

Theological Perspectives on the Theological Education of Women in the Middle East and North Africa

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This paper discusses the importance not only of including women in theological education in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, but also of encouraging them to follow God's call regardless of patriarchal contexts. It highlights the need for Arab women to be Biblically and theologically equipped, which will ultimately benefit theological education and the Church as it fulfills the Great Commission. To make these broader points, this paper argues that fundamental theological truths support the need to incorporate women's insights for the effective advancement of theological education in the Arab World. (The term "Arab" will be used in this paper to refer to the MENA context.) Thus, this paper articulates two primary arguments: 1) women should be full participants in theological education and the Church; 2) theological truths about women's vocations affirm this.

Introduction

A senior lecturer at a theological college in the UK recently asked me to describe my PhD topic. Confidently, I answered, "Theological education of women in the Arab World." He responded, "This is a facetious question, but 'Is there theological education of women in the Arab World?'" Actually, this is an excellent question because there is an acknowledged absence of theological education for women in the Arab World at postgraduate levels. Few Arab female students who are enrolled in B.A. programmes of theological education pursue postgraduate education or end up in academic employment. Because a systematic exclusion of women from theological education has developed, right from the Bachelor's level, there is a need to have more women in all programs of theological education, and that need is especially acute in the MENA region.

By discussing the theological foundations for women's theological education in the Arab World, I hope to open a way for theological education to accept more flexible approaches that include called and committed women.

It is encouraging to see experts in theological education who have already started to be involved in this conversation. Perry Shaw, having spent more than twenty-five years in Lebanon, rightly claims that the Global Church will be enhanced by being exposed to greater variety in methodology, structure, and requirements (2018, 89-108). Including women in theological education would contribute to this enhancement. However, Shaw admits that the opposite most often happens:

Sadly I have often observed that in the process of satisfying the linear-analytical requirements of the academy, many majority world and women scholars become increasingly westernized and male genderized, and so we lose the great potential gift of alternative thinking patterns they offer - in particular a level of holistic, multidisciplinary theological reflection desperately needed by a church whose "centre of gravity" is moving increasingly south and west. (2018, 103-104)

Shaw's statement describes the sad reality in the Arab World concerning the involvement of women in theological education. Too often, where Arab women do enter postgraduate studies, they are trained to think in Western ways, rather than offering the gift of their own identity as Middle Eastern women. I cannot stress enough that, as Shaw says, women are indeed a "great potential gift" that should be invested in throughout the Arab World. The Church and theological institutions ought to increase their efforts to prevent this "great potential gift" from being lost. Even in the West, women are often marginalized in theological education. To develop the great potential of the gift of its total membership, the Church and its theological institutions must embrace the academic, Biblical, and theological gifts of women scholars – from East and West.

This paper will now give a brief definition of a theology of theological education. It will also discuss the concept of God's calling in an Arab context and summarize the soteriological, pneumatological, ecclesial, and missiological foundations of women's theological education. Other foundations – such as the Christological and eschatological – will not be discussed due to this article's limited scope.

The Theology of Theological Education

Although theological education is traditionally assumed to be a male prerogative in the MENA region, women's theological education is not a new phenomenon in the global context. While it is not widespread in the MENA region, in the Western world, feminist theologians have emphasized the significance of women's lived experiences in theology. A few feminist theologians include Mary Daly (1928-2010), Letty Russell (1929-2007), Rosemary Radford Ruether (1936-), and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1938-). Although these women theologians have a reputation for being liberal, their theological writing has helped women understand how their experiences of God can shape their lives, societies, and churches, as Grace Ji-Sun Kim points out (2015, 91).

Although it contributes to understanding women's experiences, this Western feminist theology does not entirely define perspectives on women's theological education. Non-Western evangelical female voices include Roula Mansour, Anne Zaki, Mimi Haddad, Mercy Oduyoye, Priscille Djomhoue, Isabel Apawo Phiri, Limatula Longkumer, Ruth Padilla de Borst, Melba Padilla Maggay, Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Havilah Dharamraj, Joanna Feliciano-Soberano, and Xiaoli Yang. Such Majority World women theologians are a counterpoint to Western voices. An African woman theology has developed as womanist theology, and there are Asian and Latina feminist theologies – but an Arab women's theology has not been yet developed. One reason for this is that evangelical theology in the Arab World puts very little emphasis on women's involvement in theological education. Similarly, the MENA-region Church does not actively encourage women to participate in theological education. The Arab Church seems hesitant to be involved in such a dialogue since it would involve embracing change and welcoming women into leadership roles, which have traditionally been male-dominated.

A general theology of theological education has been discussed more widely in recent years – a discussion that can shed light on the specific issue of developing a call for women's involvement in theological education. Bernard Ott claims that in the Evangelical world, ICETE (International Council for Evangelical Theological Education) has initiated the development of a theology of theological education (2019). ICETE's manifesto declares,

Evangelical theological education as a whole today needs earnestly to pursue and recover a thorough-going theology of education...We must together take immediate and urgent steps to seek, elaborate and possess a biblically informed theological basis for our calling in theological education, and to allow every aspect of our service to become rooted and nurtured in this soil. (2019)

In 1993, Dieumeme Noelleste developed the concept more extensively with his book *Toward a Theology of Theological Education* (1993). His arguments mainly follow the same pattern as the work of Neibuhr and Stackhouse (1956, 1988). Robert Banks championed a Biblical rationale for theological education (1999, 79-82). And in 2018, Martin Foord proposed a methodology for developing a theology of theological education. He suggested that a theology of this kind would illuminate the topic of theological education from Scripture. For example, if the sub-topics of theological education are not discussed in Scripture, a theology of theological education would study related topics to ensure that theological education is in line with Scripture (2018, 29-42). He writes, “Firstly a foundation is laid upon the Gospel...Next, a theological rationale for theological education is developed along biblical lines, as any theology of theological education must have the purpose or end in view” (2018, 29). Ott puts this process differently: “[A] theology of theological education must speak to the questions that theological education is asking today and shed some light on them based on insights gained from study of the biblical texts” (2016, 170). As evident from these definitions, there is a certain challenge in arriving at a concrete definition of the theology of theological education.

To contribute to this conversation, in the following sections, I will develop theological perspectives on women’s theological education in the MENA region based on scriptural-theological concepts. This analysis will contribute to the development of a theology of theological education for Arab women in the MENA region.

God’s Call on Women in the MENA Region

Throughout my career as a lecturer in theology, I have rarely come across an Arab woman who acknowledges that God has called her into theological education. This fact contrasts with the many men I have met who feel “called” into theological education. “God’s calling” is a term with which Arab women are not necessarily acquainted. Reflecting on my own experience in theological education, I chose to study this field because I strongly felt God call me into it. In my early teenage years, I heard God’s voice clearly in my heart to pursue this path, and I obeyed it wholeheartedly. Growing up in an Evangelical family made this experience more achievable for me. Many MENA-region women may not have this early background and thus may be less comfortable with the idea of God’s personal call upon them.

However, recognizing this sense of God’s calling is crucial to the theological education of women in the Arab World. It is the starting point for women’s involvement in theological education, as Sharon Miller discusses (2014, iii). As I

will demonstrate later, soteriology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and missiology are important elements in the discussion, too. They all point to one of God's plans: that is, for women to be involved in theological education. I suggest that a woman called to the field of theological education must understand the implications of that call for her Christian life, be grounded in the history of salvation, be equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit, be called to serve in the Church, and be called to embody the Church's mission by serving outside the Church. Serving in the academic field of theological education is a natural step toward the goal of embodying the Church's mission.

The first step for Christian Arab women is to realize their calling, as Deborah did (Judges 4), and carry it forward into the appropriate context. Yohanna Katanacho, a highly respected Arab scholar who encourages the theological education of women, wrote in a recent article about the role of Deborah in the Old Testament:

It is not easy for a woman to lead a society of men. It would have been a great loss if Deborah had not moved and obeyed her Lord. A woman called by God is a treasure that we should cherish. It is a divine gift. We have to place her in the right position so that we can overcome in our battle against evil. Let us think how we can support our mothers, sisters and daughters in the building up of our society and church. (2018, translation mine)

Priscilla, Phoebe, and Lydia are prime examples of women who acknowledged their calling in the New Testament. Women in the Arab World should tune their ears to listen to God's call so that they can grow in their spirituality. They should attend Bible colleges so that they can master Biblical and theological content, and by doing so, overcome cultural patriarchal structures that claim that women should not be leaders in theological education or educators of men. During my several years of teaching, I have observed that many Arab Christian women who attend Bible colleges do not do so to be equipped for ministry. Rather, enrolling at a Bible college is often seen as their second choice after not getting into another university program. Because they have not been encouraged to explore this calling, many Arab female students do not feel the need to be theologically equipped, which is ultimately a loss to the field of theological education and to the world. As this calling is not prioritized within the culture, women are reluctant to pursue it further.

In the following sections, I will examine other theological foundations for women's theological education in the Arab World.

Implications for Women's Theological Education from Soteriology

Salvation occupies a preeminent place in theological education. Our cornerstone is Jesus – for salvation and for the study of God that comes from salvation. This salvation, although equally offered to men and women, was primarily fulfilled through a woman – Mary, Jesus's mother. Further, in first-century Judaism, a time when women were not esteemed, Jesus's lineage recorded in Matthew 1 includes five remarkable women: Tamar (Genesis 38), Ruth (Ruth 4), Rahab (Joshua 2), Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), and Mary herself. Bauckham argues that the appearance of four women from the Hebrew Bible in the Matthean genealogy of Jesus is extraordinary, because women normally had no place in a patrilineal genealogy of this sort (2002, 17). Each of their stories demonstrates the importance of women (Jews and Gentiles) in Christian history, as God used these women to accomplish his purposes in their specific contexts.

The women in Jesus's genealogy who are mentioned in Matthew 1:1-7 – and God's inclusion of them – should have implications for Arab women's theological education. Both Western and Arab commentators emphasize these women's sexual history. The Bible, however, praises these women for their faith and theological commitment. By contrast, God does not approve of the attitudes of men like Judah (Genesis 28: 24) and David (2 Samuel 11: 27) toward women. Perhaps the rescue from humiliation shared by Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba makes these stories special (Firth, 2019). Regardless of their sin history, these women are able to play an important role in theological education beyond their patriarchal contexts, as both men and women in Jesus's family tree receive grace through the salvation that Jesus himself offers.

Besides Mary, who is included in Christ's lineage as his mother, the New Testament records examples of several women who proclaimed the message of God's salvation. In Luke and Acts, as Clarice J. Martin notes, disciples include both women and men, and both women and men bear witness to the joy and truth of salvation in Christ (1995, 763-799). Therefore, a central implication from salvation history for theological education is that the capacity to learn and teach is not confined only to men. Instead, it is an explicit expression grounded in the efforts of both men and women to extend God's Kingdom.

Moreover, Peter states that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Acts 2:21). Since salvation is for both men and women, neither should be excluded from theological education, which is a primary way in which believers learn about salvation's benefits. The most debated verse relating to this issue is probably when Paul reminds us: "But women will be saved through childbear-

ing – if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety” (1 Timothy 2:15). Salvation is by grace, not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8). In light of these verses, which seem to be in tension with the message of salvation elsewhere in the Bible, Yarbrough brings to our attention that

Woman’s salvation does not lie in seeking to deny the terms of the fall, to reinvent herself so those terms no longer apply (if that were possible), or to relate to her husband in a proactively combative fashion in self-defense. It lies rather in Christ, who can make the “curse” latent in womanhood and fertile marriage eternally fruitful precisely “through [dia] childbirth” and its agony, the bitter medicine pronounced in Gen 3:16. (2018, 188)

In relation to 1 Timothy 2:15, Yarbrough further points out that Paul shifts to the plural “they” because his point applies to all women, not just the one woman mentioned in verses 11-15. A woman is not saved by having a child, but rather through believing and living out the practical message of the Gospel (2018, 188). While Arab societies emphasize the importance of women being mothers (and having children who are male), the Word of God shifts this emphasis to the significance of becoming children of God. Patriarchal societies are not concerned with the spiritual productivity of women but rather primarily with their physical productivity, namely that they bear male children. Since motherhood implies authoritative teaching and training (Proverbs 31:1-9 is an example of an Arab mother who teaches a king, Lemuel of Massa), might Paul’s words be applied to women theological educators (Hill, 2009, 381)? A lack of women in theological education leads to unasked questions or unrealized implications for women as they understand their full role as productive children of God.

God used Mary to make clear that women are equal carriers of the Lord’s revelation. When we think of soteriology in relation to theological education, we must ensure that our theology and doctrine are Biblically sound. Efforts in theological education are to be focused on teaching and preaching a soteriology that has room for both men and women and that is reflected in daily thoughts, writings, and actions. John Stott puts it this way: “If Mary had not given birth to the Christ-child, there would have been no salvation for anybody. No greater honour has ever been given to woman than in calling of Mary to be the mother of the Saviour of the world” (1996, 87-88). The women in the genealogy of Jesus who are mentioned in Matthew’s Gospel (1:1-7) and God’s inclusion of them should be considered as a strong demonstration of the soteriological implications for women’s theological education.

Implications for Women's Theological Education from Pneumatology

The work of the Holy Spirit is an indispensable element in the development of a theology of women's theological education in the Arab World. Banks argues that pedagogical approaches should be upheld by a perspective on the Spirit (1999, 181). Theological education should entail a fresh view of the Spirit to ensure that there is equality, innovation, and creativity in the doing of theology. Often, the Holy Spirit is not thought of as an active participant in Church and seminary life. Yet the Spirit is indeed a primary actor in theological education. In Ott's words, "Theological education understands equipping to be about more than abilities and accomplishments. It will train people in powerlessness and dependency upon the activity of the Spirit of God" (2016, 197).

Acts 1 sets the scene for just how important the Holy Spirit is in Christian ministry. First, Scripture shows us that the Holy Spirit fell on both women and men. Acts 1:14 states, "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." It is very poignant that Luke mentions women and the mother of Jesus, highlighting that they were also the recipients of this Holy Spirit.

Second, in Acts 2:17-18, Joel's prophecy is fulfilled: "Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." Both men and women are included in God's universal plan; the endowment of the Spirit is a continuation of God's plan for both men and women set forth in Genesis.

A third example from the book of Acts is that of Philip's four daughters, who were filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied (Acts 21:8-9). As a form of theological education, the gift of prophecy is carried out through anointed teachers of theology. Consequently, constructive theological education should assert the importance of transmitting the words of the Lord from Scripture to participants in theological education. Educators – God's gifts to the Church and academia – should be nurtured and developed within the context of theological education regardless of gender. It is often said that the Church has lost its prophetic voice. But the Spirit keeps the Church and academic institutions vibrant for the continuation and extension of this academic and spiritual journey. Thus, Acts demonstrates that the role of women as prophets and the role of theological education in forming female leaders for a prophetic role in the Church is indispensable.

A Trinitarian approach to Christian education understands the cooperative work of the Godhead as a model for education that includes both men and women. For

example, Nels Ferré articulated:

The meaning of creation is centrally education. The standard for this teaching is Christ; the dynamic power and directing reality for this education is the Holy Spirit. Thus we see as central to Christian theology, at its most relevant educational efficacy, God as Educator, Christ as Exemplar, and the Holy Spirit as Tutor. (1967, 150)

With the three persons of the Trinity at the center of theological education, innovative approaches to theological education can help learners and teachers move forward in their pedagogies. The perfect partnership between the persons of the Trinity is a unique example of the partnership that can be between men and women in theological education without competition or hierarchy.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit are necessary for the development of theological education, and these gifts are imparted by the Spirit, at his discretion. The Spirit gives gifts “to each one, just as He determines” (1 Corinthians 12:11), as Linda L. Belleville notes (2000, 41). As discussed above, Acts leads us to conclude that women are also recipients of the gifts of the Spirit. As such, they are expected to employ their gifts faithfully and actively for theological education. For instance, in Romans 16:7, Paul sends greetings to Andronicus and Junia. Not only is Junia a unique example of a woman who is named as outstanding among the apostles, but Paul says that she was in ministry before him. Paul’s praise of Junia can be an example for men to follow today. His testimony that Junia was a significant coworker in God’s Kingdom and that she preceded him in faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ shows her importance in the early church.

Could this principle be applied to the field of theological education in the Arab World, so that women faculty could be treated as sisters in Christ – rather than being seen as of lesser importance than male faculty? If so, women’s theological education would move forward to demonstrate the Spirit working through the body as all the members function together to their fullest potential. Following Paul’s example is of prime importance here and would mean including women as equal co-laborers in theological education.

The Church and theological institutions in the Middle East should emphasize the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in guiding, leading, equipping, and sending both men and women in theological education. By adding this emphasis to sermons, curricula, and lectures, learners and teachers will give greater value to the transforming input of the Spirit in their work. Like women in the early church, contemporary Arab Christian women can rely on the Spirit to unleash the potential of their God-given gifts. Pentecost, at which God poured out his Spirit on men and

women equally, was not the end of an era, but the beginning of a new one – an era in which the Spirit will continue to open new avenues for theological education. Spirit-empowered women have a necessary role in a robust theological education that will serve the Global Church.

Implications for Women’s Theological Education from Ecclesiology

Women have played an important part in the Church since its inception. Just as there are many well-known men throughout Church history, Christian women have made respected intellectual, diaconal, and evangelical contributions to the Church. These women have had a meaningful spiritual impact and authority. Some have achieved sainthood and received titles of highest honour. Within the Eastern Orthodox Church, a number of women are considered as “equal to the apostles” – such as Mary Magdalene, Thekla, Helena, and Nina, missionary to the Georgians (Weinrich, 2006, 263-279). Cohick and Hughes argue that a theological component is often missing in explorations of women in early Christianity (2017, xxvii). An exploration of their contributions is greatly limited by a lack of sources. This is largely because few documents from that time were written by women. It is essential to encourage women to put their thoughts into writing for the sake of future theology. Adding women’s perspectives to theology will enrich the Church beyond traditional ways of thinking.

In order for women’s theological education to flourish, churches and seminaries should work closely to promote women’s theological education in the Arab World. The relationship between the Church and the academy has to be defined. This is important to women’s theological education in the MENA because both churches and seminaries could promote women’s theological education. If churches promoted female leadership, this would create more of a culture for female training in theology and leadership.

David Kelsey stresses the significance of understanding the Church in order to comprehend theological education (1992, cited in Chopp, 1995, 45). The two are so interconnected that Ott claims that the Church is the home of theological education (2016, 197). Perhaps the Church can also be described as the incubator for theological education: it should provide a protective environment for learners and teachers in theological education. Marvin Oxenham, on the other hand, laments that the gap between theological colleges and the churches has been growing steadily over the last twenty or thirty years. Many pastors and denominational leaders are actually wondering whether seminaries and colleges are providing graduates with the kind of knowledge they need to fulfill their ministries (2018).

Beres, however, stresses that the gap between Church and academy is more of an opportunity than a problem (2014, 77-87). He suggests that “academia can enrich the church mostly by its theological efforts and innovations” (2014, 83). Yet even as the academy can enrich the Church, the Church itself has to be critical in its theological thinking, not merely spiritual. A solid partnership between the Church and the academy will enhance the theological education of women in the Arab World. This, in part, is because the Church is predominantly comprised of women. This is true in the MENA region, as in most of the world. If Church and academy engaged in partnership, then a robust engagement with the Church would have implications for women as active participants in theological education.

In our discussion of theological education in the contemporary ecclesia, the importance of women in the early church offers a clear foundation. Women like Thecla who helped construct the ongoing Christian movement and left their legacy in devotional practices and written texts. Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, declared her Christian identity boldly; Monica, the mother of Augustine, diligently prayed for the salvation of her son. Women like Paula and Melania the elder participated in theological debates and helped shape early Christianity (2017, xx). Intellect and devotion can be considered as solid components of theological education, so these women from the early church are not only examples for all women to follow. In particular, they are examples for women in theological education around the world to emulate.

Rebecca Chopp argues that, regardless of the cold shoulder the Church often gives women, women are determined not to leave. She states:

In my experience women with criticisms of the church, much more often than men, are told to love it or to leave it. But women, in the church and in theological education, have not so much left the church and formed new denominations as they have called for the transformation of present ecclesial reality. (1995, 46)

The Church does not have to apply feminist practices to involve women. As vital members of the Church, they should be addressed in discussions relating theological education and ecclesiology. Theological educators like Farley and Kesley have focused attention on the Church but without explicit reference to women in the Church. Women are there by implication, of course. But feminist authors should not be the only ones discussing this development. Rather, all scholars should highlight the important role of women as members of the Church, and therefore also as participants in the development of theological education.

An Application: Women in the Arab Church

The vision to fully include women in theological education and the Church is absent from Arab culture. The Church's beliefs are often a reflection of the culture's status quo. Many Arab churches imagine the Church without women in leadership. However, the body of Christ needs men and women equally. Imagine a body without hands or feet; surely there would be suffering and agony. How can the Church be complete if some parts are missing? Since the Church and the seminary need to work together, both need to include, respect, and honor women.

Currently, the Arab Church, culture, and theological institutions have narrow parameters within which women can participate. Farley argues that although the environment of Church lay education is different from that of theological education, "Church education should be theological education in the full and rigorous sense of ordered learning" (1989, 175). While many women occupy lay leadership roles, their participation in theological education is still important. Theological education has value beyond ordained ministry. Therefore, seminaries' close alliance with the Church must mean more than just the preparation of pastors. Seminaries must prepare all Church leaders – men and women – for service in the broader Church – including, but not limited to, the pulpit.

The headship of theological colleges in the Arab World has been purely male, with the exception of Mary Mikhael, who was president of Near East School of Theology in Beirut from 1994-2011. An example from the global context of the need for women in theological leadership is a study that discusses the place of women in the Australian College of Theology. This study considers both faculty and students (2018, 160-174). It found that the most common issue for ACT female students was

the lack of female role models, whether in lecturing, writing, research, speaking at college, or even mentioned in biblical studies or church history. Suggestions for enriching the experience of women in colleges included increasing the number of role models, especially the number of female lecturers (17 percent), allied with increased number of women in leadership roles (5%). (2017, 167)

These findings are significant and would be equally true in the MENA region.

Yet women's full participation in theological education in the Arab World does not have broad support in the Church. An increased number of voices of men and women who support the inclusion of women in theological education

could help expand women's participation. This would provide a greater understanding of the realities evangelical Arab women are facing. Women Church leaders will naturally encourage more Arab women to be involved in theological education, increasing the enrollment of women and their participation in ministry.

Implications for Women's Theological Education from Missiology

Missiology is an integral part of women's theological education in the Arab World, because in Arab contexts, women have the best opportunities to reach other women with the Gospel. However, because of cultural constraints, few women have the opportunity to become missionaries. Although evangelical theological leaders like Banks and Ott have promoted context and praxis within theological education, not much has changed for women's participation in the academy and in terms of curriculum design. Perhaps in the West, it is easier and more common for women to enroll in missional opportunities beyond the pulpit, including education, counseling, and social justice. In the MENA region, on the other hand, it seems that women are still trying to find their way into these opportunities.

Reflecting on the issue of missions leads learners to the truth that the world needs the contribution of both women and men in accomplishing the Church's missional task, and that in practical terms, women can make a missional difference by their virtues, wisdom, ethics, and competency. A greater awareness of God's theological calling on female students and faculty could provide well-trained workers to take the Gospel to places where no male pastors or Christian educators can serve. In the Middle East, only a theologically trained woman could reach Arab women in Muslim neighborhoods. Muslim women often relate better to other women than they do to men. However, Christian women must be theologically equipped before they can reach out to their counterparts (Kraft, 2018, 33-49).

The ongoing challenges posed by Islam in the Middle East make women's inclusion in theological education imperative. In recent years, missionaries have been denied entry into or been expelled from many Arab countries. Palestine and Jordan are prime examples. As political instability continues in the region, local people should be encouraged to embrace the notion of mission in their own day-to-day faith. Walid Zaila of Lebanon claims, "Our geographical location and the era we live in shape our understanding of leadership and mission. For years, in our Middle Eastern context, Christian leadership remained synonymous with 'authority' and mission with 'reception'" (2019). MENA-region women can help give new meanings to mission and leadership as they minister in everyday contexts. Since missionaries are being denied entry, Arab women who are already on the ground need to be better equipped for mission.

However, cultural values sometimes hinder the participation of Arab women in missions and therefore limit their need and opportunity for theological education. For example, in Arab cultures, it is considered sometimes shameful for women to travel abroad on their own. This is one reason why female students seldom have the chance to pursue further studies and are not involved in Christian mission.

Indeed, because women are not encouraged by the Church or the academy to move out of traditional roles, mission is not flourishing in the Arab World. Encouraging women to seek training will enable them to better engage in Kingdom work beyond their traditional roles. This might invigorate mission in the Arab World. We must never overlook the fact that, as Ott writes, “Theology and theological education can be healthy when breathing the air of mission... Theologizing belongs to the missionary task and must be taught and learned as part of theological education” (2016, 270). With this in mind, every effort to reinforce missions in women’s theological education must be made. The Church’s missional calling should drive women into theological education to reach those who may be unreachable by anyone else.

Conclusion

This article has argued that basic theological truths have clear implications for women’s theological education in the Arab World. The idea of women’s theological education has not been developed within the Arab Church and academy yet. However, the Arab World’s patriarchal confines require a culturally-specific outworking of the theology of theological education that addresses women’s roles. The Church needs to develop a theology that includes women equally with men in education.

This article has also argued that in practice, women should be full participants in theological education and that the Church must act upon this implication of the theology of theological education. Women’s theological education will only happen when the hearts, minds, spirits, and lives of dedicated women of God are supported by men of God – in the face of long-held cultural constraints. The Church and the academy can never be fully successful without investing in the spiritual, biblical, theological, and academic lives of Arab women. In light of the theological perspectives discussed above, seminaries in the Arab World must encourage and support women through higher education and careers in theology. The Arab Church should also consider seriously its position on women’s participation and should intentionally connect seminary graduates to Church leadership positions. For theological education, women’s gifts in Christ can be like yeast that a “woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough” (Matthew 13:33).

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