will in turn offer Christian service and leadership with transformative impact on African societies.

As asserted by Ferenczi, theological institutions need help in many areas: competency in administration and management; standard finance systems (the business plan); staff development (“human capacity”); facilities and resources (especially libraries and technology); curricula that are more balanced, student-centered, Church-related, and society-friendly (“adapting to the context”); more effective instructional delivery; and scholarship assistance for students.

Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that **ensuring the future of the Christian faith in Africa requires developing, encouraging, and supporting heads of theological institutions and teachers who can offer visionary and transformative leadership characterized by:**

- A faith that is equally true to biblical revelation and to authentic African spirituality,
- Critical reflection on contemporary Christian praxis, so as to expand and deepen African Christianity,
- Dialogue with and responsiveness to socioeconomic poverty, hunger, ill health, and other inhumane development indices plaguing the continent,

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson Mandela offered brief, but purposeful democratic leadership in post-apartheid South Africa. Bishop Peter Jasper Akinola, while serving as the Primate of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), stood courageously in favor of biblical orthodoxy in the contemporary debate on human sexuality. That “conservative” stance inspired even greater respect for the Church in African society.

- Victory over the growing and pervasive storms of liberal Christianity through sound hermeneutics and theology,
- Breakthrough from enslavement to religious and cultural superstitions, and resilience before the upsurge of Islamic aggression,
- The practice of Evangelical faith and an obedient Christian life amid the emerging pluralism of ideologies, philosophies, and religions in Africa and beyond.

How will the Christian faith survive in Sub-Saharan Africa? One strategy is to develop spiritually buoyant, academically competent, and ministerially experienced faculty who will live, lead, and teach for the transformation of the Church and society.



### **Emiola Nihinlola**

Emiola Nihinlola is the President of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary in Ogbomosho. He also serves as the Director of the International Council for Higher Education in West Africa and the Vice Chair of the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa. He holds a PhD in Systematic Theology, and has thirty years of experience as a theological educator and administrator.



# Theological Education in Africa: Business or Mission?

EMMANUEL BELLON

DIRECTOR, VITAL SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE

**Abstract:** Financial viability remains one of the greatest challenges facing schools of theology. To succeed, schools in Africa need to better understand the business of theological education in order to better accomplish their mission. To do so, schools must better understand the true costs of forming leaders, engage the church in the mission of theological education, and adapt to the changing demands for leadership training in the church. This article explores how institutional leaders can strengthen this understanding, developing solid strategic plans and mobilizing more resources to better serve the mission of their schools.

## Introduction

Building leadership capacity to spearhead the growth of Christianity in Africa is a venture plagued with myriad challenges. At the core of these challenges is the struggle of training institutions to attain financial viability. The primary purpose of theological institutions is to raise leaders who will shepherd the Church and influence society. This is in response to the plea of Jesus Christ for his followers to pray that the Lord of the plenteous harvest will bring in more laborers to complete the task (Lk. 10:2). This clarion call has been answered in many different ways, including through theological education. Nevertheless, fulfilling the Great Commission is a gargantuan task that requires prodigious resources.

The role of available resources for the establishment and continued operations of institutions is often underestimated and, more importantly, overshadowed by the urgency to produce pastors, no matter the cost. As the seasoned African theologian Kwame Bediako observed, “During the past thirty to forty years, the mushrooming of churches in independent Africa has led also to the proliferation of Bible schools...” (2001, 29). As theological institutions were founded to meet the shortfall of pastors, school leaders borrowed models from Western theological education that have little or no relevance to the African context as far as resources are concerned. Western theological institutions enjoy generous financial support

from Western churches, foundations, endowments, and wealthy individuals, whereas their African counterparts have no local support and depend on foreign Western generosity.

The African model for theological education has therefore been incongruent with the context from day one. Consequently, Africa is littered with financially stressed theological training programs. The efforts of institutions to survive financial crises have led to all manner of bungling academic programs. The institutions struggle with debt, and those who opt for cost reduction are shrinking into unimaginable sizes and shapes. Expanding training programs of all kinds, as well as conversions of seminaries into Christian universities, complicate the financial landscape. Acknowledging this conversion phenomenon, S. R. Graham observes: “Much has been written in the recent months about the financial challenges facing educational institutions. A few have ceased operations, others have cut expenses and expanded their missions to incorporate a broader constituency” (2015, 1). Semeon Mulatu’s 2012 dissertation research on Protestant institutions that have converted from seminaries into universities in Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo confirms that it is more difficult and complicated to operate a university than a seminary.

So what does theological education in Africa need to do in order to fulfill its mandate to train leaders for the Body of Christ? This is partly determined by how churches and mission agencies perceive the theological institutions they own. Is theological education business or mission? Was it meant to be business or mission? If the financial model of early theological education is now untenable, as evident in many institutions, then how are we to manage theological education? If theological education is a business with clear profitability targets, then the business is a lousy one. One consistent feature of almost all of the continent’s training programs with which I have interacted in the recent past is repeated losses as per business standards. Unlike business ventures, where more customers result in higher sales and profitability, every student in theological education is a cost: the more you have, the bigger your cost. If theological education is a mission, then what is the goal? What financial model should support the mission? How should we fund the mission so that the mandate to train leaders for the Church and society is fulfilled?

Perhaps the business of the mission of theological education is not an “either-or” discussion, but rather a “both-and” one. Theological education is a mission because it is part of the Church’s response to the central Commission given by Jesus Christ to make disciples of all nations. Similarly, it is a business because it has all the features involved in any business venture: customers, products, personnel, infrastructure, and returns on investments. Yet, all too often the

mission is haphazardly defined and the business of accomplishing the mission is in tatters.

There is an apparent disconnect between the business and mission of theological education; hence, the search for financial viability has been elusive. The viability of African theological institutions deserves a critical examination of certain factors, such as inherited financial models, church ownership, strategic planning gaps, resource mobilization infrastructure, changing needs of leader formation, and institutional leadership capacity. Although these factors are not exhaustive, they provide the framework for our discourse on financial viability among theological institutions in Africa. In this reflection, I will be drawing heavily from my experience as someone who has served as a seminary president for years and who has also coordinated five seminaries in different African countries. More importantly, I will also reflect on some of the lessons gained from my current position of assisting nineteen theological institutions in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia to develop viable strategies for institutional sustainability.

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## Inherited Financial Models

Western churches and missionary agencies have founded almost all of the theological institutions in Africa. Very few institutions were established through indigenous initiatives and among these few institutions, many were started with Western gifts and donations. As Gatwa indicates, theological education “eats up a lot of money, and the African churches do not have such funds. Financial dependency is common to almost all these [theological] institutions – their funding comes essentially from abroad” (2003, 11).

African schools have based their financial models on a series of assumptions: we reach out to unbelievers, they respond favorably to our message, and then we plant churches. As churches grow quickly, we need pastors to lead the churches; but since there are no trained pastors in the denomination to hire, we establish bible colleges, usually at the certificate and diploma levels. However, since we do not have the resources to start a school, we appeal to our sending church or agency to send cash so we can buy land, build structures, and provide for the education of pastors. We also request library books and qualified teachers who can serve as self-supporting missionaries. Shortly after the missionary teachers show up, we enroll men and women who have heeded the call of God in their lives to be trained as pastors. Often, these recruits are willing to be trained, but have minimal education and no cash to pay for tuition. No problem, we enroll them anyway, and solicit the money from our mission agencies and churches to cover the operational costs of the school. This continues for years until certificate- and diploma-level courses are no longer enough, so we add bachelor’s degrees and

later master's programs, and we change the name of the school from bible college to seminary.

As can be seen, this financial model requires an upfront investment to establish the school and also continuous gifts from Western mission agencies to sustain operations, since students do not pay tuition. Therefore, the two main sources of funding for continued operations are gifts from mission agencies and churches, and the donation of salaries through self-supporting missionary teachers. After a while, students are asked to pay about 10 to 15% of the tuition, sometimes with scholarships for those who cannot afford the cost. Thus, a third income stream is added with the introduction of tuition. Although the seminary may belong to an African denomination or mission, there is no expressed financial support from either.

This continues for years until the missionary teachers decide to return to their home countries. Often, the departure of one missionary means the loss of two faculty members or staff, since both spouses tend to serve in the institution. The departure of missionaries also means the stoppage or reduction of funding from friends of the missionaries who have previously supported operations. It also means that local leaders and teachers without missionary support must assume teaching responsibilities with insufficient operational funds. Although the departure of missionaries is often gradual, the financial impact of their absence is sudden and institutions are quickly plunged into financial crisis. It is obvious that local denominations and mission agencies are oblivious to the huge financial responsibility they must bear to keep institutions operational. Stopgap measures from churches to address such financial situations have often fallen short of what is needed to maintain normal operations. This is evident in many theological institutions across Africa.

Missionaries and mission agencies have never come to an amicable understanding with local church leaders regarding what it takes to establish and operate a bible college. Although church leaders and mission agencies appreciate the contribution of the bible colleges, they never understood what it takes to establish, operate, and manage schools of such caliber. Similarly, after receiving initial grants and donations for infrastructure, missionaries never factored the costs of teaching, regular maintenance, and school operations into the overall cost. The only items captured in their financial records were gifts and how they were spent. Even after tuition was later introduced to many bible colleges as a source of revenue, the total income was insignificant when compared to the overall cost of operation.

Churches and local mission agencies only realize the true cost of operating bible colleges and seminaries after the departure of missionary teachers, administrators, and staff. Previously, African churches had entrusted the

establishment and operation of seminaries to their missionary counterparts, and had never worried about operations or maintenance. Later, churches realized that operating a seminary is an expensive venture for which they are totally unprepared. The Western missionaries had applied a financial model that had been convenient at the time for their ministry, and it had served its purpose for that season. However, when the Western missionaries handed over leadership of the schools to local churches, the financial model quickly became untenable. Since the exodus of missionaries from different parts of the continent, institutional leaders have struggled to revise this financial model with very little success. Graham reiterates that even the Western model [generating income from tuition and fees, individual and group donations, endowment return, and denominational support] is not sustainable, and observes that Western theological schools have struggled with financial issues since the 1850s and have yet to discover a viable model (2015, 1).

Most often, the calculation of a seminary's operating budget is erroneously limited to faculty and administration costs. There are so many unaccounted costs because they were previously either considered as gifts in kind or as donations to the school. Hence, the actual cost of operating a seminary for an academic year is not really known. Costs such as classroom repair, missionary salaries, invested resources in fundraising, cost of volunteers, cost of outreach to the community, and others were never factored into the overall operational cost. A careful calculation of these costs against revenue would quickly reveal the reasons behind the perpetual deficit at many institutions.

Gradually, the cost of training each student per year is becoming evident, and the gap between tuition and cost is gaining much appreciation. According to a 2010 Overseas Council International (OCI, an Evangelical Christian agency supporting over 50 theological institutions in Africa) survey of 32 African theological institutions, the highest revenue that institutions derived from tuition was 30% of the annual operating cost. Many of the institutions recorded much lower revenue from tuition per year. The bottom line is that no theological student in Africa pays the full tuition cost of education. According to the OCI survey, the remaining 60% (or more) of revenue needed to train each student per year is raised through gifts and donations, which fluctuate over time. A recent (2012) posting on the Liberia Bible College website indicates that only 10% of their total revenue is generated from within Liberia; 90% is derived from overseas donations.

Often, school leaders argue that since tuition is low and since we have few students, if we increase the number of students, then we could increase our revenue. Certainly, fewer students do increase the cost per student, but since schools cannot increase the number of students per class infinitely, there will always be a gap. If students are not paying the full tuition, then no matter the

number of students we enroll, we will never break even. Therefore, more students do not necessarily mean more revenue. Since the inception of school fees in theological education in Africa until now, we have yet to find an institution where tuition is equivalent to operational cost, and where more students will eventually result in a break-even budget and subsequently, a surplus.

The inability of school leaders to raise funds from other sources to cover the remaining 60% (or more) cost of operations immediately creates a deficit. Nevertheless, many theological institutions, strapped by financial pressure, operate under the premise that adding students alone will increase their revenue. This defective financial planning model still predominates at many African theological institutions. In reality, a theological seminary can achieve financial equilibrium only if it “has sufficient resources to conduct its mission with quality, preserve the purchasing power of its financial assets, maintain its physical assets, and provide fair compensation to its employees” (Graham 2015, 8).

## Church Ownership of Institutions

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The notion that a seminary exists to strengthen the Church and its witness in a dark world has not done much to improve church ownership of seminaries. This is partly historical and, to a great extent, due to negligence. Even decades after African leaders have taken over missionary-planted churches and ministries, theological education has continued to experience dwindling support in cash and in-kind. Although churches invest huge resources in building expensive edifices, there is no commensurate investment in theological education. Seminaries remain at the periphery of churches’ core activities, and therefore lack the support they need to grow and thrive. Among the few African denominations that generously invest in theological education, the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) stands out as a shining example worthy of emulation. The determination of the NBC to sustain and develop its seminaries in Nigeria beyond the initial missionary investments is unusual.<sup>1</sup>

By and large, missionaries started seminaries in Africa to train pastors to shepherd growing congregations of believers in Jesus Christ. The Church is therefore the *raison d’être* of theological education; however, since the departure of Western missionaries, the Church’s investment in institutional development has been minimal. Historically, national church leaders have repeatedly failed to grasp the vision of their Western counterparts, as evidenced by their scant interest and investment in theological institutions. Ownership transcends investment; it also reflects the extent to which a church is willing to draw on the intellectual offerings

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<sup>1</sup> The NBC supports about ten seminaries in Nigeria, but also funds a big portion of the budget of its premier institution, the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary.

of its institution in addressing thorny and complicated issues in society. It relates to the Church's proactive engagement with the academy to generate theologically informed responses to society's changing needs.

The emerging gray areas in alternative lifestyles and the lack of depth in efforts from the pulpit to address these issues should motivate church leaders to embrace theological institutions as strategic partners in the search for wisdom and direction. Reciprocity in such a relationship would ensure that leaders in theological institutions do not sit in their ivory towers, but rather participate in the day-to-day activities of the Church, washing the feet of the faithful, and demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ as ministers of the Gospel. Responsive engagement and interaction would also educate the Church regarding the core operations of theological institutions and the need to demonstrate true ownership by facilitating school operations.

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### Changing Demands in Leader Formation

The first students who pursued theological education were individuals in full-time pastoral ministry. Many hardly possessed the qualifications required for the programs, but were accepted into the programs because they needed further training to effectively execute their duties as ministers of the Gospel. As time passed, the demography shifted to high school graduates in need of college-level theological education to serve as pastors. These were admitted to residential programs and studied under scholarships provided by the schools. Many of these young leaders were unmarried and had few social responsibilities. Others who already had college degrees went on to pursue postgraduate studies while still in their youth. Although many of these graduates continued to serve the Church as pastors and church leaders in different capacities, others discovered later that pastoral ministry and theological educational leadership are not their calling.

Today, churches are no longer looking for pastors among young graduates with only a first degree in theology, but rather seeking those who have broader experiences in life, educational exposure beyond theological training, and the ability to help parishioners with various life issues and deal with the social complexities of our time. These kinds of leaders are formed by interactions beyond the classroom. The demand for a different kind of church leader must alter the modus operandi of theological educators. The demand is pushing more professionals from other disciplines into theological education as second-career students. Russell West notes that although the financial predicament of residential seminaries may continue for a while, a new breed of seminarian is rising – seminarians who are prepared to explore emerging innovations upon older ministry training approaches (2003, 113). In fact, “full-time students living on campus and with faculty living at least near the campus is, for most institutions,

a thing of the past” (Evans and Smith 1994, 51). Instead, more and more leaders now enroll as part-time students while maintaining their jobs and hope to serve as either full-time or bi-vocational pastors.

Yet, the theological curricula have not changed in response to these demographic shifts. Modes of course delivery and residential requirements for students have remained the same. Institutional response to changing leadership demands is an important determinant of financial viability, especially if the majority of these students are professionals who have the capacity to pay higher tuition and receive limited scholarships. The resources and infrastructure needed to serve this growing group of students are not as expansive as what is needed for young high school graduates in the traditional residential bible college environment. These older professionals do not need dormitories, cafeterias, sports facilities, and the many other amenities required by residential students. With reasonable classrooms and administrative offices, a good electronic library, the requisite faculty (who may be adjuncts or working part-time), and supporting staff, the seminary can operate efficiently. The socioeconomic status of working professionals enables them to adequately foot their own tuition bills and thus contribute to the wellbeing of the seminary. Finally, because these new leaders are adult learners, they are highly motivated to finish the program and step into their various church ministries. All this is to say that the change in demand for these leaders should influence school recruitment strategies, curricula, modes of delivery, and the development of physical facilities. Considering student demographic shifts will ensure efficient use of limited resources, which will significantly reduce the cost of operation and increase revenue for institutional viability.

## Strategic Planning Gaps

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The importance of strategy in achieving a mission cannot be overemphasized in theological education. The kind of strategy an institution adopts determines whether the institution will be successful or not in fulfilling its mission. Strategy shapes the mission of the institution, and determines the various tasks and activities that must be undertaken to fulfill the mission. An institutional mission does not remain static as society changes; there should be corresponding change in the institution’s leader formation strategy. This requires a strategic thinking and planning culture, which is nonexistent in many African theological institutions.

The strategic mission of forming leaders and engaging society prophetically should be at the core of institutional learning and planning. It is central to everything that happens in the institution. Inability to articulate a clear mission aligned to the dynamic needs of society makes it virtually impossible to effectively plan for financial viability. It is not unusual for theological institutions in Africa

to operate for years without clear strategic plans outlining focused goals and objectives for achieving their missions. This is partly because the expertise needed for such planning may be lacking and the cost of engaging professionals is prohibitive. As Aleshire rightly observes in the North American context, “Quality in theological education may be enhanced by good institutional processes, but those processes, however good they may be, do not define quality theological education...quality begins with knowing something so well, so intimately, so respectfully, that ‘love of’ and ‘commitment to’ characterize this knowing” (1994, 12). Similarly, in Africa, strategic planning can facilitate learning and ensure that schools adapt their missions to changing contextual needs.

When the strategic planning gap is addressed, the mission of the institution becomes clearer, and every effort and activity can then be focused on achieving the mission. The mission determines the kind of academic programs to be offered and the caliber of faculty needed to train leaders. The faculty then determines the kind of library resources needed to support the academic programs as they endeavor to fulfill the mission. The central responsibility to train particular kinds of leaders also informs the acquisition and maintenance of physical facilities and other resources. The extent of the resources needed then informs the development of fundraising objectives and infrastructure.

Strategic planning thus reduces disjointed and tangled decision-making. It also influences the recruitment of management and administrative staff who are able to effectively facilitate the work of faculty and students. It harmonizes every decision and action regarding the institution, and provides a vision of the future that inspires passion in those serving the school. If theological education is the Lord’s business, which must demonstrate clear returns on investment, then we have the stewardship responsibility to employ every known strategy in order to produce lasting fruit in a financially viable manner.

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## Resource Mobilization Infrastructure

The ability to mobilize resources, whether for business or for non-profit endeavors, is critical for the fulfillment of any vision. However, one cannot mobilize resources with poor and dilapidated infrastructure. Experience has taught us over the years that student tuition alone is not enough to meet the financial obligation of institutions and so, we must solicit funding from other sources to keep the boat afloat. Nevertheless, little effort and few resources are invested in the establishment of fund development offices and in the training of their staff. L.H. Olley boldly asserts that whether we are dealing with “a seminary, college, or university, the larger institution usually must have at least one staff person, if not an entire department, devoted to fundraising” (2008, 215). This person needs to be fully devoted to working with alumni and donors, and often to developing

proposals for foundations and grant agencies.

Often, this responsibility falls squarely on the shoulders of the school president and everyone looks to the president to bring in funds from wherever he or she may find them. An important lesson that we have not learned from our missionary counterparts is that fundraising is fundamental to the success of mission initiatives and that without funds, great ideas and passion evaporate over time. The success of missionaries and their activities in many African countries can be largely attributed to the availability of funding from their home churches. Like Western mission agencies, theological institutions in the West have also invested in people, systems, and structures for fund development. Today, these theological institutions remain in existence because of the success of these offices.

If tuition contributes to only a third of the institution's entire budget, then the remaining 70% needs to be raised from other sources. Fund development offices drive such fundraising initiatives. Business organizations are always looking for different opportunities to raise share capital so they can grow and expand the business, and theological institutions cannot do less. In order to fulfill their missions, theological institutions need to set up funding offices with qualified staff who can craft effective plans for successful fundraising campaigns.

It is often suggested that "third stream" projects (income-generating ventures) can fill this void, but observations from across the globe attest to the fact that theological institutions lack the business abilities and competencies for successfully operating third stream projects. Very few theological institutions have third stream projects that are thriving. Projects that do thrive are often due to a particular kind of seminary leadership. This simply means that seminaries must see fund development as a critical component of ministry, and must provide the attention and all the resources needed. A seminary's financial viability is therefore inextricably linked to the effectiveness of its fund development initiatives.

## Institutional Leadership Capacity

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At the core of every theological education is leadership. Students in theological institutions are equipped to become leaders in churches and parachurch organizations. This leadership is not only spiritual, but also permeates every aspect of our *Sitz im Leben*. It is extensive and deep, and has far-reaching consequences that transcend this life. Therefore, institutional leaders must model a high standard of leadership for students – the type that demonstrates stewardship par excellence. Thus, it behooves institutional governance bodies to select leaders who have certain qualifications for the position of seminary president. As Senior and Weber reiterate, "The truly effective religious leader is one who enables a community to mobilize its energies for the hard work

of transformation and adaptation to social change. The challenging task for leadership today may be in building up institutions rather than tearing them down” (Senior and Weber 1994, 30).

In addition to academic qualifications, theological expertise, political alignment, contextual suitability, and good relationships with strategic partners, leaders should have the capacity to lead and grow a theological institution. Oftentimes, scholars rise to leadership positions because of their academic achievements; however, it takes more than academic success to lead a seminary effectively. Leaders must be able to distinguish business decisions from that of mission, and be able to seamlessly integrate the two and hold them together in dynamic tension. Ability to lead in this manner ensures that an institution operates at the highest of standards while accomplishing its mission.

Among theological institutions in Africa, very few leaders assume seminary presidency with the background and experience required. Many learn on the job with little or no mentoring at all. The result of these leadership transitional practices is evident in the institutional struggles across the continent. The skills and competencies needed to lead a theological institution can be more complex than those required for a business venture with defined deliverables and profitability standards. The leader must first be called by God to serve and that calling takes time to verify. He or she must understand the core business of theological education, which is training leaders to shepherd the Church and society. He or she must have a strong biblical and theological background or exposure, and must be able to articulate the mission of the institution in such a light. Administration and management of faculty, staff, students, facilities, and academic programs present incredible challenges for a theological school leader. Furthermore, nurturing church and funding partner relationships as stakeholders of the mission is a delicate work that requires certain skills and competencies.

It feels overwhelming for a governing board or church to consider all of these qualifications before selecting a leader for the position of institutional president. Yet, the situation in many seminaries requires just that if the institution is to be salvaged from imminent collapse. In many institutions in Africa, leaders with both strong academic backgrounds and leadership skills are a rare species. It seems that leaders with the capacity to fulfill both the business and the mission of theological education must be theologians who have had opportunities to lead other ventures, possibly through for-profit or non-profit organizations, prior to assuming seminary leadership. The confluence of business insight and theological reflection in their thinking could then enable the institutional effectiveness and growth so desperately needed in all of our theological institutions.

## Conclusion

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As theological institutions in Africa flounder with only a few sporadic glimmers of hope, we should remember that God cares about everything that affects His work. As much as He is concerned with what will advance and grow His Kingdom, He also gives due attention to those things that may hold back the spread of the Gospel to all nations. Currently, the financial prognosis for many theological seminaries in Africa is discouraging, but by integrating proper business acumen with missional focus, institutions will begin to rise again. A robust business and missional approach to theological education will require an effective and efficient financial model, strategies to strengthen Church ownership of seminaries, careful attention to the changing trends in and demand for leader formation, and strong fund development infrastructures. Above all, it will require God-prepared leaders with broader experiences in life and organizational behavior to reap the abundant harvest. God cares, and as a result, He has made sufficient and appropriate provisions for the advancement of His Kingdom. Financial viability of theological education in Africa can be achieved as we draw from all of God's to improve the leadership of our institutions.

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# Christian Reflective Practice: Prayer as a Tool for Reflection and Application in Theological Education

VOLKER GLISSMAN

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION BY EXTENSION IN MALAWI (TEEM)

**Abstract:** Reflection and application are integral for deep learning and for bridging the theory-practice gap, especially in Christian formation. A survey of the literature in both general education and Christian education deepens the theoretical understanding of the impact of reflection and application. Prayer, which can cultivate the reflection and application needed for deep learning, represents an under-utilized tool for learning integration and learner formation.

## Introduction

Christian formation, as well as moral and character education in general, faces a methodological challenge in achieving its ultimate goal of consistent deep learning.<sup>1</sup> For most of Christian history, the Church has relied heavily on preaching for its authoritative transfer of knowledge and assumed that knowledge automatically leads to changed lives. Dallas Willard highlights the contemporary dissatisfaction with this approach and acknowledges that the approach has failed, as it has not produced the expected results:

We have counted on preaching, teaching, and knowledge or information to form faith in the hearer and have counted on faith to form the inner life and outward behavior of the Christian. But, for whatever reason, this strategy has not turned out well. The result is that we have multitudes of professing Christians who well may be ready to die, but obviously are not ready to live, and can hardly get along with themselves, much less with others (2014, 69).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion linking formation in the field of theology to affective learning, see Graham, “Instructional Design for Affective Learning in Theological Education.”

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Farrah, in her assessment of lecturing as a method for adult education, concludes that lecturing is a well-suited method if the aim is cognitive or information transfer, but that a “lecture is not the best approach...to modify attitudes” (*Lecture, 228*).

Thus, Willard questions the assumption of guaranteed spiritual growth. The assumption is that the proclamation of cognitive knowledge would lead to faith, which would automatically lead to transformed hearts and to corresponding action.<sup>3</sup> This view has multiple significant shortcomings. It assumes first that teaching equals learning; second, that cognitive knowledge automatically leads to faith; third, that faith automatically develops into spiritual maturity; and finally, that knowledgeable faith automatically results in correct praxis. Such a view reflects a misunderstanding about the nature of Christian formation.<sup>4</sup> This is one of the gravest mistakes that theological educators can make: to assume that the cognitive teaching about a subject will lead to an all-encompassing mastery of the subject – that cognitive teaching about morality will lead to moral practitioners.<sup>5</sup>

In some Christian quarters, Paul’s Damascus Road experience is viewed as the “method” for deep or formative learning – the Holy Spirit comes down and ignorance falls away like scales from one’s eyes (Acts 9:18).<sup>6</sup> Yet, it is widely recognized that Christian formation is a participatory process (similar to the images of journeying or growth) through which an individual grows in action and attitude. An important element in learning and spiritual formation is the active participation of individuals. It seems that too strong an emphasis has been placed on cognitive formation through information transfer. It also seems that too strong (or exclusive) an emphasis has been placed, in some Christian circles, on divine works, thereby removing participatory formation from the human sphere.<sup>7</sup> Neither of these two schools of thought has thus far delivered the anticipated deep learning required for spiritual formation.

Willard is not the first to question this automatism. The prophets Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel explore the very same question: how could Israel have failed in their love for and obedience to YHWH if they had access to the Torah of Moses?

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the educational theory behind transformational learning, see Young, “Transformational Learning in ministry.”

<sup>4</sup> There are significant Christian traditions that tried to overcome the assumption of guaranteed maturation as evident in some forms of monasticism, Methodism, and others.

<sup>5</sup> It is significant that the ATS (Association of Theological Schools) in the USA has adopted five key program standards for the MDiv, one involving theological reflection on ministry: “The program shall provide theological reflection on and education for the practice of ministry. These activities should cultivate the capacity for leadership in both ecclesial and public contexts” (ATS 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Paul’s statement that “faith comes from hearing” (Rom 10:17) may also be used, as is often the case in preaching literature, to limit Christian proclamation and witness to the pulpit. Although Paul makes the point that faith is a response to hearing the Gospel, he does not say that faith comes through pulpit preaching.

<sup>7</sup> I am not denying that instant cognitive and behavioral transformation of individuals takes place, like on the Damascus Road, but I am questioning whether it should be seen as the primary formative approach available for spiritual formation.

The initial assumption was that the presence of the Torah in Israel should have (automatically) led to love and obedience, and should have kept the nation close to YHWH. This was not the case, as the biblical history repeatedly shows. It is most tragically seen in the failed reforms of Josiah just decades before the Judean exile (2 Kings 22-23).

The prophets provide two significant biblical correctives to the automatism assumed by some in Torahic and formative learning. The first corrective emphasizes student-centered learning (or learner-centered education). It is exemplified in the vision of the godly king who embodies divine wisdom in Deuteronomy 17:18-19.<sup>8</sup> The king is not to passively receive instructions regarding YHWH. Rather, he is to become an active and self-directed student of the Torah: he is to copy the Torah and he is to read the Torah daily. YHWH himself gives similar advice to Joshua. In preparation for entering the land, Joshua is not to passively receive the Torah, but rather to “meditate on it day and night” (Joshua 1:8). Ezekiel offers the second corrective in his vision of the heart of stone being removed and replaced by a spirit-enabled heart, which allows for the Torah of YHWH to be written directly on the hearts of God’s people (Ezek 11:19-20).<sup>9</sup> Thus, the correctives identified by the biblical authors are the active participation of the learner and an active engagement with the Holy Spirit. Formative learning requires that learners actively participate in their learning, especially in their formational learning, and allow God to shape them.

Church communities highly value cognitive as well as behavioral formation as a sign of genuine character formation. Yet, formational learning goes beyond conformity to agreed-upon norms, and aims at the genuine and lasting transformation of individuals and communities. Formational learning takes place when values are not merely explored intellectually, but rather embraced by learners as their own values and demonstrated in subsequent action (and not simply in speech). Patricia Cranton adds an important insight when she highlights that people create meaning from their experiences: “they build a way of seeing the world; settle on a way of interpreting what happens to them; and develop the accompanying values, beliefs, and assumptions that determine their behavior. Much of this framework is uncritically absorbed from family, community, and culture” (2016, 19). She notes that a transformative learning experience takes place through the critical examination of formative childhood experiences. This examination often takes place when the individual is challenged through an

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<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that kingship does not play a significant role in the Pentateuch and in the setup of the covenant community which the exception of these few verses.

<sup>9</sup> Other ingredients, like community and the participation in a learning community are other important element often utilised in theological education for transformative learning and are exemplified in the New Testament (Acts 13:1-3).

unexpected life event that does not fit expectations, thereby requiring a modified response.

Cranton's observation offers significant insights into formative theological education. Formative childhood experiences determine one's worldview and actions; yet, good theological education strives to challenge these experiences and their underlying cultural assumptions. The aim cannot be a simple intellectual deconstruction, but rather a significant encounter with the Divine (either directly or through the medium of Scripture). The aim of this encounter is to encourage learners to question and reflect on their own sets of expectations, their uncritical beliefs, the principles that guide their behavior, and their own formative experiences; and to assess their continuous validity in light of the challenge of the Gospel of Christ. The aim is not simply to reflect, but rather to reflect in the presence of and in fellowship with God. Thus, prayer is an essential tool in Christian reflective practice for participatory, learner-centered, formational learning.

## Terminology

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Jennifer Moon (2004) points out that a definition should stay as close as possible to the popular meaning of a word.<sup>10</sup> This is especially important for teachers of theology who do not necessarily have a background in education and pedagogy. The adjective "theological" in "theological reflection" adds to the concept of reflection a dimension that is not exclusively concerned about one's own personal life, but rather how the whole counsel of Scripture informs a biblical and theological response to one's present life. In this article, "reflection" refers to personal deliberation upon present existence, and especially how the present is influenced by the past, in order to intentionally influence one's future. This is not an exhaustive definition, but rather one that will help in the present discussion in relation to formation.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis is on the personal process that examines present action; recognizes the influence of the past (experiential or in terms of life

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<sup>10</sup> Moon suggests that "a common sense definition of reflection" is preferable; otherwise, the concept will bring confusion to listeners. See Moon, *Reflection*, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ministerial theological reflection might need a slightly different definition as its aim is different. This essay is limited in its scope and therefore cannot satisfactorily address all the different biblical terminology that could further inform a theological understanding of reflection. How is reflection different from "meditation," "critical thinking," or "thinking things over"? Is not "praying over an issue" or "seeking the council of the Holy Spirit" similar to reflecting on life or oneself in partnership with the divine? Is it possible that reflection and application are so intrinsically linked that they cannot be separated, especially in spiritual formation? Taylor and White insist that reflection is "primarily confined to the application of 'theory to practice,'" thereby making the point that reflection and application are an intrinsic unit (see Taylor and White, *Practising Reflexivity in Health and Welfare*, 198).

principles); and modifies, affirms, or agrees to action for the future. Reflection has similarities with biblical wisdom, which also examines the pattern of human life and draws principles for future action from it.

Theological reflection is an appropriate response to the problem of pharisaism. Pharisaism is the preoccupation with, adherence to, and veneration of selected biblical truth in negligence of the wider counsel of Christian Scripture. Pharisaism is a potential stumbling block for formative learning, as it undermines deep reflection and instead emphasizes a superficial reflection on (personally) selected truth. It is not personal and self-directed, but is rather focused on external appearances, too often focused on the “speck in someone else’s eye,” while neglecting personal shortcomings.<sup>12</sup> Surprisingly, theological education has not often directly addressed the issue of pharisaism, even though confronting it was unmistakably central to the ministry of Christ on earth, whereby he sought to liberate the people of God from all types of misinformed, self-justifying religious adherence.

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## Background and Case Study

My initial interest in reflective practice and growth arose from my own background in Theological Education by Extension (TEE), specifically from my observation of the gap between the theory of TEE and the actual practice of TEE. This article therefore focuses on TEE, but will offer suggestions for residential theological education as well. Theological education in all forms must concern itself with integrating Christian reflective practice into its academic programs, as well as its spiritual formation.<sup>13</sup>

TEE arose as a direct result of the growing self-assertion of Majority World churches in the 1960s and 70s. During this time, educators questioned the exclusive use of Western academic seminary-type education for the ministerial training and formation of clergy, and emphasized the need for practical ministry-orientated education.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, theological educators started addressing the need for the democratization of theological education, moving away from an exclusive concentration on ministerial formation to include the theological formation of the laity (Pobee 2013, 19). TEE began as a process of decentralizing theological education to train ordained ministers in Guatemala in the early 1960s.

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<sup>12</sup> See also Moon, *Handbook on Reflective and Experiential Learning*, 95-102, where the problem of superficial reflection is addressed.

<sup>13</sup> For a similar concern about fragmentation, see Farley, *Theologia*; Cannell, *Theological Education Matters*; Banks *Reenvisioning Theological Education*; and Naidoo, “The Call for Spiritual Formation.”

<sup>14</sup> See Bernhard Ott, *Understanding and Developing Theological Education*, 132-133.

Instead of having students come to the seminary, the seminary went to the students, who were predominantly part-time ordained ministers in rural areas. TEE utilizes a blended learning approach, traditionally comprising three elements: “*self-study materials, regular seminars, and life experience and ministry in the students’ own context*” (Harrison 2004, 319). For its educational methodology, TEE builds on a multi-directional reflection-application conversation.<sup>15</sup> This ongoing conversation is the continuous interaction between the learning content and the application of that content in practice through reflection. Reflection and application are foundational for formative deep learning. The methodological significance of TEE is that reflection is intentionally used in every learning event: first there is reflection on the lesson content, then reflection on practice (or, in other words, on the application of the learning content), and finally reflection within a learning community on everyone’s reflection and practice. Reflection is an ongoing process that does not have an end, but rather points to the need for lifelong learning.

Unfortunately, there is a gap between theory and actual practice within TEE. Several factors contribute to this gap: the reliance on Programmed Instruction (PI), a method of writing self-study material that initially offered high hopes for transforming learning; the conflation of schooling with “proper” education (which undermined non-traditional forms of learning); the widespread underfunding – and under-appreciation – of church-based theological education for the training of laity, especially in the Majority World; and the overemphasis on the three elements of self-study, application, and group meetings, which unfortunately downplayed TEE’s own educational method of reflection and application. Ott offers a good assessment of TEE’s potential, highlighting that TEE can deliver high-quality theological education if the learning is ideally set up and organized (2013, 119).<sup>16</sup> To succeed, the actual learning environment must correspond to the methodological assumptions; the theory about learning needs to be reflected in the actual learning that takes place. Within TEE, more often than not, the two did not meet. TEE practitioners theoretically subscribed to the TEE learning methodology, but through their actions contradicted that theory. Though Ott’s comments refer to TEE specifically, there is a wider recognition that the very same dichotomy also exists in residential or other forms of (distance) theological education. High-quality theological education will always require careful attention to both the content and the form of pedagogical delivery.

<sup>15</sup> For further discussion on defining TEE according to its learning philosophies, see Glissmann, “Theological Education by Extension.”

<sup>16</sup> See Ott, 135. Ott links the failure of many TEE attempts to the improper use of the methods. Of TEE, as well as practice-oriented forms of theological education, Ott writes: “the benefits of these models can only be realized under ideal circumstances.”

The under-theorized use of reflection in TEE also features in residential and distance theological education<sup>17</sup>. At times, residential and distance educational models require students to participate in reflective activities. Students may be asked to keep and write reflective journals as part of both spiritual and academic formation. However, in my own experience, I never received instruction on how to reflect, what reflection is, what the object of my reflection should be, or what ideal reflective practice looks like. A non-representative survey among friends involved in theological education indicates that my experience is the norm, rather than the exception.<sup>18</sup>

In TEE, as within the wider field of theological education, reflection and application remain under-theorized and under-utilized. This leads practitioners to subscribe theoretically to a learning method without a sufficiently deep understanding of how such a method is applied to an actual learning event. Practitioners simply associate concluding lesson/unit/topic questions with reflection. However, such questions are often ineffective. To elicit responses that will promote reflective learning, questions need to be specifically tailored to the learning outcomes, to the overall curriculum, to the learning tasks, and to the main teaching. It is easier to ask content-driven questions because they are easy to assess. Furthermore, reflection is often relegated to an independent activity after the course when students are sent home to think (reflect) about the lesson without any follow-up. When reflection is pushed into the null curriculum, students learn that reflection matters little because the teacher and the grade system do not attach value to it.<sup>19</sup> The lack of follow-up on reflection conditions students to diminish its meaning, consequently hindering their ability to achieve deep learning and become reflective Christian practitioners. Students need to develop the skills needed to be reflective Christian practitioners so they can bridge the gaps between head and heart, and between school and life. Only then can they address the common complaint that theological training lacks relevance to life and ministry.

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## The Importance of Spiritual Formation

A further challenge to reflection is the assumption that the process is self-evident – that potential practitioners inherently know what reflection is and how it should be used. The word “reflection” sounds simple and familiar as a word that means “deep thinking.” The use of reflection as tool of deep learning is undermined when the reflection is not informed by extensive educational research and best practices.

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<sup>17</sup> “Under theorized use” means that an idea, theory, or concept is used without understanding, or without utilizing its full theoretical importance and intended application.

<sup>18</sup> A positive example of where reflection is actually taught to students as a module is Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS). See Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, 11-12.

<sup>19</sup> See also the discussion in Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, 88-89.

For this reason, the concept of reflection, and especially theological reflection, requires careful explanation in order for reflection to contribute fully to formative deep learning. Similarly, the idea that learning should be applied might appear self-evident. This is surely true in technical and vocational fields, but it is less self-evident when it comes to values, attitudes, or theological concepts.

Traditionally, theological education focuses on theological knowledge exclusively in the cognitive domain, ignoring both the affective and the behavioral domains. Beside the fact that this reflects a misguided understanding of humanity, it also separates theological education from spiritual formation, which has traditionally placed a much greater emphasis on the affective as well as behavioral domains. Ideally, theological education and spiritual formation would be seen as different, but joined tools at the disposal of theological educators seeking to empower learners through formational learning. I propose that reflective prayer is a tool that unites theological education with spiritual formation, while at the same time aiding formational learning.

Throughout Christian history, the quest for a formative understanding of God has been closely linked with the ideal of Christian spirituality/formation. The core assumption about spirituality is that it is “the outworking in real life of a person’s religious faith” (McGrath 1999, 2). Christian formation has implications for character formation and is closely associated with the concept of sanctification, which refers to the renewal of the image of God in mankind.<sup>20</sup> Simon Chan helpfully links Christian spirituality to its core theological concept of Christian perfection: “the Christian life is an intentional process aimed at a goal that is variously called union with God (Catholic), deification (Orthodox) and glorification (Protestant)” (1998, 18). Spiritual formation, therefore, posits a formational, non-static (because it is ever changing and ever developing) understanding of human life lived toward the goal of Christian perfection, and ever-closer union and conformity with the character of God.<sup>21</sup> Christian formation’s focus is on how best to achieve or internalize learning that will help learners toward the goal of Christian perfection.

### *Reflection-Application in the General Education Literature*

TEE builds its educational methodology for formative learning upon the reflection-application conversation.<sup>22</sup> The unfortunate under-theorized use of TEE merits a

<sup>20</sup> The Westminster Shorter Catechism (question 35) describes sanctification as “the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”

<sup>21</sup> It is often said that children are “works in progress” and therefore should be treated with grace, as they are still developing. However, it is illusory to believe that grown-up humans are finished products. They also are works in progress, and are growing, developing, and changing. See also Dan Gilbert, “The Psychology of Your Future Self.”

<sup>22</sup> In these sections, I refer to the reflection-application cycle in TEE and most forms of theological education. The emphasis on “action” corresponds to the “application” of learning in ministry.

wider engagement with the theories that link formative learning with reflection and application in the education literature.

The publication of Dewey's *How We Think* in 1933 marked the beginning of a theoretical engagement with reflection as a tool for learning. His starting point is the observation that thinking (or learning) is related to experience. His approach is well summarized by an aphorism attributed to him: *We do not learn from experience...we learn from reflecting on experience*. Dewey distinguishes between a primary experience, which is an interaction with the environment, and a secondary experience, which is a "reflective experience in which the environment is used as the object of reflection" (Panda 2004, 64). Mietthinen highlights five phases or aspects of reflection according to Dewey: (1) The indeterminate situation: the habit does not work; (2) Intellectualization: defining the problem; (3) Studying the conditions of the situation and formation of a working hypothesis; (4) Reasoning – in a narrower sense; (5) Testing the hypothesis by action (2000).

Paulo Freire builds on this theory through his influential concept of *praxis*, which he defines as "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed" (2000, 120).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory uses a process of critical reflection to put transformed insights into action.<sup>24</sup>

TEE's cycle of reflection-application draws heavily on David Kolb's widely used cycle of experiential learning, which emphasizes the recurring experience of reflection followed by action as a way of deep learning. Kolb identified four processes that are needed for learning to take place. He describes them as: 1) concrete experience, 2) observation and reflection, 3) the formation of abstract concepts, and 4) testing in new situations (Smith 2010). Though the learning process is described chronologically, ideally the learning process is ongoing, like a "continuous spiral." In Kolb's learning cycle, a learning event takes place and is then improved via reflection (observation, analysis, review, relating the outcome to known theories, and conceptual experimentation to modify the initial approach) and application (testing the modified approach).

Another interesting theory for further reflection within Christian formation was developed by the influential education theorist Donald Schön. In his book *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), he developed an approach known as "reflection-on-action," as well as "reflection-in-action," to address the theory-practice gap in professional knowledge (the very gap we wish to address within Christian formation).

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<sup>23</sup> It is important also to highlight that TEE, as a method of theological education, was conceptualized in the 1970s in South America and is clearly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire.

<sup>24</sup> See King, "A Journey of Transformation."

Jürgen Habermas' theory on the construction of knowledge is widely used in contemporary research on reflection. In a constructivist view, learners construct meaning and knowledge by interacting with existing knowledge, and allowing it influence their views and actions. This does not happen automatically, but only through reflection. Habermas' interest is in the question of how humans process ideas and construct knowledge from them. He identifies reflection as key for the construction of knowledge (Moon 2004, 2). Habermas (1971) classifies knowledge as instrumental knowledge, interpretive knowledge, and acting knowledge. Acting knowledge is a kind of formative knowledge that acts on the intellectual insights of instrumental and interpretive knowledge. Habermas thus highlights the importance of both reflection and application in the construction of knowledge.

Jennifer Moon (2004) focuses on reflection as learning, which, though largely cognitive, will lead to application or action.<sup>25</sup> As previous concepts encounter new ideas, reflection brings old and new together through a process that integrates new ideas into the “existing body of previous ideas and understandings, reconsidering and altering... [the learner's] understanding” (5).

In their professional role, teachers have embraced the concepts of action, reflection, and application to enhance their classroom teaching. However, as Petty (2004) points out, their efforts have not always translated into improving learning. As an educational model grounded in the “action” of ministerial application, TEE (and other forms of theological education) can benefit from a deeper understanding of the theoretical frameworks upon which their models are based.

### *Reflection-Application in the Christian Education Literature*

Christian educators have also addressed the importance of the reflective process from a faith-based perspective. Thomas Groome has developed the influential concept of “shared Christian praxis.”<sup>26</sup> Groome writes, “Christian religious education by shared praxis can be described as a group of Christians sharing in dialogue their

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<sup>25</sup> Moon gives a common-sense definition of reflection: “Reflection is a form of mental processing – like a form of thinking – that we use to fulfil a purpose or to achieve some anticipated outcome. It is applied to relatively complicated or unstructured ideas for which there is not an obvious solution and is largely based on the further processing of knowledge and understanding and possibly emotions that we already possess.” To this she adds, “Reflection/reflective learning or reflective writing in the academic context, is also likely to involve a conscious and stated purpose for the reflection, with an outcome specified in terms of learning, action or clarification...” (*A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning*, 82-83).

<sup>26</sup> Sylvia Collinson uses some of Groome's insights and highlights how action (which could be a teaching event) is followed by reflection in gospel recollections of Jesus' ministry. Her identification works especially well in the Gospel of Mark. That seems to be because discipleship in Mark is always active, in contrast to the formal pedagogical style of the rabbis. See Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 37-38.

critical reflection on present action in light of the Christian Story and its Vision toward the end of lived Christian faith” (1999, 84). Groome understands praxis as action and reflection with the aim of the formation of an individual (1998, 405). He describes the transformative goal as follows:

I have been convinced for some time that the learning outcome for Christian religious education should be more than what the Western world typically means by “knowledge”; that it is to engage the whole “being” of people, their heads, hearts and life-styles, and is to form, inform and transform their identity and agency in the world...our aim is not simply that people know about justice, but that they be just, not only understand compassion but be compassionate (1998, 2, 8).

Influenced by Freire’s concept of praxis, Groome describes five movements (or components) in shared Christian praxis: (1) present action, (2) critical reflection, (3) theological reflection, (4) internalization of the Christian Story, and (5) living the faith. The fifth movement offers “participants an explicit opportunity for making decisions about how to live [their] Christian faith in the world” (1998, 148). The decision to live faith is “primarily or variously cognitive, affective, and behavioural and may pertain to the personal, interpersonal, or socio-political levels of their lives” (1998, 266). The decision can also be described as an application of learning (as well as a commitment) to future practice.

Another example of faith based reflective practice is Patricia Lamoureux’s integrated approach to theological education, in which she builds on the image of the spiritual journey. The approach is holistic, as opposed to purely cognitive, and is focused on “ways of being, thinking, deciding and acting” (1999, 142). Methodologically, she puts theological reflection at the heart of her approach because she recognizes that formative learning requires critical theological reflection. She describes theological reflection as a process whereby people learn from their experience through intentional and critical reflection on God’s presence. Theological reflection enables the learner to identify and correct any “distortions in feelings, perceptions, attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour” that we might hold about God (Lamoureux 1999, 145). Her approach consists of three parts: a) engaging the story (reflection on human experience through narratives, like novels or movies); b) interplay between experience and theology (how course material or a theory relates to the human experience), and c) appropriating the learning (which can be implemented in a group setting). The aim of appropriating learning is for the learner “to draw insights and implications for personal life, ministry, and/or theological understanding” (1999, 150). Lamoureux continues, “The most profound expression of appropriating the learning is conversion. By conversion I mean a basic transformation of a person’s ways of seeing, feeling, valuing, understanding, and relating” (1999, 151). The highest goal for appropriating learning is reached

when the implications of learning are applied to change an individual – not just his thinking, but also his being – through reflection, observation, and application.

In summary, reflection and application are recognized as integral to formational learning in the field of education broadly, as well as in theological education. All surveyed learning theories agree that becoming a reflective practitioner is important for formative learning. Theological education needs to utilize these insights to train Christian reflective practitioners in order to overcome the widespread theory-practice gap.

## Prayer as a Key Tool for Reflection and Application

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When supported by prayer, the complementary results of reflection and application lead to more significant learning.<sup>27</sup> In *Spiritual Theology*, Simon Chan writes that “prayer is the first act that links doctrine to practice” (1998, 126). Prayer applies theology to the actual world of the learner. Therefore, prayer has the potential to become a central element in theological education, and especially in spiritual formation.

The importance of individual prayer as a distinct, active, and powerful learning tool cannot be underestimated. Prayer is perhaps the essential ingredient for Christian spiritual formation. Even the other essential elements, such as worship and Scripture reading, are often supported and enhanced by prayer. Theological education should utilize prayer more intentionally, as it is rich in its silence, is purposeful with words, enhances meditation of biblical passages and theological insights, provides space for reflection on life’s events and encounters, and makes room for the learner to commit herself to act differently in the future – all while seeking divine council in individual worship. Prayer, as an intentional and habitual activity, requires repetition and time. Christ compared the Kingdom of God to a slow-growing tree, which takes time to grow and to develop its full glory (Mt. 13:31). Intentional prayer has the potential to be an important act of reflection, as well as a tool for application in formational learning.

Therefore, the question that underlines this article is: how might prayer support, enhance, and deepen reflection and application in theological education? Prayer is often included as a component in the keeping of a reflective journal, but could it also serve as a learning activity in itself, whereby learners seek the Holy Spirit’s counsel on classroom learning content?

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<sup>27</sup> Reflection is one aspect of prayer, among many other aspects. In terms of spiritual formation, prayer is more active and participatory than worship. Prayer is a reformulation of experience and theology in conversation with the divine. Prayer is also the means by which practitioners can struggle with the implications of their faith.

Prayer offers a rich and beneficial context for reflection and application in theological education. In prayer, reflection is done in the very presence of God, or more specifically in the presence of the holy and resurrected Christ (1 Pet. 3:15). Prayer is a purposeful encounter with the Divine, the ultimate source of knowledge and insight. It is done with the assumption that learners will pay close attention to the divine voice speaking into their lives. The holiness of Christ is, therefore, both an unmasking reality, as well as a reassuring comfort spurring spiritual formation, and growth into the high moral and behavioral ethics of the kingdom of God.<sup>28</sup> The holy presence of Christ means that the worshiper's true self (without deception, masking, and self-justification) engages with the transcendent holy God himself. The holiness of Jesus also acts as a countermeasure to sin and unbalanced self-love, while continuously offering meaningful restoration after failure through forgiveness. At the same time, Christ's nearness is a comforting reality as the acceptance of the worshiper into the very presence of the Divine is due to the sacrificial love of Christ himself.

In order for prayer to be an effective tool for formational learning, it should intentionally provide space for reflection in the following areas: reflection on God; reflection on self, and reflection on neighbor. The threefold division follows the Greatest Commandment to first love God, and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Mk .12:30-31, Lk. 10:27).<sup>29</sup>

### *Reflection on God*

Reflection on God is not limited to the human capacity to detect patterns of divine behavior in the life of the people of God. Rather, it is done in partnership with the Holy Spirit in order to progress in understanding the mysteries of the life of faith. Too much of the Church's reflection does not progress from reflection on God's being to reflection on how this impacts the life of faith. Reflection on God is fundamentally a reflection on God's self-revelation in Scripture. God's self-revelation is discovered not in abstract philosophical terms, but rather in a developing and maturing relationship with the people of God through recorded history. The highest divine self-revelation is the giving of Godself in the person of Jesus Christ for the restoration of humanity into the image of God. Reflection on God is reflection on his moral self-revelation, his nature, and our nature in the process of being liberated to reflect God's character – with his concerns absorbed as our concerns, and his action and our action aligning – as a result of God's action.

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<sup>28</sup> "Thy will be done on earth..." (Mt. 6:10) indicates that the will of God, as well as his reign, is breaking in through the deeds of the "royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9), which is the Christian community.

<sup>29</sup> "Love your neighbor as yourself." The order implies that loving the neighbor is dependent on the love for and understanding of oneself. Loving oneself leads to loving one's neighbor.

*Reflection on Self*

Reflection on self participates in the restoration of humanity into the full display of the image of God. It is not simply a new term for self-help. Sin and self-deception unfortunately undermine and distort the image of God in humanity. Reflection on self is the reflective tool that allows for the restoration of the image of God in the individual. Reflection on self should not lead to self-rejection, for the Great Commandant makes it clear that it is the self's experience of the Divine that flows into the self's kindness toward the neighbor. We ought to ask: are my actions, speech, emotions, and behaviors consistent with the whole counsel of God's word? Reflection on self is reflection on the patterns of life: patterns of sin, patterns of emotions, patterns of motives, patterns of behavior, patterns of actions and thoughts (both the ones done, as well as the ones left undone), and patterns of likes and dislikes. Current behavior is often the result of past experiences and of one's unique character.

One must also recognize that one's greatest strengths often relate to one's greatest weaknesses. Reflection on self should be done with the recognition that humanity has an intrinsic preference for self-deception,<sup>30</sup> as well as for elevating individually preferred Scriptural truth to universal applicability, in negligence of the whole counsel of God's word. The self is fundamentally self-justifying in the sense that it easily recognizes others' faults while remaining oblivious to the self's own faults (cf. Lk. 6:41-42, Mt. 7:3-5). This intrinsic tendency needs to be recognized, addressed, and corrected; otherwise, as Jesus said, one's spirituality will remain hypocritical. The corrective is a reflective application of the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Lk. 6:31, Mk. 7:12). One ought to consider: "I see a fault in my neighbor, but don't I act just like him/her in similar situations?" It is not surprising that the Golden Rule is found in both Luke and Matthew in the scene where Jesus narrates the bizarre story of the individual who seeks to help remove a tiny fault (a speck of sawdust), while being blinded by a huge plank.

Finally, reflection on self makes space for acknowledging faults or sins so we can subsequently seek forgiveness and restoration through Christ. When necessary, this is followed by seeking restoration of a damaged relationship with a neighbor (Mt. 5:23-24). It may also lead to future action and/or to modified behavior in a similar situation (covenanting).

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<sup>30</sup> For a treatment of the subject of self-deception, see Hauerwas, "Self-Deception and Autobiography."

### *Reflection on Neighbors*

Reflection on neighbors aims to build up the restorative community of God's people with communal concerns for a shared wellbeing. It also directs specific actions to the restoration of the image of God in the neighbor. Such actions are specific and intentional because concern for the neighbor can never be passive or accidental. One begins by considering who might be one's neighbor at any given time (Lk. 10:36). A neighbor may be those closest to oneself (spouse, children, and family members), those unknown to the self, and everyone in between. Reflection on neighbor questions the self's actions, speech, emotions, and behaviors toward the neighbor. Reflection on neighbour also spurs commitment to future actions that will benefit the neighbor. Reflection leads to action, whereby a theoretical concern for the neighbor finds its practical application.

### *Prayer as Activity*

Prayer has the potential to be a powerful reflective tool for formational learning in spiritual formation. Like reflective writing, prayer can provide reflective space for participatory reflection about one's own life lived before the Divine. It gives space for participatory learning, whereby the learner fully and actively participates in achieving his/her own internal formation. The meaningful encounter with the Divine opens up a safe environment for encountering and questioning formative experiences, renews the image of God in mankind, and leads to forgiveness and new future commitments.

Prayer as a reflective learning activity could serve as theological engagement with a topic. The learning task could be: "reflect and pray in light of God's presence (his light that exposes everything hidden and his available forgiveness) on improving a (troubled) relationship." This example focuses on repairing relationships, but it could also focus on God's forgiveness, God's covenant, God's concern for the poor, etc. Initially, learners should be provided with detailed questions guiding reflection on the three foci (God, self, and neighbor) and listening to the Holy Spirit:

- Upward focus on God: What am I learning from God's revelation about relationships and especially my relationship to God? What does God say about the importance of relationships?
- Inward focus on self: What is causing the problem? How can I improve the relationship? Is there a need to seek forgiveness from God or from the other person? Do I need to recommit myself to the relationship that God has placed me in?
- Outward focus on neighbor: What does God say about the other? How can I bless the other?

## Conclusion

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Learning approaches surveyed in general education literature, in Christian education literature, and in spiritual formation all recognize reflection as a key element for internalizing learning. Reflection is used in all the surveyed approaches to arrive at deep or formative learning. This is especially significant for spiritual formation, which shares a deep commitment to formative learning. Reflection is not the end of the process, but rather a tool for internalizing learning. Cognitive knowledge is not the automatic magic bullet for faith formation. Rather, it needs to be utilized or applied in order to be internalized. As Graham states, “The more a value or attitude is internalized, the more it affects behaviour” (2003, 59). It is not surprising then that within spiritual formation, reflection and application are used to promote (gradual) spiritual growth in the journey toward God. Spiritual formation is never accomplished; it is always a process of human life aligning itself with the Godhead, using new experiences and encounters to restore the image of God in oneself. Lamoureux warns that reflection is countercultural in our age of the immediate available information (1999, 153). Therefore, reflective skills need to be developed, time for reflection integrated into the educational process, and learning applied contextually.

What is now needed in theological education (TEE and residential or distance education) is recognition of the importance of theological reflection as a tool for formation, for bridging the theory-practice gap, and for deep learning. Prayer is key to helping learners bridge the gap between theory and practice, and between their studies and their spiritual formation. Prayer places the process of reflection within active communication with God, allowing for deeper understanding, listening to God’s voice, and commitment to action.

The goals of theological education require time and are best achieved through participatory learning. Learners need clear guidance (based on best practices) on how to reflect. They need the opportunity to practice reflection, to talk about their reflections, and to share their reflections with others in order to become Christian reflective practitioners. Theological schools will need to incorporate reflection as a key part of assessment in all subjects in order to create Christian reflective practitioners. More importantly, students need to be given time to reflect (this is perhaps easier to achieve in TEE, as the learners live in their original communities while engaging in theological learning). Once students engage in reflection, they will also need space for sharing their reflections. It is my hope that instead of adding a module or a course to the (most likely already overloaded) curriculum, reflection could instead serve as a core learning activity to increase the impact of existing courses.

In conclusion, reflection and application are vital tools for aiding formative

learning, and especially spiritual formation. A brief survey like this one can only skim the surface of best practices for reflection, and especially theological reflection. A lot of refined contemporary thinking is available to practitioners to help them better utilize these tools, and avoid un-theorized or under-theorized uses of reflection and application. As a unique form of reflection, greatly facilitates Christian formation.

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## **Volker Glissmann**

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# Theological Education in the Western Hemisphere: Select Histories and Current Trends – A Review Essay

AMOS YONG

FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Theological education in North America particularly, but also across the Euro-American West more generally, is undergoing sea changes. This review attends to some of the developments, focusing specifically on four recent books published by Wipf and Stock.<sup>1</sup> Consideration of these volumes will help document historic trajectories in the field and spotlight charted venues into relatively new territory in this latter part of the second decade of the twenty-first century. We will begin with the latter and work toward the former, for reasons that will become clear at the end of this essay.

## North America

*Proleptic Pedagogy: Theological Education Anticipating the Future* is a collection of articles by faculty members at St. Paul School of Theology, the main campus of which is in Kansas City, Missouri, with a second site about 350 miles away in

<sup>1</sup> Wipf and Stock has emerged as a leading publisher of theological scholarship more generally and on theological education more specifically. In the latter domain, they have not limited themselves to works on the Western hemisphere. One such book is A. Kay Fountain, ed., *Theological Education in a Cross-Cultural Context: Essays in Honor of John and Bea Carter* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2016), although this volume will not be discussed in the present essay. For more on theological education in the Majority World, see Dietrich Werner, et al., eds., *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives, Ecumenical Trends, Regional Surveys* (Oxford: Regnum Studies International, 2010); Dietrich Werner, et al., eds., *Asian Handbook for Theological Education and Ecumenism* (Oxford: Regnum Studies International, 2013); and Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner, eds., *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Studies International, 2013).

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.<sup>2</sup> The introduction (written by editor Nancy Howell, a process feminist theologian) and seven essays were supported from 2007-2010 by a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion: “Proleptic Pedagogy: Teaching from the Future to Distance, Disability, and Race.” The three elements in the grant subtitle are evidenced throughout the book, in some cases serving as the foci for individual chapters. For instance, there are essays devoted solely to technology and to race, although there is no chapter only on disability. The latter is addressed in multiple places, albeit mostly in passing. Yet, intriguingly, the pedagogical theme woven throughout the book in many ways addresses the diversity of teaching styles needed to engage the many learning impairments in theological education.

It is this pedagogical – or better, andragogical (related to teaching adults instead of children) – motif that provides coherence to the book and structures its parts. Each of the chapters begins with a classroom story (in this book, “classroom” refers to both traditional brick-and-mortar and online environments), discloses the pedagogical challenges in the current era, engages the scholarly literature in teaching and learning, sketches a theology of teaching as an initial response, and concludes with some practical proposals for theological educators. The faculty inevitably build on their existing research interests and scholarly expertise so that the basic argumentation plays out in chapters that explore the contributions offered by contemplative and mindfulness practice, deploy hip-hop as an educational device, inquire into how experiential education can be recalibrated in the present milieu, etc. Each of these topics has been increasingly pronounced in the pedagogical and andragogical literature, but is innovatively inflected here through the perspective of theological education.<sup>3</sup>

The goal of each individual essay and of the book as a whole is to conceive again a theological education that does not just accommodate people with disabilities or attend to racial and ethnic diversity, but that is reconstituted from the ground up in ways that are always and already diversified, whether in traditional classrooms or via online platforms. The wager of the contributors is that both approaches “anticipate the future” (the book’s subtitle) even as they effectively reconfigure and transform theological education in the present (hence, the “prolepsis” referenced in the main title). For theological educators who are also sensing the need to update their repertoires in order to educate diverse

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<sup>2</sup> Sondra Higgins Matthaei and Nancy R. Howell, eds., *Proleptic Pedagogy: Theological Education Anticipating the Future* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Those interested can consult Amos Yong, “Beyond Ableism: Disability and the Renewal of Theological Education,” in Myk Habets and Andrew Picard, eds., *Theology and the Experience of Disability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Voices Down Under* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2016), 250-63.

students more effectively, including those who bring diversity related to disability and impairment, *Proleptic Pedagogy* will be a helpful springboard. Of course, the book's success will lead eventually to its marginalization. Although their details may not be presently identifiable, the challenges of the future will require fresh conceptualization and consideration as we move forward.

## Down Under

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Christian Education and the Emerging Church: Postmodern Faith Formation is a monograph by a minister with the Uniting Church in Australia who is also a lecturer in apologetics and evangelism at Trinity College Queensland (a Uniting Church school, albeit one located in the more Reformed and Evangelical segment than the more historically “liberal” denomination).<sup>4</sup> To my knowledge, this is Sargeant’s first book, but its contribution to the literature on Christian education is important for those working in theological education. If the latter is exemplified by *Proleptic Pedagogy*, generated as it was by seminary faculty, then the former is oriented around the tasks of Christian discipleship in the Church – precisely the engagement intended by Sargeant’s book. While church education and seminary education will and should continue to run along parallel lines, not only does the latter build on the former, but in many cases, what is happening in the former domain is displacing the latter, particularly its more traditional formats. A case in point is that many megachurches are initiating their own “schools” of ministry and discipleship, and generating ministers in their own image who are skilled in their own philosophies and mission practices. Also, to the degree that institutions of theological education are not producing church planters, and like-minded and capable graduates, church-based education – the sort of Christian education Sargeant is talking about – will embrace the tasks historically reserved for seminaries, and divinity and theological schools.

Sargeant is neither writing against nor undermining so-called theological education. However, her own argument, which orients Christian formation around the corporate worship of God, links Christian discipleship and transformation to the Church’s liturgical practices. More and more theological educators are recognizing that their work cannot be accomplished apart from the Church, and in that sense, Sargeant’s proposals are just as relevant for what is happening in these tertiary educational endeavors. Right doctrine and right teaching are nurtured in a doxological context, so the crisis of Christian formation is exacerbated when formative liturgical practices are absent. Vital worship, however, is not reducible to liturgical and congregational frames, but rather extends into all

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<sup>4</sup> Wendi Sargeant, *Christian Education and the Emerging Church: Postmodern Faith Formation* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

of life, and hence, infuses Christian learning.<sup>5</sup>

It is precisely in this postmodern context that the intellectual life is interwoven with the ecclesial, the spiritual, the behavioral, and the practical. Christian education is not merely cognitive, but rather forged through transformative action. Although some North American Evangelicals may be suspicious of the so-called “emerging church” featured in Sargeant’s book title, the fortunes of these “emergents” Down Under (in Australia, specifically) – especially as played out within and among the Uniting Churches – are not quite identical with those of their counterparts across the Pacific and north of the Equator. What is true in both realms is that those in “emerging churches” are convinced that we have been relocated from a modern (Enlightenment) to a postmodern time and space, and in that respect, the nature of what it means to be the Church will also manifest and be expressed differently. Yet Christian Education and the Emerging Church, while attentive to postmodern shifts, represents a valiant effort to draw out the potency of the Gospel as unleashed in the worship of twenty-first century Christians for the purposes of empowering Christian learning, formation, and, ultimately, faithfulness.

## The Eastern Front of the Western World

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*A Future and a Hope: Mission, Theological Education, and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society* takes us from Oceania to the “other side” of the West: the Soviet and post-Soviet world.<sup>6</sup> More specifically – as both authors are affiliated with the Evangelically oriented Donetsk Christian University on the far-Eastern border of Ukraine, and thus address specifically the Ukrainian context and sociopolitical situation – the proposal at hand emerges from the Eurasian boundary in a geopolitically liminal space and time between Europe and Asia. The stakes are high even at this time of writing as the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula has intensified the volatility of an already unstable region. It is not surprising then that Searle, whose other scholarship has been on Irish Evangelicalism,<sup>7</sup> and Cherenkov, whose other publications have been in Russian, are focused on an understanding of the Gospel and a vision of a Church that is engaged with social transformation. It is toward such ends that their own proposal for theological education includes missiological and public-theological dimensions.

The political ferment, however, unfolds amid a deeply religious matrix. Post-Soviet Ukraine might also be characterized as post-Christendom, if only in the sense

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<sup>5</sup> Leading the way in this regard is James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Joshua T. Searle and Mykhailo N. Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope: Mission, Theological Education, and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Joshua T. Searle, *The Scarlet Woman and the Red Hand: Evangelical Apocalyptic Belief in the Northern Ireland Troubles* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2014).

that Orthodoxy in this country has been disestablished in principle even if not in reality coming out of the break-up of the Soviet Union. Yet, of course, to say that there is no longer an Orthodox hegemony in Ukraine is not to say that its peoples are now non-Orthodox, and certainly not to deny that Slavic cultures remain formed and shaped by the Orthodox presence over the past millennium and more. Nevertheless, it is within a context of Christian (read: Protestant) pluralization that Searle and Cherenkov envision and are working toward a more Evangelical Ukraine, not one that involves proselytism of the Orthodox faithful toward Baptist or Pentecostal churches (although such is happening), but rather one that draws Ukrainians into a deeper Christian and even Orthodox faith in the contemporary Ukrainian milieu.<sup>8</sup>

Against this backdrop, then, the central idea of *A Future and a Hope* is “a church without walls,” meaning first and foremost the people of God who are engaged with the task of witness and mission amidst the sociopolitical and economic challenges that constitute this Ukrainian moment. Theological training institutions are not limited to buildings; their work does not occur in such spaces. Rather, theological education in the post-Soviet context cannot but be missional, committed to prophetically heralding the coming reign of God, and inspiring a faithful social imagination that seeks to be contextually relevant and effectively engaged in society. Various models are promoted, including “The Christian Seminar” that sought to connect Christian faith, post-Communist developments in the former Soviet Union, emerging consumerist trends, and globalization dynamics. Put alternatively, Christian theological education on this Eastern front of the Western world in the present situation cannot but exist fully in line with the Lausanne Covenant’s holistic missiological vision to encourage and empower students to participate in the *missio Dei* for the Church’s witness in the public square. The point, then, is that theological education that does not inspire and engender social transformation fails to bear effective Christian witness in Ukraine. Christian witness is the task and hope that Searle and Cherenkov invite theological educators – within and beyond Ukraine – to uphold and perform.

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## Women and Theological Education

*The Role of Female Seminaries on the Road to Social Justice for Women* tells two interrelated stories, as suggested by the title, but does so according to a different and temporal register.<sup>9</sup> If the other volumes in this review essay have ranged

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<sup>8</sup> For more on the growth of Protestantism, including Baptist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal versions, in this former Soviet region, see Catherine Wanner, *Communities of the Converted: Ukrainians and Global Evangelism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Kristen Welch and Abraham Ruelas, *The Role of Female Seminaries on the Road to Social Justice for Women* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2015).

far and wide across the contemporary Western world – encompassing three hemispheres! – then this final book takes us from the present century back in time at least a hundred years and more. We are treated here to the combined expertise of a scholar of Pentecostal women’s history (Welch) and of Pentecostal women in higher education (Ruelas); thus, the book focuses naturally on female seminaries starting in the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Note, though, that “seminary” in this volume does not refer to graduate studies in ministry as it does in today’s parlance. Instead, when qualified as “female” and understood in a North American context up to two hundred years removed from our present, it refers to the range of secondary schools, and later colleges, where women were formally educated above the primary level. The “road to social justice” signaled by Welch and Ruelas is central to book’s narrative: how schools were started, against the resistance of cultural conventions that assigned women’s place to the domestic sphere; how curriculum were developed, first to certify domestic labor, but later to expand the horizons of female learning; how women were trained for teaching, first of other women in such “female seminaries” and gradually in co-educational environments, etc. Our authors spend time charting also the origins and development of African American “seminaries” and of Native American women’s educational organizations, institutions, and schools. The story of the emergence of female study and learning detailed here is thereby significantly one of the quest for social justice for women and of the hurdles that needed to be overcome, especially during the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

If we presume that *The Role of Female Seminaries* would merely tickle our historical curiosity, we need to think again, given the anti-intellectualism, patriarchy, and androcentrism that characterize much of Evangelical and conservative Protestant efforts in theological education, even in the third millennium. These exist not only in the Majority World (although it is unquestionably widespread across the Global South); the anti-intellectualism that Searle and Cherenkov document along the Eastern front of the Western world is prevalent even in ecclesial environments at the center of Euro-American Evangelicalism.<sup>11</sup> The march for social justice that Welch and Ruelas document was not achieved across the Evangelical board by the early twentieth century. Far from it, as there remains an urgent need, perhaps not for female seminaries, but

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<sup>10</sup> See Welch, ‘*Women with the Good News*’: *The Rhetorical Heritage of Pentecostal Holiness Women Preachers* (Cleveland, Tenn.: CPT Press, 2010) and *Deep Roots: Defining the Sacred Through the Voices of Pentecostal Women Preachers* (Createspace, 2013); and Ruelas, *Women and the Landscape of American Higher Education: Wesleyan Holiness and Pentecostal Founders* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2010), and *No Room for Doubt: The Life and Ministry of Bebe Patten* (Laurel, Md.: Seymour Press, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> See Searle and Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope*, 94-96, for a discussion of the anti-intellectualism shared by Ukrainian Evangelicals with their European and American counterparts.

assuredly for theological education that supports, empowers, and liberates women and men from the shackles of patriarchy still palpable in Evangelical churches and institutions. The kind of social transformation Searle and Cherenkov aspire toward as educators has to include the reconfiguration of the role of women in the Church, in academia, and in society. Hence, theological educators today ought to have ready at hand the story of the origins and growth of female seminaries against all odds. We can't possibly hope that theological education will achieve its purposes for half of the human race if we are ignorant about the steep challenges women have faced, and continue to confront, along the long road toward the renewal of the mind and the forging of the intellectual life.<sup>12</sup>

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## Transitional Comments

To be sure, a short review essay cannot do justice to the topic at hand, surely not even to any of the four books presented in the preceding paragraphs. Also, although we have heard from vastly disparate contexts – mostly synchronically located, but also with some diachronic perspectives resounding through the pages of Welch and Ruelas' text – across the Western world, there is both so much more to be said. Moreover, what has been said not only ought to be further qualified, but also can and should be contested, both at the level of empirical adequacy or historical facticity and at the level of conceptual coherence or performative normativity. Although no account is exhaustive or infallible (and this applies not only to historical works like that by Welch and Ruelas, but also to constructive compositions such as the other three books discussed here), we ought to ponder how each of these volumes, separately and then together, can inform the task of Christian education, lower and higher, in the current global context.

Written thereby in a spirit of inquiry, this review essay attempts to situate the proposals before us in their various discursive contexts and highlight how they might be conduits for reflection on theological education, but not only for those working in the Euro-American West. A less demarcated and more holistic account and assessment is definitely due, even if it has to be given elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> In the meantime, we should always learn from our past (achievements and struggles) even as we recognize that each of our efforts is undertaken amid various ecclesial (emerging?!) contexts and socio-historical (post-Soviet, for instance) realities,

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<sup>12</sup> This is true especially for Evangelical theological educators; mainline Protestants have made more progress, e.g., Rebecca S. Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Those interested can consult, in due course, my *The Spirit of the Seminary: Renewing Theological Education between the Times* (forthcoming), the pedagogy and andragogy of which is derived from a broader work: Dale M. Coulter and Amos Yong, *Finding the Holy Spirit at the Christian University: Renewing Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018).

deploys a range of modalities (pedagogical and andragogical), and is directed toward distinct teloi (e.g., social transformation) – all this is true whether in or outside the so-called Western world. Hence, the conversation partners introduced above can be effective interlocutors for the task ahead.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Thanks to Hoon Jung, my graduate assistant, for proofreading a previous version of this essay; all foibles remain my responsibility.



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