

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO
RESIDENTIAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA

by John N. Ochola

The formulating pattern for evangelical theological education articulated in the *Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education* should go a long way towards streamlining theological education in Africa. Theological education is not just a school system. It deals with the divine destiny of humanity.¹ This paper lays down some crucial proposals for the implementation of the much talked about holistic or person-centered and truth-centered theological education in Africa. It does this by stressing that theological education, by its very nature must be spiritual, internal, practical and vocational, and that theological educators must measure to the biblically determined and professionally justified standard.

Theological education must give spiritual connotation to knowledge and its application. The extremes of intellectualism dangerously influencing the development of spiritual life as an ideal must be curbed. Thinking in terms of traditional academic patterns and standards of cognitive knowledge is not enough. Knowledge must be approached in terms of a virile service to God. To maintain spirituality in theological education, the following factors must be incorporated in the educational process.

Firstly, theological students must be subject to a rigorous standard of moral and spiritual requirements; anybody falling short should not qualify for graduation.

Secondly, spiritual opportunities in the daily schedule must be provided: chapel services must be mandatory, special emphases meetings revolving around revival, holiness mission prayer, and as well as other forms of Christian fellowship must be offered.

Finally, the services of a spiritual director should not be dispensed with. Every institution should have a spiritual director or dean of students whose work should be supplemented by other members of the faculty who takes a personal interest in the spiritual maturation of the students.

Theological education must make knowledge internal as well. The idea of learning something just for the purpose of passing examinations should not be entertained. What must be required is a real assent to truth. The ground of truth, the Bible, must be taken seriously. To come to a real assent the student must digest and internalize the grounds or reasons presented to him. He must be guided to discover the truth for himself. For this to happen the following principles must be blended into the teaching and learning methods.

Patterns of learning and training must encourage and facilitate self-directed learning.² Teachers must be on guard against the habit of making themselves and their textbooks authoritarian.

They should not deposit knowledge in the heads of students expecting them to learn it off by heart parrot-fashion, keep and guard it till they demand it back at the time of examination. If this is done, students will become passive and docile in matters of knowledge.³

Also, assignments should not be reduced to oral and written evidence of the student's ability to recall what certain authors have said,⁴ but rather as Bruce J. Nicholls suggests

More creative forms of assignments need to be explored. For example, a biblical book study could result in the class as a whole preparing a commentary for that book for a specific target audience such as high school students, factory workers, and so forth, with each student or group of students preparing different chapters. .

Again in thematic theological study, the integration of biblical material with Church history and contemporary case studies would help students to contextualize their studies for their future ministries.⁵

For practical courses like Church Administration, Church Growth, etc., guided field research and case studies should be incorporated. Lecture methods should be combined with opportunities for questions, personal reflections, dialogues, forums and seminars.

The knowledge gained by the foregoing methods of teaching and learning would then become deeply embedded in the effective domain of a student's life in such a way that affects his present and future belief, behaviour, feelings, and knowledge. He would then be able "to propose matters in a valid and convincing way to other human minds."⁶

Concurrent with the spiritual and internal aspects should be the practicality of theological education. Wilson W. Chow rightly observes that,

Seminaries should be different from schools of religious studies, patterned after the universality model, or even from professional training schools. There must be a functional integration between learning by precepts and learning by experience, between being and doing. The students are trained to be like Christ, to know the Word of God, and to do the work of the ministry.⁷

From this point of view, theological education is itself life and not just preparation for life. To attain this practicality two factors at least must be present in the educational process.

First, a laboratory/workshop approach to teaching and the learning process should be used. As an example and model to the student, the teacher must exemplify in his personal life the values and skills taught. On his part "the student should learn Christian living and service by precisely engaging in practical Christian living and service in the here-and-now learning situation."⁸ It must be stressed to the student that it is what he does now that counts.

Second, the institution must be keen to plan and supervise practical Christian ministries as

...part of the student's learning experience, and not merely provide cheap labor to local churches during the weekend.⁹

Lively chapel services should be planned and made indispensable for both the staff and students. These activities viewed as an integral part of a student's education should be executed with initiative expected of the student rather than from administrative coercion.

Theological education must decisively respond to the call that:

The times are weighted with unusual challenge and unusual opportunity, Everywhere the opportunities and challenges take on new and confusing forms. The times demand an urgent quest for the renewal of theological educational patterns, . . .¹⁰

Each theological institution should, therefore, clearly define patterns of ministry for its graduates and forge training schemes appropriate for them. Many theological institutions in Africa operate with a vague or less-clearly defined general goal of training people for pastoral work and its related disciplines, but how many of their graduates really joined the anticipated ministry?

Evangelical theological institutions have a well defined manifesto on theological education establishing an authoritative framework on which to work, but the same manifesto leaves room for each individual institution to deliberately design its own programme of theological education to suit the context in which it serves.¹¹ Therefore, each institution should identify a specific area of training and plainly define it. This definition can be implemented in the light of changing opportunities for service, modern technology and mobility.

The greater job choice possible in our society, coupled with more jobs appearing with special implications for the Kingdom of God¹² exerts pressure on theological education to go vocational. To illustrate, a situation already exists in Kenya where religious education has been made compulsory in the school curriculum. In such a situation the need for academically and spiritually qualified teachers must be met by our theological systems, otherwise the situation is bound to be exploited by those who treat Christianity as one of the many religions with detriment to the Church and many souls. Similar challenge exists in the areas of mass media communications, administration, social service, and cultural development to mention a few.

As a first step towards integration of vocational skills in theological education, ACTEA and, where provided, government accreditation must be speedily sought and adopted by each theological institution for their obvious benefits.

The success of integrated theological education proposed in this paper is only possible through a faculty dedicated to the task. The following standards are therefore suggested for teachers.

Apart from their academic responsibilities theological educators should not become spectators of the spiritual and devotional life of students; they must always be united in seeing that both the staff and student body are in a state of mission and spiritual preparedness.¹³ Philip J. Hughes' advice is timely here.

Much of the success of education depends on the actual relationship between the person who is being educated and the educator. Those who are being educated ... respond when genuine concern is shown for them as people and when interest is expressed in their own interests and situation. For this concern to be experienced as genuine, it must extend beyond the class-room and beyond class-time. If it is limited in the hours in which it is expressed or the situations in which it is experienced doubts will be thrown on its genuineness. Concern that is shown only in the class-room will not be understood to be concern for the person as a person - only as part of a role.¹⁴

Thus, each teacher should pray, play, and eat with the students, enquire about the students' needs, and give help and guidance not only by word-of-mouth but by personal example as well.

Each theological educator must get actively involved in Christian ministries both within and outside the academic community. He should be involved in evangelism, preaching, Bible study, counseling, or any other form of service his gifts may allow. By doing this he will gain a realistic knowledge of what Christian ministry is like in the context in which he serves, will hear the questions that are really being asked by the people, and will tailor his teaching methods and materials to suit these questions and needs.

Research, writing, and publishing obligations should be required of each theological educator. Solutions to problems affecting the Church can only be found within the community served. Through proper rational and intelligent research and dissemination of research findings the problems can be identified and resolved. It is time theological educators abandoned the habit of giving hypothetical answers based on deductions or theories derived from foreign scholastic systems and instead embark on research to provide authentic and effective answers to the needs of the Church.

If the spirituality, practicality, and vocationality of theological education advocated in this paper could help implement the agenda for the renewal of evangelical theological education in Africa and so commend the gospel, then those involved in the process of theological education are under obligation to fulfill their ministry with all earnestness and discretion by implementing the proposals.

ENDNOTES

- ¹Parratt, J., ed. *A Reader in African Christian Theology*. London: SPCK, 1987. p. 37.
- ²See *Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education*.
- ³Njoroge, R. J. *Philosophy and Education in Africa*. Nairobi: Transafrica, 1986. p. 158.
- ⁴Dickson, K. A. *Theology in Africa*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984. p. 220.
- ⁵Bowers, P., ed. *Evangelical Theological Education Today 1*. Nairobi: Evangel Publishing House, 1982. p. 20.
- ⁶Parratt, J., ed., *op. cit.*, p. 39.
- ⁷Bowers, P., ed., *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- ⁸Lee, J. M., *The Shape of Religious Instruction*. Mishawaka: Religious Education Press, 1971. p. 19.
- ⁹Bowers, P., ed., *op. cit.*, p. 59.
- ¹⁰*Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education*.
- ¹¹*Ibid.*
- ¹²Clowney, E. P., *Called to the Ministry*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964. p. 24.
- ¹³Wagoner, W. D., *The Seminary: Protestant and Catholic*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966. p. 48.
- ¹⁴Hughes, P. H., "Person-Centered Education". *Journal of Christian Education*, Papers 88, April 1987. p. 18.