A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR GREATER EFFECTIVENESS IN MINISTRY TRAINING IN AFRICA

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To Karis, my gift of grace:

I am blessed to have you walking by my side on this journey of life. You have helped me truly learn and practice what I have written about here. Thank you for your unconditional love, your endless patience, your faithful prayers, and your tireless work in the ministry of the gospel we share together.

Her children arise and call her blessed;
her husband also, and he praises her:
"Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all."
Proverbs 31:28-29

To my children — Kayla, Krista, Elliot, and Khloe:

The way you model intercultural understanding and adaptation is both a blessing and a challenge to me, and I pray that God will use you greatly in spreading his glory among the nations. Thank you for your understanding and patience with my long absences and late hours in this process.

To my colleagues and students, past and present, on the African continent:

Thank you for teaching me more than I could ever have imagined or have hoped to teach you. May God give you the grace to find answers to the questions facing the church in Africa and to create new cultural forms which help you flesh out the truths and teachings of Scripture in a manner that fits your contexts for God's glory and the advance of his kingdom.

ABSTRACT

This paper is the fruit of twelve years of my own shortcomings and dissatisfaction accompanied by ongoing study and reflection on missions and theological education in the African context. Its purpose is to generate a conversation among Western missionaries and theological educators in an effort to discern better ways and "best practices" for developing a system of theological education that truly fits the African context in both content and practice. Chapter one explores the necessity of this process in light of the last one hundred and fifty years of missions history.

Chapter two then seeks to establish the biblical basis for this contextualizing endeavor by rooting the ideas of theological education and contextualization in the truth of Scripture. This is first accomplished by examining the purpose of theological education and the people involved in it to provide an understanding of both the content and context of theological education. Then, it turns to understand contextualization by examining its definition and history before looking at both divine and human examples of the process found in the Bible.

Chapter three further broadens the discussion of contextualizing theological education by providing an understanding of the African worldview and sociocultural context, including the modern challenges of urbanization and globalization. Then, the two primary models of western schooling, pedagogy and andragogy, are evaluated in light of the realities of the African continent in order to present the need for a more effective model for training men and women for ministry. The consequences of a lack of contextualized theological training in Africa further highlight the importance of the topic.

Finally, chapters four and five propose a number of solutions for contextualizing theological education for Africa. Chapter four presents the social research which supports the need of changing our theological education practices. Chapter five then follows with a number of suggestions to help missionaries and theological educators to adapt themselves and their methods for more effective ministry in the African context.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Since the commencement of the church on the day of Pentecost, the followers of Christ through the centuries have pursued the mission of God in various ways according to their understanding of the nature of God's kingdom and how it should be spread. Over the last century and a half, there has been an explosion of "foreign missions" which put an emphasis on crossing geographic, linguistic, and/or cultural barriers with the message of the gospel. With the inception of the modern missions movement toward the latter half of the 18th century, the world has shown a keen interest in missionary activity in Africa,[1] beginning with the work of the missionary-explorer David Livingstone. Many of these foreign missions in Africa were fraught with great difficulty, danger, and even death as men and women forsook what they knew and loved for the sake of Christ. These veritable heroes of the faith braved significant dangers and made enormous sacrifices to take the good news of Jesus to those who had never heard of him and are therefore worthy of our respect and admiration.

But these men and women were not perfect. As products of the worldview of their day, these missionaries at times acted and spoke in ways which bring us a great deal of consternation today, much in the same way that our actions and words may be distressing to those of future generations. Some mission mistakes have been recognized and abandoned decades later, while other of their errors continue to have a profound impact on the landscape of Christianity across the continent of Africa even today.

A popular adage maintains, "Those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it." Therefore, although we have a profound respect for those servants of God

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[1] Throughout this paper when we use the term "Africa" we will be referring to what is often called Sub-Saharan Africa, which has a culture that is distinct from the nations of the Maghreb or North Africa. Any reference to the countries or region of North Africa will be therefore be specified with the term "North Africa."

who preceded us in advancing the gospel around the world, we must be able to look critically into the past to see where missions and missionaries of days gone by have erred so that we who are engaged in the same work today will not continue to replicate their missteps. We do this recognizing that if we are able to see farther than our missionary predecessors, it is only because we are standing on their shoulders to do so. This critical look into history, of course, is not intended to be an exercise in casting stones, realizing that we ourselves have erred and will undoubtedly continue to in the future. Instead, it proposes to be an honest examination of our past mission endeavors with the desire to build an even better future of ministry and relationship with our national brothers and sisters for the glory of Christ our Savior. Many nationals across Africa are painfully aware of both the past and current failures of Western missionaries but, for a variety of reasons, have chosen not to expose them. There are those, however, who desire to see us surmount these errors and have therefore graciously accepted the task of helping us recognize and correct them so that we might move forward together for the sake of the gospel.

The history of uncontextualized mission thinking

Before the term contextualization became part of missiological parlance and practice, many missionaries simply reproduced the same models of ministry that they had seen fleshed out in their home cultures. Operating without the benefit of contemporary missiological reflection and anthropological insights, many early missionaries reflected the colonial mindset of their day in regard to missions in Africa. In fact, much of the missionary activity in Africa leading up to the twentieth century centered its emphasis on seeing visible changes in behavior such as wearing of clothing, abandoning of sinful, traditional practices, accepting baptism and communion, and regular church attendance as evidence of conversion.[2] This was often accompanied by

[2] Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), p 10.

the importing of Western structures and mindsets which were completely foreign to the African context. The missionary goal was to simultaneously christianize and civilize “the natives”.[3]

However, as Richard Engle observed, “At times the missionary himself did not realize that he was in fact imposing upon the target culture an institutional form which was neither mandated by the Bible nor in the best interests of the emerging church in the long term.”[4] The emphasis on external forms and behavior by early missionaries in Africa tended to produce two parallel effects. First, it gave a superficial character to Christianity in which old practices, rather than being eradicated and replaced by biblical behavior, simply went underground where they continued to be practiced, carefully hidden from the missionaries. Tom Stallter observed that “as mission history shows, the wholesale destruction of these areas of tradition for the Christians without introducing functional substitutes most often led to syncretism and underground practice as people attempted to meet felt needs that were not addressed by the Western missionary in his presentation of the Gospel.”[5] The other result was a syncretistic mixture in which the old practices were baptized into the Christian faith and given new names, while their fundamental identity and meaning remained unchanged.[6] After several generations, missionaries began to realize that a simple change in behavior was not sufficient if the nationals’ underlying beliefs were left unchanged since it was relatively easy for a new convert to conform their behavior to a missionary’s expectations in order to procure position or favors that the missionary could bestow.

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[3] Paul Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), p 83.

[4] Richard Engle, “Contextualization in Missions: A Biblical and Theological Appraisal,” *Grace Theological Journal*, 1983, p 88.

[5] Tom Stallter, “An Orientation to Intercultural Ministry in the Central African Republic and Chad”, Unpublished dissertation, Western Seminary, 1993, p 239.

[6] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, p 11. Stallter also elaborates on this in his dissertation p.239-41.

Near the turn of the twentieth century, Protestant missions began to take an important turn. In an attempt to counter the superficialism and syncretism inadvertently brought about by the practices of their predecessors, missionaries began to focus on the establishment of Bible schools and seminaries to teach new converts the fundamentals of the Christian faith. As the global church began to expand over the course of the late 20th century through various mission efforts, there was an accompanying growth in understanding the necessity of preparing national believers to serve the church. This led to the proliferation of training schools throughout the world with the express aim of putting 2 Timothy 2:2 into practice: “and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” Mission agencies and theological seminaries from the West began to put a greater emphasis on training national pastors and leaders in addition to the primary tasks of evangelism and church planting. This resulted in Bible schools of various types cropping up around the world.

As we approached the dawn of the 21st century and the center of gravity in missions began to shift from the West to the global south, traditional Western missions in Africa increasingly began to give way to national mission works. During this time many missionaries began to contemplate and implement strategies to turn their ministries over to national leadership — attempts at nationalization that were met with varying degrees of success. Some nationals carried on the work started by the missionaries while others chose to simply start afresh rather than building on the existing Western foundation. This latter situation produced a conundrum for some Western missions who were forced to decide whether to continue their works or to abandon them altogether. The difficulties of this transitional period have even caused some to question whether or not there is still a place for Western missions in Africa or if they should simply cede their place entirely to the nationals. While it seems logical that the center of gravity has shifted more toward national works, this does not necessarily mean that Westerners no longer have a place

or potential for ministry in central Africa. It does imply, however, that going forward, Western missionaries must understand the role that they are to play in advancing the kingdom of God in Africa and be more intentional about being contextual in the way they carry out God's mission in the 21st century and beyond. Although much missionary interest in Africa continues to this day, the results and methods of a century or more of mission work have been increasingly and rightfully called into question in recent years.

Many of the errors that continue to plague Western missions today have their roots in a subtle, underlying, neocolonialist attitude that has been pervasive, though at times subconscious, throughout the last century and a half of mission work. In fact, the majority of the errors of the past that still exist today in various forms find their link in the unfortunate fact that much early mission work followed patterns established by Western colonization efforts. Gene Daniels has aptly observed,

> Although the sun long ago set on the colonial day, and despite our best efforts to repudiate those kinds of power relationships, many Western missionaries simply don't know any other way to relate to the rest of the world. Centuries of habit have deeply conditioned us to unconsciously structure our relationships to the rest of the world in a way that reeks of an imperial corpse they have already rejected.[7]

One major error springing from the colonial mindset prevalent among many early missionaries was the ownership and control that the missionaries exerted over their ministries. When missionaries came to Africa, many of them, through their manner of living and behavior, placed themselves in the role of patrons in their particular cultures. A patron is seen as a well-placed person in society who bestows favors that his clients could not otherwise obtain for themselves; in return for these favors, the patron receives unquestioning loyalty and is often publicly honored by his clients as an expression of

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[7] Gene Daniels, "The Converted Missionary: Becoming a Westerner Who Is Not Western-centric," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Jan 2011, p 18.

gratitude.[8] Although this patron-client relationship is rejected in the West, it still forms the general operating principle of many societies throughout much of the majority world, including most of Africa. For this reason, when missionaries came to Africa, living apart from the nationals but offering them various social aids such as providing jobs; building churches, medical clinics, and schools; digging wells; etc., they were immediately perceived by the nationals as rich, foreign patrons from whom they could procure additional favors. The missionaries, however, neither understanding the nature of the patron-client relationship nor that they themselves had reinforced this concept through their actions, viewed the nationals as simply looking for handouts and quickly grew weary of their constant demands. Furthermore, they became wary of those who seemed to desire to use their relationship to the missionary for their personal advantage. As a result of their suspicion, the missionaries, hesitating to trust the nationals, often kept a tight hold on the reins of their ministries, insisting that things be done their way, even though their methods were not particularly well-adapted to the culture. Due to the nature of the patron-client relationship, the nationals felt obligated to submit to their patrons' wishes, not wanting to be perceived as disloyal or ungrateful for the favors they had already received — and hoped to receive in the future. The combination of these elements produced an environment of mutual misunderstanding that in turn created a vicious cycle of distrust. Many missionaries viewed the nationals as manipulative "yes men" and were in turn viewed by the nationals as arrogant, thoughtless patrons who needed to constantly be appeased in order to maintain their good favor.

Numerous Western missions across Africa felt the need to create a significant infrastructure for their ministries that was habitually held in the name of the Western mission. In order to preserve their investment, missions were obligated to commit both personnel and resources towards management and maintenance of the various

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[8] David deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p 95-119.

properties and structures. This contributed to the missionaries becoming the gatekeepers of ministry — deciding how things would be done, who would do them, and what remuneration they would receive — and supported the illusion among the nationals that what they saw around them belonged to the missionaries rather than belonging to them or to God. Nationals who were ultimately included in the leadership of a particular ministry were often given responsibility without any real authority; they were not free to conduct the ministry as they saw fit but had to operate under the supervisory eye of the missionaries. This managerial posture adopted by the missionaries reflected the colonial system of government, once again reinforcing the ideals of the patron-client system and relegating the nationals to operate on a secondary tier — working for a human patron rather than working for their Savior on an equal plane with the missionaries.

The continuity of uncontextualized mission thinking

A surface examination of the situation across Africa today seems to indicate a vast improvement from the early days of colonial mission. However, the age old problems of distance, control, and pragmatism are, unfortunately, far from being memories of a distant past. While many of the old, external vestiges of colonialism have disappeared over time, the same subtle, underlying, neocolonialist attitude is, in many cases, still alive and well and expresses itself in new and even more disturbing ways. Although the physical distance between missionaries and nationals may have greatly lessened over the last few decades, some missionaries continue to live in compounds or communes apart from their local community of national believers. More importantly, however, whereas the separation of yesterday exhibited itself more in the physical realm, today's distance operates largely on an intellectual level in which the missionary sees his training, methods, and even his ideas as being superior to those of African nationals.

One example of this intellectual distance is seen when missionaries come to Africa and proceed to set in motion a pre-fabricated ministry plan rather than taking the

months and even years that are necessary to connect with the nationals and learn about their culture before forming and implementing a ministry strategy. Consequently, once they arrive on the field, these missionaries continue to act much like the patrons of the colonial days, proceeding to roll out their well-developed ministry plans formulated using Western logic and methods without giving heed to the long-term effects that their actions produce. This first error is further compounded when missionaries set their plans in motion without seeking counsel from nor listening to the advice of wise, spiritually minded nationals who could offer their profound insight into the intricacies of their own culture by exposing the core values, beliefs, and assumptions inherent in their particular African culture. A missionary who from the outset of his ministry can grasp the differences in worldview such as the central role of the community as opposed to the individualism of Western culture or the unity of the spiritual and physical worlds as opposed to the stark dualism of the West will be much more effective ministering in the African context than if he were to begin his ministry with the assumption that the African nationals hold the same basic presuppositions about life that he does.[9]

This phenomenon of intellectual distance can be further illustrated by the growing popularity of the church growth movement — an approach of rapid growth through evangelization and baptism as opposed to slow progress toward spiritual maturity through systematic biblical teaching and discipleship. Not understanding the patron-client culture prevalent across Africa, missionaries at times seem unaware that many nationals will respond positively to their attempts at evangelization simply out of a desire to please the missionary and to keep the door open for future favors offered by their Western benefactors. When they cling to this notion of an intellectual distance, missionaries continue to force the African nationals to accept their ideals and understanding of ministry and to relegate them to an inferior status in the work of the Lord.

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[9] A fuller treatment of the differences between the African and Western worldviews will be developed in greater detail in chapter three.

Furthermore, whether consciously or unwittingly, many missionaries in Africa continue to present themselves as rich, foreign patrons through the way they set up their ministries. Rather than erecting simple, culturally appropriate infrastructures for their ministries, many missionaries immediately begin by building or renting large structures similar to those found in their own Western culture. This allows them to proceed rapidly with their ministry but later proves impossible for nationals to fund or maintain independently of their Western predecessors. Such a practice only reinforces the idea that the missionaries are the ones who own and control the ministries. In most cases, these ministries will require continuous foreign direction or support in order to carry on after the missionaries move off the scene and seek to turn their ministry entirely over to national leadership. This *modus operandi* sets the ministries up for almost certain failure if these foreign supports are ever completely removed.

By repeatedly employing these pragmatic methods in the patron-client culture that is prevalent across Africa, many of today's missionaries unwittingly persist in perpetuating the understanding among nationals that ministry must be done in a Western way and with Western funds.[10] Such an idea essentially destroys the drive among many African nationals to create their own culturally appropriate ministries, for in a patronage system, "all initiative must be seen to come from the patron, and any creative initiative with which the patron disagrees will be undermined."[11]

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[10] In challenging many students to consider being involved in the work of missions, the author has repeatedly encountered the objection, "Oh we (Africans) can't do missions because we don't have the same kind of money that the white man does." One evangelist desired to use the Jesus film to evangelize the surrounding villages, as many Western missionaries in Africa do, but lamented the fact that he didn't have the laptop, projector, screen, and generator that he would need to show the film as well as a motorcycle to transport his material from village to village.

[11] Perry Shaw, "Patronage, Exemption, and Institutional Policy," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Jan 2013, p 12.

Relating uncontextualized mission thinking to theological education in Africa

This same problem of intellectual superiority is seen in institutions of theological education across Africa. As mission practices began to change in the twentieth century, Western models of theological training designed to prepare men and women for ministry were deemed necessary and thus imported into Africa in great numbers. This trend continues even today as, among American and Canadian missions, those primarily involved in education and training have seen the sharpest percentage of increase over the last decade.[12] Whether through short-term missions trips or career missions, pastors and/or professors from the West — theological "experts" who themselves were trained in Western seminaries — come to Africa to teach courses that are virtually indistinguishable from the Western training they themselves have received.

Despite the encouraging increase in the number of theological training schools around the world, the inadequacies of these institutions quickly became apparent. It was long believed that right knowledge about God and the Christian faith would produce theologically solid and biblically faithful believers. Unfortunately, this view has proven to be overly simplistic and unreliable for producing its intended results. While multitudes of national believers have been schooled in orthodox doctrine through the diffusion of missionary Bible schools, their "knowledge" of these truths has not always lead to appropriate action in their communities and local churches. At times these deficiencies in knowledge have been the impetus behind the numerous aberrant local theologies which have cropped up across Africa. In other instances, formal education has served to produce divisions within the church, and a polarizing effect takes place as the trained leaders arrogantly manifest a position of superiority toward the uneducated members in their communities.

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[12] "Primary Activities of Mission Organizations." Missio Nexus Infographic. https://missionexus.org/primary-activitues-of-mission-organizations/, Oct 24, 2017.

As early as the late 1960s, men such as Peter Savage began calling for a "more realistic theological training"[13] and even speaking of "crises in third world theological education."[14] One of the major challenges identified among these theological schools was that many of them were Western imports which taught and tested for cognitive knowledge of theological theory rather than the more practical aspects of personal growth in character and ministry skills. "Instead of producing pastors and church planters, they are instead producing maladjusted theologians in a pastoral context," Savage observed.[15] Much of this was due to the fact that the "Western methods, curriculum, and educational structures were carried to the ends of the earth, and most often became the models on which theological education was designed" rather than producing a contextually relevant system of theological education which addressed the needs of the local churches.[16] This model of training served to give the students social mobility by providing them with prestige in the eyes of their churches, but it did not adequately train them in practical ministry concerns such as caring for the needs of people in their local church context.[17]

An examination of the current state of theological education around the world reveals that many of the same concerns expressed fifty years ago continue to plague theological educational institutions today. Despite the proliferation of theological training schools across Africa, there continues to be an insufficient number of trained national leaders as these institutions struggle to keep pace with the rapid growth of the global

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[13] Peter Savage, "A Bold Move for More Realistic Theological Training," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Jan 1969.

[14] Peter Savage, "Four Crises in Third World Theological Education," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Oct 1972.

[15] Savage, "Four Crises in Third World Theological Education," p 3.

[16] Beth Grant, "Theological Education in the 21st Century," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Apr 2004, p 2.

[17] Savage, "A Bold Move for More Realistic Theological Training," p 2.

church.[18] Among those who are trained, while vast numbers of students are able to respond adequately, even brilliantly, to questions on an exam, many often demonstrate an overall inability to translate those principles into practical application in their pastoral ministry. Additionally, some students who are trained in Western-model Bible schools essentially become third culture persons[19] who, upon completion of their training, have become a sort of hybrid individual, at times having been transformed so thoroughly by a Western-style education that they have difficulty fully relating to the people in their culture of origin. The combination of these factors has created a serious dilemma in international theological education which must not be left to continue unabated.

In the posthumous collection of his anthropological reflections, the late Paul Hiebert calls for a shift of emphasis in mission work in the twenty-first century to focus on the transformation not simply of behavior or belief but of the underlying worldviews that fundamentally shape those systems of behavior and belief. This proves to be a daunting task indeed, for as Hiebert explains: "the problem with worldviews is that they are largely unnamed, unexamined and unassailable. It is particularly difficult to examine our own worldview because it is hard to think about what we are thinking with."[20]

As it applies to theological education in Africa, transforming underlying worldviews requires that we as Western educators first recognize the Western influences that impact our own worldview before we attempt to understand the worldviews of those we are seeking to train. This process must begin by recognizing the impact of the

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[18] Lois McKinney, "Why Renewal is Needed in Theological Education," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Apr 1982. p 1-2.

[19] The term "third culture kids" is used to refer to children who spend all or part of their formative, developmental years outside of their parents' culture or that of their passport country. These children are raised with influences from their parents'/birth culture as well as the culture in which they grow up, which combine to form a hybrid third culture that reflects elements of both cultures yet is not wholly one or the other. This concept is developed fully in the book *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds 3rd edition* by David Pollock, Ruth Van Reken, and Michael Pollock (Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2017).

[20] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, p 320.

Western, modernist worldview on our own theologizing. Paul Hiebert makes an important point here that warrants consideration:

> Systematic theologians need to examine the cultural and historical contexts in which they formulate their theologies to discern the biases that these might introduce in their understanding of Scripture. All theologies are human creations seeking to understand divine revelation, and all theologies are embedded in histories and worldviews that shape the way they see things. There are no culture-free and history-free theologies. We all read Scripture from the perspectives of our particular context. This does not mean we can know no truth. It does mean that we must never equate our theology with Scripture.[21]

It is only when we have accomplished this that we will be able to adequately contextualize the process of theological education for the African continent rather than simply transplanting a pre-adapted Western theology as has often been done in the network of conservative, evangelical, Western-initiated Bible colleges and seminaries across Africa. In large part, these theological schools reflect the character of their counterparts in the West, being founded on a modernist worldview and based largely on a theoretical study of Bible interpretation and systematic theology.

Understanding the basis of Western theological thinking

What we refer to as Western theology is the system of theology which was developed during the post-medieval period known as the age of modernity (a period which includes the Renaissance and Reformation) and which reflects the character of that age with its focus on objective knowledge attained through abstract logic and human reason.[22] Modernism was not only developed in the West but also laid the philosophical foundation on which much of Western society was constructed.

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[21] Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, p 42.

[22] Ibid., p 142.

Western theology produced and is predominately centered on the organized, rational system of thought known as systematic theology. Systematic theology has a long history in the Western Christian world, finding its origins in the revival of Greek logic in the twelfth century. Drawing from the whole of Scripture, it seeks to assemble a comprehensive, unchanging system of ultimate theological truth that presents an overarching and authoritative understanding of who God is and how every other being and object in the universe relates to him.[23] Those who desire to "know God" and prepare to serve him as ministers are schooled in systematic theology and are thus presumed to be adequately prepared to bring this unchanging truth to bear on those around them. Since systematic theology was built on Greek philosophy and further developed under the modernist worldview, it focuses predominately on the theoretical nature of God and the universe more than on the practical application of those truths to everyday living.[24] As such, it insists on proof through rational arguments and logical consistency, organizes objects into digital categories,[25] and presents its claims by means of propositional truth.[26]

Western theology has numerous strengths which have been manifested with its use throughout the centuries.[27] Though by no means an exhaustive list, we will highlight

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[23] Ibid., p 39-40.

[24] In modern Western seminary curricula, the practical aspects regarding the application of the theological theory that is taught in classes on textual interpretation and systematic theology often falls under a secondary domain entitled "practical theology." Classes on practical theology are often significantly fewer in number than those dealing with interpretation and systematic theology in a traditional Western seminary curriculum.

[25] According to Hiebert, digital categories classify an object or person based on what it is naturally in itself. In a digital system there is often a clear boundary delineating the classification, and the object being classified is seen as either "in" or "out" - it either "is" or "is not." An example of a digital category is seen in the binary system where everything is evaluated in terms of 1s and 0s. There is no third option. Digital categories are also referred to as "well-formed" or "bounded" sets. Much theological debate centers around these "digital categories."

[26] Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, p 195.

[27] Andy Naselli treats ten strengths of Systematic Theology, along with their corresponding weaknesses, in his book *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017.

three of these strengths. First, by virtue of its organizing theology into rational categories, Western theology provides a means to systematically examine the fundamental truths of Scripture in a logical manner. The Scriptural teachings regarding the Bible, God, mankind, etc., are grouped together to provide a quasi-complete picture of the particular domain of theology. Second, after having assembled the Scriptural teachings into various domains of theology, the subsequent theological understanding can be preserved for posterity and used as a standard against which all further theological understandings are tested. This provides believers with a continuity of doctrine and prevents against theological drift from generation to generation. Third, as the study of the various domains of theology are compiled and related to God and his work in the world, Western theology provides us with an understanding of the biblical worldview — the overarching theme that ties Scripture together and helps us understand how God has been working in the world throughout history and the culmination toward which his work is leading.[28]

The dangers of uncontextualized theological thinking in Africa

But Western theology, for all of its strengths, is not without its accompanying weaknesses. In fact, it is often the very same elements that form the strengths of Western theology which, when that theology is removed from its Western context, become its greatest weaknesses. While Western theology examines truth in a logical manner, not all societies around the world employ the Western system of logic. Additionally, when theology is formulated into a static declaration of propositional truth which is not adaptable in order to make it relevant to the questions of a particular culture or generation, the very doctrine that is meant to prevent theological drift from generation to generation becomes the element that prevents our theology from being relevant to the

[28] Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, p 40.

current generation or culture.[29] This does not mean that truth changes from generation to generation but rather that the questions we ask of Scripture must change as the culture around us changes.[30] It is for this reason that Hiebert highlights the importance of self-theologizing — that churches of each generation and culture "have the right to read and interpret the Scriptures for themselves"[31] rather than simply regurgitating the pre-packed theology that was passed to them from previous generations or other cultures.

In his evaluation of Western theology, Charles Kraft points out five major weakness, especially when it is brought into the non-Western world, citing that it is "largely captive to Western cultural ways of thinking," is overly academic, tends to be more concerned with the ideas than practice, focuses more on how life should be than how it is, and is overly oriented toward writing.[32] The fact that Western theology is based on the modernist worldview and categories of thought, that it focuses heavily on theoretic and academic analysis, and that it is constructed as a self-contained and unchanging system creates serious difficulties when one attempts to transfer Western theology into a non-Western cultural context such as those found across the continent of Africa. A further investigation into each of these weaknesses is necessary to create an understanding of the foundations of Western theology and its lack of correspondence with a non-Western worldview.

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[29] Personal correspondance with Tom Stallter, January 2020.

[30] Chris Bruno, "Biblical Theology Versus Systematic Theology in Missions," The Missions Podcast, July 23, 2018. Bruno illustrates this statement with the fact that many churches and organizations are now having to add statements regarding marriage, sexuality, and gender identity to their doctrinal statements because of the new questions that people of the current generation are asking in regards to these issues. The same holds true when one crosses cultures and faces new questions that he has never before had to ask of the text of Scripture.

[31] Paul Hiebert deals with the question of self-theologizing in chapter eight "The Fourth Self" of his book *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1985, p 193-224.

[32] Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996, p 88.

Its captivity to modernist worldview and thought

As the medieval period came to a close with the end of the Crusades, men and women became increasingly skeptical of authority and began to question much of what was once assumed to be fact. This questioning of the true nature of the world and the accompanying elevation of human reason and logic led to many great scientific discoveries during the period of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Underlying these discoveries was a new worldview which came to be known as modernism. Modernism espoused the ancient Greek understanding of dualism and insisted on a separation of the supernatural/religious/spiritual sphere of life from the natural/secular/scientific sphere.[33]

Although Western theology continued to affirm God's dominance over all spheres of life, thus rejecting the religious/scientific dualism of the modernist worldview, it was still subtly influenced by the spirit of modernism. René Descartes had established three axioms that set the tone for modern man's analysis of the world around him: 1) the supremacy of reason, 2) a mechanical theory of the world, and 3) the unchanging character of the laws of nature.[34] Under modernism, man began to see the universe as a machine which could be studied, understood, and controlled for his own desired ends. Scientific knowledge, achieved by means of logic and reason, was therefore elevated as the means of understanding and ultimately controlling the world around us. Though theologians maintained the supremacy of scriptural truth over reason, they still sought to apply their logic and reason to the Scriptures in order to grasp the underlying reality of things as they really are — as God knows them to be. They believed that God had created a real universe and governs it by natural laws; and therefore spiritual realities could also be studied, understood and classified using reason and logic.[35] This would

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[33] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, p 143-46.

[34] Ibid., p 180.

[35] Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1985, p 113-14.

eventually result in the development of systematic theology, which was an effort to classify the truth revealed in the Bible according to various logical categories.

As Hiebert notes, systematic theology is based on two fundamental assumptions which are inherent to modernism — first "that there are basic unchanging realities, and if these are known we can understand the fundamental structure of all reality" and second "that ultimate truth can be known by means of human reason, and that this truth is ahistorical and acultural — it is true for everyone everywhere."[36] This truth is often systematized in propositions that do not allow for contradictions or ambiguity of any kind. The impact of modernist reasoning and philosophy on Western theologizing began with St. Thomas Aquinas[37] and has been evident even from the inception of Protestant theology. Reformers such as Luther and Calvin[38] did not uniquely employ Scripture (as might be assumed by their championing of the phrase *sola Scriptura)* but also used logic, rhetoric, and other philosophical devices as they developed their particular understandings of theology.[39]

Even today, Western theology, with its heavy emphasis on studying the various categories of systematic theology, continues to be dominated by a modernist worldview which is characterized by its emphasis on logic and rationality, as Christopher J. H. Wright affirms: "The contemporary Western theological academy was largely built on an

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[36] Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, p 39.

[37] John Reid, Lesslie Newbigin and David Pullinger, "Modern, Postmodern, and Christian," Lausanne Occasional Paper 27, 1996, p. 8.

[38] The modern day Calvinism-Arminianism debate is a good example of this. The five points of Calvinism flow logically from the core beliefs of the sovereignty of God over all things and that mankind is totally depraved as a result of Adam's fall into sin. As the points of Calvinism are developed, they are built one upon another using a "since … therefore" logical sequence. Scripture, however, maintains that while God is sovereign over all, man is also responsible for his own choices and actions. This leaves ambiguity and apparent contradiction, which is not easily tolerated in logical, rational Western thought, and so much ultimately fruitless discussion is carried on in an attempt to resolve these ambiguities. Arminianism, the counter-point to Calvinism, is structured much the same way with its basic tenets following logically from its core belief in the free will of man.

[39] Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, p 42.

Enlightenment modernity worldview, which privileged objectivity and sought a singular all-embracing theological construct."[40] As the conclusions of systematic theologians throughout the centuries have been triaged and declared to be either orthodox or heterodox, the accepted conclusions are now understood to be universal truths that are impacted neither by history or by culture. However Wright exposes the hubris of this assumption by Western theologians that they somehow have a corner on the theological market when he writes,

> As against the rather blinkered view of theology that developed in the West since the Enlightenment, which liked to claim that it was scientific, objective, rational and free from either confessional presuppositions or ideological interests, theologies have emerged that declare such disinterested objectivity to be a myth — and a dangerous one in that it concealed hegemonic claims. These theologies argue that contexts do matter, that in the act of reading and interpreting the Bible, the questions of who you are, where you are, and whom you live among as a reader make a difference. The Bible is to be read precisely in and for the context in which its message must be heard and appropriated. So these approaches to the Bible and theology came to be called "contextual theologies" within the Western academy. This term in itself betrayed the arrogant ethnocentricity of the West, for the assumption was that the other places are contexts and they do their theology for those contexts; we, of course, have the real thing, the objective, contextless theology.[41]

While this perspective on theology is largely unchallenged and therefore satisfactory to those in the West, an African cultural context is not as easily served by Western theology. This is the case because typical African theologians[42] neither use the West's distinct form of logic nor do they ask the same questions of the Scripture that a Western theologian does. The logic of Western societies tends to be abstract and

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[40] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006, p 45.

[41] Ibid., p 41-42.

[42] When we use the term "typical African theologians" we refer to those who reflect the values and thinking patterns of traditional African culture as opposed to those who, having been trained in Western institutions of theological education, now think according to Western categories and logic.

impersonal, focusing on concepts that cannot necessarily be related to or observed in every day life but which are simplified and analyzed in order to form general theories which help to govern our thinking about God and his creation. In contrast, most of the non-Western world employs a more relational logic in which objects or people are analyzed based on their relation to other objects or people.[43] Given that much of the theological discussions generated in the West are more abstract in nature,[44] they therefore do not always seem to have a direct correlation to the practical life of non-Western students. Unfortunately, Western theology, largely based on abstract logic, often proves inflexible on this very point when transplanted into other cultures which do not operate on the same system of logic.

> As prisoners of our cultures, we distort God's creative work and his purpose and meaning for humanity. In Western cultures, part of that distortion has involved giving priority to the analytical learning style … The culture of Western schooling is based on that distortion and thus has elevated the propositional style of teaching and devalued relational learning in the classroom.[45]

Since abstract theological concepts are difficult to assimilate into non-Western, relational thinking, many non-Western theological students, though capable of understanding a number of the abstract concepts of theology, often have difficulty fleshing out these concepts in real-world scenarios.

Despite the insufficiencies of modernist thinking in the African context, some western theologians continue to endorse the virtues of the modernistic mindset primarily in opposition to the relativism which has become the principal tenet of the post-modern worldview. While it is certainly necessary to avoid the extremism of postmodern

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[43] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, p 39-44.

[44] Examples of these theological abstractions include seeking to understand the dual nature of Christ (both fully God and fully man), the Trinity, the transmission of the sin nature to mankind, trichotomy vs. dichotomy, etc.

[45] Judith and Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Teaching Cross-Culturally*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003, p 65-66.

philosophy which denies the existence or possibility of knowing absolute truth and maintains that each culture must create their own version of truth for themselves,[46] theologians from the West cannot, however, fall into the error of going to the other extreme and imagining that their systems of Western theology alone hold a monopoly on the correct and complete formulation of biblical truth. They can indeed celebrate the diversity that the Bible itself revealed long before post-modernism came on the scene[47] without fearing a headlong plunge into theological relativism.

The belief in the universality of Western systematic-theological conclusions has led many Western theologians to subscribe to the “copy-and-paste” method of theological training in Africa and other non-Western contexts. However, as Dave Guiles encourages theological educators in Africa, it is necessary to "avoid the common error of transplanting our theological structures into cultural soils that are vastly different than our own.”[48] The copy-and-paste method structures the curriculum for Bible schools in Africa in much the same way as schools in the West and puts a heavy emphasis on the teaching of Western-style systematic theology in the African classroom without realizing, as Shaw has pointed out, that “theological education was first developed in the West and … that much of the educational methodology employed in theological education better suits white Western males than it does those from the Global South and East.”[49] Despite this fact, Western missionaries continue to transport their Western theological systems along with them to Africa and other places around the world — a mindset that Charles Kraft identifies as “monocultural myopia.”[50]

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[46] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, p 228-29.

[47] Wright, *The Mission of God*, p 47.

[48] Dave Guiles, *Teaching and Learning in Central Africa: A Six Session Orientation Contrasting the Learning Styles of Central Africans and North Americans*, unpublished manuscript: Grace Brethren International Missions, 2008, p 3.

[49] Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*. Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2014, p.142.

[50] Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, p.70.

In his analysis of this phenomenon of monocultural myopia in Western missions, Kraft cites a number of dangers inherent in this perspective that have impacted both the spread of the gospel and the process of theological education across Africa. First, he notes that monocultural myopia produces an ethnocentrism in which we judge all other perspectives by our own worldview. Our understanding becomes the standard and the judge of all others. An ethnocentric sense of superiority in our theological interpretation leads to the second danger of absolutism, in which we view ourselves as possessing the only right or valid viewpoint. “Monocultural Westerners who believe their perspectives are the only right ones and wield power over other people have caused incredible damage throughout the world,” Kraft observed.[51] This myopic perspective causes us to see ourselves or our viewpoints as intrinsically superior to others and subsequently leads us to be unnecessarily critical or condemning of others. Again, this does not mean that we cannot teach absolute biblical truth across cultures, but rather that we must be extremely careful to do what many early missionaries to Africa did not — distinguish between what is biblical and what is cultural so that we are teaching biblical truths without imposing our own cultural values.

Absolutism often manifests itself in the evangelical theological world, where a high priority is placed on the Word of God, through an over-application of the “biblical” label. When this takes place, one’s views on any particular topic (buoyed by their carefully chosen proof texts) are labeled as the “biblical” position, hence implying that any contrasting position is forcibly unbiblical. In this way, by appealing to a higher, divine authority, missionaries can impose any number of personal beliefs or preferences upon nationals in another culture under the guise of teaching them the Bible. Kraft comments that “As missionaries we have often been guilty of first condemning a people’s customs, then teaching against them, and then letting them make ‘their own choice.’ Very often

[51] Ibid., p 70.

this was the reason for Western schools — to teach them how to think straight."[52] Such a mindset belies the subtle intellectual superiority that carries on the neo-colonialist attitude which continues to be prevalent among Western theological educators on the mission fields across Africa and the world.

A further danger of monocultural myopia is found in creating a foreign subculture overseas through the exportation of our ways of doing church and/or theological education, with the focus being placed on issues that primarily come from or affect the West. This style of education produces nationals who are trained in Western-style schools and who themselves become third culture people — hybrids who neither belong fully to their own culture nor to the missionaries' imported subculture.

It is important to understand that all hybridism is not inherently bad or undesirable. In fact, Christianity intends to produce the "third culture person" phenomenon across the globe by encouraging believers from all cultures to conform to the biblical standard. The gospel itself demands this. Paul said to the Romans, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2). A disciple of Jesus is not to allow himself be pressed into the mold of his surrounding culture, but is to have his thinking, and subsequently his actions, transformed by the Word of God. This is a truth which applies in every culture — even in the West. Therefore we can say that in the African culture, those who have been transformed by the gospel become biblical-African hybrids. This hybridism is what missionaries and theological educators should be working to develop.[53]

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[52] Ibid., p 71.

[53] The issue of becoming a hybrid or third culture minister is complex in the sense that anyone who experiences prolonged contact with a different culture over a period of time, unless he intentionally closes himself off from its influences, will assimilate some level of that culture's values, beliefs, and behaviors. Missionaries themselves often experience this effect the longer they remain on a given field of service as do their children who are raised overseas. This cultural assimilation proves especially true in training situations, as Jesus himself indicated: "The student [disciple] is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher" (Luke 6:40 NIV). As much as possible, we want to see our theological training transform the unbiblical values, beliefs, and assumptions while allowing the students to remain as culturally African as possible.

But there is another type of third culture person that Western missionaries and theological educators must diligently and intentionally work to avoid creating. This is the Western-African (or biblical-Western-African hybrid) who has become as much or more Western than African. These type of hybrids do not simply accept to conform themselves to the biblical culture but also to the missionary's Western culture. Sadly, Western missions has produced countless numbers of these kind of hybrid individuals over the last century and a half. These Western-African hybrid students often end up perpetuating the missionary's monocultural myopia in one or more areas of their own ministry as they, the next generation of teachers, reproduce numerous Western cultural elements that they themselves received as biblical truth. In the event that they finally recognize and reject the missionary's imported Western subculture, Western-African hybrids may ultimately find themselves creating a different sort of hybrid ministry that combines the elements they prefer from each culture. Without a proper contextual understanding and application of Scripture, this can easily lead to syncretism.[54]

Its emphasis on academics over application

In addition to being dominated by a modernist worldview, Western theology has become largely an academic exercise in which much of the responsibility for training pastors has been taken away from the local church and placed on academic institutions who emphasize schooling over training.[55] In this educational system, theological propositions are analyzed in a Western-style classroom setting — often using highly technical theological language which presupposes an emphasis on Western, linear logic

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[54] When used in reference to Africa, the term syncretism most often refers to the blending of traditional animistic practices with biblical teaching. However syncretism cannot be limited exclusively to such a narrow definition. Many missionaries themselves are guilty of syncretism in their own practices as they conflate biblical truth and Western cultural values, often providing biblical proof texts to support the "biblical" nature of their cultural preferences. In order to avoid syncretism in any culture, we must make a clear distinction between what is biblical and what is cultural and be willing to set aside our cultural preferences in favor of the whole of biblical teaching.

[55] Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, p 274.

and requiring the use of books coming from the highly literate West into primarily oral, non-Western cultures. The classroom dynamic often stresses a theoretical and conceptual nature of theological discussions which focuses more on the ideological, rather than focusing on the practical application of theology to the real-world problems that students face.[56] The emphasis on academics over application has produced a phenomenon in which many theologically trained men and women, who can provide the appropriate answers to theological questions for their exams in Bible school, often have great difficulty applying the same concepts to the realities of their ministry and family life.[57]

Its inability to address non-Western realities

Because Western theology was developed within its own cultural framework, using Western logic to answer Western questions asked of the Scripture, it is relatively maladapted to the non-Western context and unable to address questions asked by those of other cultures. In his analysis of theology, Timothy Tennent notes :

> What we call theology is the result of all our most important questions being posed to the text of Scripture and reflecting on how the Bible addresses or answers those questions. An examination of any systematic theology textbook will quickly reveal that it is not a systematic summary of all that the Bible teaches about everything. Rather, it is a summary of those questions we have posed and that were important in our own reception of the gospel. For example, despite the fact that the Bible addresses issues like demonic bondage and food sacrificed to idols, the many questions that might naturally arise from such texts are generally not found in theology textbooks in the West, because they were not at the forefront of Western experience or perceived concerns. One of the by-products of the long sojourn of the gospel in Western culture is the false assumption that all potential questions have been canvassed and answered and that there are fundamentally no new questions to be answered. Thus, Christian theology becomes static within certain fixed categories.[58]

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[56] Ibid., p 88.

[57] This point will be examined in greater detail in chapter three.

[58] Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-first Century*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010, p 338.

One of the clearest examples of Western theology's inability to address pertinent questions in African belief systems is seen in the severe handicap with which many Westerners come to a treatment of the spirit world. The inability of conservative evangelical missionaries and theologians to answer these type of African questions has given rise to the rapid growth of Pentecostal-style churches across the continent. Where practical questions regarding ancestors, demons, and the spiritual world often receive little attention or teaching in Western-transposed theological studies, they are given serious consideration in Pentecostal realms. For this reason an innumerable host of Christians across the continent of Africa flock daily to churches or mass campaigns where they are promised healing or deliverance from the demonic influences in their lives. Unfortunately, many of these so-called "men of God" who frequently claim for themselves lofty spiritual titles such as prophet, apostle, bishop, or doctor have little or no theological training and often act more like traditional healers, shamans, or marabouts than biblical shepherds of the flock. Their lack of biblical grounding often results in great abuses — not only of the Scriptures but also of the people of God. Unfortunately the biblically illiterate masses continue to flock to these churches, seduced by promises of health, wealth, and success in their endeavors.

Western theology's inability to respond to these profound, basic questions stemming from an African worldview has also contributed greatly to the proliferation of a "split-level Christianity." This can be seen when African believers openly embrace Christ and Christian doctrine yet secretly continue to hold on to their traditional beliefs in an effort to respond to their felt needs which are largely ignored by a Western treatment of doctrinal questions.[59] Further complicating this reality is the fact that the various disciplines of theological study taking place across the continent of Africa are largely prescribed by Western categories of thought which do not always correspond to the

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[59] Paul Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tité Tienou, "Responding to Split-Level Christianity and Folk Religion," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* Vol 16, No 4, Winter 1999/2000, p 173.

questions that Africans face in their local contexts.[60] This fact led Dr. David Kasali to lament that "Often times our theologies in Africa scratch where the Americans and Europeans itch and leave the African itching all over with nothing to scratch."[61]

This should not be taken to imply that Western theological education and the conclusions at which they have arrived and which are taught in systematic theology classes are incorrect — quite the contrary. Systematic theology is the result of theologians posing questions to which the text of Scripture is called to respond. However, Western theologians can only pose Western questions of the text — and these are not the same questions that an African would ask of the Scriptures. A western theologian does not ask questions concerning ancestor worship, witchcraft and sorcery, curses, spirit eating, amulettes, polygamy, etc., like an African theologian would because they are not concerns which he faces on a daily basis, if ever. This is why western theology can never provide the answers to the questions that Africans are asking.

For Western theological educators, rather than simply giving African students the "right answers" from the Western systematic theology textbooks, we must train them both how to ask their own African questions of the Scripture and how to search the

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[60] A few examples here will help to clarify the difference between the abstract theological thinking that is cultivated in the West and the more concrete, ground-level thinking that preoccupies the non-Western mind. In systematic theology classes found in most Western seminaries it would be normal for a student studying anthropology to be presented with a debate over trichotomy and dichotomy or the lapsarian positions (sublapsarianism, infralapsarianism, supralapsarianism) as part of the theological curriculum. A Western seminary class on Christology might discuss questions such as the ontological nature of the Trinity, whether or not Christ was able to sin, and other similar abstract categories of thought, whereas the African concern would deal with more concrete realities such as whether the blood of Jesus carries a particular mystical/magical power to deliver us. The study of Pneumatology in the West might center around the proofs for the deity of the Holy Spirit, the understanding of the procession of the Holy Spirit (his relation to the Father and the Son), whereas the questions forming in a non-Western mind would have more to do with the realities of speaking in tongues, casting out demons, and miraculous healings for today. In a Western course on Soteriology, students might be presented with the dilemma of the *ordo salutis*, the order of the conceptual steps in the working of God to bring salvation to man. However, this would generally be of little concern to the African student of theology who would be more concerned about the deliverance that his salvation provides from demonic influences in his family and community.

[61] David Kasali, "Doing Theology in Africa," unpublished paper delivered at Wheaton Graduate School, Wheaton, IL, Nov 5, 2002, p 5.

Scripture to find those answers. This does not imply that there is no place in Africa for teaching the truths found in Western systematic theology, but rather highlights the fact that we must go beyond the simple transmission of truth to training Africans how to find truth in the pages of Scripture and not simply in our theological statements. Chris Bruno has stated that "Translating some … standard evangelical systematic theologies into different languages is helpful, but even better is training people in those cultures who can write systematic theologies in and for that culture, answering the questions that are most relevant to those particular groups."[62] This requires that we first lay a solid foundation by teaching the basic doctrinal truths found in Western systematic theology, but we must then allow our African brothers and sisters to build their own African houses upon that foundation.

For Western missionaries, however, involving the African church in the process of developing a system of theology for their own context is not an easy process as it often causes them to undertake the uncomfortable task of evaluating their own theological positions and at times discovering that what they have labeled "biblical" may actually be more appropriately labeled "cultural." Paul Hiebert highlights the tension that often accompanies this process :

> Most mission movements have led to theological crises … How should we respond when national church leaders develop theologies that they claim are more relevant to their culture? If we encourage them, are we not opening the door for theological pluralism and, eventually, relativism? If we oppose them, are we not guilty of the worst form of ethnocentrism and of stunting their growth? These are central questions we are forced to ask by the very nature of our task, and we dare not take them lightly …
>
> Most of us were raised within a church and taught its theological confessions. We were monotheological and assumed that there is only one way to interpret the Scriptures, that all deviations from this approach were false. It comes as a shock, therefore, when we find honest, deeply committed Christians interpreting the Bible in different ways … The first time we truly confront theological pluralism, we experience theological shock. As in the case of culture shock, our old absolutes are challenged, and the

[62] Bruno, "Biblical Theology Versus Systematic Theology in Missions." The Missions Podcast, July 23, 2018.

> unquestioned certainties we hold are put to the test. We are faced with the fact that there are different ways to interpret Scripture and forced to ask why we think our own interpretation is correct.[63]

However difficult this process may be for Western theologians, we must be committed to empower and walk alongside our African brothers and sisters in this endeavor. It is only as Africans are free to ask African questions of the biblical text in order to find answers that address the African situation that a truly African theology will develop and begin to take root in the African church. Western theologians who have enjoyed the benefit of a pre-developed theological system which addresses many of their own cultural questions should be patient in allowing African students and theologians to develop their own. If it took the Western church three to four hundred years to firmly establish a position on the full divinity of Christ, surely the African church must also be granted appropriate time to study, debate, and flesh out a theology for their own context.

Focus of the paper

If Western missionaries are to create more contextually appropriate ministries in Africa in the 21st century, they must seriously reevaluate their *modus operandi* for ministry, especially pertaining to the way they conduct theological education on the continent. Theological institutions are playing an important role on the African continent in training men and women in the knowledge of God and in preparing them for ministry, but as the number and impact of Bible schools and seminaries continues to grow, it behooves us to investigate the impact of their underlying worldview and the effectiveness of their methods on the African continent. This will subsequently enable us to make the necessary adjustments in order to train servants of God who are capable of

[63] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, p 196-97.

exegeting the Scriptures as well as their own sociocultural contexts in order to effectively apply God's Word to the particular context in which they live and minister.

From the outset it is important to make clear that this paper is written by a Westerner involved in theological education in Africa for other Westerners engaged in the same work, and for this reason the reader will find periodic uses of "we" and "us" throughout the paper. It would be presumptuous for the author to address such a work to Africans as though he, as a Westerner, sought to tell them how they should contextualize theological education for a culture that they understand more deeply than he could ever hope to. If any part of this paper in any way proves helpful to one of our African brothers or sisters in their ministry of theological education, it is only an evidence of God's gracious hand. However, it is my conviction that we as Westerners need to better understand the unseen Western presuppositions with which we approach our educational ministries as well as the fundamental cultural realities of the continent where we minister if we are to be able to better adapt our methods of theological education to the African context.

The goal of this paper is to address some of the perceived deficiencies in our Western methods of doing theological education in the context of evangelical ministry in Africa. As such, its scope does not permit us to examine all the positive happenings in the African church and institutions of theological education, though there are many reasons to rejoice. Much great work is being done across the continent and we echo the sentiment of the Psalmist when he says, "The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes" (Ps 118:23 NIV). The limitations of the paper also do not give us adequate space to provide an exhaustive treatment of the challenges to be faced in doing theological education in Africa. The elements mentioned in these pages are merely indicative, and there is much that could be said that will not be addressed here.

It is also important to note that the highlighting of certain negative elements of African culture or the challenges seen in the African church is not indicative of a

pessimistic view of ministry in Africa on the part of the author but it rather attempts to be a realistic admission of the obstacles that must be confronted as we do theological eduction in Africa. While we acknowledge the great growth that is happening across the continent, we have chosen to stress the points where additional growth is still needed in the desire to see the work of theological education in Africa continue to progress to the glory of God. Additionally, because the evangelical world in Africa is quite broad, generalizations will be made which will not necessarily apply to every individual, culture, or situation across the continent. Since the author's experiences will differ from those of his readers, certain observations or assessments made in these pages may not match up with the reader's perspectives or experiences. But if this paper accomplishes nothing more than to create or to further discussion and analysis of how Western missionaries can better adapt their methods of theological education to their particular context, then the author's hopes will have been realized.

To this end, we will begin this evaluation by examining the biblical basis for contextualization in theological education (chapter 2), after which we will look into the sociocultural, missiological, and educational foundations that support the practice of contextualization in the African context (chapter 3). We will then present the social research conducted which provides concrete support for contextualizing our theological methods on the continent (chapter 4) before presenting our recommendations for implementing this contextualization of theological education methods in Africa (chapter 5). We will then conclude this work by presenting our final observations along with a general conclusion.

Chapter 2

Biblical Basis for Contextualization in Theological Education

If we truly believe that we are to equip people for ministry through theological training, then we should be able to present a clear biblical mandate for such a practice. This mandate should give us an understanding not only of why we should teach but also what we should teach. Although it would be impossible to thoroughly examine every biblical text referencing teaching or education, we will attempt to pull out major biblical themes which will guide our understanding of the purpose and content of theological education as well as the importance of contextualization in the training process.

What do we mean by theological education ?

For some the term theological education conjures up images of students sitting in a classroom poring over textbooks and discussing abstract theological terms such as "hypostatic union" or "supralapsarianism." Scott Moreau described these formal institutions of theological education as being

> structured and hierarchical, and typically culminate in a certificate, degree, or other recognized symbol of completion … Traditionally these learning institutions feature residential, face-to-face classes with a set curriculum that every student is expected to complete or appropriately master prior to completion (or graduation) … Formal educational institutions are regulated, licensed, and accredited by external agencies, in most cases the educational division of the national or regional-level government.[64]

While this description indeed falls within the bounds of what we refer to as theological education, it is by no means the only way in which theological education is done. Here we will employ a broader definition of theological education which entails

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[64] A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualizing the Faith: A Holistic Approach*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018, p 57.

"the impartation of a knowledge of God with the purpose of impacting an student's life and ministry." Using such a definition implies that communicating this knowledge of God can be done in a variety of settings using a variety of means of instruction. It also implies that this knowledge of God is not merely informational but should produce a transformation in the life of the learner. It is this latter part of the definition which leads us to examine the biblical purpose of theological education.

The purpose and content of theological education

Old Testament Scripture uses four primary words in reference to learning which are pertinent to our discussion of theological education: knowledge, understanding, skill and wisdom. The word *knowledge* (דעת ; daath) refers to learning that is "gained in various ways by the senses … [it] is a general term for knowledge, particularly that which is of a personal, experimental nature."[65] Another Hebrew term translated as *knowledge* (ידע ; *yada* or מדע ; *mada*) refers to the realm of thought and is at times translated as science or learning.[66] "This [word] can range from the mere acquisition and understanding of information to intimacy in relationship"[67] as the means by which the knowledge is gained (cf. Gen 4.1). Whether through study or experience, the word *knowledge* speaks of what is learned in the intellectual realm.

The term *understanding* (תבונה ; *tevunah*) differs from mere knowledge in that while "yada generally describes the process whereby one gains knowledge through experience with objects and circumstances, [understanding] is a power of judgment and perceptive insight and is demonstrated in the use of knowledge."[68] Understanding goes beyond data gathering and speaks to the use of the knowledge that one possesses.

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[65] R. Laird Harris, ed., "דַּעַת", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980. electronic text by OakTree Software.

[66] Harris, "מדע", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.*

[67] *Hebrew Vocabulary of the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 2006. electronic text by OakTree Software.

[68] Harris, "תבונה", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament.*

While the acquisition of knowledge is important, it is never an end in itself. The ultimate goal of teaching is not simply to impart information, but to provide understanding of when and how that information should be used.

One who shows particular aptitude at applying the knowledge he has obtained to a particular situation is said to be a skilled person. The word for *skill* (חכם ; *hakam*) can also be translated as cunning or shrewd[69] and speaks of someone who demonstrates great ability in applying their knowledge to a specific task. This term was used to refer to the craftsman who made the priestly clothing for Aaron (Ex 28.3) and the elements for the tabernacle (Ex 31, 35-36) as well as being used for those who built the temple (Jer 10.9). It is also used to describe those who show a particular shrewdness in handling delicate situations and relationships (2Sam 14; 1Kin 3:10-28; 5:7). In this way the term *skill* can be used synonymously with the word wisdom. The primary difference between skill and wisdom lies in its origin. While skill can be a product of human ability or cleverness, the Bible presents wisdom as finding its source in God alone and being related to his character.

> The source of all wisdom is a personal God who is holy, righteous, and just. His wisdom is expressed against the background of his omnipotence and omniscience … He alone knows wisdom in its truest sense. The wisdom of God is not found in man's speculation. He alone must provide this wisdom for man's guidance so that man can live the best possible moral and ethical life (Prov 2:6; Job 11:6) … Wisdom for man is not only to make one humanly wise, but also to lead him to fear the Lord, for this is the beginning of all wisdom (Job 28:28). True wisdom for man involves knowing the Holy One. So, men are to listen to the wisdom of God with attentive ears (Prov 2:2).[70]

As we consider these four scriptural terms, our goal in theological education becomes more explicit. While we will undoubtedly pass on knowledge to our students, we must not limit ourselves to the mere transmission of theological information. Our

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[69] Harris, "חָכָם", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*.

[70] Harris, "חָכְמָה", *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*.

desire must be to see our students exhibit understanding and skill in applying the knowledge they will receive to relationships both inside and outside the church. This will require not just a mastery of biblical material, but also of the specific context in which they will be seeking to apply the Word of God. However, the ultimate goal is to guide our students to seek wisdom through developing a personal, intimate relationship with the triune God himself. Only then will theological education be truly transformational in the lives of those we are seeking to train.

Even the most cursory survey of Scripture makes it clear that theological education was never intended to be merely an informational exercise through which a person gains additional knowledge about God. Instead the instruction given by God and about God was intended to impact the way his people conducted themselves in their daily interactions with each other as well as with outsiders. The teaching of Scripture, whether in the Old or New Testament, is always given to inform believers' practice.

Moses made this point abundantly clear to the people of Israel when he repeated the law for them before they entered the Promised Land. Seven times in the first fourteen verses of Deuteronomy 4, which serve as his introduction to the re-giving of the law, Moses emphasized that the point of this law was that it be put into practice: "And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, *that you might do them* in the land that you are going over to possess" (Deut 4.14 ESV). Then later in his discourse, Moses once again exhorted the people to put God's law into practice:

> *You shall be careful therefore to do* as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. *You shall walk in all the way* that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess. Now this is the commandment — the statutes and the rules — that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, *that you may do them* in the land to which you are going over, to possess it. (Deut 5.32-6.1 ESV)

The prophets who ministered in the time of the divided kingdom called the people to return to God — not simply to know more about him, but to live according to what God had already revealed to them. When the people refused to live according to God's law and insisted on imitating the nations around them, God promised that judgment would fall on them in order to bring them back into a pattern of right behavior toward him and their fellow man. The culmination of this judgment was the conquest and exile in the land of Babylon for 70 years, which ultimately served to cure the people of Israel of their spiritual idolatry. Yet there was still much about the true practice of God's law that Israel did not understand until Jesus came on the scene.

Jesus' teaching regularly emphasized that the correct understanding of the law was the one which led not to right answers but to right practice. He did not seek to solve all the theological dilemmas of his day, but showed people how to live in right relationship with God and man. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not give the people new information about God, but instead put the emphasis on the proper understanding of the values of the kingdom of God and how those values should inform the actions of those who would welcome God's kingdom. He insisted that knowledge which is not put into practice is of no value at all. It was in regard to this very point that he made his most acerbic critiques of the Jewish religious leaders and teachers of the law, calling them hypocrites and blind guides. It was not that their doctrine was wrong, but it was essentially useless as it did not produce right action, starting first in their own lives. This is why Jesus said, "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (Matt 23:2-3).

Both Jesus' teaching and his life modeled what right doctrine wedded with right practice would look like. At the end of his earthly life, just before his departure to heaven, Jesus left his disciples with his final command — to make disciples of all nations by baptizing them and "teaching them *to obey* everything I have commanded you" (Matt

28:20). As disciples of Christ we are not simply to teach all of Jesus' commands, but to teach obedience to all of those commands. Once again, the emphasis is that our teaching is not merely for the sake of information, but for obedience.

We find this same focus in the writings of Paul, who described himself and his colleagues as "admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ" (Col 1.28). His message was always centered on Jesus and how the believers' lives should reflect his life and teaching. The goal of Paul's teaching, therefore, was to inform the believers' practice so that they might "conduct [themselves] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil 1.27). In writing to Timothy, Paul referred to his instruction as "the teaching that accords with godliness" (1Tim 6.3). Even in the epistles in which Paul sets forth some of the most profound doctrinal information such as Romans and Ephesians, he marks a transition in his letter with the phrase, "Therefore (or then) I urge you…" and proceeds to make very practical applications of that doctrinal information to the lives of the believers to whom he is writing (Eph 4:1; Rom 12:1; cf. Tit 2:1-10).

This brief overview of Scripture shows us that the purpose and content of theological education must be to teach students the truth of the Word of God while assuring its application in their own lives and ministries. The clear witness of both testaments of Scripture is that theological education is never given for the sake of mere knowledge, but to produce right action — specifically manifested in love for God and love for one's neighbor. Jesus said that these were the two greatest commandments under which the entire Old Testament could be subsumed (Matt 22.34-40). Paul taught Timothy that this love was at the very heart of sound teaching and that any teaching which does not aim to produce this love is ultimately useless:

> The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm (1Tim 1:5-7).

Therefore, if we are to offer a truly biblical theological education, we must teach in a way that produces an impact on students' behavior — both in their lives and in their ministries — as the primary aim of any program of theological education which we would undertake. Theological education must be transformational and not merely informational.

The people and context of theological education

Having understood the why and what of theological education, we now turn to the questions of who and where. Who should be involved in theological education? and Where should this education take place? In the Old Testament, the teaching of the law and the decrees of God were committed to two groups of people. First, fathers were to teach their children the commands of God throughout the course of their daily interactions (Deut 6:4-9). In this way the law of God was to be passed from generation to generation as part of the normal fabric of every day life. This education was not limited to a particular place or time, but was to be given in a variety of contexts — "talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut 6.7). The second group who taught the people God's law was the priests/Levites. As the religious leaders of the people of Israel, the priests functioned as both the practitioners and the instructors of the law (2 Kin 12:2; 2 Chr 35:3; Neh 8:7,9). Little information is given in Scripture regarding the context in which this teaching took place, but Scripture records it as common practice for the priests of God to be the teachers of the people of God, even though many eventually taught falsely and turned the people away from God (Jer 18:18; Eze 22:26; Mic 3:11).

During Israel's exile, throughout the inter-testamental period, and into the time of Christ, we find that much of the theological education for the people of Israel took place

in the context of the synagogue.[71] Since the temple had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, the Jews of the exile gathered together to discuss the law in an assembly called a synagogue. In this context, due to the absence of the temple and the sacrificial system, the priests of the old, sacrificial system were functionally replaced by the rabbi, a Hebrew word signifying “my master” or “my teacher”. Their purpose was to continue teaching the people of Israel the law of God. Some rabbis served as itinerant teachers who traveled from one place to another assembling the people to teach them the law of God. It is in this context of an itinerant rabbi that we can understand the ministry of Jesus. A reading of the Gospels gives evidence that Jesus’ teaching was not limited to a building but, in a fulfillment of Deuteronomy 6, also happened as they sat in houses or walked along the road.

After the death and resurrection of Christ, the apostles continued to teach “the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2) to all those who followed Jesus. In the early days of the church, the believers assembled to be taught privately in houses as well as in public places such as the temple courts and the Jewish synagogues. As the church grew and spread throughout the Roman world, Paul and Barnabas made the Jewish synagogues their base of operation, usually speaking first in the synagogues in whatever city they went (Acts 13:46; 17:2), publicly teaching and proving the message of Jesus Christ from the Scripture. They also taught the disciples of Jesus privately, exhorting them in their faith and encouraging them how to flesh out the law of Christ in their daily interactions with others (Acts 18:7; 19:9; 20:20).

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[71] According to the definition of “συναγωγή” in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (ed. Geoffrey Bromily, Eerdmans, 1985), in the LXX the primary sense of the term synagogue refers to an assembly or gathering of people and not to the building or place where the gathering took place. This term is also used to refer to the collecting of taxes, bringing in a harvest, heaping up stones, gathering of a crowd, and the swarming of bees. It is not until the New Testament that the word synagogue took on a double meaning — referring not only to the assembly of people but also to the building where the assembly took place as Judaism spread throughout the known world.

Scriptural conclusions regarding theological education

Upon examining the process of transmission of theological truth in the Bible, we can conclude that theological education took place in the assembly of God's people and was assured by the spiritual leaders of that assembly. These spiritual leaders were not only instructors but also practitioners of the faith. For this reason we contend that in our era, theological education should be centered in the context of the church, the assembly of God's people, and should be assured by the spiritual leaders of those assemblies, notably the pastors/elders.[72] These practitioners and instructors of the faith must ensure that, in providing theological education, they are reaching the heads, hearts, and hands of their students by ensuring that theological education is not divorced from the ministry context. In doing so, they will be equipping them with practical truth for local church ministry and not simply with academic theory.

Maintaining that theological education should flow out of the context of the local church implies that Bible schools should exist as an extension of local churches and should be designed to serve those churches rather than existing as independent entities which are served by local churches. This is not primarily a question of location but of priority; a Bible school does not necessarily have to be housed in a local church, but it must submit to the authority of a local church or churches. Additionally, theological training schools should exist to serve and advance the agenda of the local church(es) rather than expecting the churches to advance the agenda of the Bible school. Although many of those who lead and/or teach in Bible schools may have advanced diplomas indicating a higher degree of theological training than those who lead the churches, this does not mean that the Bible school should dominate or impose upon the local

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[72] While we greatly value the impact of theological schools around the world over the past several centuries, Jesus promised his disciples that he would build his *church* (Mat 16:18). Since the day of Pentecost the church is and must be the primary means through which God is accomplishing his work in the world. Scott Moreau noted "It is fascinating that the [formal] mode of learning most favored in Western settings, and typically most favored by Western Christians, has such little foundation in the Bible" (A. Scott Moreau, *Contextualizing the Faith: A Holistic Approach*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018, p 70).

church(es). If theological education is to flow out of the local church, then the church must be the master and the training institution the servant. Lois McKinney advocates for this return to the priority of the church in theological education when she contends:

> The renewal of theological education will come about only as we focus our efforts upon the church, and make its ministry central. Education for ministry will help us to sharpen our goals, to develop appropriate curricula, to individualize instruction, to plan holistically, and to nationalize and contextualize our programs.[73]

We must not dissociate theological theory from its practice in the local church. This means that in our training we must seek to develop students who cannot only think deeply through theological issues but who can also apply their theology in their own local context. It is through the union of theology and practice in the process of theological education, which is firmly rooted in the context of the local church, that we can adequately prepare men and women for an appropriate, contextual ministry. A focus on theology alone may prepare the student to think through critical theological issues but can leave him lacking in the realm of applying the text to his daily life. On the other hand, focusing solely on practice will expose the student to the dual danger of theological error and syncretism in his ministry.

Rooting the process of theological training in the context of the local church helps to ensure that it does not become a mere theoretical, academic exercise but that it prepares the student in and for a given sociocultural context. Sadly, many of the men and women who are being trained for ministry are removed from their own local church context, at times being required to travel some distance away, even to other countries, to receive the theological training that they seek. Savage commented on the unintended consequence of this type of training when he observed that “time and again graduating students have returned enthusiastically to their regions, with real and great vision for the future. Sad to say they are now foreigners! Their people suspect them, detest their

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[73] McKinney, “Why Renewal is Needed in Theological Education,” p 9.

'foreignness' and finally reject them."[74] While we must admit that in some cases a prolonged absence from the local church is necessary in order for a student to receive a well-founded theological education, this cannot be seen as the ideal scenario for a man or woman who wishes to be trained in solid theology that is to be applied in the context of their local church. For this reason, as much as is humanly possible, we should seek to integrate theological education with ministerial training.

In her article on the need for renewal in theological education, Lois McKinney correctly identifies and addresses these challenges. She affirms that "the elitist, professional pastors who emerge from some of our theological institutions are the antithesis of the servant-leaders the churches need"[75] and emphasizes the need for theological education to be focused on the church and on training men to be models in their ministry. However, McKinney advocates a dichotomy between "ministry education" and "theological education," which runs the risk of disconnecting theology from practical ministry.

> "Ministry education is not to be confused with theological education. Theological education prepares scholars who develop and extend theological disciplines. Ministry education prepares servant-leaders for the church. Both theologians and ministers are needed. The problem arises when we fail to distinguish between the two in the educational programs we develop. Excellence in biblical and theological disciplines may be taught in an academic setting. Excellence in ministry must be modeled within a committed Christian community."[76]

Theology, however, cannot be developed in a vacuum; it must be examined and refined in the context of the local church if it is to touch the issues that people in the local assemblies face in their daily lives. Ministers in the African church need to be good theologians, although they do not necessarily need to be trained as formal scholars if

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[74] Savage, "A Bold Move for More Realistic Theological Training," p 4.

[75] McKinney, "Why Renewal is Needed in Theological Education", p 6.

[76] Ibid., p 8.

their primary ministry is to be caring for the flock. Alternately, African scholars who will produce theological reflections for the African church must not sit in proverbial "ivory towers" and reflect on theoretical issues of theology which have no connection to the lives of the people for whom they are thinking and writing. Theological reflection cannot be divorced from the life of the church.[77] This is especially true when teaching theology in an international context, which is why we insist that theological education must be contextualized for each individual setting. The best way for that contextualization to take place is through national pastor/teachers who deeply understand their cultural context and who conduct theological and ministerial training within the local church.

We cannot imagine that Western theological educators can adequately address the contextual issues facing international local churches simply by bringing students into Western, academic classrooms and teaching them theology as if it were a purely separate, academic exercise. Edgar Elliston makes a pertinent observation on this point:

> The formal or schooling approach to theological education ... is typically isolated from the "real life" of the community where it is located and from the community where the students will ultimately serve. ... It provides an opportunity for advanced theoretical considerations in a teacher-centered, hierarchical context. The goal of "academic excellence" is sought sometimes as an end in itself without involvement in the community to be served or in the lives of the students.[78]

Perry Shaw further notes that in many Western-model theological schools "the emphasis all too often is on the delivery of vast quantities of biblical, theological, and missiological information rather than on modeling the Christian life."[79] It is little wonder

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[77] McKinney rightly stresses the point that theological education should not force all students into the same pastoral mold. However, she creates a false dichotomy when she tries to separate theological education from ministry. We maintain that the goal of all theological education is to prepare students for ministry, varied though those ministries may be.

[78] Edgar Elliston, "Inter-Cultural Leadership Development" in *Unto the Uttermost*, Doug Priest, ed., Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1984, p 284-88.

[79] Perry Shaw, "The Hidden Curriculum of Seminary Education", *Journal of Asian Mission*, 2006, p 30-31.

that many seminary graduates have a difficult time applying what they have learned in the classroom in their local churches. Rather than dividing the church and the academy, we should instead seek to maintain their unity as Paul did when he referred to the role of pastor/teacher in speaking of the gifts which Christ gave to the church (Eph 4.11).

The local church in Africa is particularly crucial to theological education endeavors in that it can help determine the needs of the cultural context in which the students are or will be serving. Theological education in Africa should not be producing cookie-cutter pastor/theologians who all dress, speak, and think in the same specialized way. Instead, local churches need to work in conjunction with theological training schools to delineate the necessary knowledge and competencies that a trained minister should have in their particular sociocultural context. This will allow the theological schools to ensure that they are contextualizing their training of men and women for service in the specific context of the local churches that they are trying to serve. It is not enough to simply fill students heads with biblical knowledge if they do not have the understanding, skill, and wisdom to apply that knowledge to their particular context.

The importance of the integration of the more theoretical aspects of biblical content and the practical aspects of cultural context in theological education can be illustrated by considering a railroad track.[80] A railroad track consists of two parallel steel rails which are laid side by side. These rails are joined together at regular intervals by railroad ties to which the rails are anchored. Each rail must run parallel to the other rail if the train is to make progress along the track, since the train is incapable of balancing on only one of the rails.

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[80] This illustration has been adapted from chapter 2 of James Plueddemann's book *Teaching Across Cultures: Contextualizing Education for Global Mission*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018. Plueddemann uses the illustration of a split rail fence to illustrate the linking of the top and bottom rails (representing the theoretical and the practical) by fence posts. The split rail fence, however, did not seem to be the proper metaphor to use in this instance since a fence serves to create barriers rather than facilitating progress and advancement. For this reason Plueddemann's metaphor has been changed to that of a railroad track which facilitates travel and carries the idea of moving ahead. A second consideration in changing the metaphor is that railroads are likely more well-known across the African continent than the split rail fence.

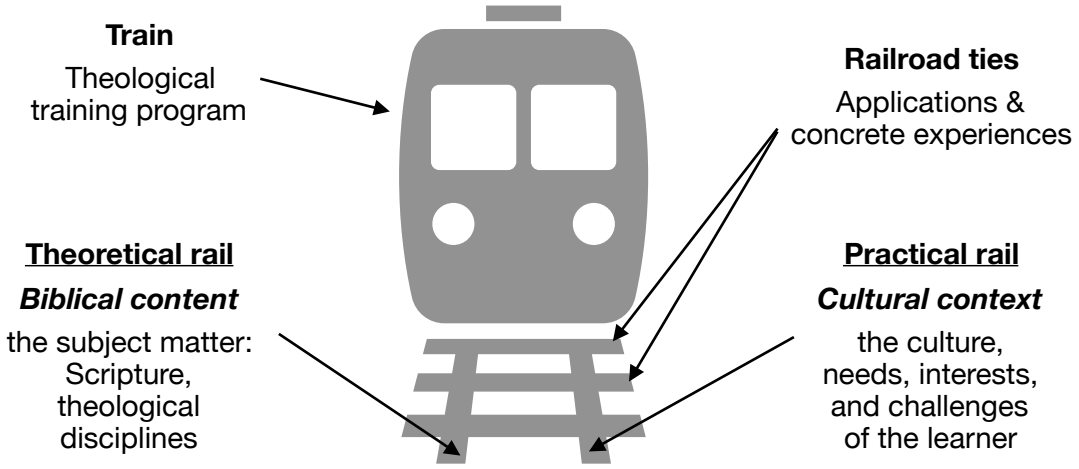

Figure 2.1: The railroad track illustration of integration in theological education

Theological education can be understood in much the same way. The rail on the left represents the theoretical aspect or the biblical content of theological education — the subject matter, passage of Scripture, or theological discipline being studied. The rail on the right represents the practical aspect or the cultural context of theological education — the culture, needs, interests and challenges of the learner. The railroad ties which join the two rails together represent the applications and concrete experiences which link the biblical content with the cultural context. Together these rails and ties form the track on which the train of theological training runs. In theological education, if the theoretical and practical "rails" are not running parallel to one another the "train of training" will quickly go off the tracks and grind to a halt. Balanced theological education requires more than the rail of biblical content; it cannot run without the second rail of cultural context. However, simply laying two rails parallel to one another is not sufficient to create an operational railroad track. Just as the two rails of a railroad track must be linked to one another by placing railroad ties at regular intervals in order to maintain the proper distance between the two rails, so it is with theological education. The biblical content and the cultural context must regularly be linked to one another through

contextual applications and concrete experiences in order to provide a balanced track upon which the train of theological training can make progress. Additionally, in the same way that a railroad track must be regularly inspected for flaws which would cause derailment, any program of theological education should also be regularly evaluated to ensure that the rails of biblical content and cultural context upon which the train of training moves ahead are structurally sound and well connected to each other.

What do we mean by contextualization?

Much has been written in recent missiological literature regarding the importance of contextualization, yet despite the popularity of the concept, evangelicals have still not arrived at a consensus regarding the definition of the term. For this reason the word contextualization remains somewhat ambiguous and has even become a subject of much consternation in certain circles. In order to obtain some clarity regarding the idea of contextualization, we will examine its historical origins, propose a definition of contextualization, and examine the biblical basis for the practice.

The history of the term contextualization

Much of the debate surrounding contextualization stems from its origins in the Theological Education Fund (TEF) of the International Missionary Council (IMC) which was part of the World Council of Churches (WCC) during the early 1970s. TEF's goal was to rethink their methods of theological education in order to produce "a real encounter between the student and the Gospel in terms of his own forms of thought and culture, and to a living dialogue between the church and its environment."[81] The origins of the idea of contextualization were "rooted in dissatisfaction with traditional models of

[81] *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund (1970-77)*, Bromley, England: Theological Education Fund, 1972, p 13.

theological education"[82] and a desire to transform theological education in a way which was more fitting to the international contexts in which it was being carried out. Shoki Coe, who is credited with coining the term "contextualization" and who was the leader of these discussions within the TEF, "had long been preoccupied with the observation that 'in trying to improve the levels of our theological education we are in fact *uncritically repeating* and *imitating* the particular pattern which we happened to inherit.'"[83] Unfortunately, around the same time that the idea of contextualization was finding its awakening, the WCC began the journey of reevaluating some of its theological positions which ultimately lead them to reject the inspiration, accuracy, and authority of the Bible to which evangelicals unequivocally hold. This subsequently cast a great deal of suspicion within evangelical circles on the idea of contextualization and the way it was being fleshed out by the WCC. Some even concluded that the word itself "was already so tainted by liberal presuppositions and so tarnished with misunderstanding and confusion that it should be laid to rest."[84] Overall, there was concern that the idea of contextualization would undermine the authority of Scripture and lead to compromise and syncretism.[85] In many ways contextualization became the evangelical boogeyman that was out to get those who wandered too far from the line of acceptable Western mission practice.

Despite considerable opposition, the idea of contextualization ultimately persisted in evangelical circles; however, a consensus has yet to be reached as to a standard definition of contextualization and the finer nuances of the way in which it should be

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[82] David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models*, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000, p 29.

[83] C H Hwang (Shoki Coe) quoted in Wilbert Shenk "The Missionary Encounter with Culture since the Seventeenth Century," in *Appropriate Christianity ed. Charles Kraft*, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005, p 46.

[84] Bruce Flemming quoted in Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, p 33.

[85] Harvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology and Mission in Trialogue,* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Books, 1984, p 176-177.

practiced, especially in conjunction with the inspiration and authority of Scripture. Over the past several decades, much discussion has taken place among evangelicals regarding the proper balance between the priority of Scripture and the adaptation of the gospel message to the receptor culture. Many evangelicals speak of contextualization as the shaping of the message of the gospel to people of other cultures, but few of them can agree on where the line should be drawn or how to answer the question “How far is too far?”.

In his 1978 article on contextualization, Charles Kraft spoke to the crux of this dilemma in the debate regarding contextualization in evangelical circles:

> Evangelicals believe that the Bible must be interpreted in its original context. Evangelical scholars devote their time and energy to understanding the original linguistic and cultural contexts in which God revealed himself to the original authors and in which they recorded his revelation. But the task of interpretation is not complete when the original materials are understood by the scholar. The message that God communicated in those ancient times and places must be interpreted in such a way that it is properly understood and responded to by contemporary people in contemporary times and places. … Some might feel that the intensive investigations of generations of Western theologians must surely have produced by now a once-for-all set of theological understandings that can simply be passed on from culture to culture. Those of us who have been involved in contextualizing Christian theology in non-Western cultures have not, however, found this position to be entirely accurate. … The contextualization of Christian theology is, therefore, not simply the passing on of a "Product" that has been developed once for all in Europe or America. It is, rather, the imitating of the process that the early apostles went through. Since the materials from which the theologizing is done are the same biblical materials, the essential message will be the same. The formulation of that message and the relative prominence of many of the issues addressed will, however, differ from culture to culture.[86]

The difficulty that accompanies this process is that, more often than not, the gospel messenger does not realize the degree to which his interpretation of Scripture is bound by his own theological presuppositions which are born out of his evangelical cultural context. As evangelical scholars, we must be careful not to impose our own

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[86] Charles Kraft, “The Contextualization of Theology,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol 14, No 1, January 1978, p 32-34.

culture-bound understanding of Scripture upon believers in a different cultural context. History has shown that the line between contextualization and syncretism can be quite fine indeed and largely depends on one's perspective — one person's syncretism may very well be another person's contextualization. Eugene Heideman speaks of the danger of Western missionaries using certain terms in the process of contextualization, describing them as "power words" which can be used, especially by Western missionaries and theological leaders, to express approval or disapproval of practices deemed by Western missionaries to be outside of the bounds of orthodox Christianity.

> The use of these words can call up powerful emotions, limit discussion, and reinforce or undercut traditional authority. As commonly used, they function on the boundary line between heresy and orthodoxy, with a strong suspicion that syncretists have crossed the line into heresy while contextualists have enabled people to experience new creativity and depth in their faith. They are, however, dangerous words. Just underneath the surface, one often discovers traces of neo-colonialism, racism, and oppression in their use … They can easily be heard as power words, enabling those who use them to maintain benevolent theological control on behalf of orthodox Christian truth, making sure that the younger Christians do not fall into errors which were once made in the West.[87]

While we understand and respect the desire to prevent younger believers from falling into the same errors of past generations, we cannot presume that we as outsiders know best how the gospel should be presented in a foreign culture. Western missions cannot afford to ignore or minimize the cultures into which we desire to bring the gospel lest we run the risk of presenting a message that has no impact on our listeners in their own sociocultural context. We must first enter these cultures as learners before we attempt to enter them as teachers. Darrell Whiteman echoes this sentiment in his editorial from the January 1997 volume of the *Missiology*:

> Although the need to contextualize the gospel is obvious, in actual practice it is very difficult to do. Blinded by our own ethnocentrism and ecclesiastical

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[87] Eugene Heideman, "Syncretism, Contextualization, Orthodoxy, and Heresy," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol 25, No 1, Jan 1997, p 38-40.

> hegemony, it is very difficult to cultivate the art of listening and learning from those different from ourselves. But in a spirit of humility this is a fundamental requirement for contextualization.[88]

In our efforts to contextualize as evangelical theological educators, we must never accept sacrificing the authority of the Scriptures to speak into and correct errors in any given culture. Yet we also must not remain so ignorant of our own cultural presuppositions that we transmit them into other cultures as if they were biblical truth. This is a fine line that western theological educators must walk delicately. A few years after the coining of the term "contextualization" in the early 1970s, Harvie Conn drew attention to this very fact:

> The traditional evangelical hermeneutic rightly confesses that without the norm of Scripture, the Christian faith runs the risk of losing itself in the concrete situation. The new dimension of covenant contextualization adds that without the concrete situation, the Christian faith runs the risk of losing itself in cultural irrelevancy or ethnocentricity.[89]

The ignorance of Western theological educators in respect to their own cultural biases has led many efforts of theological education across the continent of Africa into the cultural irrelevance of which Conn spoke. Based on research conducted by the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) at the end of the twentieth century, John Jusu observed that "the prevailing non-African models of training were so steeped in recycling content and so low in responding to context, that they were inadequate for emerging African training needs."[90] Again, this is not to say that theological truth is not being taught in Western style theological schools in Africa, but often it is being taught in

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[88] Darrell Whiteman, "Editorial: Contextualizing the Gospel," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol 25, No 1, Jan 1997, p 4.

[89] Harvie Conn, "Contextualization: A New Dimension for Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Jan 1978. https://missionexus.org/contextualization-a-new-dimension-for-cross-cultural-hermeneutic/ consulted 08 Oct 2019.

[90] John Jusu, "Partnering Together to Deepen the African Church," Equipping Christian Leaders, October 18, 2019, https://www.entrust4.org/post/ecl-partnering-together.

such a way that does not make that truth relevant to the context in which it is taught.[91] James Nkansah-Obrempong notes that "Theological ideas and theological formulation become more fruitful and relevant if they reflect the thought forms of the recipient's culture. True theological reflection emerges as we construct theology by using metaphors, ideas, and concepts that form the central core of values in a culture"[92] rather than transposing Western cultural concepts into the African context.

Instead of simply recycling Western content in the African context, Western theological educators must continually reexamine their efforts in theological education in order to strike a just balance between scriptural authority and contextual adaptation. In his 2003 address at the ICETE International Consultation for Theological Educators, Larry McKinney presented a pertinent observation:

> While theological educators must not put culture ahead of Christ, the wisdom of cultural sensitivity cannot be ignored. Educationally, one should always begin with students' needs according to their context. Curriculum development theorists and academicians have emphasized that societal context is one of the vital considerations in the establishment of educational programs.[93]

The International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) further highlights the importance of contextualizing theological education in their "Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education."

> Our programmes of theological education must be designed with deliberate reference to the contexts in which they serve. We are at fault that our curricula so often appear either to have been imported whole from abroad, or

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[91] Many theological educators from the West who come to Africa to teach will teach on the latest theological issues that are *à la mode* in the West, but which have little to no bearing on the African context.

[92] James Nkansah-Obrempong, "The Contemporary Theological Situation in Africa: An Overview," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol 32, No 2 (2007), p 144-45.

[93] Larry McKinney, "Evangelical Theological Education: Implementing Our Own Agenda." ICETE International Consultation for Theological Educators, High Wycombe, UK, 2003. https://icete.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/0-03-McKinney-Our-Own-Agenda.pdf consulted 08 Oct 2019.

> to have been handed down unaltered from the past. The selection of courses for the curriculum, and the content of every course in the curriculum, must be specifically suited to the context of service. To become familiar with the context in which the biblical message is to be lived and preached is no less vital to a well-rounded programme than to become familiar with the content of that biblical message. Indeed, not only in what is taught, but also in structure and operation our theological programmes must demonstrate that they exist in and for their specific context, in governance and administration, in staffing and finance, in teaching styles and class assignments, in library resources and student services. This we must accomplish, by God's grace.[94]

Evangelical theological educators must come to the same realization that the ICETE Manifesto makes explicit in their statement — that understanding the context into which the biblical message is being brought is just as important as the understanding the content of the biblical message itself. We must become equally adept at exegeting cultural context as we are at exegeting the biblical text. Only then will we begin to appropriately contextualize theological education for the African context.

Toward a definition of contextualization

In speaking of contextualization, we will out of necessity limit the discussion to its application in the realm of theological education and intentionally side step questions of contextualization that relate to other domains such as evangelism and discipleship (i.e. insider movements, church planting movements, etc.) or Bible translation. Given that the term "contextualization" grew out of the concern of the TEF to rethink its methods of theological education in global contexts, it is only appropriate that we return to examine the need for contextualization in this domain. For the purpose of this discussion, we will also limit our discussion of contextualization to examining theological education in the African context.

But before we seek to apply the principles of contextualization to theological education efforts in the African context, it will be helpful to propose a basic definition of contextualization as a base from which to launch our discussions. The word

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[94] "ICETE Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education" as found at https://icete.info/resources/manifesto/ accessed December 26, 2019.

"contextualization" itself leads us to speak of placing or studying something (in this case theological education) in its context (the continent of Africa). The late Nigerian theologian Byang Kato provides a general sense of the term when he defines contextualization as "making concepts or ideals relevant in a given situation."[95] Charles Kraft further narrows the focus by describing it as "the process of learning to express genuine Christianity in socioculturally appropriate ways."[96] While these definitions are helpful in grasping the basis of contextualization, Dean Flemming's definition will better enable us to understand the process involved in contextualization:

> I take contextualization, then, to refer to the dynamic and comprehensive process by which the gospel is incarnated within a concrete historical or cultural situation. This happens in such a way that the gospel both comes to authentic expression in the local context and at the same time prophetically transforms the context. Contextualization seeks to enable the people of God to live out the gospel in obedience to Christ within their own cultures and circumstances.[97]

In this definition Flemming highlights several important realities. First, contextualization is a process. It is not a simple, pre-fabricated solution that can be applied to a complex problem, but rather an ongoing work that requires continual evaluation and dependence on the Holy Spirit. Second, this process is qualified by the terms *dynamic* and *comprehensive*, which speaks to the ever-changing and broad nature of the process that is to be applied to all the various facets of a certain context. Third, this process concerns the fleshing out of the gospel. It is not enough to simply teach theological truths, but they must be made to live in the given context. Fourth, contextualization does not take place in an abstract void but must be worked out in a concrete, historico-cultural context. This means that the truth of the living Word of God

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[95] Byang Kato cited in Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, p 33.

[96] Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, p 376.

[97] Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2005, p 19.

must be fleshed out in the realities of a particular situation in a way that both fits and transforms the context in which it is being lived.

Western missionaries and theologians must also take into account that the process of contextualization must begin with the gospel messenger himself. The person who wishes to contextualize the gospel in another culture must first wrestle with his own cultural presuppositions and come to grips with how his own culture has shaped his understanding of Scripture.[98] This is our goal when we speak of contextualizing theological education in the African context, for, if we do not first realize how our own Western culture has affected us, we will subconsciously see our culture as superior and unwittingly transmit certain of our own cultural values as we seek to train others for ministry in the African context.[99] Unfortunately, this has been the pattern of many Western missionaries serving in Africa, as Chopo Mwanza has observed:

> In my conversations with Western missionaries, very few of them adjust to the culture they go to minister in. Many struggle with cross-cultural relationships and ministry. Therefore it is not uncommon to find Western missionaries who serve in Africa living in a Western bubble, insulating themselves from African culture. This fails to develop meaningful, sincere relationships with the local people they minister to and work with. Conversely their African gospel workers will not be forthright and vulnerable with their Western counterparts. This invariably leads to all kinds of relational and ministerial problems, even breakdowns. An unfortunate result of ignorance about African culture is the tendency to label everything African as evil. Consciously, or unconsciously, Western missionaries deem their own culture both superior and biblical. This is not only wrong, for the outcome is ministries and churches in the depths of Africa that appear to have been transplanted from New York or London. Sadly, this encourages the false notion that

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[98] In their book *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, Randolph and O'Brien highlight the importance of understanding that we come to the Scripture with certain lenses which affect how we see what we see when we approach the Bible.

[99] When we speak of "how our own Western culture has affected us," we must realize that the term culture as used here refers to a complex layering of multiple subcultures that are comprised of, among other factors, our religious, social, and educational upbringing. Two people from the same national culture may differ greatly from one another due to differences in their religious upbringing (or lack thereof), the social stratum from which they hail, and the educational base that their thinking is built upon. For this reason each person must critically examine his/her own individual perspectives, presuppositions, and prejudices to see how the conglomeration of his various sub-cultures has shaped his thinking.

> Christianity is a white man or Western religion. But when Western missionaries are humble enough to listen, learn and build sincere, transparent and healthy relationships amid diversity, they will display the power of the gospel before the watching world.[100]

This being the case, we will argue that contextualization is not something that we do to the gospel, but rather something that we do to ourselves. Contextualization is adapting our own way of thinking and speaking — our preferred methods of teaching and communicating — so that they will better fit the context into which we are seeking to teach the truth of the gospel. With this understanding, we can define contextualization as ***the dynamic process by which the gospel messenger adapts his presentation of God's truth to most appropriately fit the context into which he is speaking without altering the meaning of the message that God has communicated to man***. This definition will show itself in the biblical examples of contextualization and will shape our discussion of contextualizing our methods of theological education across the African context.

Biblical examples of contextualization

While contextualization has become a buzz-word in recent years, we can by no means claim that it is a new practice. Although neither the term "context" nor any of its cognates (contextual, contextualize, contextualization, etc.) are found on the pages of Scripture, the practice of contextualization can be observed throughout the biblical record. The process is first seen as a divine activity which is then replicated by God's servants who spread God's message, especially the Apostle Paul. We will begin by examining the divine example of contextualization before investigating its use by God's servants.

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[100] Chopo Mwanza, "To Western Missionaries: From an African Pastor," The Gospel Coalition Africa blog, https://africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/western-missionaries-african-pastor/, accessed January 11, 2020.

The divine example of contextualization

We see evidences of contextualization as far back as the Garden of Eden when "the infinite God created finite man and then communicated with him in 'finite' ways, i.e., ways which allowed man to internalize and live out God's message."[101] In fact, we can say that contextualization has been divinely modeled for us in ways that we would do well to imitate. In creating Adam and Eve and entering into fellowship with them, God modeled contextualization for us in that he came to them ("walking in the garden in the cool of the day" Gen 3:8) and communicated with them on their turf and in their terms. This process did not in any way change the character of God. He continued to be infinite and limitless, yet he adapted himself to Adam and Eve's situation for the purpose of communicating his truth to them in a way that would profoundly mark their lives. The means by which God communicated with Adam and Eve was not simply through teaching them propositional truth about himself but rather by entering into a relationship with them. Relationship, then, is the critical element which forms the foundation for the process of contextualization.

God created man as a relational being. In the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2, the first time that something was declared to be "not good" was when God said "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2.18) before creating woman as a companion for him. But the relational nature of mankind is evident in even greater fashion when we consider the fact that both man and woman were created in the image of the Triune God who himself is a relational being. Enoch Wan notes that "If we want to understand life, we must understand relationship. The starting point for that understanding is God who is Relational."[102]

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[101] Engel, "Contextualization in Missions," p 86.

[102] Enoch Wan and Mark Hedinger, *Relational Missionary Training*, Skyforest, CA: Urban Loft Publishers, 2017, p 19.

Scripture testifies to the inter-relationality of the Triune God who enjoyed perfect communion and fellowship among the three persons of the Trinity long before God created man and entered into a relationship with him. In examining the relationship within the Trinity, Wan emphasizes the corresponding poles of equality/mutuality and hierarchy/subordination. On the one hand the equality/mutuality means that the members of the Trinity are "mutually involved in personal and dynamic ways"[103] with each other in that there is an equality in their essence and that they are united in purpose and action. On the other hand, the element of hierarchy/subordination "has to do with the roles that are assumed by the various Persons. … this reality is seen for instance in the submission of the Son to the Father's will and his obedience, even to the point of death on the cross (Phil 2:1-8)."[104] These qualities and functions of relationship within the Trinity help us to understand the way in which we humans should function in our relationships with others.

Not only is contextualization evidenced in the divine activity of creation, but it can also be seen in God's interactions with mankind. Rather than analyzing each individual case, we will take God's interactions with Abraham as an illustration. When God first called Abraham and made promises to him (Gen 12), he reached into the context of the region of ancient Mesopotamia in which Abraham was living. Abraham understood the norms, expectations, and tactics of his cultural environment and acted according to them. We see him telling Sarah to say that she was his sister when they went down to Egypt (Gen 12) and then again with Abimelek in the Negev (Gen 20), giving a tithe of the spoils of war to Melchizedek (Gen 14), taking his wife's maid Hagar to conceive a child by her (Gen 16), welcoming the three men who were passing on their way to Sodom (Gen 18), making a treaty with Abimelek in regard to the land and wells which he dug (Gen 21), concluding a property deal with the Hittites for the cave in which to bury Sarah

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[103] Ibid., p 23.

[104] Ibid., p 24-25.

(Gen 23), and sending his servant back to his homeland to find a wife for his son Isaac (Gen 24). Although some of these actions may seem to be ethically questionable and even to demonstrate a lack of faith in the Lord, especially when considered in the light of further biblical revelation, it is instructive that God never reproached Abraham for any of these actions. Instead he continued to reveal himself to Abraham, to reassure him with more explicit promises, and at times even to test his faith.

Richard Engle concludes that "God dealt with Abraham within his cultural context, and his faith matured within the same context."[105] Not only was Abraham a product of his own culture, but God also dealt with Abraham within the framework of his own cultural context. For example when God made a covenant with Abraham (Gen 15), he did so using the ancient form of a suzerainty treaty in which animals were divided in two and the parties concluding the covenant walked through the divided pieces.[106] Although God could have simply reiterated the promise to Abraham that he first made in Gen 12, he reassured Abraham using a cultural form with which he would have been familiar and which doubtless communicated more to Abraham in his day than it does to us in our own (cf. Jer 34:18).

God continued to reveal himself to mankind contextually throughout the centuries, but we have the most clear example of contextualization as a divine activity in the incarnation. John describes this incarnation in his gospel by saying, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us … No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (John 1:14, 18). The Greek verb ἐξηγήσατο, translated "has made him known," is the same word from which we derive the term "exegesis." Jesus fully exegeted the Father for us by taking on human flesh and living among us. He did not just

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[105] Engel, "Contextualization in Missions," p 92.

[106] Frank Gaebelein, ed., *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990, electronic text by OakTree Software.

give us propositional truths about God but showed us what He is like in the context of a human culture and human relationships. John further emphasizes this in the introduction to his first epistle when he says, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at, and our hands have touched” (1John 1:1).

Jesus in human flesh was the fullest, most contextual exegesis of God. He grew, learned, and developed relationships (Luke 2:52) in order to flesh out God’s message in the most contextual way possible. Throughout the four gospels we see a multitude of evidences of the message of God (“the Word”) revealed in the first century Jewish context, thereby illustrating that God is committed to contextualization.[107] John highlights this beautifully by giving us consecutive narratives of the interactions of Jesus with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin (John 3) and the immoral Samaritan woman (John 4). The details and approaches of these two encounters are diametrically opposed, yet we see Jesus masterfully shaping each encounter to present his identity and mission in a way that addressed the worldview of each — adapting the presentation of his message to a different audience while communicating the same essential message.

Human examples of contextualization

However, Jesus was not the only one we find practicing contextualization in the pages of Scripture. Some of the most effective servants of God serve as great examples of the importance of contextualizing their message. Joseph, after being sold into slavery by his brothers, adapted himself thoroughly to the Egyptian context not only by taking an Egyptian wife and and Egyptian name, but also by becoming like the Egyptians in his

[107] The very fact that the Holy Spirit inspired four different gospel accounts, written by authors from different sociocultural backgrounds and contextualized for different audiences, so that all would receive the good news of Jesus in a message that was adapted to their sociocultural context, is another proof of the priority of contextualization in the communication of the gospel.

look and his speech. His transformation was so complete that his brothers did not even recognize him when they came down to Egypt years later to buy grain (Gen 41-45). In Acts 7, Stephen describes Moses as "being educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" and "powerful in speech and actions" (Act 7:22). God sovereignly used Moses' Egyptian upbringing to equip him to deliver God's message of deliverance to Pharaoh, yet he also had to prepare Moses through forty years of looking after sheep in Midian so he would be ready to shepherd his people as they left Egypt and wandered in the desert. In another case God chose Daniel who was from the royal family and the nobility in Israel and sent him to Babylon to serve in the king's palace. God used this experience of being taken from home and family and being taught the language and literature of the Babylonians to prepare Daniel not only to give God's prophetic message to his people Israel but also to bring foreign kings to the realization that "the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth" (Dan 4.32). God placed Joseph, Moses, and Daniel into undesirable and uncomfortable situations so that they would be able to communicate his message contextually both to God's own people as well as to those of other cultures.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of human contextualization found in the Bible is seen in the life of the Apostle Paul. As Joseph, Moses, and Daniel before him, Paul was a true multicultural man, having been born and raised in the Greco-Roman world in Tarsus but trained at the feet Gamaliel, one of the leading Jewish rabbis of his day.[108] Paul championed the cause of contextualization not only through applying it in his own ministry but also by waging a battle to prevent the Gentile Christians from being forced to adapt to the Jewish cultural and religious system.

Paul expressed his *modus operandi* for a contextual ministry in his first epistle to the Corinthians: "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I

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[108] In the examples of Joseph, Moses, Daniel, and Paul we can see one potential benefit of someone who has received training in a culture other than his home culture. Becoming multi-cultural enables a person to see the world with a broader perspective and even allows him/her to more objectively evaluate his own culture as from an outsider's perspective. This multicultural perspective becomes indispensable in the process of contextualization.

might save some" (1Cor 9:22). While Paul understood the liberty he had in Christ to live according to his own personal preferences and convictions (which were informed by personal, direct revelation from God!), he preferred to "put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ" (1Cor 9:12). He explained that when he was among the Jews he adapted himself to their cultural context, including submitting to their cultural and religious laws, in order to more effectively reach the Jews. When he was in a non-Jewish context he continued to live under the law of Christ but adapted himself to the Gentile context so that his message would more effectively reach the Gentiles, through both his preaching and his lifestyle.

Even in the discourses of Paul recorded in the book of Acts we can see how Paul adapted his speech and rhetorical patterns to fit the context of those to whom he was speaking. The message of Paul to the animistic Gentiles of Lystra, which focused on the existence and identity of the Creator God as seen through the means of common grace (Acts 14), was significantly different from the more technical discourse that he gave at the Areopagus in Athens in which Paul employed philosophical arguments and quotations from secular poets (Acts 17). And both of these addresses were completely different in tone, content and even language from when Paul addressed the Jewish crowd at the Temple in Jerusalem in Hebrew/Aramaic (Acts 22).

Everywhere he went Paul consciously looked for ways to adapt his presentation of God's truth to the context, all while remaining faithful to the message. Though Paul intentionally contextualized his message, he did not allow this process to supersede the power of God in preaching the message as he wrote to the Corinthians: "When I came to you I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God … My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power" (1Cor 2.1, 4-5). While the Apostle Paul obviously understood the importance of contextualizing his message, he also realized

that it was not the primary, determining factor in the gospel equation. The purity of the gospel could never be compromised in order to make the message more palatable or gain human approval (Gal 1:8-9). However, this truth did not keep Paul from adapting the form of the message to his audience.

Paul not only modeled contextualization in his ministry but also passionately fought for its application in the face of those who wished to impose their cultural religious system upon others. Charles Kraft summarizes the conflict in these words:

> The early Greek churches were in danger of being dominated by Hebrew theology, just as many non-Western churches today are in danger of being dominated by Western theologies. God, however, led the Apostle Paul and others to struggle against the Hebrew Christians to develop a contextualized Christian theology for those who spoke Greek. In order to do this, Paul had to fight a running battle with many of the Hebrew church leaders who felt that it was the job of Christian preachers to simply impose Hebrew theological concepts on new converts (see Acts 15).[109]

In Acts 15 we read that when some Jews came from Jerusalem to Antioch saying that believers had to follow the law of Moses, Paul and Barnabas had a “sharp dispute and debate with them” (15:1-2). Ultimately this dispute would lead Paul and Barnabas to travel from Antioch to present their case before the apostles in Jerusalem. The resulting decision showed a genuine concern for both right practice and cultural sensitivity for both the Jews and the Gentiles.[110] However, the council in Jerusalem was not the end of the contextualization debate. The monocultural Jewish party wanted to insist that the Gentiles must become like them (i.e. follow their customs and rituals) in order to be considered followers of Christ, but Paul would have nothing of that argument.

We get a further glimpse into the tenor of this dispute when we read Paul’s epistle to the Galatians where he says, “We did not give in to them for a moment, *so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you*” (Gal 2:5). So strong was Paul’s

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[109] Kraft, “The Contextualization of Theology,” p 33.

[110] Engle, “Contextualization in Missions,” p 96-97.

understanding of the importance of contextualizing the gospel among the Gentiles that he linked it to the very purity of the gospel and was willing to fight vehemently for its preservation. At one point Paul even directly and publicly confronted Peter, one of the chief apostles and pillars of the early church, over this issue because Peter's actions before the Jewish believers were not matching up with his words and actions in front of the Gentile believers (Gal 2.11-21). This was particularly important because as a leader in the early church, Peter's actions had a significant impact on others as illustrated by the fact that Paul's own colleague Barnabas was "led astray" to act in a way that was not "in line with the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2.13-14). For this reason Paul could not allow this ethnic imposition by Peter to go unchallenged in the early church.

In his ministry Paul both practiced contextualization and argued for the broad acceptation of its practice as the early church spread across the Roman empire. If the contextualization of the message of the gospel was such a critical issue for Paul at the beginning of the church, should it be any less important to us in our mission efforts today? We insist, as Paul did, that proper contextualization is the key to presenting the truth of the good news of Jesus in every culture. As we now turn to consider the context of theological education on the African continent, let us hold to the importance of contextualization with the same sense of passion and urgency as the Apostle Paul in order to see how we can most effectively adapt our theological teaching in the African sociocultural context.

Chapter 3

Sociocultural, Missiological, and Educational Foundations for Contextualizing Theological Education in Africa

While mission history testifies to the need for contextualization in all mission endeavors, the most urgent domain for contextualization in the African context today (and across much of the majority world) is in the area of theological education. This is the case precisely because it is so easy for Westerners to carry out theological training in Africa without even thinking of the need for it to be contextualized. But the reality is that theological education is not a one-size-fits-all proposition where students are expected to master the same core truths irrespective of their cultural contexts. Instead, effective theological education must be contextualized by adapting and applying the truth of God's Word to the particularities of the society in which a student is living and studying.[111] In the African context, this must take place in a relational context.

This human penchant for relationships is observed in that the majority of societies in the world are labeled by anthropologists as collective societies — that is

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[111] Although we have previously highlighted the benefits of someone becoming a multicultural person through studying abroad, there are also corresponding dangers when theological students are transported to other cultures to receive theological education. Many times this training is not as effective as if the student studied in his own home context unless the foreign student is continually cognizant of the need to contextualize his theological studies to his home context. Otherwise he risks being drawn into theological discussions and preoccupations of the foreign culture in which he is studying which have little if anything to do with the issues believers face in his home culture. This can often lead to the foreign theological student becoming a Western-African hybrid and can seriously compromise the ultimate effectiveness of his ministry upon returning to his culture of origin.

This is not to say that a student from an African culture should never go to study in another country, but rather to insist that he should be made aware of the dangers that are inherent in the process. It would be wise for him (and for his sponsors) to consider if there are other viable alternatives, whether in country or elsewhere on the continent, before the student is whisked away to a completely different cultural context that he will find in the West. He should also be made aware of the need of a period of cultural re-acclimation to his birth culture at the end of his studies, especially if he has spent a long period of time away, in order to allow him to readapt to the realities of the context in which he will be living and ministering.

societies in which the group, rather than the individual, is seen as the basic and fundamental unit of society.[112] In these societies an individual's identity and worth are tied to his group. As a result, his thoughts, preferences, choices, aspirations, actions, and even his well-being are all intimately connected to (and therefore subject to) those of the group(s) with which he identifies. Each individual in a collective society is expected to work cooperatively for the advancement and honor of the group from which he derives his primary identity and worth.

Yet anthropologists acknowledge that not all societies hold to collective values. The majority of the Western world is characterized by individualism, which Hiebert describes as the belief that "each person should be an autonomous person with his or her own separate identity. … At an early age we are taught to think and choose for ourselves, given our own personal property, and encouraged to stand up for our rights."[113] Individualist societies encourage independence in both thought and action (as opposed to the interdependence of collective societies) and tend to elevate the individual over, and at times to the detriment of, the group.

Whether a society is individualist or collective, its members transmit the values and expectations of the society to the next generation. Charles Kraft observed that "every society must provide mechanisms for passing on to the young those patterns and habits considered necessary for meaningful life … This teaching and learning process starts soon after conception and is carried on intensively throughout childhood."[114] Therefore the values, beliefs, and assumptions concerning what is "right" and "normal" are deeply engrained into individuals of a given society from their early days and form the foundation on which their life and relationships are built. Any deviance from these norms is likely to be met with a mixture of bewilderment and rejection.

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[112] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, p 122.

[113] Ibid., p 122.

[114] Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, p. 274.

In our global world, these encounters with cultural deviances often come through intercultural exchanges in which members of individualist societies, operating on the norms they have assimilated, interact with others from collective societies who have a different set of norms for life and relationships. This applies not only in the worlds of international travel and business but also in the world of international theological education. As we seek to teach the truth of the gospel in a different cultural context, we must do all that we can to ensure that our own cultural particularities are not creating unnecessary obstacles to understanding God's truth. Sherwood and Judith Lingenfelter offer some pertinent advice for those involved in intercultural teaching: "good teaching in any culture will include traditional learning techniques … A teacher who wants to be a Christlike servant in a cross-cultural setting will try to make learning as context specific and real to life as possible."[115]

There are two uncritical extremes that Western educators can gravitate toward when going into an international context. The first extreme is to transport his Western education assumptions and methods along with him. The opposite extreme is to check all of his Western assumptions and methods at the door and completely adopt the assumptions and methods of the local context. For effective intercultural education to take place in the African context, a Western teacher must first come to understand the expectations and learning styles inherent in the African cultures. Only when he has grasped what is expected of him as a teacher and how his students can best learn can he know where and when to challenge those roles and learning styles in appropriate ways. Jesus himself modeled this in his ministry as he intentionally challenged the status quo from within the accepted social role of an itinerant rabbi. While he maintained the familiar form, he did not, however, imitate all of its applications. Matthew records that the crowds took particular note of this difference: "When Jesus had finished saying these

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[115] Judith and Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Teaching Cross-Culturally*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003, p 40.

things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (Mat 7:28-29).

Though it seems simple in principle, contextualizing our methods of theological education often proves to be a difficult prospect due to the complexities of the modern African context into which theological education is being brought as well as the captivity of theological education to the traditional, Western model of education. Additionally, when Western educators fail to understand the importance of culture in education and the negative consequences of transplanting the Western educational model into Africa, it only encourages them to maintain the status quo rather than seeking to find better, more context-specific ways that theological training can be carried out across the continent.

In this chapter, we will examine these factors in order to better understand the reasons underlying the lack of contextualization in evangelical theological education throughout Africa and the importance of rectifying this problem. Understanding the sociocultural, missiological, and educational foundations for contextualizing theological education will more adequately prepare us to better address the problem plaguing theological education in Africa and the dangers inherent when traditional Western education is imposed on an African culture. Ultimately, our goal is to clarify how those who come from a Western educational system can learn to adapt their teaching styles and methods to accommodate the methods of learning in African cultures.

Understanding the African context relative to theological education

We should not imagine that we can appropriately or effectively engage in theological education in Africa without a thorough understanding of the context into which we are seeking to teach God's truth so that we can adapt our methods of teaching to fit the needs of the students. As Sherwood and Judith Lingenfelter have remarked,

> "Every training or educational situation has a cultural context of teaching and learning. … One of the first steps in teaching cross-culturally is to clarify and value the cultural distinctives of the participants. … The teacher's role is to create the most appropriate context within which students can learn. … Students will always bring their culture to the classroom. As teachers we may be tempted to impose our culture of school on those students."[116]

Analyzing a foreign culture, especially when having only limited experience in that culture, proves to be a daunting task indeed. One must start by learning to set himself outside of his own culture of origin (a difficult undertaking which requires time and open-mindedness to achieve) in order to observe the variety of worldview elements that are present in a second culture. Despite the complexity of this endeavor, it is a necessary effort to make sense of the African culture into which we bring our Western systems of theological education.

The first step in understanding another culture is to attempt to wrap one's mind around the core values, beliefs, and assumptions that make the society tick. Values refer to the attitudes that people who share a common culture hold toward a particular action or object. It is these attitudes which serve as the standard for whether something is seen as either good or bad. Beliefs are an individual's mental representations of the outside world — what they "know to be true."[117] Assumptions form the basis for both values and beliefs by defining the nature of reality. Together these elements form a cultural filter through which all communication passes and is evaluated. This is referred to as a person's worldview — how he perceives the world around him.

The African worldview and its impact on theological education

Daring to speak of "African culture" or an "African worldview" in broad strokes is a dangerous proposition since Africa is a culturally diverse continent with no universal

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[116] Ibid., p 17-18.

[117] Everett Rogers and Thomas Steinfatt, *Intercultural Communication*, Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1999, p 81-82.

understanding of the world that is shared by the entirety of its people.[118] Nevertheless, Paul Mbunga Mpindi notes that "the attentive student of the cultural texture of Africa will notice a constant, a master line that seems to govern the various cosmological systems in place."[119] Therefore, while seeking to avoid the error of reductionism, we can speak of certain generally accepted, "universal" elements which tend to characterize cultures across Africa. Before examining the various behavioral components that can be found across the African continent, it is necessary to first grasp the generalities of an African worldview.

A student's worldview has important implications for how he will learn in international theological education. We cannot, in the scope of this paper, hope to give a full treatment of the African worldview, extrapolating every individual element and contrasting it with that of the West. However, we wish to emphasize certain worldview elements which impact a student's way of seeing the world and of relating to those around him as these will have a bearing on how we approach theological training in a contextual way. The worldview of an African student is completely different from that of a Westerner and therefore must be adequately taken into account in seeking to develop a program of theological education that is more than just a "copy and paste" of the Western model of education. Archbishop Desmond Tutu provides a basic overview of some of the differences between a Western and African worldview:

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[118] Describing African culture will necessarily include generalities that do not hold true in every context. Many of the examples that are used in this section are drawn from the context of the author's experience and observations in francophone central Africa, the majority of which took in an urban setting. While we realize that these examples will not be representative of all of Africa, nevertheless in this context we have been able to observe a number of individuals, not only from the various regions of Cameroon but also from a variety of surrounding African nations. Additionally, the author's limited experiences in visiting other African nations as well as his readings on African culture are also reflected in these examples and illustrations.

[119] Paul Mbinga Mpindi, *Manuel de Morale Chrétienne en Afrique*, Cotonou, Benin: Éditions PBA, 2014, p 15. (Translation by the author).

> It is important … to note the differences in the African perception and that of the Westerner … the Westerner is largely analytical, whereas the African tends to be synthetical … the Westerner breaks things up and the other tends to see things as wholes. … The Westerner will tend to be cerebral, whereas the African gives great play to feelings. The former, particularly in his worship, may be cold and intellectual, while the latter might be emotional and warm, sticking loosely to intellectual content. The Westerner emphasizes the individual person, whereas the African will give an important place to the community. The one encourages initiative — the Western view — and is concerned about individual liberties, whereas the latter tends to stifle personal initiative for fear of being out of step with the herd. The Westerner will usually be lonely in a crowd, whereas the African comes into his own as a communal being."[120]

As we seek to develop a contextualized theological education for Africa, we must take into account the world in which the typical African student is raised[121] before coming to school to receive theological education since that world forms the foundation upon which their theological education will be built. The process of understanding the student in his social context will help theological institutions in developing a suitable curriculum for the theological education they offer. The goal of this curriculum should then be to take the student from where he is upon beginning his training to where he needs to be in order to effectively minister the gospel in his culture.[122]

In order to better understand the African worldview, we will compare and contrast the African and Western perspectives on five distinct worldview elements: comprehension of the universe, sense of identity, the role of status, concept of time, and

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[120] Desmond Tutu, "God's Kingdom of Righteousness" in proceedings of the fifteenth World Methodist Conference, Nairobi, Kenya, 1986, p 161.

[121] This "world in which the typical African student is raised" is admittedly a rapidly changing world due to the experience of urbanization and globalization. The traditional African worldview will be presented in the pages that follow, after which we will deal with the impact of urbanization and globalization to examine how it is changing not only the culture but also the worldview of many students who are seeking theological training.

[122] Robert Keyes, "Theological Education: Are We Doing the Right Things?", *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Apr 1981, p 2.

values in communication.[123] This worldview incorporates an individual's basic comprehension of life and has a profound impact upon their learning style. These elements must be understood and taken into account if we are to provide theological education which is truly adapted to the African context; therefore, for each of these elements analyzed, we will also seek to draw out certain implications of the worldview differences for contextualizing theological education for the African context.

Comprehension of the universe

In the eyes of the average Westerner, the world is regarded as a mechanical system — like a great machine that can be studied, tinkered with, adjusted, and manipulated through the use of science and technology. In this mindset, Westerners tend to see the universe as a sort of inanimate object which is to be used and capitalized on to fulfill man's needs and satisfy his desires.[124] Contrast this assumption with the African view of the world which sees the earth as one interconnected, living organism dominated by spiritual forces. In the African system of thought there is no clear division between physical and spiritual, animate and inanimate, or living and dead since everything in the world is seen to have some degree of life and force. Man relates to the forces in these realms through the mediation of the ancestors, either to harness or to thwart the power of a particular spirit or living entity.[125] Rituals, sacrifices, and gifts then

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[123] These five elements and their descriptions are the author's synthesis of several works which highlight value differences among various cultures including Geert Hofstede's *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* 2nd edition, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1997; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Global Business,* New York: McGraw Hill, 1998; Edward T. Hall's *Beyond Culture*, New York: Anchor Books, 1989; and Hiebert's *Transforming Worldviews*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. Andrea Edmundson provides a brief synthesis of these and other cultural elements which affect learning methods in the chapter entitled "The Cultural Adaptation Process (CAP) Model: Designing E-Learning for Another Culture" in her book *Globalized E-Learning Cultural Challenges*, Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing (Idea Group Inc), 2007, p 271-73.

[124] Tom Stallter, unpublished class notes on Intercultural Communication, Winona Lake, IN, Grace Theological Seminary, 2014.

[125] Karl Grebe and Wilfred Fon, *Religion Traditionnelle Africaine et Relation d'Aide*, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, Centre de Publications Évangéliques, 2000, p 3-4.

become the key to man's survival as they help to preserve the harmony in all his relationships — with the earth and its governing spirits as well as with his family, friends and acquaintances.

If this way of thinking seems utterly strange to the Western mind, it is only because we have been inculcated from infancy with a completely different view of the world. For the African, however, this is not simply the correct way to think; it is the only way. Whereas Westerners view the world as a mechanical system, a "thing" to be used, manipulated, and profited from, Africans view the world as that network of relationships in which harmony must be maintained at any cost both among the living and the dead. And while Westerners may dismiss the belief in spirits as absurd or primitive, Africans understand that spirits are real and not to be trifled with. Thus one reason that many Africans will continue to dutifully perform familial or tribal rituals even after becoming a Christian is to preserve the harmony in their relationships whether with the living family members or the departed ancestors or spirits.[126]

As Western theologians seek to train African men and women for ministry, we must come to grasp and respect the differences between our most basic conceptions of the world around us. Additionally, we must be careful not to impose our Western, mechanistic view of the world either on the text of Scripture or on those whom we are seeking to train. Instead, we must be willing to rethink some of our own assumptions regarding what is real and possible, especially in respect to the spirit world, if we wish to have a transformational ministry in the African context.[127]

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[126] While we are not advocating that African Christians should continue these tribal rituals as there are often links to the spirit world involved, it is important for Western missionaries to realize the dilemma that new African believers find themselves in and the pressure placed on them by their families to continue with these rituals for fear of disturbing harmony in the group.

[127] Maintaining an open-minded approach does not lead one to espouse the lack of absolutes, but rather ensures that we are not setting culture, neither ours nor theirs, above the text of Scripture. In the history of missions in Africa, many Western, evangelical missionaries dismissed the African's descriptions of the spirit world as impossible or sheer superstition while teaching them the "right" (Western) way of seeing things. Unfortunately, this only served to drive many practices and beliefs underground — still alive and well yet hidden from the view of Western missionaries.

Sense of identity

Recognizing this dominant assumption about the interrelatedness of the world in traditional central African societies helps to explain the dissimilarity in many of the beliefs, values, and subsequent behaviors that stem from this worldview as compared to the Western worldview. These contrasting worldviews give rise to a fundamental difference of mentality between Westerners and central Africans. The Western worldview promotes a more individualistic outlook on life wherein each individual is responsible to learn how to manipulate "the machine" to serve his own needs and desires. Although ideally an individual should also care about what happens to those around him (and often his happiness and good is tied up in that of others), the primary emphasis in the Western worldview is placed on the individual doing what is best for himself.

On the other hand, an African thinks with a much more collective mindset evaluating the impact of his every decision on his entire network of relationships — immediate and extended, living and deceased. In Africa the family forms the primary social construct. This group is not limited only to the nuclear family but includes all descendants (both living and deceased) of a common ancestor. When it has grown sufficiently large, the family can form a tribe or ethnic group. This extended family is the primary social unit to which a person belongs and from which he derives his status in society. Perhaps the greatest value within the family is unity, which must be maintained at all costs. Unity and harmony are important for the preservation of one family and their interests against the other extended families (tribes/ethnic groups) in a region. If a family is divided, they will become weak and unable to assert themselves and would therefore be subject to being oppressed or taken advantage of by larger, stronger families.[128] This helps to explain why individualism is so frowned upon, why tribalism is so deeply engrained in African societies, and why maintaining proper relationships is essential to life in Africa.

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[128] Grebe and Fon, *Religion Traditionnelle Africaine et Relation d'Aide*, p 6-7.

The underlying relational character of African society is beautifully captured by the Zambian author Choolwe Mbetwa when he writes about the communalism that is inherent to the African context:

> "A vital aspect of African culture is her social interconnectedness. Africans are fundamentally communalist … Without fear of contradiction Africans can say: all we are and all that is ours belongs to all who are ours. … To describe us as society-centered, or smarter still, sociocentric, is to describe us accurately."[129]

This quotation bears witness to the fundamentally relational nature of the African worldview — a priority which cuts across numerous elements of life that is lived in community. For an African, one's identity is better expressed as "we" rather than "I." John Mbiti describes the African relational orientation in these words:

> "In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people. Including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group."[130]

One way in which this communal identity is frequently evidenced is in the realm of personal introductions. In many cases, an African will give his family name(s) first, followed by his or her given or personal name(s). This is contrasted with Western culture in which a person usually presents himself by giving his individual name (called his "first name") first and sometimes exclusively. Even the terms "first name" and "last name" carry a subtle connotation that belies the individualistic tendencies engrained in Western culture. The collective mentality is reinforced in certain local languages that make no distinction of terms between a person's biological siblings and those of his extended

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[129] Choolwe Mbetwa, *Why Africa is Poor*, Chingola, Zambia: Merina, 2018, p 66.

[130] John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, 1969, p 108.

family or which refer to uncles or aunts as “father” and “mother”.[131] Wilfried Fon comments,

> “Our languages usually do not distinguish between brothers of the same parents and brothers of the extended family. We refer to them all by the same word. In the same way, we call any older person in our extended family ‘father’ or ‘mother.’ When asked about our origin, we usually refer to ourselves as ‘a child of a certain compound’ rather than as a child of our actual parents.”[132]

Although individual identity is indeed present in traditional African societies, it is most often a subset of the group identity. Whereas René Descartes’ famous phrase *“Je pense, donc je suis”* (“I think, therefore I am”) captures the Western, individual mindset, John Mbiti has summarized the African perspective on life with the saying, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.”[133] Due to the centrality of the family in the African way of thinking, relationships are infinitely more important than results, which is another element that seems extremely foreign to the typical, task-oriented Westerner. The fundamental assumption that everything in the world is linked means that relationships must be of primary concern even at the expense of an individual’s achievement. As a result of this way of thinking, a person’s relationship with his family (both the living as well as the departed ancestors), with the land on which he lives (including the nature spirits of that land), and with others of the society at large play a crucial role that impacts virtually every aspect of his daily life.

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[131] If an African wishes to indicate that a specific individual is his biological brother or sister, he must resort to using the qualifying phrase “same father, same mother.” In the same way, a distinction such as “same father, different mother” or “same mother, different father” can be used to identify half-brothers or sisters in the case where a parent has had multiple partners due to a polygamous relationship, divorce, immorality, etc. Normally, however, an African will just use the general term “my brother” or “my sister.” One can only imagine the confusion experienced by many Western missionaries who try to understand the familial relations of their African friends in terms of the linear categories of Western families where more precise terms such as uncle, aunt, cousin, second cousin, half-brother/sister, etc. are used.

[132] Grebe and Fon, *Religion Traditionnelle Africaine et Relation d’Aide*, p 6.

[133] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p 108-109.

Since individuals in collective societies find their identity in the group, it therefore stands to reason that any important decisions made will be made by the group or at least with the best interests of the group in mind. This implies that one must not only think long and hard for himself (as in the West) but he should also have the consensus of the entire affected group (family, tribe, ancestors, co-workers, etc.) before making a decision or engaging in a particular action. This often results in long, in-depth discussions or ceremonies in which the advice and support of the group, especially of its most important and influential members, is sought before deciding on a course of action. Decisions are usually not made quickly, and an individual will rarely go against the thinking of the group for fear of being ostracized or excluded. For the African, the priority is placed on ensuring that the entire group is united behind whatever decision is to be made. In this context, sacrificing one's personal goals or desires is often preferred and even lauded if it is mutually decided that it is in the best interest of the family or group.[134]

When one is living in a collective environment with the emphasis placed on the common good and a desire to promote harmony and unity within the group, a natural outworking of that mindset is a spirit of cooperation. Members of a certain group, be it a family, community, etc., are expected to help one another and work together for the survival of the group. In such societies one individual should never seek to surpass the others in the group unless it will result in collective good for the entire group. When such an individual does succeed, there is an expectation that his success will invariably trickle down to the other members of the group.[135] A group member who does not share the fruits of his success may be accused of being "*chiche*" or stingy — someone who thinks only of himself — which is one of the worst accusations of poor character that can be

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[134] Understanding this mindset shines a different light on practices such as arranged marriages that may seem outdated or oppressive when viewed from a Western perspective.

[135] An illustration of this mindset was seen when Barack Obama won the presidential election in 2008. A number of people in the African context in which we were living expressed an expectation that Africa would begin to improve because "one of ours" had been elected as the leader of the United States. One person even asked if we thought that "les noirs" (black people) would begin to oppress "les blancs" (white people) as had been done to them in the past.

leveled against someone in a collective society.[136] The flip side of this communal coin implies that an individual should never do anything harmful to another member of his group or to the group as a whole for his own personal advancement. Coming from this

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[136] These expectations of harmony and cooperation in non- or pre-industrial, agrarian societies are often linked to the idea of limited good. Anthropologist George Foster described the image of limited good as the understanding that "all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honor, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply." He adds that "not only do these and all other 'good things' exist in finite and limited quantities, but in addition there is no way … to increase the available quantities." (Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good," *American Anthropologist*, vol 67 1965, p 296.) Bruce Malina adds "Since all good exists in limited amounts that cannot be increased or expanded, it follows that individuals, alone or with their families, can improve their social positions only at the expense of others," which only a dishonorable person would attempt to do. (Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p 89.) According to Malina, this idea of limited good encourages individuals and families to maintain the status quo rather than trying to advance their situation in life and encourages practices such as hospitality and generosity as proof that they are not trying to succeed to the detriment of others.

Others, however, see the idea of limited good as incorrect, demeaning (in that it reflects cultural Darwinism) and "woefully reductionistic" (cf. Jayson Georges, "'Limited Good' has limited good," blog post on HonorShame.com from Nov 2, 2015 - http://honorshame.com/limited-good/.) Georges advocates for a changing of the term from "limited good" to "limited consumption" because it highlights the global socio-economic realities which underly these mindsets. Georges wrote, "Perhaps the reason why Majority World contexts have a view of 'limited consumption' is because most of the world's legal, political, financial and economic structures leave very few resources for them to consume."

The author's experiences in urban Africa, which exhibits the character of a commercial society rather than an agrarian one, have brought him into greater contact with a spirit of competition than the idea of limited good. In this urban context, vendors often enter openly into competition with one another in an apparent effort to provide for their family and/or to try to improve their state in life. One former seminary student even described the prevalent mentality in urban Cameroon as everyone attempting to climb the same ladder, doing whatever is necessary to reach the top. Then, once a person has succeeded in climbing the ladder, he pulls the ladder up with him so that no one else can reach the level that he himself has attained. This competitive, commercial mentality is likely due to the influence of Western capitalism which impacts much of urban Africa.

Due to the author's lack of exposure to the mentality of limited good as well as the fact that the majority of theological education efforts seem to be taking place in the urban regions of the African continent, we will not develop this idea further in this paper. However, the subject has been treated in sources such as: George Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good," *American Anthropologist*, Vol 67 1965, p 293-315 and "A Second Look at Limited Good, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol 45 No 2, p 57-64; Eunice Pike, "The Concept of Limited Good and the Spread of the Gospel," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol 8 No 4, October 1980, p 449-454; Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, chapter 4 "The Perception of Limited Good: Maintaining One's Social Status" p 81-107; John Pilch and Bruce Malina, *Handbook of Biblical and Social* Values 3rd edition, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017; and Douglas Oakman, "The Biblical World of Limited Good in Cultural, Social, and Technological Perspective," *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, Vol 48 No 2, 2018, p 97-105.

perspective, competition can be perceived in a negative light because it pits one individual against the other in a situation where only one will succeed. The spirit of cooperation and mutual aid, which is at the core of collective, African societies, is usually absent when the spirit of competition is present.[137]

This emphasis on relationships in Africa manifests itself through the virtually universal value placed on generosity across the region even though many Africans themselves are seen by Westerners as having little or nothing to give to others. Giving in a way that appears to be to one's immediate detriment (i.e., giving money to someone who asks even when the individual knows he will need the money tomorrow) seems strange and even foolish to the individualistically oriented Western mind, but for an African, this generosity is valued above his immediate comfort or needs. Through acts of generosity, he forges the bonds of group unity, maintains a harmonious relationship with outsiders, and can potentially procure favors for his family in the future.

Tangible items are not the only things with which one is generous in this context, however. Respect and honor are also critical elements of generosity in African culture. Because different individuals possess varying levels of power or influence in a family or community, greater respect and honor are given to those who have a greater ability to influence the family or community whether for good or evil. For this reason, influential people or visitors are often given special privileges such as titles, positions, or seats of honor at events in an effort to further enhance their respect in the family or community. In many cases, this honor and respect will also mean that an individual will do everything possible to keep the honored person from being shamed or losing face. Thus a respected person or visitor will always be treated with the utmost respect, even to the

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[137] The author has observed a number of violations of this ideal, especially in the urban African context. One can understand how members of different ethnic groups who live in a same neighborhood might not consider their ethnically different neighbors as part of their in-group, but at times even among biological families one may hear accusations of theft, physical harm, and even sorcery, often sourced out of jealousy over one individual's success or advancement in life. This has lead many of the older generation to bemoan the loss of traditional values in the face of the modernization and globalization (Westernization) of Africa.

point of exaggerating his worth or efforts through flattery or extravagant treatment. Additionally, the honored individual will likely never be directly told that he is wrong even if his error is obvious to everyone around him since that would bring him shame, thus causing him to be seen as inferior to those around him and thereby disrupting an otherwise harmonious relationship.

The fact that our theological students come from a background where their identity is derived from the group has several important impacts on theological education. First, we must take into account that many students may not be used to thinking individually and expressing their own opinions. If and when they choose to speak in the classroom, they may express only opinions that they know will be popular with the group or give the answer that they believe their professor wishes to hear rather than risk “rocking the boat” by posing questions or offering a divergent viewpoint.

Second, because of the interconnectedness of African society, it may be difficult for theological students who have significant family responsibilities to give the time and resources that are usually required for one attending Bible college or seminary. Especially if the student is the oldest son in his family, he will often have many pressures of the extended family added to him in addition to the pressures of school. These pressures may be increased if certain members of the family expect that his proximity to “rich foreigners” will produce a trickle-down effect for the other members of the family. Keeping in mind the value placed on generosity in group oriented societies, we must take into account the whole life of our students and not just their academic course of studies as we seek to shape their lives for ministry in the African context.

Third, coming from a highly competitive Western culture, we must realize the challenges that a Western academic environment will pose for our students. Rather than always requiring students to work individually and competing with one another for the best grades, students should often be encouraged to work collectively and foster the spirit of cooperation and mutual aid. This will not only match the collective culture which

they come from, but it will also set a positive precedent for them so that when they enter into ministry they will view other servants of God as co-laborers rather than competitors.

Role of Status

Another worldview element to consider as we seek to contextualize theological education is the role that status plays in African societies. Status refers to one's standing in a society, which can be based on aspects such as one's origins, economic position, or political affiliations. In the non-monarchial West, status is largely based on a person's achievements. Western societies (especially America) hold the belief that even someone who comes from humble beginnings can "work his way to the top." These type of stories even form the basis for our folklore and determine who we view as our cultural heroes. However, this kind of achieved status can be fleeting. When status is based on one's achievements, the moment the achievements are gone the status can disappear along with them. However, in much of the non-Western world, including Africa, status is attributed or ascribed based on a person's belonging to a particular group rather than on his achievements. A person born into an elite family or social class will always be seen as inherently important because of his lineage. Even if that person grows up to achieve little to nothing in his life, he will always enjoy a certain status because of the family or class into which he was born.

Power Distance

Whether status is seen as ascribed or achieved will play an important role as to how people are treated in a society. Whereas the Western world would regard every individual in the society as inherently equal or deserving of equal treatment,[138] the non-Western world is predominately hierarchical, seeing certain people as having inherently more value or importance in society than others. What flows naturally from this

[138] These cultural values are often expressed in national rhetoric such as the American pledge of allegiance, "…with liberty and justice for all" or the French national motto "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité" (Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood).

conclusion is that those who are seen as more valuable or important should be treated differently than common people. For this reason the rich, powerful, and influential people in a society are often accorded preferential treatment because of the elevated status that has been attributed to them by virtue of birth, social connections, or economic prowess. This attributed status produces what Geert Hofstede refers to as “power distance” that exists between groups of people in a given society. Hofstede defines power distance as “the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.”[139] This means that not only does the distance exist but also that people expect that distance to be present and accept it as normal. Those who are born into rich or influential families are expected to be accorded inherent advantages in the society because of who they are. One will find very few if any of the “rags to riches” stories in Africa that are popular among Western cultures, particularly in the United States. Traditional African societies are acutely hierarchical, and great care is given to maintain the appropriate relational distance among those of different standing in society. Across Africa one generally finds that people accept this inequality in their societies even if they are often frustrated by the unequal treatment and advantages given to the rich and influential.[140]

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[139] Geert Hofstede, “The 6 dimensions of national culture,” https://www.hofstede-insights.com/models/national-culture/. Consulted Oct 24, 2019.

[140] Several examples will help to illustrate: when the President of Cameroon travels from his presidential palace to the airport on the other side of town, not only does he receive a police escort, but also all activity along his route is expected to stop for him. This means that not only are the roads closed to traffic, but also that all business along the roads are forced to close and even pedestrians are required to stop walking when the presidential motorcade is passing. Though this affects people’s livelihood and produces some frustration, there is a general acceptance that it is simply the way things are because of the president’s elevated status. Additionally, other important members of the society such as the police and military will regularly circumvent normal traffic laws, including driving on the opposite side of the road, in order to facilitate their passage through the city. It is also common in certain businesses for people who are obviously well to do or well connected to be served before others who have been waiting longer for service. Some medical services such as hospitals or laboratories even offer an expedited or VIP service in which someone can pay an extra fee in order to be treated before others who cannot pay such a fee.

This power distance provides a certain *de facto* structure to society and impacts its function. For example, in Western societies every person, whether rich or poor, is expected to wait their turn for access to certain goods or services, even though in certain social situations the rich or influential may be given priority or privilege. Although they do not guarantee the absence of preferential treatment, laws have been put into place in most Western nations to prevent, or at least limit, the rich and powerful from exerting undue influence for their own benefit. In general, Western (democratic) society expects everyone to operate according to these laws, regardless of who they are. On the contrary, in much of the non-Western world, certain people are essentially deemed to be "above the law" and able to do largely as they please because of who they are, whom they are connected to, or what they can offer in terms of finances or favors. What the Western world frowns on and considers as corruption is simply a normal part of life across much of Africa.[141]

Power distance, whether in cases of corruption where violations of the law are circumvented, or in the preferential treatment given to those who are of a "higher class" in society, forms part of the fabric of daily African life. In this system, individuals do not traditionally try to change their status as one would in the West but often accept the status that has been attributed to them and function accordingly. Oftentimes the power distance in Africa manifests itself through physical distance. The rich and influential tend to congregate in certain neighborhoods of a city or town, often building large houses which are, in many cases, surrounded by walls or fences. Even in the case where physical barriers are not erected to maintain the power distance, invisible mental barriers often persist. For this reason it is rare to see a true mixing of the social classes. The same mentality is equally true in the religious sectors of society. Pastors or teachers,

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[141] Transparency International's 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index ranks Sub-Saharan Africa as the lowest scoring (most corrupt) region of the world. Forty-two percent (twenty-one) of the fifty most corrupt nations are from Sub-Saharan Africa. https://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/corruption_perceptions_index_2018. A spreadsheet containing the data from the 2018 CPI can be dowloaded at https://www.transparency.org/files/content/pages/2018_CPI_FullResults.zip

because of their perceived connection to God, are often seen as being “set apart,” and these “men of God” are held in esteem even by non-religious members of society. As a result of this religious power distance, the average church member would never think of sitting next to his pastor. Whenever the social or religious elites do find themselves mixing with the *hoi polloi* in a public setting, they are often distinguished from the masses in some observable way, such as by wearing special clothing, being given special seats of honor, being served first at a meal, etc.

In addition to physical distance there is also the aspect of intellectual distance that must be considered. Those who are seen to be of higher social status or superior intellect often seek to maintain a distance between themselves and those who are below them. Even in church, where believers are all supposed to be “one in Christ,” it is not uncommon for African pastors, especially those who have received formal theological training, to distance themselves from the “simple members.” Some African pastors will even abuse the power distance between them and their members to the point of refusing to allow any church member or leader to contradict them, claiming that the person is “speaking against God’s anointed” if he does. Additionally, in the majority of academic settings, it is common for professors to maintain a certain distance from their students, often making sure that the power distance is fastidiously observed. In most cases, teachers rarely rub shoulders with students outside of the classroom unless it is in a formal setting, such as a meeting in a professor’s office, where the hierarchy among the individuals is well established.

Patronage

Another outworking of ascribed status in the African context is found in the concept of patronage, a system where less privileged individuals seek to create social networks that will connect them to those of higher status — patrons — in the society. In this way those of lower status seek to honor those in the society whom they recognize as having a higher status than themselves by allowing them to function as a high status

patron while at the same time positioning themselves as a client to benefit from what high status people have to offer.

The meaning of the term “patron” can vary greatly depending on the cultural context in which it is used. For the majority of Westerners, the idea of patronage is familiar in two or three different usages. To patronize someone is understood to be a negative attitude whereby a person speaks or acts in a condescending manner thus betraying an attitude of superiority toward the other person. This attitude and accompanying actions should never become part of our lifestyle as reflections of Jesus Christ. Other connotations of the word patron refer to a loyal customer of a business establishment or an individual who supports a person or organization by using their wealth or influence to help to their particular cause. This latter definition seems to more closely approximate the way in which patronage is viewed throughout the majority world.

The ancient greco-roman world was a world in which goods, power, and influence were viewed as limited commodities that were consolidated in the hands of a few wealthy, elite individuals. An average individual who had need of these goods or services was forced to pass through a “gatekeeper” — someone who had the ability either to provide the client with what he sought to obtain from his own resources, or who could serve as an intermediary to another elite person who could fulfill his needs.[142] In this ancient world, then, a patron, as a well-placed person in society who through his riches or social influence bestowed favors for his clients that they could not otherwise obtain for themselves, was a necessary part of life and business for the average citizen. In return for the favors he provided, the patron received a certain measure of social capital in the form of unquestioned loyalty and public honor bestowed by his clients as an expression of their gratitude for his grace toward them. This created a mutually beneficial relationship in which the client received the favors necessary to live and

[142] DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity*, p 96-97.

conduct his business and the patron received increased honor and social status as his clients sang his praises in both word and deed.

In the greco-roman world, patronage was often understood to be a long-term, reciprocal relationship which was described as being

> marked by the mutual exchange of desired goods and services, the patron being available for assistance in the future, the client doing everything in his or her power to enhance the fame and honor of the patron (publicizing the benefit and showing the patron respect), remaining loyal to the patron and providing services whenever the opportunity arose.[143]

Since the patron/client relationship was a public affair rather than a private transaction, a patron or client who did not uphold their end of the relationship would be publicly shamed and, especially in the case of the patron, lose valuable social capital. Due to the reciprocal nature of the relationship, therefore, it was difficult, if not impossible, to sever a patron-client relationship without incurring serious shame for one or both parties.[144]

Throughout church history and continuing into the modern age, one of the more common applications of the term “patron” is found in catholic and orthodox circles through the idea of patron saints — those who are believed to be the special guardians of a person or group and who intervene specifically to God on behalf of their “clients.” A patron saint is usually chosen when an interest or event in the saint’s life overlaps with the interest or need of a particular individual or group. Patron saints are prayed to, revered, and even in some cases honored with their own special day in response to the divine favor that they are thought to procure.

The English word “patron” is derived from French where it carries the connotation of a boss, owner, or the person responsible for a certain operation or activity. This meaning in turn stems from the Latin *pater (patr-)* meaning “father.” In Catholic circles,

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[143] Ibid., p 97.

[144] Ibid., p 106-19.

“Father” is the preferred term used for the priests who not only are responsible for directing the spiritual operations of the church but are also viewed as the authority for the believer’s spiritual life. In addition, the priests serve as mediators between the people and God, brokering divine forgiveness and favor on behalf of their parishioners, which furthers the idea of spiritual patronage.

In describing the modern-day patronage system which is prevalent in much of the majority world, Jayson Georges notes:

> Patronage, simply put, its a reciprocal relationship between a patron and a client. Patrons are the superior party with resources and power to help other people. … Patrons use their influence and wealth to ensure other people’s security and survival. Their generosity protects and provides for the people under their care. Clients, on the other hand, are social inferiors who attach themselves to a patron in order to secure protection and resources. To maintain the patronage relationship, clients must reciprocate when they receive help from the patron. But the client is not as wealthy as the patron, so instead of repaying financially, they repay by honoring the patron.”[145]

Although this patron-client relationship is not uniquely for the sake of financial advancement, being connected to a wealthy or well-placed patron in the society can provide valuable “social capital” which can prove indispensable in time of crisis or need. Since generosity through sharing of goods and resources is presupposed among those of a given group, it is only natural that those who do not have easy access to these resources would seek to create relationships in order to link themselves with others who do as a means of social security. David Maranz observes that “friendship in Africa is much more than friendly relationships between two or more people. It involves concepts of solidarity, hospitality, sharing of resources, obligatory frequent interaction, and living as community, that is, practically as a large family.”[146]

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[145] Jayson Georges, *Ministering in Patronage Cultures: Biblical Models and Missiological Implications*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019, p 13.

[146] David Maranz, *African Friends and Money Matters*, Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2001, p 64.

Understanding the role that status plays in the African context allows us to recognize several important implications for contextualizing theological education in Africa. First, Western theological educators must realize the status which is attributed to them when they come to Africa. Since missionaries in their own countries may be viewed as "nobodies" who live at or even below the "poverty line," it may come as a shock for them to discover that when they go overseas "because they are Westerners, they automatically occupy a high status in most economically poor societies."[147] This high status will be instantly attributed to the missionary upon his arrival and means that he will be labeled as a rich patron and expected to act accordingly. For a missionary not to act in accordance with this perceived status in his new culture can cause a great deal of confusion and even resentment with those among whom the missionary is trying to minister.[148] This can even create complex relationships between teacher and student, especially since a teacher who is seen to act "immorally" (according to the cultural values of collectivism and generosity) will quickly lose credibility among his students.

It is also important for a Western educator to understand the impact of power distance in the theological classroom in Africa. Teachers in the African culture stand as the unquestioned authority, and students will usually take great care not to publicly challenge a teacher or cause him to lose face, especially in front of his students. For this reason, some students may even be hesitant to ask questions of their teachers in the classroom. On the one hand, asking a question might imply that the teacher did not do a sufficient job of explaining the subject matter, thereby calling his abilities into question. On the other hand, if a student posed a difficult question to which the teacher was unable to respond, or could do so only with considerable difficulty, it would risk bringing

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[147] Jonathan Bonk, *Missions an Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem Revisited*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007. Kindle edition location 1632.

[148] The issue of how a Western missionary can function within a patronage system so as not to compromise his mission will be developed more extensively in Chapter 5 where we will present recommendations for contextualizing ourselves for better theological education practices in Africa.

that teacher public shame and dishonor. For this reason, in many African cultures, the job of the teacher is understood as lecturing out of his treasury of knowledge while the job of the student is dutifully taking notes on the lecture and being prepared to reproduce the knowledge that the teacher has given. This is yet another factor that discourages critical thinking and evaluation among those who occupy a lower rung on the intellectual ladder of an educational society.[149] Brian Arensen notes that "in the African world view, truth is handed down from respected leaders. … These leaders (chiefs, elders, or parents) are listened to because of their authority, not because of what they say. The weight of truth is measured by the authority of the giver, not by the truth itself."[150]

This cultural understanding of a high power distance between teacher and student, even at the university level, stands in stark contrast to many Western societies which put a higher emphasis on equality and seek to minimize or remove the distance barrier between teacher and student. In many Western classrooms, students are encouraged to ask questions and interact orally, with a percentage of the student's overall grade for a class being given for in-class participation. Especially in adult education, the teacher is increasingly expected to assume the role of a facilitator of discussion, debate, and discovery in the learning process rather than that of a lecturer. Part of this expectation stems from the comparative lack of power distance in Western cultures compared to those in Africa. For this reason, each student is seen as having something valuable to offer to the class and their input is encouraged.

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[149] This aspect of power distance in education is beginning to change across the continent, especially as African children are exposed to newer, Western models of education from an early age. For this reason many from the current generation of students feel more free in approaching their professors directly, asking questions in class, and expressing a different opinion from the professor than students from previous generations would have. The changes coming to Africa due to urbanization and globalism will be discussed further in a subsequent section.

[150] Arensen, Brian, "How to Teach Using the Inductive Method." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly,* July 1995 Vol. 31 No. 3, p 338-33. In his analysis, Arensen unfairly caricaturizes African culture when he says that "People are not even expected to understand what they're taught. The sole task is to receive the total teachings and pass them on without question." He is however accurate in his assessment that in much African culture truth is accepted based on the supposed authority of the person speaking rather than on the veracity or factuality of his claims.

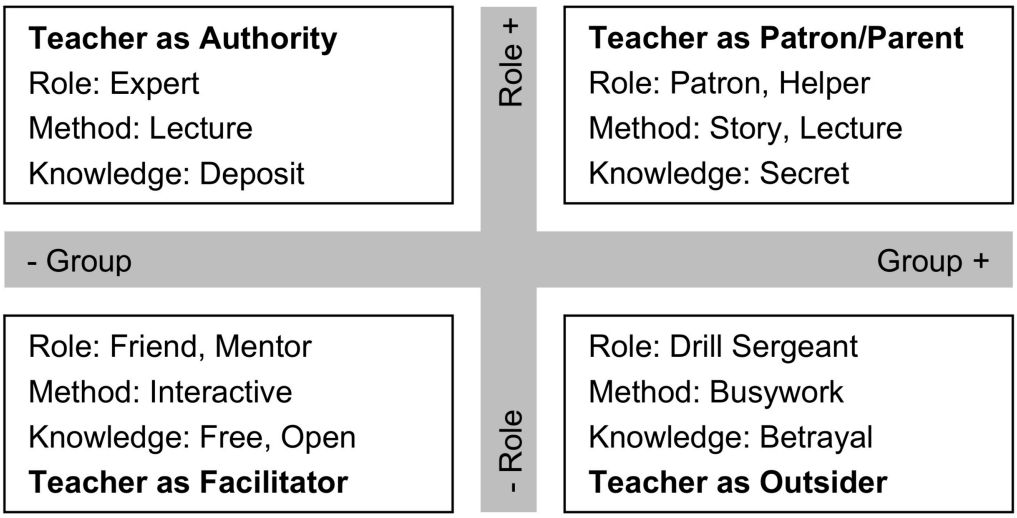

Figure 3.1: Lingenfelters' Four Roles of Teachers

In *Teaching Cross-Culturally*, the Lingenfelters describe four different roles that a teacher can assume.[151] Though traditional Western education prefers the role of a facilitator, in Africa teachers are perceived, and expected to act, as an authority or a patron/parent.[152] When the role a foreign teacher assumes in a Western style theological classroom does not match up with the expectations of the students, it can create a feeling of disorientation for the African student. One who comes to class expecting to listen and copy down what the teacher says or writes on the blackboard might initially feel uncomfortable when pressed to ask questions or share an individual opinion in class. Conversely, a Western teacher may feel disoriented at times when he poses a question to the class and is faced with silence as no one dares to respond. These obstacles can often be overcome with time as the teacher and students become more comfortable with one another and as the teacher's expectations for the class are more clearly understood, but it may at times prove to be difficult to attain the same level of openness and dialogue that is common in classrooms in the West.

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[151] Lingenfelter, *Teaching Cross-Culturally*, p 76.

[152] Guiles, *Teaching and Learning in Central Africa*, p 8.

As we take these illustrations of differing cultural values and learning preferences into account, we realize that much of what seems rational and logical to us in our Western system of education is foreign to someone from another culture and with a different worldview. Unfortunately, much of the onus of adaptation in international evangelical theological education in Africa has fallen on the student who has been forced to adjust to the foreign style of his foreign teachers, rather than seeing the foreign teacher adopt a more local style to accommodate his students.[153] Western strategies for training students which have been influenced by a worldview which is different from our own will inevitably prove ineffective if they are not adapted to the context into which we bring them. Given that “missionary teachers cannot assume that their students will learn simply because they present their material, especially if their teaching does not fit their students’ learning style,”[154] we must take seriously the need to re-evaluate our system of theological education in the African context.

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[153] In *Teaching and Learning in Central Africa*, Dave Guiles provides some useful counsel regarding the question as to whether missionaries should seek to fulfill the cultural expectations of a teacher or to establish new patterns in the culture: "One of the dilemmas faced by anyone seeking to teach cross-culturally revolves around the tension of whether to conform to the expectations of students or to insist that students conform to the teacher’s expectations. Remember, however, that regardless of the power distance of a society, the teacher is a person with power. Teachers have more training and skill, they control the curriculum and classroom, and ultimately they determine the standards of evaluation of the success of their students (Lingenfelter 2003:18). Our goal as emissaries of Jesus Christ is not to engage in a struggle over the relative merits of large or small power distance, but rather to encourage the transformation of our host culture through obedience to the Word of God. Christ can be honored with either power preference through men and women who occupy their roles in humility and service. However, we urge you to remember that you are the one who is crossing cultural boundaries. Your commitment to model Christ within the parameters of a high power distance environment will remove unnecessary barriers to the learning experience and will provide invaluable lessons to your students as you model humility.” Guiles then provides four teaching tips Teaching Tips for Ministry in Large Power Distance Environments 1) Learn to appreciate and respect the advantages of teaching in a large power distance environment. 2) Avoid the trap of assuming that your preference for equality equals humility. True humility can be modeled within any power distance preference. 3) Learn to dress appropriately according to the expectations of your students. 4) Always stress the authority of the Word of God. Help students to see how you are allowing the Word to transform your own culture as a means of teaching that ultimately all cultures must be transformed by God’s power.

[154] Earle and Dorothy Bowen, “Contextualizing Teaching Methods in Africa”, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, July 1989, p 8.

Concept of Time

Contrary to popular Western belief, time is a very important commodity in African cultures; it is, however, viewed in a completely different way from the West. John Mbiti maintains that Africans are geared more toward a past and present orientation of time[155] as opposed to the future orientation which dominates Western, linear thinking. Mbiti explains that in the African mindset,

> The linear concept of time in Western thought, with an indefinite past, present, and infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking. The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realized and cannot, therefore, constitute time. If, however, future events are certain to occur, or if they fall within the inevitable rhythm of nature, they at best constitute only *potential time*, not *actual time*. What is taking place now no doubt unfolds the future, but once an event has taken place, it is no longer in the future but in the present and the past. *Actual time* is therefore what is present and what is past. It moves 'backward' rather than 'forward': and people set their minds not on future things, but chiefly on what has taken place.[156]

In his assessment of Mbiti's concept of time, Scott Moreau gives an illustration which helps to contrast the difference between African and Western views of time:

> Mbiti's view of the African understanding of time may in one sense be likened to a man standing in a river and facing downstream. The current may be thought of as the flow of time, with the view of the man in the river including primarily that which is peripherally around him and secondarily on that which has already gone past him (downstream). … The future is only what can be seen in peripheral vision and so the 'upstream' time holds little importance in the perceptions of the man in the water. It will pass when and how it passes, and then will it become of consequence to him. Only what is currently passing or has already passed is of significance, for it has become

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[155] John S Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background: A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concept*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, p 24.

[156] Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p 17. It must be noted that Mbiti's analysis of the African perspective on time, especially the application of his research among a few tribes to the whole of Africa, has been opposed by a number of authors, most notably Byang Kato (*Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1975, p 61-62) and A. Scott Moreau ("A Critique of John Mbiti's Understanding of the African Concept of Time," *African Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 1986, vol 5, no 2, p 36-48).

> part of his concrete reality and is therefore important. … The cycles of nature (seasons, years, hours of the day, etc.) may be thought of as debris floating along on a recurring basis; not always exactly the same, but comfortingly familiar. Rather than the man moving into the future by going upstream, he lets the future come to him by remaining stationary. Since he knows it will reach him eventually, there is no need to focus on it, and he cannot speed its advance.
>
> Within this same illustrative framework, the Western concept may be seen as a man *swimming* upstream. Time is not viewed as in control of the swimmer, for he advances himself against it. In fact, it is more static than dynamic, and the focus is more on what dangers and events lie ahead than on what has already passed. The Westerner moves *through* time … while time moves by the African.[157]

Westerners often view time as a commodity that can and should be used ("make good use of your time", "redeem the time") and profited from ("time is money") but can also be misused ("stop wasting time") and lost ("making up for lost time"). Africans, however, do not traditionally view time in this way; instead, their focus is turned more to the people and events surrounding them at that particular moment. As a result of their perspective on time in addition to their collective mentality, relationships are valued more highly than future results or achievements. Time itself tends to be relational, revolving primarily around the important people and events that mark the life of the family or community. Thus an individual operating from the basis of an African worldview rarely, if ever, feels pressed to arrive "on time" for an event or to accomplish a task in a given timeframe, especially if a relationship might be strained in the process. Instead, it is always preferable in the African mindset to take time for people, especially important members of the society and those of one's immediate entourage through greetings, conversations, and even long debates, regardless of prior appointments or engagements. In this way, relationships are nurtured daily to ensure their continuity.[158]

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[157] A Scott Moreau, "A Critique of John Mbiti's Understanding of the African Concept of Time," *African Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 1986, vol 5, no 2, p 39.

[158] Wilbur O'Donnovan, *Vivre un Christianisme Biblique en Afrique Contemporaine*, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire: Centre de Publications Évangéliques, 2002, p 18-19.

In Africa, spending time with a person rather than rushing off to another appointment or simply waiting on them to arrive is a cultural way of honoring an individual as it communicates to him that one views the relationship as important and worth “wasting” time on. Because time is seen as primarily relational, events are not governed by the clock as much as by the presence of the most important people who will be attending. In fact, it can be extremely insulting to start an important meeting or a special event if a key person has not yet arrived or to end an event simply because the clock dictates that it should be over. Westerners who act in these ways in Africa often convey the rather offensive idea that their schedule is more important than people.

In the context of theological education in Africa, it is much more important that a teacher show that he has time for his students and their concerns, both in and outside of the classroom, than to begin and finish teaching at prescribed times. Remembering that the African conception of education is much more relational than in the West, it is also necessary for a teacher to make himself available to his students outside of the classroom. Whether through an open door policy or making visits to his students, a teacher must be generous with his time if he wishes to communicate genuine interest in and concern for his students.

Values in Communication

One important way in which Western theological educators must learn to contextualize the process of theological education is through the way in which they communicate, whether addressing students or particular issues. In general, Western culture employs a very direct form of communication, as is evidenced in popular adages such as “Don’t beat around the bush," “Say it to my face," “Call a spade a spade," or “Say what you really mean.” Anthropologists refer to this style of explicit communication as “low-context” communication because the words themselves are the primary carriers of the meaning rather than the context in which the words are spoken. In contrast, high-context communication contains a great deal of background information that must be

understood for the communication to make sense.[159] Someone who is not privy to this background information will have a hard time understanding what is being communicated.

The impact of context on communication

Because individuals are so closely connected in African societies, there is much that is communicated through the context in which conversations take place. The insiders of a particular group, in addition to having the same values, beliefs, and assumptions as well as a common language, already know the backstory of a given situation and thus do not need to have many elements stated explicitly as outsiders would. This "high-context" communication takes place across the numerous collective societies of central Africa and can lead to rather indirect means of speaking such as the famous African proverbs and stories. In this way, truth is expressed but often in a veiled way.[160]

Because many Africans utilize the more subtle elements of communication that pass unnoticed by people from low-context cultures of the West, it can be difficult for an outsider to truly pierce into the culture or even to understand what is really being said. At times, even insiders are left to decipher the meaning of a particular message for themselves by piecing together the various contextual elements, which often leads to long discussion among themselves after the initial message has been passed. For this reason, the Westerner often sees Africans as speaking in circles rather than "getting right to the point," however each trip around the proverbial circle may provide important

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[159] B. Neese, "Intercultural Communication: High- and Low-Context Cultures," *SouthEastern University Online Learning* (Aug 2016), http://online.seu.edu/high-and-low-context-cultures/.

[160] One such example of these rather nebulous proverbs is the oft-heard assertion, "The mouth that eats doesn't talk." While the phrase itself can have a vast number of potential interpretations, the context in which the proverb is given shapes the intended meaning. In the African context, this particular proverb is often used in reference to bribery or corruption, indicating that the person who receives a kick-back won't say anything about an illegal activity that he himself has benefited from.

clues as to the intended meaning of the message being passed. The difficulty comes when the speaker assumes that his audience understands what he is communicating and expects a certain action when, in reality, the listeners may still be unclear on the speaker's intended meaning. Ultimately, a speaker can know whether or not his message was understood in the way he intended by whether or not the desired result is produced. If his expectations are not met, the speaker may reunite the group to restate his message, once again using rather ambiguous language, until the desired effect is produced.

Naturally, this whole process produces much frustration for the Westerner who is used to a style of communication that is much more clear, precise, and efficient. To an African, however, stating a wish or message explicitly could risk causing the person to lose face if he does not understand or is unable to respond favorably to the request. Once again, the relational nature of the culture is seen in the fact that it is more important to not risk shaming a person than to communicate "clearly and efficiently," even if it means that time is "wasted" in waiting for him to understand the true meaning of the message through repetition or trial and error. What complicates the equation for intercultural communication is that the foreigner (in this case the missionary), since he is highly respected, will rarely if ever be told directly that he is wrong — either in his transmission or interpretation of a message — or have his request denied. Instead the nationals will often agree verbally with the foreigner as a way of honoring him but then will simply act in the way that is most culturally appropriate, leaving the missionary to decipher his error when the nationals' actions do not line up with his own expectations.

Importance of nonverbal communication

A portion of what is implicitly communicated in the high-context culture of Africa, and what is often missed by foreigners in these cultures, is transmitted through the various elements of non-verbal communication. A number of these elements can carry a drastically different meaning in the African context than what a person from the West

might normally attribute to them. Although it is impossible to examine every element in detail in this work, we will seek to highlight some of the more important elements that impact intercultural communication in this setting.[161]

When we refer to corporal means of communication, there are two primary elements — kinesics and paralanguage. Kinesics, refers to the various aspects of the body including gestures, movements, eye signals, facial expressions, posture, etc. Generally speaking, Westerners are much easier to "read" than Africans, especially in terms of facial clues. The average African is usually much more careful to mask a facial expression or gesture that might belie his feelings on a particular matter, especially when in front of an honored guest. For this reason, many Africans initially appear very serious or even stone-faced. This is also impacted by a desire not to be perceived as frivolous, which means that they will often smile much less than the average Westerner, especially for a picture which is likely to be seen and shown to others who do not know the individual.

Another element which can add to this perception of Africans as "closed" or reserved is the neutral posture of crossing of one's arms, which, again, does not carry the same connotation of hostility or disbelief that it can often signify in the West. Crossing one's legs or even ankles in many African contexts, however, expresses an attitude of importance or superiority in relation to others. While a foreigner may well be perceived or treated as more important or superior by an African, he should be careful not to give the impression that he sees himself as superior. For this reason, the majority of Africans, both men and women, will sit with their feet firmly planted on the floor. If seated on a comfortable couch or chair in a more informal setting, an African will often slouch down, possibly even with arms crossed, as an indication that he is relaxed —

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[161] Much of this comes from observation of individuals from across the francophone central African region in the urban setting of Yaoundé, Cameroon. An effort has been made to include communication elements that transcend the broader region of central Africa and even the continent as a whole, although some elements mentioned here may prove to be more particularly Cameroonian.

which is completely different from what the posture would communicate if a Western teenager were sitting in the same way.

Eye contact is another important element of communication, albeit difficult to understand at times. In many central African cultures, eye contact in dialogue is a sign of perceived equality among two parties and can therefore be seen as insulting when such equality does not actually exist. For example, many African children are taught to never look an authority, such as a parent, teacher or pastor, in the eyes as they respond to a question. Instead, the child's head and gaze is directed downward as a sign of submission. To regard a superior directly in the eyes can be an indication of disrespect, hostility and a challenge to authority. This principle finds its counterbalance, however, in the practice of staring. Across much of Africa, it is common to be met with prolonged stares that are not diverted when the gaze is met, as is often the case in the West. These stares, though disconcerting for the average Westerner, are not necessarily to be interpreted as a sign of hostility or ill will on the part of an African but may simply be indicative of a curiosity in regard to the presence of a foreigner in their midst.

Hand gestures are also used differently in central Africa than in the West. For example, in order to indicate that you want someone to come to you, the proper gesture is to have the palm facing down (facing up could more likely indicate a sexual proposition) and to make a scratching motion with all four fingers (one or two is usually used for animals). There is also a difference when it comes to communicating numbers using one's fingers, in that one starts at the thumb rather than the index finger. The choice of which hand is used is especially important in Muslim cultures where the left hand is seen as unclean. For this reason, one should use extreme care in these areas not to wave, touch a person, or even to give or receive something with the left hand so as not to cause an unwarranted offense.

The second aspect of corporal communication, paralanguage, deals with communicating through how something is said even more than by what is said. For

example, it is common to hear a public speaker in Africa raise his voice almost to a yell and enunciate his words more clearly when he wants to emphasize his authority as the messenger or the importance of his message. Among the Beti people in the central region of Cameroon, speaking in raised and seemingly tense tones is a common occurrence and is not necessarily a sign of anger or hostility.[162]

Another aspect of paralanguage is found in the variety of sounds that are made to communicate various messages. For example, a street vendor might make a kissing sound to passers by in order to attract their gaze to the wares that he is selling — which is quite a different message than what this sound would communicate to someone, especially a female, walking down a street in the West. Sounds also provide an important measure of nonverbal feedback in many central African cultures. Rather than nodding or giving verbal assent as is often done in the West, one might hear a guttural "clucking" or a gasping sound as an indication of agreement with what is being said.

Not all paralanguage is audible, however. Certain cultures may communicate an affirmative response by simply raising their eyebrows or an individual may point with his lips rather than with his hands to indicate a direction. Silence is another important aspect in communication and, in some cases, is not merely acceptable but preferable. For example, when a person is sick, central Africans find the Western idea of leaving the person alone to recover very strange and prefer to show their solidarity by visiting and sitting with the sick person. In this case, there is no real expectation of conversation, therefore no one is bothered when all parties are silent. What is communicated by a person's presence is more important than any words he might say. The same holds true in the event of the loss of a family member or friend.

One aspect that many Western visitors to Africa notice quickly is the differing concepts of spatial orientation and personal zones. In a communal culture, everything is

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[162] On various occasions we have witnessed heated arguments, in which a brawl seemed to be the natural and imminent outcome, that ultimately dissolved into laughter rather than fighting as each party was simply seeking to assert his dominance over the other party in the argument rather than expressing anger as their tone and gestures seemed to indicate.

shared, including what a Westerner might consider his own “personal space.” An absence of personal space can often cause a Westerner to feel crowded and uncomfortable as though his sense of privacy was being violated. This lack of privacy or personal space affects the process of communication in important ways, and one must learn the different, unwritten rules of space in relation to communication in central Africa.

For example, the Western concept of standing in line or waiting one’s turn is quickly shattered when a foreigner arrives in Africa as people often press around a window or point where a service is being offered seemingly without regard for who arrived first. The same holds true when driving in much of Africa. Drivers who wish to enter the flow of traffic from an auxiliary road either wait to find an opening or slowly push their way forward into traffic in order to create an opening for themselves. Even the lane lines painted on the roads often serve as little more than general indicators and are often ignored. When traffic is moving slowly, it is not unusual for drivers to create a second, third, or fourth lane of traffic in the hopes of passing more quickly. This can easily lead to gridlock, especially in intersections when multiple vehicles converge on a single point from many different directions. The differing Western and African perspectives on space and taking turns causes many Westerners to find driving in Africa a stressful and chaotic experience.

Another outworking of these unwritten rules regarding space in a communal culture is that having conversations with people in what Westerners would usually consider private times is not considered taboo. For example, an average African will usually think nothing of talking to a neighbor through the window while he is bathing or of approaching a woman who is nursing a baby with her breast completely exposed — practices which can be quite disconcerting to the uninitiated Westerner. Another unwritten rule of space is that if someone wishes to have a private, uninterrupted conversation, he should find a quiet place such as a home or office where a door can be shut since communal culture dictates that any conversation held in a public setting is fair

game for anyone interested to come and listen or join in. The Western concept of standing close but at a distance and waiting to talk to someone appears to be unknown across Africa. In fact, contrary to seeing interrupting as rude, it would instead be considered more rude to pass by two or more friends who are engaged in a conversation without “interrupting” them in order to exchange greetings. Additionally, having a conversation in someone’s courtyard or on their veranda, even if they themselves are not involved in the conversation, is not seen as an intrusion of one’s privacy since the outdoor area is considered as a public place.

Closely related to the idea of space is the aspect of contact, which can also have a profound impact on communication. When we speak of contact in the context of African culture, important questions must be asked and answered such as “How much contact is normal or acceptable in the culture?”, “What kinds of contact are appropriate?”, “How and when does contact occur?”, and “Who initiates and breaks off contact?” Even where these questions may not initially seem to have anything to do with communication itself, breaking of these unwritten rules can have a profound impact on the perception of an individual, either enhancing or undermining his communication. Unfortunately, there are no simple answers to these questions as the current study evaluates a large number of subcultures across Africa, nevertheless there are certain generalities that seem to hold true across a wide spectrum of these cultures.

Physical contact in Africa is most often seen in greetings and usually involves a handshake or “*les bises*,” the typical French greeting of touching cheek to cheek two to four times, accompanied each time by an “air kiss.” Many African cultures have modified this French greeting into a touching of each side of the head, just above the temple, to the respective part of the other’s head and then a touching of the foreheads, often while gripping the other’s elbows or forearms. At times these greetings can be extended by the prolonged holding of hands, especially if the two people are walking together in the same direction. While this might be perceived as an indication of a homosexual lifestyle

in the West, two men walking down the road holding hands is a completely normal and acceptable gesture in much of Africa as it serves to indicate a true friendship. This gesture virtually never takes place between a man and woman that are not romantically involved, however. The traditional American hug is also rarely if ever publicly observed among Africans, and especially not between the sexes.

With the advent of modern technology in Africa, it has become much easier to maintain metaphysical contact with others. Phone calls, texts, and emails all permit individuals to maintain their network of relationships, even at a distance. Even short calls of a minute or two to send one's greetings or a brief message inquiring about the person are often sufficient to keep the relational lines open. Despite the ever growing use of technology across Africa, however, the communal culture that defines the region and the subsequent priority given to relationships makes face to face encounters the preferred method of contact whenever possible.

An individual's physical characteristics also have an important part to play in communication. In the African culture, age and the experience that usually accompanies it is given a great deal of respect. As such, evidences of age such as gray hair can play an important role in how a person is received when he speaks. Additional physical characteristics such as one's weight or perceived strength can also have a significant impact on how the message is received. As a general rule, and in contrast with the perspective of the West, Africans look favorably on a heavy person as their weight is an indication of someone who has sufficient resources to live well.[163]

Clothing and other artifacts play an important role alongside of physical characteristics and can, by themselves, communicate much more than language itself. In Africa a person is not simply judged based on what they say but on who they are. To

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[163] Due to this perspective, an appropriate way to compliment an African, including a woman, would be to comment on their weight gain. To say or even imply that a person is thin could be perceived as an insult as it might insinuate poverty in that he is unable to care for himself when sick, doesn't have sufficient resources to eat well, or, in the case of a woman, is not strong enough to do the rigorous work often required of a woman in the culture.

be an effective communicator, then, one must look the part of the role that he is seeking to fulfill. Hair is to be kept neat and clean, which for men usually means short or shaved and for women means frequent braiding of the hair or wearing of wigs. Clothes are one of the most important artifacts in African culture and, especially in urban areas, can vary between traditional African dress and Western style clothing. For example, it is not uncommon to see a man who may not have a job or even a house of his own walking around town dressed in a three-piece suit, for a person who does not dress seriously will not be taken seriously. Shoes also play an important part in the wardrobe and are kept meticulously clean, whether from mud in rainy season or dust in dry season. If it can be afforded, jewelry and perfume or cologne are often worn prodigiously by both men and women as a status symbol, proving one's worth and position. If an individual has his own vehicle, it also becomes a virtual extension of his person and therefore is washed frequently, often every day, before he leaves his home. The house in which a person lives also communicates much about him, including not only the neighborhood and architecture of the home itself but also the decorations and furniture placed inside.

In employing these various artifacts, the focal point is not on comfort, as is often the case in America but on the presentation of one's position. Someone who does not care to present himself in the socially expected way corresponding to his perceived status will be a point of curiosity and even contempt to those around him. It is little wonder that many Americans are viewed with intrigue and even disdain when they choose their dress and artifacts primarily for comfort in view of the hot African climate. When working in an African context, a Western theological educator should expend the necessary time and effort to learn the particularities of the culture in which he will be teaching in order to ensure that what he communicates through the various physical characteristics does not distract or detract from the truth that he is seeking to communicate.[164]

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[164] Specific recommendations of how to learn and adapt to particularities of a given culture will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

All of the elements mentioned in this section have an important role to play in adapting theological education to the African context. The astute theological educator will not only seek to understand and adapt to these generalities of the African context, but, since Africa is far from a monolith, will also seek to discover the particularities of the individual culture in which he is working in order to more effectively adapt his methods of theological education for the particular context.

African cultural elements directly impacting theological education

In addition to the general aspects of a traditional African worldview, there are some specific African worldview elements which have a direct impact on theological training in Africa. These components relate to and often are in direct conflict with the principles of the traditional, Western schooling system which has so often been imported wholesale into Africa. Taking these cultural priorities into account will help to inform the best practices for contextualizing theological education into the African setting.

Oral Preference Learning

The majority of traditional African students are fundamentally oral learners. This means that while the majority of them may be literate, their preferred learning style is geared toward oral methods of learning rather than the heavy emphasis on reading and writing which dominates much of the traditional, Western educational curriculum. These type of people are known as secondary oral learners[165] or oral preference learners[166] — those who prefer the use of stories, proverbs, sayings, etc., to transmit and receive

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[165] Mark Overstreet, "Διδακτικόν: Rethinking Theological Education: the Preparation and Assessment of Pastors in the Majority World of Oral Learners", paper presented at the ICETE Triennial Consultation, Anatalya, Turkey, Nov 2015, p 6-7. In this paper Overstreet classifies illiterate people as primary oral learners as they do not have the ability to learn through literate methods. Secondary oral learners are those who, while having the ability to read and write and therefore not qualifying as illiterate, are more skilled in, and therefore greatly prefer, oral learning methods.

[166] Term taken from *Beyond Literate Western Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts*, ed by Samuel Chiang and Grant Lovejoy.

knowledge. An emphasis on either oral or literate methods of learning impacts the way students think and process information. Hiebert notes that for Westerners “literacy has molded our thinking, producing patterns of thought that seem perfectly natural to us, but which are strange to those in non-literate [or primarily oral] societies.”[167]

The difference between those who are oral preference learners, such as many theological students in Africa, as opposed to those who are primarily literary learners can be observed in the education of their children from a young age. In the West, parents are encouraged to teach their young children by reading to them, often stopping to point out observations or ask children questions about what they are seeing and/or reading. Asking children questions about the books they are reading such as “What color is the ball?”, “How many birds do you see on this page?”, or “What is Jane doing here?" is a common practice among Western parents who read to their children from an early age. These questions help to develop the child’s ability to think and analyze from an early pre-school age. As children grow up and go to school, the Western schooling curriculum not only encourages continued reading but also tests students on their ability to analyze a text through reading comprehension assessments. This process further encourages critical thinking skills and assessment of written text which are both necessary abilities for full integration into Western society.

This Western process of early childhood development is contrasted with African society in which children are more often instructed from an early age using oral methods such as stories, songs, dances, dramas, and recitations which they hear and see as they share in the life of the community. When African children begin school, they are often expected to do even more memorization through recitation and dictation exercises and therefore their capacity for reflection and analysis is not always developed in the same

[167] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, p 134.

way as children from the West.[168] As the children proceed to the older grades, the frequent absence of textbooks in the classroom means that often students are simply expected to copy word for word in a notebook what the teacher writes on the board and then to study their notebook in order to reproduce that information on the test. Testing then often becomes more of an analysis of how well a student is able to memorize and reproduce information than his/her ability to understand and apply the information to a particular situation. This method of schooling reflects the reality of the difficulty of trying to learn in areas of the world where easy access to written texts, lab equipment, etc., is not as abundant as in the West. At the same time, such a method of schooling also serves to reinforce the cultural values associated with the previously mentioned worldview elements — collective identity as well as group thinking and decision making — where independent critical thinking and individual analysis are neither expected nor desired, especially from young people.

When African students trained in this kind of a schooling system rise to the level of Bible college or seminary, many of them will find the transition into a traditional, Western style of education very difficult.[169] When the traditional, Western theological education system is imported indiscriminately into African cultures, the African students will find themselves suddenly immersed in a system where they are expected to read

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[168] An anecdote may prove helpful to illustrate this point. When our oldest daughter was four years old we sent her to a local, private preschool so that she could be immersed in the French language and Cameroonian culture. They taught her letters, blends etc. as a normal preschool in the West would. As we approached Christmas time, the preparations for the annual Christmas program began. One day, our daughter came home and began practicing the recitation and accompanying drama that her class would be enacting during the Christmas party: "Recitation: The consequences of polygamy,'Ever since you brought your favorite wife to live here …'" Needless to say, we were shocked that the school would expect a class of four year olds to perform a recitation about polygamy, even when it was obvious that they would not understand what they were reciting. But their purpose was not to develop critical thinking skills but rather to inculcate certain values through recitation, drama, and dance.

[169] One particular area of difficulty is seen when many non-Western theological students struggle, at least initially, in learning the Western approach to hermeneutics, as they are likely not accustomed to asking these kinds of analytical questions of a written text. The process of asking questions of the text is fundamental to the process of inductive Bible study and hermeneutics which is the focal point of many Western, evangelical seminaries.

and analyze texts even though many of them have not developed the same capacity of doing so as students from the West. This ultimately produces the phenomena that has been observed in countless theological training schools across Africa where theological students may be able to respond adequately to questions on a test because of their well-developed capacity for memorization and recitation, yet they have much difficulty in putting that same information to use in a church setting where they themselves must analyze and apply those truths in a concrete situation.

Relational learning style

In keeping with the collective orientation of their cultures, much of the learning in traditional African societies takes place in the context of relationships, especially between those of a mentor/trainer and his apprentice. Due in large part to the fact that most Africans are oral preference learners, the necessary learning for life is not transmitted as much through a process of abstract, formal study but through observation and imitation of practical skills necessary for everyday life. Those who wish to learn a trade or skill will begin by observing and learning from one who has mastered the skills for a time before trying the skill themselves under the watchful eye of their tutor. In many cases a mentor will be training a number of apprentices at the same time, thus working together for the continuation and benefit of the community. In these types of relational societies, "the basic ingredients [of learning] are modeling and imitation."[170] LaNette Thompson describes the traditional African teaching model in this way:

> In the traditional West African model, which is primarily oral, teachers enter into relationships with their students. Often, the students are sent to live with the teachers. Instruction, for the most part, is given according to the needs of the students and their ability to understand. Teaching is not limited to a particular time or day, but can occur in natural settings, often outdoors in mentor/apprentice relationships. … Once the students understand the teachings, they put it into practice and are expected to teach what they have

[170] Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, p 274.

> learned to younger learners. … The teacher in this model is revered and respected, having earned the right to teach through life experience.[171]

In the West, however, the prevailing mindset is that for one to be properly educated, he must attend a traditional school in which an expert authority transmits abstract information which the student is expected to accumulate and regurgitate on the ensuing exams as proof of his or her "learning."[172] Thompson also gives a synopsis of this style of education:

> In Western models, teachers are professionals with the ability to analyze their subject and give their own interpretations of the subject content. … Since teachers know more than their students, they are in positions of power and deserve a salary for sharing their specialized knowledge. Since the students are not experts, they are not expected to pass along what they have learned to others. Teachers must have a place to teach that is arranged according to the needs of the teacher. The students are dependent upon the teacher and the availability of books or other written resources.[173]

Thompson's general description is equally applicable to traditional, Western seminary education, even that which has been exported to Africa and around the world. Most often this style of education is centered on the knowledge and interests of the teachers and is delivered in terms of presenting propositional theological truths which are analyzed and debated in class and through written requirements such as exams or term papers. The students and teachers do not necessarily develop a deep relationship nor are they expected to regularly interact in natural settings outside of the classroom.

In this schooling model of education, students are not just encouraged but most often required to work individually and in competition with their other classmates rather than developing a learning-in-community mentality. Since Africans in general tend to be

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[171] LaNette Thompson, "Helping Adults Learn: Lessons from Andragogy and the Challenge of Context" in *Beyond Literate Western Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts*, Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2013, p.108-09.

[172] Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, p 82-83.

[173] Thompson, "Helping Adults Learn: Lessons from Andragogy and the Challenge of Context", p 108.

more relational than the average Westerner, those relationships play an important part in the learning process. African community orientation most often emphasizes group effort and cooperation rather than the competitive, individual achievement that is often encouraged in Western-model schooling. In fact, individual achievement in the African context is usually frowned upon as it puts the interests of the individual above those of the group.

For many typical African students, transitioning from an informal, cooperative community into a more formal, Western-style classroom may lead them to initially feel disoriented. From an early age, many African children are taught in a more intimate, relational way when they are gathered in a circle under a tree or around the evening fires and hear stories or engage in discussions with their parents and other elders of the village. This represented the traditional African version of schooling — "*l'ecole sous l'arbre"* ("the school under the tree"), which is vastly different from the schooling model brought to Africa by Western colonialists. When Africans who began learning in the traditional type of schooling find themselves in "*l'école des blancs"* ("the white man's school"), it may be very difficult for them to adapt. Suddenly they find themselves in a system where the teacher is more cold and distant. They are expected to think and produce individual work, are evaluated and rewarded based on their individual efforts, and are even told that working together on tests or projects is considered cheating. Providing this style of education in the African context creates a foreign environment in which the student is required to learn. A student's ability to adapt to this foreign environment will largely determine his level of "success" in his theological training. Ironically, in going through the process of adaptation to Western theological education, the "successful" student has now become somewhat of a foreigner in his own culture and must subsequently readapt to his original culture if he is to be "successful" as a pastor or teacher. Unfortunately, many African students do not successfully complete the cycle of re-adaptation and continue as though they were a foreigner in their own culture.

The impact of urbanization and globalization on education in modern Africa

Given that a significant percentage of theological training in Africa is taking place in the urban centers across the continent, we must also recognize the impact of urbanization and globalization on modern Africa. Timothy Tennent cites globalization among a number of "megatrends" impacting missions in the 21st century and observes that "the forces of globalization have created a new situation in which there is no such thing as a mere local ministry context. Every local context today is informed by the larger global context."[174] As we consider how we should do theological education in an African context, we must realize that much of what we know as traditionally African is rapidly morphing through contact with other cultures. Much of what has been described in this chapter relating to the African worldview and learning preferences reflects the mindset of traditional African cultures; however, as foreign influences multiply across the African continent, this mindset is changing rapidly as Africans increasingly adopt elements of the Western mindset, especially concerning education. This can largely be related to the twin forces of urbanization and globalization.

Each year an ever increasing number of people are flocking to the major urban centers across the African continent. Some leave the villages and rural areas of Africa to come to the major urban centers in search of a better life, while others are forced to flee their homes areas due to various dangers such as armed conflict or political threats. Whatever the cause, this rapid urbanization puts people in contact with numerous other cultures which they may have never encountered before. The effects of urbanization can either cause people to become more open to different ways of seeing the world, thinking, and doing things or it may have the reverse effect, causing people of a particular ethnic group to become somewhat closed off to others. When the culture from which these people come is significantly different from the primary culture of the major urban center,

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[174] Timothy Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010, p 42.

they may adopt a preservationist mindset, holding even more closely to their ethnic traditions in an effort to maintain their identity as a people group so as not to be assimilated into the urban mass. Cultures are usually not rejected or accepted wholesale, however. Individuals often assimilate some components of a culture while rejecting others that they deem to be incompatible or undesirable. In this way, they can adapt to a more global world while still maintaining their own unique cultural identity.

In the major urban centers, Africans not only come into contact with those of other African cultures but also foreigners from both East and West. In addition to the major European colonial powers (France, England, Portugal) who continue to wield influence in Africa, other Western nations like America and Canada also have an important presence on the African continent through military presence, economic development, or missionary activities. Additionally, China is investing heavily in Africa through their Belt and Road Initiative, especially in areas of power development, transportation infrastructure, and telecommunications networks,[175] and South Korea has become a major force in business as well as intercultural missions. This globalization has brought many foreign cultures to Africa's doorstep, and the results are being felt across the continent.

Modern Africa is experiencing an identity crisis of sorts. While she seeks to hold firmly to tradition wherein her identity lies, she also is ready to wholeheartedly embrace the perceived advantages that come with adaptation to other cultures. This identity crisis is particularly observed among different generations. Often the older generations tend to hold more strongly to traditional beliefs and practices while younger generations are more open to changes in their worldview and behavior, seeing such an adaptation as critical to their future aspirations. Since many of the younger generations tend to come to the major urban centers for university education or in search of a job, they encounter

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[175] Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "OECD Business and Finance Outlook 2018," https://www.oecd.org/finance/Chinas-Belt-and-Road-Initiative-in-the-global-trade-investment-and-finance-landscape.pdf, accessed Nov 22, 2019.

different cultural values and practices more frequently and tend to be more openminded toward assimilating others' values into their own worldview. Charles Kraft maintains that the process of formal education itself is a major factor in urbanization and globalization. In his estimation, formal education "serves to extract people from traditional life into the Westernizing segment of society. This process has much to do with the emigration of people from rural to urban areas and from nonwestern to western countries."[176]

Across much of Africa, the Western educational system has already been deeply engrained in the minds of many students, particularly among those who were born and raised in the urban centers and know little to nothing of the traditional African village life. Among the younger generations of Africans who are being reached through theological education efforts, there is an increased desire to see all things Western take root, especially in the realm of education. Even from a primary or secondary school level, most schooling taking place in African urban centers closely follows the traditional Western schooling model. In general, Western-style schooling is now seen as the only "real" education, and there exists a common expectation of how schooling should be carried out. Students have come to expect some sort of formal recognition such as a certificate or diploma for any training that they receive, even a seminar that only lasts a few days. At the Bible college or seminary level, institutions are also obligated to provide diplomas or, at the least, certificates of completion, for their program of studies, otherwise students will not see the training as having equal value with that of other universities in providing them with academic recognition and social mobility. In this way, as Shaw maintains, "emerging leaders [have been] 'schooled' to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, and a diploma with competence."[177]

However, as we have previously noted, the proliferation of certificates or diplomas for theological training across Africa has not necessarily been accompanied by

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[176] Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, p 276.

[177] Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, p 82.

a transformation of the hearts and minds of those who have been trained. Although the schooling model does not necessarily produce the desired character in the students who are being trained, nor is it necessarily adapted to a given context, theological education around the world continues to be enslaved to this model.[178] Robert Banks notes that the servitude to the traditional, Western schooling model is present even among seminaries in the West:

> For all their theological differences, seminaries tend to have more in common than appears to be the case. For example, with few exceptions they all recruit formally qualified faculty, use critical methodologies, and value academic accreditation. Most still tend to view pastoral ministry as a profession, and provide training in relevant skills. Only rarely do they question the dominant schooling paradigm by which they fashion their lives. Seminaries have often adopted secular models of education, rather than subject them to rigorous theological or practical evaluation: even where such questioning takes place, it often parallels what is taking place in higher education or training for the professions generally, not on any distinctive grounds.[179]

As Western-style education continues to exert its influence across Africa, and especially in the major urban centers, the traditional values of community and cooperation are beginning to be replaced by individualism and competition. Even as early as preschool, which some children start as early as two years old, students are ranked and rewarded based on their individual performance. Parents even speak of their children with pride in terms of what ranking they achieved in their class. This can create a complex mixture for the development of a contextualized program of theological

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[178] This can be illustrated by looking at Alan Harkness's analysis of the four main types of theological education: theological studies in a (usually) secular university, theological education in a theological college, seminary or divinity school, institutions established primarily to equip laypersons for ministry and mission, and non-campus attendance theological education. Of these four the first three largely follow the schooling model and even the fourth borrows elements of the schooling model though distancing students from the classroom itself. Harkness even poses a question to know "whether the use of the schooling paradigm is in fact a major contributing factor to the dis-ease expressed about ministerial formation." ("De-schooling the Theological Seminary: An Appropriate Paradigm for Effective Ministry Formation" in *Teaching Theology and Religion*, vol 4, no 3. p. 141-154).

[179] Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999, p 6-7.

education as the cultural dynamics shift and change from place to place and from generation to generation. How do Western theological educators train men and women for ministry in the midst of a complex, multicultural amalgamation?

These foreign influences which have now become part of the fabric of modern Africa present challenges to the training of men and women for ministry in Africa. Despite the thirst evidenced across Africa for all things Western, the Western theological educator must not ignore the fact that he is still training in and for ministry in the African context and must not conduct his training as if it were a-cultural. However he must also be aware of the dynamic nature of cultures and not treat the process of contextualization as a “once-for-all” endeavor. In our efforts to contextualize theological education for the African context, we must be constantly adapting and adjusting to account for both traditional values as well as the modern, global context. Unfortunately, as the traditional Western method of schooling has been implanted across much of Africa, especially in the major urban centers, many of the same educational methods have even been applied to theological and ministry training. This creates a complex dilemma across modern Africa, and evangelical theological educators must address the complexities of urbanization and globalization differently for their unique situations. In order to effectively evaluate how these factors affect our methods of theological education, we must now turn to examine how our models of theological education have been shaped by the Western mindset in which they were developed.

Understanding the Western schooling model of education[180]

While individual methodologies and educational details may vary from one institution to another, the vast majority of the Western educational system follows what Perry Shaw refers to as the "schooling model" — an educational design which leads students to believe that only formal schooling equals true education.[181] The impact of this schooling model is subtle but pervasive, as Ivan Illich observed: "In school we are taught that valuable learning is the result of attendance; that the value of learning increases with the amount of input; and, finally, that this value can be measured and documented by grades and certificates."[182] In the Western educational system, learning necessarily takes place within the confines of an institution (a school), designed for the purpose of transmitting knowledge from those who already possess it to those who are searching for it — and who have the ability to pay in order to receive it.

Pedagogy : the traditional Western model of education

What we refer to here as the traditional Western model of education has often been referred to in educational theory as "pedagogy." Malcolm Knowles reflects that this model of schooling is "the only way of thinking about education that most of us know, for it has dominated all of education … since schools started being organized in the seventh

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[180] Given the scope of the current study, it is impossible to provide an in-depth analysis of the philosophy and history of the Western educational system from its origins until now. For the purpose of our study, and at the risk of becoming reductionistic, we will merely attempt to give a general overview of the Western educational model in order to evaluate its impact on ministry training in African contexts. For a more detailed treatment of the foundations of education see *Christian Education: A Guide to the Foundations of Ministry* edited by Freddy Cardoza.

[181] Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, p 82.

[182] Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, downloaded from http://philosophy.la.psu.edu/illich/deschool/ , p 29.

century."[183] Though this typical Western educational model is significantly different from traditional education in many non-Western societies, due in large part to the colonization efforts of European countries dating back to the 15th century, it has spread and taken root across the globe and has now become an international phenomenon.

In the pedagogical model of education, the majority of learning takes place in the formal setting of a classroom[184] following a "top-down" model which is centered largely around the teacher.[185] In this model, the resident experts at the head of a particular educational system, whether teachers, headmasters, directors, national secretaries, etc., decide what is necessary for the students to learn and what is left out of a particular course of study. While the prescribed courses may not exactly respond to the interests or even the needs of the students, it is the educational hierarchy, rather than the students, who determines what is important to know. Students enter into a classroom where they are seated facing a professor who stands or sits at the front of the room, often in front of a black (or white) board. The professor is assumed to be an expert authority on the subject being taught, whose task is to transfer the necessary information to the students. In turn, the students will repeat this information back to their professor in the form of a test, paper, or another means of demonstrating their mastery of the information that was taught to them. Professors will then evaluate the students' learning of the information by somewhat arbitrarily attributing grades to their work, which forms the basis for conferring a diploma at the completion of the students' training. In many cases, these diplomas are seen as prerequisites for entering certain sectors of the

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[183] Malcolm Knowles, *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult Learning*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1984, p 8. The term pedagogy was employed by Knowles and others who were seeking to distinguish methods of adult education (what Knowles called *andragogy* — coming from the Greek word ανδρος (andros), signifying an adult man) from the traditional methods used in schooling children (*pedagogy* - from the Greek word παιδίον (paidion), signifying a child). Now however, Knowles' theories of andragogy are being applied not only to the education of adults but also in educating children as well.

[184] Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, p 276

[185] Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, p 82.

workforce or for continuing on to receive more advanced education. Individuals who have excelled in this traditional Western schooling model often become teachers for the next generation and thereby perpetuate the cycle of the traditional Western schooling model.

A move toward Andragogy : changes in Western educational theory

Whereas the pedagogical schooling method focuses primarily on the transmission of information while maintaining a high power distance between the teacher and the students, more recent developments in modern educational theory in the West have begun to address the perceived deficiencies in the pedagogical model of education and to propose different methods for conducting education. A number of varied and significant changes in educational theory began to be introduced in the second half of the 20th century and have revolutionized the world of education. Illeris has observed that educational theories before 1950 revolved around four primary approaches (German Gestalt psychology, American behaviorism, Russian cultural-historical theory, and Piaget's constructivism) but were also significantly influenced by the ideas of Sigmund Freud and John Dewey. Then, between 1950 and 1970, men such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow began to bring psychology to bear on theories of learning and motivation which ignited a different line of thinking regarding educational theory.[186]

Another important educational development in the 1950s was the publication of Benjamin Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, which highlighted the importance of the affective and psychomotor aspects of the learning process in addition to the transmission of knowledge (cognitive). Bloom maintained that a student who does not have a positive attitude toward learning or who has not been taught the requisite skills to accomplish a given task is much less likely to succeed in his endeavor. Bloom's

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[186] Knud Illeris, "An Overview of the History of Learning Theory," European Journal of Education, Research, Development and Policy, 2018;53:86–101. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12265.

Taxonomy therefore encouraged teachers to not only understand the objectives of their instruction but also to be able to communicate them to their students. Bloom divided the objectives for instruction into six domains: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. Bloom's *Taxonomy* would be subsequently revised at the turn of the century, removing the step of synthesis and inserting a final category — that of creation. The learning objectives were also changed to the verb form to concord with activities intended for the students: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create.

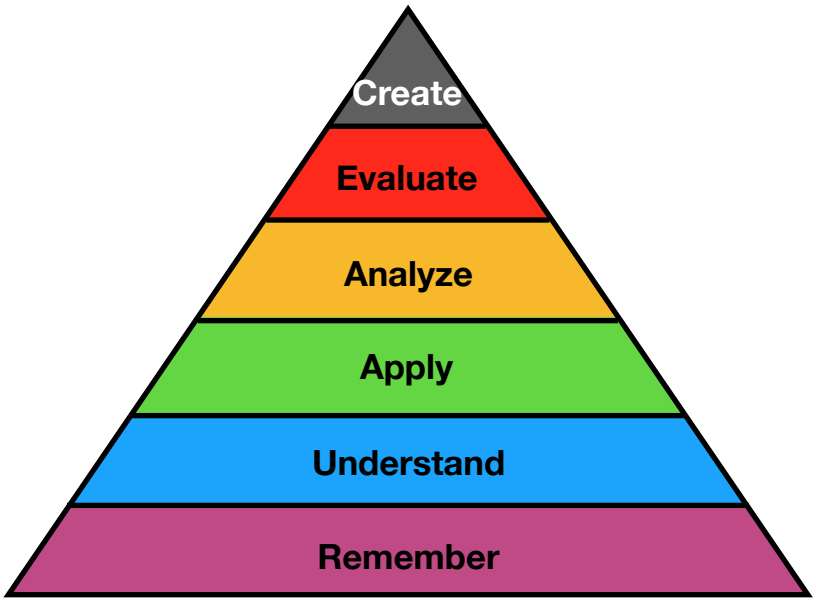

Figure 3.2: Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Revised)

Bloom's *Taxonomy* was an important development in education for several reasons. First, the taxonomy encouraged teachers to establish concrete goals for their teaching — focusing not only on the subject they were teaching but also on why they were teaching it. Additionally, Bloom recognized the importance of communicating these reasons for learning — what the instruction was designed to accomplish — to the

students so that they would be motivated to learn. A third benefit of Bloom's *Taxonomy* is that it encourages teachers to go beyond merely providing their students with information to giving them the necessary skills to succeed in their given field.[187]

The structure of Bloom's Taxonomy, as represented in Figure 3.2, establishes the hierarchy of these teaching objectives. Knowledge, and the ability to remember what has been learned, is the foundational element of any learning, for a student will never be able to put into practice what he has not learned or cannot remember. This is the level of basic recall, which is often evidenced through memorizing or defining concepts. Comprehension or understanding is then built upon the foundation of knowing/ remembering since the simple repetition of facts or phrases is useless to the student unless he can understand what those facts or phrases mean. A student shows that he has understood by not only reciting and/or defining concepts, but also by explaining the ideas that underly the facts. Once a student both knows and understands a subject matter, can he then pass to the third learning objective of applying what he has learned. It is in the application process where the information a student has learned is linked concretely with the real world. Here a student is asked to put his learning into practice by solving problems related to the subject of study.[188] Although these three steps represent only half of the hierarchy of objectives outlined in Bloom's *Taxonomy*, much of the teaching process in Western theological education (based on pedagogy) stops after the third level. However, Bloom's *Taxonomy* needs to be followed to its conclusion by teaching students to see connections between ideas (analyze), to objectively critique an idea or practice (evaluate), and to formulate new ideas and practices (create) which will permit them to address questions and issues particular to their own culture.[189]

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[187] Patricia Armstrong, "Bloom's Taxonomy," Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/ accessed Dec 5, 2019.

[188] Ibid.

[189] The way in which this process can be used in theological education to promote problem solving in the African context which leads to a theology which addresses African issues and questions will be developed in Chapter 5.

Following Bloom's Taxonomy, some of the most significant developments and expansions of thinking in the field were introduced onto the educational scene beginning in the 1970s. Macolm Knowles' writings on andragogy emphasized that the teacher should act more as a facilitator of learning than a dispenser of knowledge. In this facilitating of learning, the teacher must take into account the students' interests, experiences, internal motivations, and barriers to learning in order to adapt his methods to each situation so that he can best facilitate learning for a particular group.[190] Paulo Freire in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* argued along the same lines as Knowles, insisting that students should not be seen as empty bank accounts into which teachers are making deposits of information. In addition, he argued that education should be for the purpose of social change and transformation, thereby liberating people from the structures which oppress them.[191] Jack Mezirow advocated a process of "Transformative Learning," in which the student is brought face to face with a "disorienting dilemma" which causes him to step aside to assess himself and his assumptions, recognize that others have gone through this same process, explore his options, formulate a plan of action, and reintegrate himself into the society. In this way, Mezirow encouraged teachers to challenge students to reflect not only on content but also on the processes and premises (i.e., worldviews) which have led them and others to their beliefs and understandings. He describes transformative learning as "the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action."[192]

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[190] Malcolm Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy*, Chicago: Follet, 1970.

[191] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Translated by M. Ramos, London: Penguin.

[192] Jack Mezirow & Associates, *Learning As Transformation*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

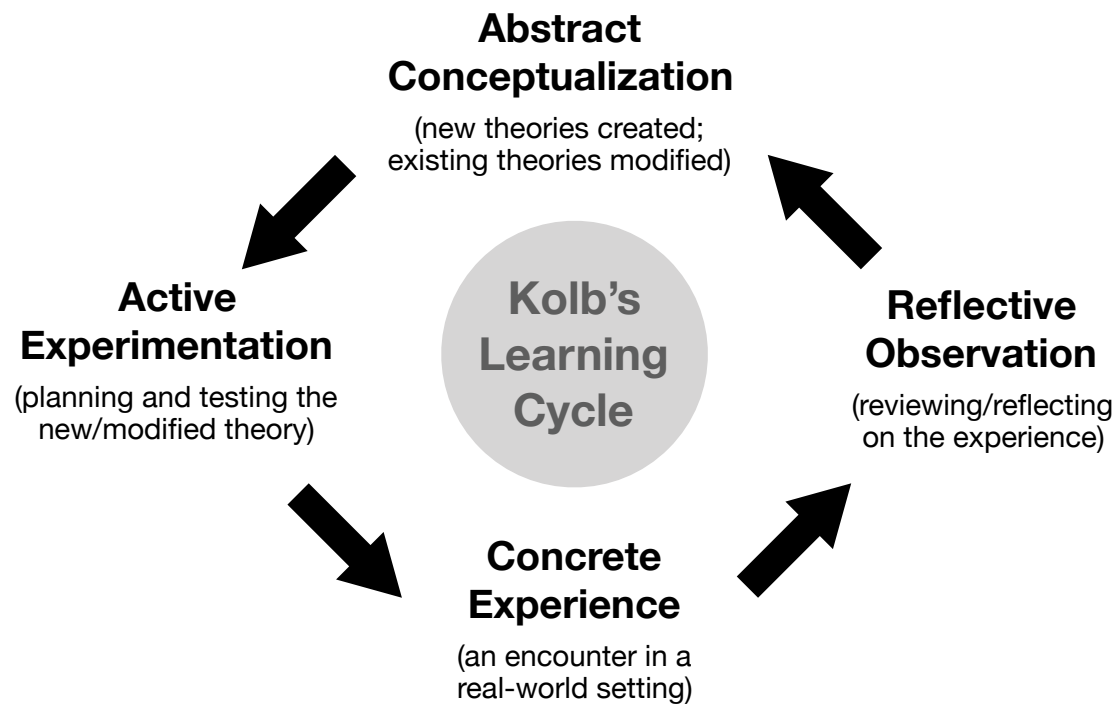

Figure 3.3: Kolb's learning cycle

Following on the heels of Mezirow, David Kolb introduced his theory of "Experiential Learning," which was the first of its kind in that, rather than dealing with a single aspect of the learning process, it attempted to create a comprehensive theory of learning. According to Kolb, learning is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience."[193] In other words, Kolb maintained that true learning is not simply the accumulation of facts and theories but must pass through the process of experience in order to constitute true learning. Abstract theories or concepts that are learned in the classroom must be applied in various real-life situations, which subsequently generate new ideas.[194] Kolb posited that there are four integrated activities in the learning cycle: concrete experience (a given encounter, complete with one's

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[193] David Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development (Vol 1)*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984, p 38.

[194] Saul MacLeod, "Kolb - Learning Styles," 2013, p 1. retrieved from www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html

thoughts and feelings about that encounter), reflective observation (thinking about the encounter, especially any discrepancies between the learner's experience and his understanding), abstract conceptualization (theories are developed or modified based on observation and reflection), and active experimentation (new theories are planned and tested in another real-world setting).[195] While all four elements are interrelated and indispensable in the process of learning, the concrete experience is the key to this cycle for without it there would be no possibility of observation/reflection, developing new theories, or testing them in the real world.

Applying modern Western educational theory in the African context

While a great number of these modern educational theories have produced necessary changes to the pedagogical model of education throughout the West, great care must be taken when applying them in an intercultural context such as Africa. Even though the vast majority of these theories have been based on significant research in the field of psychology, virtually all of these studies have been conducted among what Joseph Henrich and his colleagues refer to as W.E.I.R.D. people - those who are primarily **W**estern and **E**ducated and who come from **I**ndustrialized, **R**ich, and **D**emocratic societies. They commented that,

> Behavioral scientists routinely publish broad claims about human psychology, cognition, and behavior in the world's top journals based on samples drawn entirely from highly educated segments of Western societies. Researchers—often implicitly—assume that either there is little variation across human populations, or that these "standard subjects" are as representative of the species as any other.[196]

Although this observation does not invalidate the research that has been conducted, it does provide a necessary correction to those who wish to import the conclusions made

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[195] Ibid., p 1-2

[196] Joseph Henrich et. al., "The Weirdest People in the World," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33, no. 2-3 (2010): 61–83. doi:10.1017/S0140525X0999152X.

about modern Western education into theological education in Africa without first considering the context. It is important to include this caveat because, as Tim Hatcher has observed, “some Western educators and trainers [such as Malcolm Knowles] have asserted that their methodologies are universally applicable”[197] while others, who may not state that belief explicitly, operate as if that were the case.

In examining the impact of culture on learning, David Catterick[198] summarizes the three potential responses of Western educators[199] to cultural differences in education culture: non-accommodation, intervention, and modification. The non-accommodation response refers to the fact that the educators themselves refuse to make any concessions in their teaching style to adapt to those from a different culture. This refusal is based on the assumption that because the West is leading the world in the field of educational theory and practice, therefore Western methods are superior. In the non-accommodation method, it is the students who must make all the accommodations to adapt to the foreign teachers’ foreign style of teaching. It is often through this process of forced adaptation that students become Western-African hybrids.

The second response, that of intervention, takes a small step forward from the non-accommodation response in that it acknowledges the role that cultural differences might play in the learning process, yet it continues to maintain that teaching methods should remain essentially Western, largely due to their supposed superiority. While the

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[197] Tim Hatcher, ““Toward Culturally Appropriate Adult Education Methodologies for Bible Translators” https://www.diu.edu/documents/gialens/Vol2-3/Hatcher-Adult-Ed-Methodologies.pdf , 2008 p 2.

[198] David Catterick, “Do the Philosophical Foundations of Online Learning Disadvantage Non-Western Students?”, *Globalized E-Learning Cultural Challenges*, Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing (Idea Group Inc), 2007, p 116-29.

[199] Catterick’s use of the term “BANA countries” (Britain, Australasia, and North America) roughly corresponds to Henrich’s definition of WEIRD countries: “those countries clustered in the north-West of Europe (U.K. France, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, etc.), and British-descent societies such the U.S., Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.” (Henrich, p 44, endnote 5). Catterick uses “BANA countries” specifically in reference to online education, where these countries tend to take the lead in offering e-learning.

first response assumes that the students will adapt on their own, in the second method the teacher attempts to intervene to help the students to adapt to a new (foreign) style of learning through a guided adaptation program. Ultimately, however, the end result remains the same, namely that foreign students are forced to become Western in order to succeed in the training that is offered.

Catterick's third response, modification, accepts "that the educational philosophies which inform teaching … need to be reevaluated and possibly modified."[200] This allows the Western educator to enter into a process of critical evaluation of the educational methodologies and their applicability to the particular context. This in no way minimizes the validity of Western educational goals and methods but simply acknowledges that they may not be always be appropriate in a non-Western context and may even form barriers to true learning when removed from the Western context in which they were developed. The onus, therefore, is on the Western educator in an intercultural context to discover the appropriate means of wedding these two realities.

Adrian Holliday calls for intercultural educators to conduct their own research into the cultural norms in a particular country in order to develop what he calls their own "ethnomethodology" — a method of teaching which fits the context in which they are teaching. A Western teacher, therefore, should constantly be evaluating the learning style of the culture, adapting their teaching styles accordingly, and evaluating the effectiveness of the methods being used.[201] This ethnomethodology does not discount the important, modern educational theories but also does not seek to impose them *carte blanche* into a different culture without critically examining how to contextualize them to create "best practices" for education in their host culture. Each educator is, therefore, responsible to learn about his host culture in order to adapt his style of teaching so that

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[200] Ibid., p 127.

[201] Adrian Holliday, *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

he can be a more effective educator in his particular context, using what Hatcher refers to as “blended methodologies.”[202]

> [Modern] Western educational paradigms seek to promote problem-solving abilities and critical thinking skills; they also seek to provide learners with the tools needed to be life-long, self-directed learners. Western educational paradigms seek to accomplish this through methodologies that are learner-directed, dialogue based, and emphasize an egalitarian interaction between the learner and the instructor, with the instructor serving more as a facilitator than an instructor. These methodologies are not the only path to these goals. I suggest these objectives can be reached using methodologies and social interactions that are less offensive to the cultural preferences of [non-Western] learners. [203]

This requires the international educator to have a deep understanding of modern Western educational theory and design as well as the values, beliefs, and assumptions of his host culture. In the case of theological education in Africa, this synthesis becomes even more necessary. We are not simply training men and women for a professional field that will serve for their own personal advancement but we are training them to advance the kingdom of God in their own cultures. If we do not do this effectively, the consequences of an uncontextualized training will be disastrous for the African church as has been evident throughout mission history.

Understanding the consequences of the Western educational model in Africa

Michael Page has posited that “for training programs to have meaningful goals and objectives, it is necessary for trainers to understand what constitutes effectiveness

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[202] Hatcher, “Toward Culturally Appropriate Adult Education Methodologies for Bible Translators,” p 13.

[203] Ibid., p. 13. A fuller treatment of how to “promote problem-solving abilities and critical thinking skills” will be addressed in Chapter 5 as we seek to address cultural issues plaguing theological education in Africa.

in the target culture and what the factors are that influence success."[204] Many well-meaning, Western missionaries, who either lacked the ability to adequately consider the African context in which they were seeking to train pastors or simply failed to do so, transplanted Western models of theological education similar to those in which they themselves were trained. For this reason, missionary educators in Africa — and many of those who were trained under them — have often subsequently divorced the text of Scripture from the context into which it is to speak. That is to say while they may have taught their African brothers and sisters how to exegete Scripture, they have not blended that teaching with an appropriate, in-depth exegesis of the African context which enables African nationals to apply the Scriptures to the felt needs and deep issues in their own cultural contexts.[205] The result of this one-sided exegesis is that African students are being taught truth which has little relation to the concrete situations in which they live — unless it is the students themselves who draw those correlations.

At first glance, the pedagogical schooling model appears to fit seamlessly into the African context where hierarchy and power distance are well established. However, the model proves to be particularly dangerous when Western-trained theologians with little experience or knowledge of the realities of the African context become the primary determiners of the course of study for training Africans to serve in the African context. The uncontextualized nature of the schooling model of theological education has the tendency to produce a number of unintended and undesirable consequences in the lives of both the pastors who are trained under this method and the churches who are led by

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[204] Michael Paige, *Education for the Intercultural Experience*, Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1993, p 170.

[205] This seems to take place most frequently when the theological conclusions that have been developed by Western theologians who are addressing Western questions are translated and transposed into the African context through the teaching of systematic theology. Especially in the anglophone regions of Africa, it is very easy for a Western Bible college or seminary professor to come to Africa and teach the same systematic theology course in an African theological institution that he teaches in his own college or seminary. While the theological principles taught remain true, the manner in which they are taught, complete with Western illustrations that are difficult to understand in an African context, can create confusion when they are not made to relate to the particular African context in which the teaching is taking place.

these pastors. The very theological education which was intended to strengthen the African church has instead produced effects which are leading to her weakening and destruction such as the promotion of a hierarchical spirit, the preponderance of full heads without transformed hearts, the production of hybrid ministers, and a proliferation of weak and frustrated churches across the continent. If we hope to be able to make a course correction in the future, we must first examine how the Western, non-relational model of theological education has produced these effects in the African church.

Promotion of a hierarchical spirit

Perhaps the most deadly of the unintended consequences that the Western model of theological education can produce is the promotion of a hierarchical spirit that permeates the church and theological institutions. It should be noted that this problem is not unique to theological education, as the spirit of hierarchy permeates every level of the African society. One Bible school student made a pertinent observation about the extent of this mentality in the African society: “In Africa, if a man is a chief, his wife must also be chief among the women, his son must be chief among the children, and even his dog must be chief among the dogs.”

Unfortunately, this same spirit can often be seen in the local church as important or influential families battle for position and power in the church and leadership roles are distributed based on family affiliations rather than biblical qualifications. In this way church leadership, and even the Christian faith itself, is often seen as an inheritance which is passed down from father to son and throughout the subsequent generations. For this reason, when a young seminary-trained pastor takes the reins of leadership in a church, a battle for control often rages between the newly trained pastor and the previous leaders who are unwilling to relinquish their control and influence over the church. One seminary graduate admitted, “When we get out of seminary, our concern is to go back to our churches and to show them that we now have knowledge.” However, as Paul told the Corinthians, knowledge puffs up rather than building up as love does.

In speaking of a hierarchical spirit, it is important to clarify that we are seeking neither to promote the Western cultural value of equality in non-Western cultures nor are we pushing for an elimination of role distinctions in African culture. Hierarchy will always have a part in African (and other non-Western) cultures. The structure of hierarchy serves to maintain order and proper functioning of the church and institutions of theological and ministry training, but the spirit of hierarchy is truly destructive in ministry training schools because it is contrary to the clear teaching of Jesus to his disciples:

> "Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. *Not so with you*. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' " (Mark 10:42-45)

In John 13 we can clearly see the way in which one can maintain a hierarchical structure without a hierarchical spirit through how Jesus modeled and taught his disciples. After washing his disciple's feet, a task reserved for the lowliest of slaves, Jesus asked his disciples "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He then proceeded to give an explanation which reinforced his positional superiority vis-à-vis his disciples ("You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am") yet insisted on a rejection of the hierarchical spirit among them ("Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet").

While these and other similar texts of Scripture are regularly taught in theological schools across Africa, its message is often contradicted by what is practiced in those same schools. Perry Shaw refers to this as the "hidden curriculum," which he explains in detail in chapter 5 of *Transforming Theological Education*:

> "The fundamental thesis is that theological students learn about Christian leadership not merely through the content taught in the classroom, but also (and often more significantly) through such things as the way classroom

> teaching takes place, the model of teachers' lives, and the students' experience of the school's administration."[206]

One illustration of this hidden curriculum can be seen in the structure of the classroom itself. Shaw notes that because of the way in which a traditional classroom is set up, the teacher is physically set apart from the rest of the class and "there is a subconscious emotional distance created … The unspoken assumption in formal classroom settings such as these is that the students are ignorant 'open receptacles', eagerly awaiting the answers to life's issues."[207] A lack of attention to the impact of the hidden curriculum in any culture can lead to a complete undermining of what is actually being taught in the classroom since students will naturally tend to follow what they have seen modeled before them rather than practicing what they have been taught in the classroom. In the relational African context, where people are trained from infancy to imitate what they have seen modeled before them, this poses an even greater danger. The impact of the hidden curriculum in theological schools across Africa can be further explained through the twin phenomena of neocolonialism and bossism.

The neocolonial phenomenon

The phenomenon of neocolonialism refers to the tendency of Western missionaries ("the white man") to regard and treat Africans as their colonial fathers once treated them. This can be observed in African institutions of theological education when Westerners implicitly present themselves as the foreign experts and expect a certain level of deference and special treatment. Expecting or even welcoming honors such as having prestigious titles conferred upon them or being put in charge of developing new programs despite their lack of understanding of the culture and their inability to appropriately contextualize the theological training to the African context can be an

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[206] Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, p 79.

[207] Ibid., p 82.

evidence of a neocolonial mindset among Western theological educators. This expectation of special treatment often produces a deference to the “white man,” whether out of a desire to honor his contributions, to procure further favor/funding for the school, to give additional credibility to the training program through his presence, or for any other number of reasons, and is detrimental to a theological school in the African context because it reinforces a hierarchical spirit.

The reinforcing of a hierarchical spirit takes place in at least three ways. First, it supports the cultural idea that certain people are inherently more important in God’s work because of their ethnicity, financial status, or position. However, such an idea is contrary to what Paul taught the Galatians: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3.28). This subtle belief becomes dangerous when graduates go out into ministry with the expectation that, now that they have been schooled and received their diploma, they have finally climbed the social ladder and reached a place of deserving such honors because of their elevated position. Second, preferential treatment for Westerners perpetuates a model of dependency by implying that Africans are unable to do ministry, whether theological training, church planting, evangelism, etc., without foreign presence or presents. When national African institutions depend primarily on Western funds, there is often a lack of a sense of ownership and initiative within the institution. Instead of using what is available to them and seeking creative solutions to local problems, nationals rather tend to look to the West for the needed financial resources to carry out ministry. Third, a hierarchical spirit restricts the growth and efficacy of the theological school by continuing to promote a Western-modeled, non-contextual approach to theological education by giving theological information that is not sufficiently connected to concrete elements in the African cultural context where that truth needs to be fleshed out to produce transformation. Shaw observes, “The exposition of texts is not enough: the text must be connected to the context. When connection is not made in the

theological school, it is difficult for graduates to make the connections in their ministries."[208]

The "bossism" phenomenon

The second manner in which a hierarchical spirit is promulgated in the African church is through what Choolwe Mbetwa describes as the phenomenon of "bossism." This bossism is described with the idea that "in hierarchical societies power is about the most glamorous thing. As for the African male, he is in his element when lavished with real power."[209] In short, everyone wants to be the boss of someone. Bossism in African society is often a corollary of neocolonialism; if the Westerner is seen as "the big boss" in neocolonial African societies, then it is only natural that others will seek to position themselves under him in the proverbial pecking order. However, this idea of bossism is not unique to modern Africa as we see this kind of jockeying for position in the life of Jesus's disciples. On several different occasions, Scripture tells us that the disciples asked Jesus (Mat 18) or argued among themselves (Mar 9; Luk 9) as to who would be the greatest. James and John even went as far as to have their mother make a formal request to Jesus that they be seated right next to him in the kingdom (Mat 20:20), which naturally provoked the ire of the rest of the disciples. However Jesus went on to explain that, contrary to popular opinion, being great in God's kingdom does not consist of having a position of power or authority but in humbly and sacrificially serving others as Jesus himself did (Mat 20:25-28; Mar 10:42-45).

In the hierarchical societies that dominate the African continent, bossism is frequently seen in all areas of society but especially in the political realm. Mbetwa highlights three elements that are consistent with bossism.[210] The first is the idea of intoxication with power, which implies that the one in power has absolute authority over

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[208] Ibid., p 84.

[209] Mbetwa, *Why Africa is Poor*, p 46.

[210] Mbetwa, *Why Africa is Poor*, ch 5, p 46-56.

all who are under him and demands complete and unquestioning submission from all of his subjects. In order to maintain this power, African leaders often succumb to the second effect of bossism, namely an unrivaled paranoia. Those who wield unlimited power believe that someone is always out to get them and usurp their position of power. This explains why African leaders seem to have a particular affinity for foreign connections over local ones, knowing that the foreigner can never displace him. The African leader is therefore always seeking to surround himself by loyal subjects, even if it is necessary for him to "buy" his supporters with favors. This naturally produces the third component of bossism which is challenging a challenge. Any rival, whether real or imagined, must be challenged and ultimately deposed. "When hierarchical leaderships fall in love with power, they become hysterical about every form of public criticism, dissent or challenge. In the spirit of a jealous lover they resent anyone that threatens their affair with power."[211]

Although African pastors and theological educators are expected to be transformed, indwelled and controlled by the Holy Spirit, these natural, cultural tendencies toward bossism are seen all too often, even among the best pastors and theological trainers and especially among those whose theological education has been more informational than transformational. Evidences of bossism are frequently seen in the African theological education institutions when teachers have an air of superiority about them. This may take multiple different forms such as insisting on particular titles or terms of respect, speaking in high theological terms, refusing to allow any questions or dissenting opinions in class, or even publicly dressing down students who are viewed to be a challenge to the professor. An attitude of superiority can also carry over outside of the classroom when teachers refuse to mingle with their students outside of the classroom. In African society it is natural and expected that those who are higher up on the proverbial hierarchical ladder will maintain a "professional distance" from those who

[211] Ibid., p 52.

are below them. However, when pastoral students who already are culturally accustomed to this type of behavior in society are further shaped by the hidden curriculum of bossism in their theological training, “the more likely it is that graduates will take an emotionally distant ‘expert authority’ pattern into church ministry.”[212] This will lead them to reproduce the same spirit and pattern of hierarchical behavior, thereby sabotaging, even if unwittingly, the very gospel message they are preaching.

The bossism mentality consequently carries over into a pastor’s ministry through an inability or unwillingness to cooperate with other pastors. If a pastor has been trained in traditional Western model which promotes an individualist, competitive model of schooling where each student must work on his own in competition with his fellow students for the best grades, it is highly likely that he will carry that independent, competitive spirit with him into the ministry. When this takes place the elements of power intoxication, paranoia, and challenging all challengers become visible in the church. Older pastors may refuse that younger men from their church be sent out to receive training for fear that they will become their rivals in the church tomorrow. In order to prevent an aspiring young man from being trained, pastors might refuse to write the required pastoral recommendation letter, often giving the excuse that the church does not have enough money to contribute to his training, or they may mobilize certain influential members of the church against the young upstart. If the student does succeed in leaving to be trained, the church often does not follow through with their promise of financial support, leaving the pastoral student to fend for himself in order to finance his theological training. When the student does finish his training and returns to his church, it is not uncommon to hear of these newly trained pastors being deprived of ministry opportunities by the current pastor who hoards all the responsibilities and authorities for himself. At times a church may even refuse to ordain a recently trained man as pastor or require that he raise the funds to assemble an ordination committee, which often

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[212] Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, p 83.

includes paying for their transport, lodging and food, and honorariums. Ultimately, many theologically trained students end up leaving the churches in which they grew up in order to plant another church elsewhere in the same city or region. It is not uncommon for these pastors to end up in competition with one another, if not for church members then for position, prominence, and recognition in their cities or regions. When pastors are shaped in this way, each one is in essence seeking to establish his own little kingdom of influence rather than working together to advance the kingdom of Christ.

Although this problem of the hierarchical spirit did not originate in the Bible college or seminary, the solution to this problem must begin in that milieu. Theological training should not be regarded as a means of social mobility by which a student can climb the rungs of the societal or ecclesiastical ladder with every degree obtained. Because the spirit of hierarchy is so deadly within the church, Bible colleges and seminaries across Africa must set the example in abolishing such a spirit. This implies that in order for our African brothers and sisters to become servant-leaders they must see it modeled to them from the highest levels of church leadership. If the men and women trained in our institutions are to model servant leadership to those in their churches, they themselves must see it modeled by the leaders of the institutions where they are trained, for they will not otherwise find it in the society around them.

Preponderance of full heads without transformed hearts

Another unintended consequence at times produced by traditional Western theological education in Africa, which lies at the heart of the hierarchical spirit, is that many programs of theological training fill heads without working to transform hearts. The curriculum of Western theological institutions tends to be heavily weighted toward content delivery, with the end goal being to transmit a large quantity of essential information that students need to know to be effective in ministry. Kraft notes that “the commitment to teaching in classrooms itself predisposes the process in favor of the

passing on of information and against the modeling of behavior."[213] However, upon observing the results of theological education in Africa over the last few decades, it has become evident that simply filling students' heads with theological content has not produced the intended result of humble servant-shepherds who are well equipped for ministry. Perry Shaw remarked,

> For a long time, teachers in our seminaries have thought that if they could teach students sound theology, Greek exegesis, and church history, these students would begin to function like Christian leaders. We have assumed that students will naturally put into practice what they learn in homiletics, teaching, and counseling classes [and] that if we can persuade students to understand and believe the right things, they will act accordingly.[214]

When we speak of untransformed hearts, this does not mean that pastors themselves are necessarily unregenerate but rather that their lives have not been transformed by the teaching that they have received. Mere biblical information given apart from an emphasis on transformation becomes a spiritual veneer which overlays an unchanged worldview. The proof of this can be seen when trained pastors continue to manifest unbiblical cultural values, attitudes, and actions despite having received much theological teaching to the contrary. As they eventually become leaders of churches and theological training institutions, they will doubtless lead future students down the same road which exalts cultural values over Scriptural teaching.

One such manifestation of this consequence comes when students equate their theological positions and practices — their training culture — with biblical revelation (see Figure 2 below). As Hiebert reminds us, all theological systems are human constructs and not truth as God himself sees it.[215] Undoubtedly, each theological formulation or system of biblical interpretation seeks to accurately reflect the biblical revelation as God gave it, but there can be no perfect overlap. Most theological training schools have a

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[213] Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, p 283.

[214] Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, p 73.

[215] Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, p 42.

bent towards a particular “-ism," which, when presented as the only true understanding of biblical truth, produces in students a belief that they are better instructed than others who hold to a different “-ism.” Upon completing their education, these newly trained pastors often present themselves or are presented to churches and theological schools as a sort of expert with all the right answers. This in turn produces a spirit of arrogance in the hearts of the pastors which minimizes the Holy Spirit’s work to continually reveal truth to them and gives trained pastors the false impression that they now know everything they need for ministry. Consequently, pastors are ill-equipped to continue learning on their own in dependence on the Holy Spirit after graduation because they assume that the training they already received has fully prepared them for ministry.

After having gained some ministry experience, if pastors feel a need for further education, they will in many cases enroll in another program of informational study, realizing that the informational training that they received in their previous course of study was not sufficient to prepare them for ministry and hoping that acquiring more information will solve the problems they are facing in their current ministry. Unfortunately, unless the program in which they enroll is truly transformational and contextualized, it will likely only further complicate the problems as the pastor simply fills his head with more information and, at the end of the training program, gains another title which brings with it even greater expectations of recognition, respect, and preferential treatment. In this way, institutions of theological education may end up reproducing their own church culture rather than biblical culture. The lack of heart transformation in the primarily informational theological training programs may largely stem from the very schooling model in which the theological students are being trained. While the content of the courses offered provide the student with solid theological content, the manner in which the schooling is structured often contradicts the very truths that are being communicated.[216]

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[216] Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, p 81.

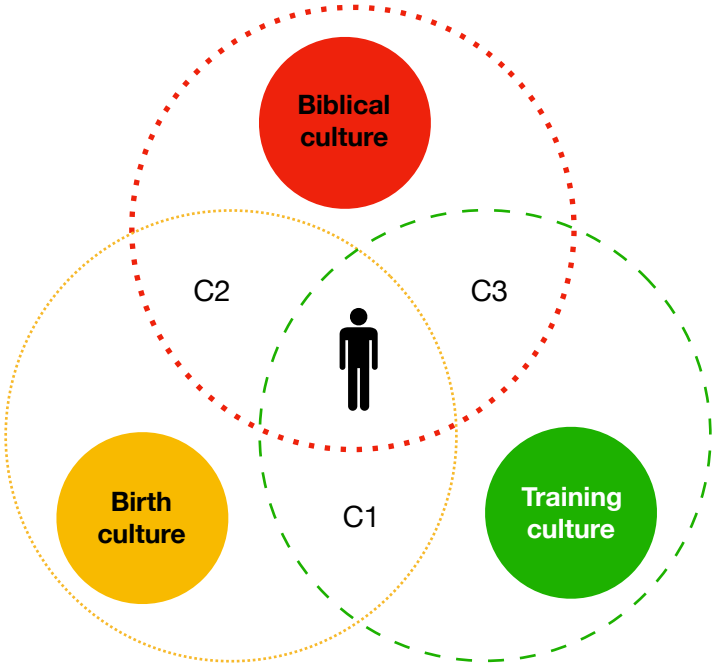

Figure 3.4 Distinguishing cultures in international theological education [217]

[217] We must learn to make clear distinctions between what is biblical and what is cultural. This is what is depicted in Figure 3.4. Making these distinctions applies not only to the differences between one's birth culture and the culture (values, beliefs, and behaviors) that the Bible teaches but also between the biblical culture and the culture in which we have been trained. I am convinced that, in any given place in the world, a significant part of what we label as "biblical" reflects as much or more of the culture in which we have been trained than it does the Biblical culture. If we are not careful to make proper distinctions among what belongs to our birth culture, the culture in which we were trained, and a truly biblical culture, we may find ourselves in a number of undesirable cases. The first case in which we can find ourselves (C1 in Figure 3.4), is when we adopt values or practices that are acceptable in both our birth and training cultures but actually fall outside of biblical prescription. The danger here is that we allow culture to trump what Scripture says in regard to how we should think and live. The second case (C2), is an inherent danger associated with uncontextualized Western theological education in Africa. In this case we may reject values or practices that fall outside of the realm of acceptability in our Western training culture but which are well within the realm of both the biblical culture and an African's birth culture. The danger of case two is that, much like the Judaizers in the time of the Apostle Paul, we demand that Africans abandon some of their own cultural elements in favor of our Western culture. The third case (C3), which often causes a good deal of angst in any culture, deals with values or practices that are outside of the norm of of our birth culture but lay firmly within the realm of both biblical culture and the culture in which we are trained. It is at this point where the Bible, and good theological training, confronts unbiblical elements in a given culture and demands that the student submit, not to Western culture, but to the values and practices required by the Word of God. (Figure 3.4 adapted from Tom Stallter's notes on "Contextualization for Meaningful Ministry," Grace Theological Seminary, July 2013.)

Production of hybrid ministers

As has been previously established, when Western pedagogical methods of education are applied to the African context without an effort at contextualizing those methods, the students who are trained in those methods are forced to adapt themselves to the Western method of thinking, speaking, and writing in order to succeed in these institutions of theological training. While this adaptation may enable them to produce quality Western products in terms of research and writing, it also fundamentally changes the African student in a way that transforms them into cultural hybrids who have blended the values and practices of two or more cultures. While this cultural amalgamation may allow the African student to successfully navigate the international theological education scene, it often removes them to a certain degree from full integration with their own cultures for which they were trained to serve. As previously mentioned, many seminary trained African pastors who have spent a number of years receiving traditional Western theological education experience a sense of loss of identity and frustration when they return to their home areas to minister, especially if those areas are more rural with traditional African mindsets. Additionally, the churches who sent them for training may feel equally disappointed that their new pastor is no longer “one of them” since he no longer thinks like them or can relate to their thinking and way of life. The production of Western-African hybrid ministers also contributes to the theological “brain drain” taking place across much of Africa in which the best and brightest of the African students are recruited by Western universities and seminaries, thereby pulling them out of the context in which they were allegedly trained to minister. For those who do stay in the African context, many of the most successful students end up being absorbed into the same Western institutions which trained and transformed them into cultural hybrids. In this way they end up serving to perpetuate the uncontextualized, traditional Western model of education in which they themselves were trained and which will form the next generation of Western-African hybrid ministers.

Proliferation of weak and frustrated churches

In the African context, when Western theological education combines the elements of a hierarchical spirit and full heads in the lives of cultural hybrid pastors, the product that will invariably be produced is a weak and dysfunctional church. One does not have to look far across the landscape of the African church to testify of this reality, as the popular adage maintains: “Christianity in Africa is a mile wide and an inch deep.” While the health of the African church is a complex equation to which we cannot apply a simplistic solution, we must nevertheless recognize the role that a non-contextualized model of theological education plays in the failing health of the African church.

When the very same model of non-contextual and highly informational education that the pastors themselves received as students in the theological school is transferred into the churches through the pastor’s preaching and teaching, the churches are condemned to the same fate as their pastors — having full heads but untransformed hearts. In many cases the church members feel frustrated and disconnected with their pastor, seeing him as targeting them with his sermons and using his theological acumen to manipulate them for his own goals or desires. In turn, the pastor himself becomes frustrated with his members, seeing them as being resistant both to him and to his message. In this way, many churches find themselves at an impasse either until the pastor succeeds in driving the resistant members from the church or until he himself leaves, often to lead another ministry or to plant another church. Regrettably, unless the pastor is himself transformed through new training or changes his methods, he is destined to reproduce the same product in his new location.

When the very pastors that we are training in our theological institutions unwittingly bring unhelpful and even destructive tendencies into the churches they are leading, it is little wonder that many local African churches are spiritually weak and frustrated. It is necessary, then, that the institutions of theological education reevaluate their impact on the church, for, as Shaw insists, “If there is no meaningful change in the

churches we are serving, we have failed in our task as schools of ministry formation."[218] Therefore if the theological schools are to truly serve the African church, we must re-examine and readjust our methods of training and adapt to a more relational form of ministry training which is better suited to the African context.

[218] Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, p 52.

Chapter 4

Social Research on Theological Education in Africa

In an effort to better understand how Western educators can attempt to reshape their theological education efforts to better fit the African context, a multi-pronged, mixed-methods research study was conducted centering on three theological training schools in Africa. In an effort to reflect the cultural diversity of Africa, the schools were chosen from three different regions of the continent — Central, East, and Southern Africa.

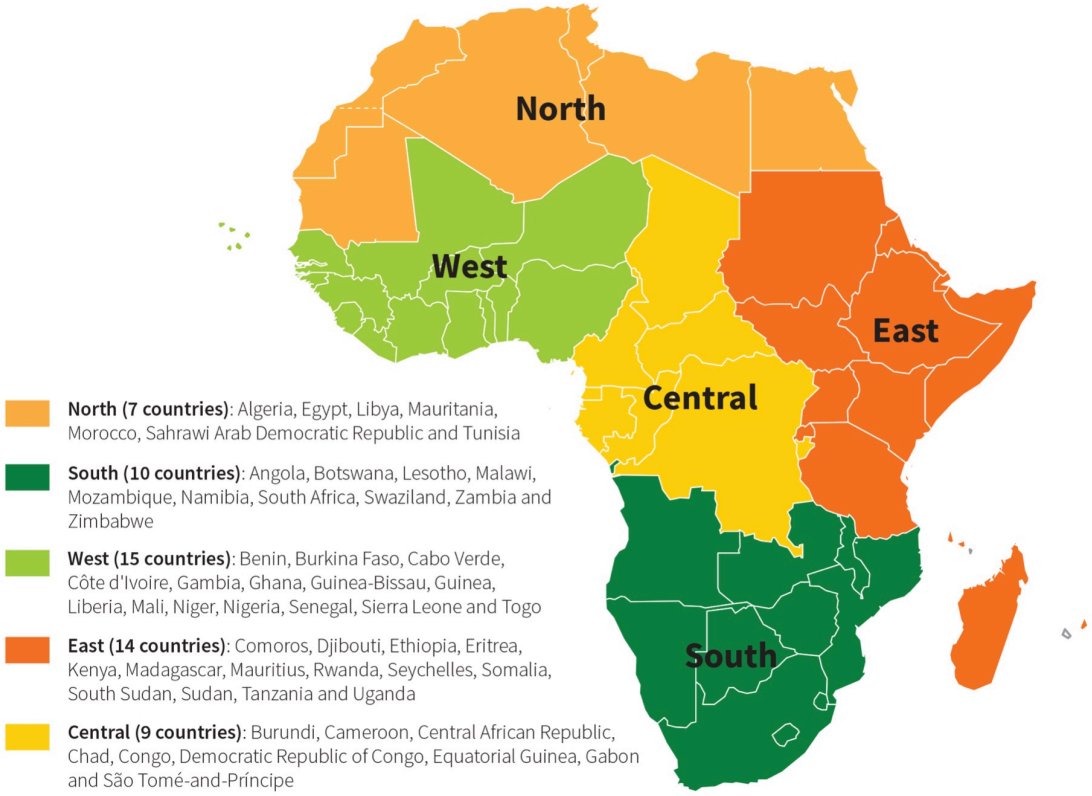

Figure 4.1: Regions of Africa (as determined by the African Union)[219]

[219] Map provided by the Sahel and West Africa Club. Accessed at http://www.west-africa-brief.org/content/en/six-regions-african-union on Dec 11, 2019. It should be noted that there is no single universally agreed upon division of Africa according to these regions, nevertheless the division represented by the map seems to be the most commonly accepted and logical division.

It is assumed that the diversity among the schools, and by extension their students, will provide a representative sampling of a range of different cultures that are found across the African continent.

Purpose of the research

The research conducted was designed around a central research question: "Does the model of theological education used in Bible schools across the African continent adequately prepare students to minister in the realities of the African context?" This research question is based on the assumption that Western methods of education, while providing a solid theological formation, are not sufficient to prepare men and women for a number of complex issues which they are sure to encounter in carrying out local church ministry in the African context. The goal of the research was to test this theory against the concrete experiences of students who have been trained in Western-model theological schools in Africa.[220] Additionally, the researcher hoped to identify a number of Western educational methodologies that should be contextualized in order to produce a model of theological education that is particularly adapted to the African context.

Overview of the research methods

A mixed-methods social research study was deemed to be the most appropriate method to respond to the central research question because it allows the researcher to accumulate both quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide the necessary insights into students' assessment of their educational experience. The research data

[220] Referring to these institutions as "Western-model theological schools" does not necessarily indicate that these institutions are plagued by the unintended consequences mentioned at the end of the previous chapter. The qualifier is used to indicate that these schools, at their creation, were structured to reflect a Western model of theological education.

was conducted using three non-sequential procedures of data collection and subsequently synthesized in order to test the research theory and produce a contextualized model of appropriate theological education for Africa.

Three different procedures were employed to collect the research data:

Procedure 1: Qualitative interviews with the directors of each school

Procedure 2: Quantitative survey of students

Procedure 3: Educational experimentation including course variations and diverse teaching methods

In the first procedure, an interview was conducted with the director of each school to determine the level of training offered, the structure of the training (including curriculum and methodology), the identity and quality of their teachers (including criteria for recruitment), and the goals for their graduates and means of evaluating whether those goals are met. The interviews also touched on challenges the schools face in adapting theological education to the particular context. Due to the distance between the three schools as well as the difficulty and elevated cost of travel within Africa, two of the interviews were conducted using phone calls and electronic messaging services.

The researcher also employed a second procedure for accumulating data which involved inviting current and former students of the three schools to participate in a quantitative survey about their educational experience. This survey sought to produce understanding of the qualities that students look for in a good teacher, to gauge their satisfaction with how well their studies prepared them for ministry, and to measure the perceived effectiveness of select educational methods in their theological training. In order to overcome the challenge of geographical distance between the three schools, this survey was created and conducted using SurveyMonkey for the majority of the respondents. Directors of each school were provided with a link to the survey site which was provided to any students of the institution who wished to participate in the survey. In

some cases the researcher directly contacted students of these theological schools to provide them with a link to the survey. Approximately 30% of the total number of surveys completed were conducted onsite among current students at one of the theological schools, and those responses were manually entered by the researcher.

Due to the inclusion of students from anglophone and francophone countries, two identical surveys were conducted, one in each language. The researcher, who has lived in francophone Africa since 2008, was responsible for the translation of the survey into French. Of the responses that were received for the survey, fifty-four percent (54%) came from francophone students and forty-six (46%) from anglophones. The responses from the two surveys were examined to establish any significant differences between the anglophone and francophone respondents and then synthesized to form a single report.

Over the last five years, a third research procedure has been in process at the theological school in the Central African region where the researcher directs the masters program. As the primary instructor in the program, the researcher has been experimenting with curriculum changes as well as alternate instructional and evaluative techniques in an effort to assess if these changes will produce observable differences in the masters students' motivation and application of what they are learning. Each of the four students that comprise this masters cohort received their undergraduate training at the same institution which follows a traditional Western model of theological education. This makes the evaluation of the use of newer, contextualized methods of education of particular interest to the current study.

The students were not explicitly informed that research was being conducted in order to preserve the normalcy of the interactions with the instructor/researcher. Upon completion of the final series of classes, the researcher invited the four students to participate in individual exit interviews in which they were asked to compare the two different educational models which they have experienced, to describe the strengths and weakness of each, to select the model which was most helpful in equipping them for

ministry in their context, and to explain why the model they chose was particularly useful to them. The students were assured that declining to be interviewed would have no bearing on their grade for the final courses, nor on their completion of the program and that the confidentiality of their responses would be preserved. None of the students declined to be interviewed.

Description of the research subjects

The main target of this research was current or former students from three evangelical institutions of theological training in Africa originated by missionaries in the last 30 years. This population was targeted because it is the students who are formed in these theological schools who are expected to make an impact for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in their churches and communities. Due to the evangelical character of the training schools, the vast majority of those responding to the surveys, who either are or will soon be pastors in local churches, were men.

In regard to individual identities of participants in the survey, other than general demographic data gathered for the purpose of classification of responses, no personally identifying information was collected from those who responded to the quantitative survey in order to preserve their anonymity and thereby guarantee transparency in responding to the survey. The names of the four masters students who were interviewed at the end of their program have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

Findings of the social research

Interviews with the directors of the schools

The purpose of the interviews with the directors of the schools was for the researcher to gain a better understanding of each school's history and objective as well

as their choices regarding curriculum and professorial staff. These interviews were conducted before the quantitative survey results were collected and analyzed in order to provide insights into the responses from the survey.

Each of the schools operate with the same general objective of training African nationals to carry out gospel ministry in the context of the African church. All of the schools chosen for the research were founded by one or more Western missionaries who recognized a need for providing theological education for the leadership of the churches in their particular country. The fact that these schools were started by missionaries was of particular importance to the research since those who were trained in Western theological institutions are likely to reproduce the models of training which greatly impacted them.

Two of these schools continue to operate under the leadership of the founding Western missionaries while the founder of the third school has handed the reins of leadership to nationals who were trained in the institution. Of the two schools who are run by Western leadership, one already has an important level of national faculty and staff and is moving toward full nationalization while the other, as a younger school, is much earlier in the process but is working with national pastors to provide direction and instruction in their institution.

Of the three schools, one is church-based and therefore, by design, purposes to provide a more practical type of ministry training with a particular emphasis on using the socratic method of questions and discussion in the classroom. The other two fall into the traditional mode of formal academic institutions. One of these two formal schools offers an education program in addition to the ministry training, while the other is strictly an institution designed to prepare men (and their wives in a separate program) for pastoral ministry in local churches. All three schools offer bachelors and masters level courses, and one has recently begun a Doctor of Ministry program.

Each of the three schools researched began by borrowing heavily from various Western institutions in terms of design and curriculum but, as time has elapsed, have sought to reevaluate and revise their curriculum to inject fresh material which addresses the needs of their particular context. At present all three institutions continue to offer a certain number of courses that are taught by Western professors although two of the schools are working toward a greater degree of "Africanization," with upwards of two-thirds (2/3) of the teaching posts of one school and 80% of the other being occupied by African nationals. Each of the schools are sensitive to the need to adapt their curriculum to the needs of their region, although the way they go about this adaptation differs from institution to institution. One school in particular encourages their national teachers to write new courses or to revise existing courses as they are being taught with an eye to the applicability of the material taught to the context in which the students are ministering. This same school has also launched a structured evaluation of their entire curriculum with a view toward a better contextualization of their curriculum. This evaluation includes soliciting feedback from students on each class offered and conducting exit interviews with graduating students each year.

One of the schools is close to completing the accreditation process with ACTEA (the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa) and their national board of education. Another school is not currently offering accredited programs but is considering pursuing accreditation through ACTEA. The third school is not currently accredited and has expressed no designs on pursuing accreditation in the future. Of the schools evaluated, two conduct their instruction in English and the other in French.

Quantitative survey[221]

The thirty-eight question quantitative survey provided a number of valuable insights regarding the preference of African students in theological education. Fifty-five

[221] The complete survey can be found in Appendix 1

current or former students responded to the survey although not every respondent answered every question. The survey can be divided into six distinct sections. The first section was comprised of four questions about the characteristics that were most important to students in a Bible school or seminary teacher. The second section included sixteen questions intended to gauge a student's impression of their teachers as a group, then their favorite and least favorite teachers. These questions centered on the teacher's apparent preparedness to teach, approach to teaching, style of teaching, openness to student participation in class, and availability outside of class. The third section posed two questions regarding the student's opinion on the most and least effective methods of learning. In the fourth section, four general questions were posed concerning the student's purpose in receiving theological training and their perception of the impact of that training. The six demographic questions which comprised the fifth section were followed by six open-ended questions permitting the respondents to describe what aspects of their training they found most and least useful in preparation for ministry.

Preferred characteristics in a Bible school teacher

The first series of four questions in the survey sought to ascertain what students considered important characteristics in a Bible school or seminary teacher. Each question was formulated with the phrase "Which characteristic is more important to you in a Bible school/seminary teacher?", and the respondent had to choose between two possible responses. In each of the four questions, one of the responses represented more of the traditional Western method while the other reflected elements that would more closely correspond with the African mindset such as a relational focus and a practical, concrete focus to learning.

In response to the first question, 91% of respondents chose "A teacher who is flexible in his teaching and allows for questions and discussion" as opposed to the 9% who preferred "A teacher who gives the maximum amount of information about a subject

in his lectures." This demonstrates an overwhelming preference for group discussion over expert monologue. It also highlights the inclination toward a relational dynamic that is involved in questions and discussions.

The second question sought to gauge a student's preferences between more intellectual exercises such as reading and writing, which tend to be more abstract and are usually associated with the traditional Western schooling model, and more practical exercises, which are rooted in a concrete situation and help the student apply what he is learning. The students were asked to choose whether they preferred "A teacher who incorporates practical exercises to aid in applying the subject taught" or "A teacher who requires reading and writing for deeper reflection on the subject." Despite the expectations that usually come with the formal academic setting, three out of five respondents opted for the heavier emphasis on the practical exercises while 40% indicated a predisposition for the intellectual exercises of reading and writing.

For the third question, students were given a choice between "A teacher who is available to his students outside of the classroom" and "A teacher who arrives on time, uses the class time fully, and finishes on time." Although the two possible responses were not mutually exclusive (in that a teacher who uses the full allotment of classroom time may also be available to his students outside of class), the question was meant to decipher which of two positive elements has a higher priority in the students' culture. The two responses served to contrast the standard time-oriented Western approach to the classroom with a higher relational priority commonly seen in the African culture. It is therefore not surprising that almost 9 out of 10 students (89%) preferred a teacher who was available to them outside of class rather than one who exhibits a clock-and-calendar time orientation that is common in the West and, consequently, in much of Western education. This also reflects the belief that learning does not only happen at prescribed times and places but can and should also take place at various undetermined moments and places throughout one's day.

The final question weighed the teacher's mastery and transmission of content against his "bedside manner" by asking respondents whether they preferred "A teacher who is a gifted communicator in the classroom" or "A teacher who regularly demonstrates patience with his students in class." Once again, two responses which were not mutually exclusive were provided in an attempt to ascertain which of the two positive characteristics is seen to be more preferable in the African context. While students generally expect their teachers to have a mastery of the course content and to be able to communicate that in a clear and even captivating way, only 36% opted for the skilled teacher over the patient one. Once again, we see the dominance of the relational aspect of the African culture and the penchant toward a teacher who is willing to walk alongside of his students and help them learn, even if the students' walk is slower than the teacher might prefer.

Students' impression of their teachers and training

The students' overall appreciation of their teachers as a group was vastly positive with 30% claiming to be happy with all their teachers and 48% saying they were happy with most of their teachers. Only 4% expressed dissatisfaction with the majority of their teachers. The vast majority of respondents felt that their teachers were both well prepared to teach (91%) and open to student participation in their classes (94%).

Respondents were also asked to judge their teachers' general approach to teaching as evidenced in how they approached the learning process. Analyzing this question can help to discern whether teachers have a greater penchant to dispensing information or teaching for practical application and transformation. More than half of the teachers (56%) were deemed to be most concerned that the students understand what was being taught, while another 13% of respondents felt that their teachers were most interested in simply covering the course material, without a particular regard to the students' understanding or application. Slightly less than one-third of teachers (32%)

were said to be most concerned that students be able to apply what they were learning. Overall these figures seem to reflect the general inclination toward the informational approach that tends to dominate traditional Western schools.

On the surface, the teachers in the three schools as a whole seemed to demonstrate considerable openness to including questions and discussion as part of their teaching methodology. The greatest percentage of respondents (43%) thought that their teachers split the time equally between lecture and questions/discussion with two groups of students split on either side of that line — with 35% saying that the majority of the class time was lecturing although some time was left for questions and discussion and 17% feeling that more of the class time was given to questions and discussion with some time for lecture. This spectrum of responses is illustrated in Figure 4.2 below.

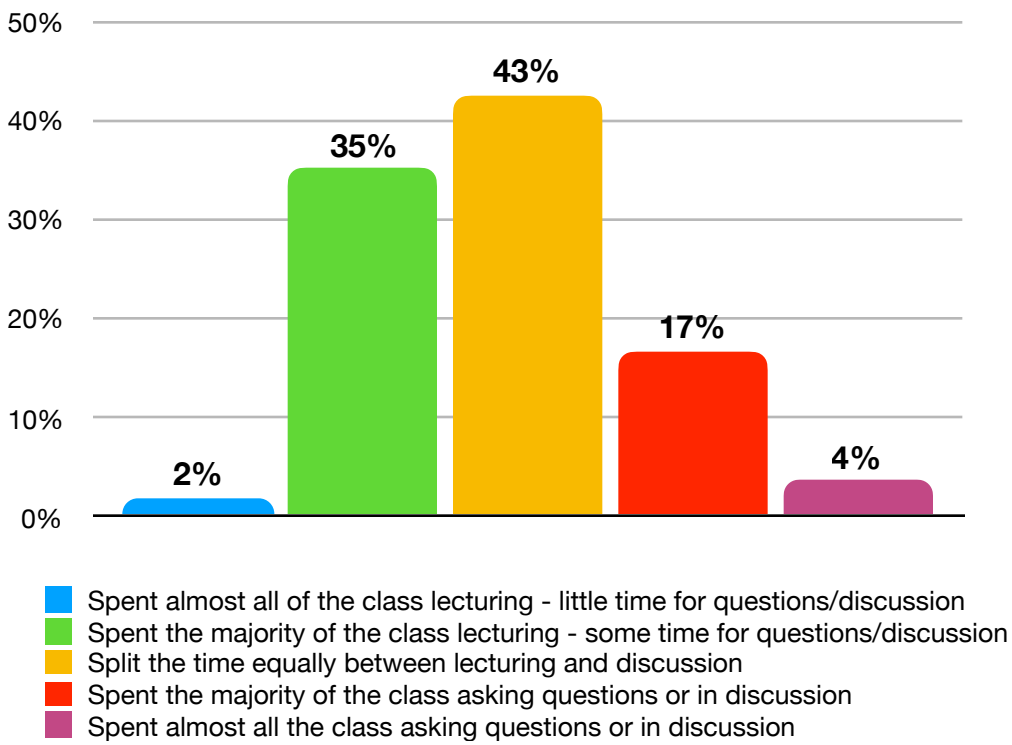

Figure 4.2: Students' Evaluation of Instructional Styles

However, upon closer examination, these figures show a significant difference in the educational method of the two formal schools which place a heavier emphasis on the theoretical aspects of theological training and the one school that aims to be more practical. The responses of the students from the practical school were separated out and laid next to the replies from the students of the two formal schools in Figure 4.3 below. The blue bars illustrate how a more formal, theoretically oriented school tends to rely much more heavily on classroom lectures whereas a school with a more practical orientation (green bars) lends itself naturally to a greater use of questions and discussion in the classroom, focusing not only on the students' understanding of the material being taught but also their application of what has been learned in their ministry context.

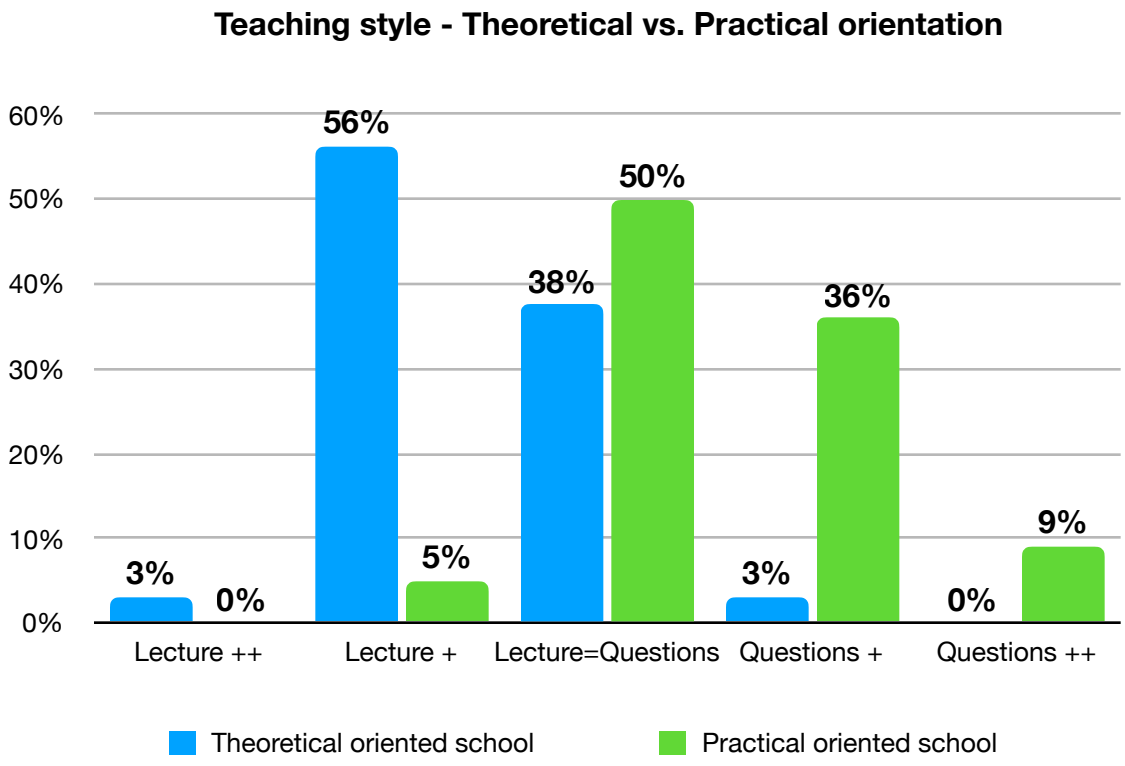

Figure 4.3: Instructional Style Differences in Theoretical vs. Practical Schools

Another element that demonstrates the difference between formal schools with a heavier emphasis on the theoretical and those with a greater practical emphasis is found in the percentage of the training that takes place in the classroom, as was investigated in question 25 of the survey (see Figure 4.4 below). In the two theoretical oriented schools, 97% of the training provided was described as taking place all (31%) or mostly (66%) in a classroom. While the majority (64%) of the training in the school with a greater practical emphasis was said to take place mostly in the classroom, a considerable percentage (36%) indicated that half or more of their training took place outside of the classroom. This seems to be a logical conclusion given that a heavier emphasis on practical application of what is being learned as part of the curriculum would require teachers and students to leave the classroom from time to time in order to put the classroom theory into practice.

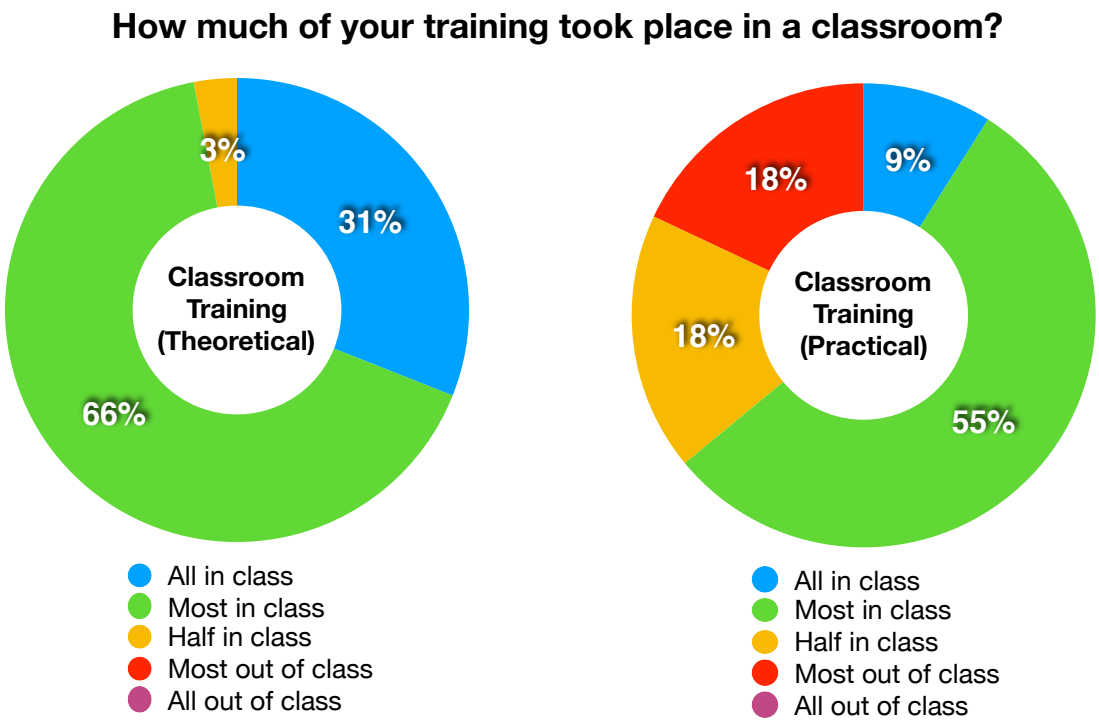

Figure 4.4: Percentage of Classroom Training: Theoretical vs Practical Schools

Even in schools that demonstrated a more formal structure and a greater reliance on traditional Western education methods such as classroom lecture, students considered their teachers as being generally available to them outside of the classroom. The greatest number of respondents (43%) said their teachers were always available outside of the classroom while 32% said they were usually available and 21% considered their teachers available to them sometimes.

The respondents' preferences for a more interactive style of teaching and having teachers be available to them outside of the classroom were clearly evidenced in the responses concerning their appreciation of their teachers as a group. Once again the African cultural values of relational priority, togetherness, and group thinking were emphasized in the students' replies. These values also stand out when we compare the responses to the questions regarding a student's favorite or least favorite teacher. The same five questions concerning a teacher's preparedness to teach, approach to teaching, style of teaching, openness to student participation in class, and availability outside of class were posed in relation to a student's favorite and least favorite teacher. This line of questioning helps to set the standard for the ideal teacher in the African context since one who is determined to be a person's favorite teacher will most likely reflect the values that closely align with the student's image of an ideal teacher. Contrarily, a student's least favorite teacher will likely conduct himself in ways furthest from a student's ideals for his teachers.

In analyzing the data provided by the respondents, it is clear that a teacher in the African context should know his material well. 98% of respondents indicated that their favorite professor was always (74%) or usually (24%) well prepared to teach. For the least favorite professor, he was esteemed to be well prepared only half the time or less by 43% of respondents. We can conclude, therefore, that regardless of one's teaching style, being prepared to teach is important when stepping into the African classroom. However, this is not the only consideration when determining the qualities of a good

teacher, as is indicated by the 57% who said that their least favorite teacher was also always or usually well prepared to teach.

Another important element represented in the research data is an instructor's approach to his teaching. A teacher who is only interested in covering the material in the course syllabus was likely to find himself classed among his student's least favorite teachers, as 49% of respondents indicated that their least favorite teacher was primarily interested in getting through the notes for the class. On the contrary, for those who were listed as favorite professors, 48% of them took care to ensure that their students truly understood what was being taught and another 43% were most concerned that students actually apply in their ministries what they are learning in the classroom. Only 15% of the least favorite teachers were judged to have this concern for application.

This does not mean, however, that a teacher must abandon lecturing in the classroom. A significant majority (80%) of respondents' favorite teachers lecture as much (47%) or more (33%) than they direct discussions or answer questions. However a teacher's being open to interacting with his students and not just lecturing is seen as an extremely important element in the African classroom. This interaction can take place in the form of questions and discussion in the classroom, as evidenced by the fact that 93% of respondents qualified their favorite teacher as one who either insisted that students speak in class (46%) or usually allowed them to do so (47%), or through the teacher's availability outside of class, which 89% of students listed as another characteristic of their favorite teachers. Therefore an ideal teacher for the African context is one who is well prepared to help students learn using instruction, questions, and discussion, who emphasizes understanding and application of the material, and who freely interacts with his students both in and out of the classroom.

Effective methods of learning

A successful teacher realizes that learning does not only take place through classroom instruction but also through the use of various exercises which help the student flesh out what he has learned in word or activity. The third section of the quantitative survey asked two questions (Q21 and 22) to ascertain how effective students find common academic exercise in facilitating learning. Traditional Western education often employs highly literate academic exercises such as reading and writing (taking notes while listening to a lecture, test taking, and writing papers) as the means of assessing what the student has learned in a class. Recent technological advances have facilitated the addition of audio-visual components such as digital presentations and video to classroom instruction. An important question must be considered, however: How effective are these methods in the African context, especially in a classroom that is comprised of oral preference learners — those who do not favor the highly literate methods of learning?

In order to discern the appropriate educational methods for the African context, respondents were asked to rank a list of seven educational activities from the most to the least effective. Those methods considered most effective were given a score of one (1), while the least effective methods received a score of seven (7). In question 21, students were asked to evaluate effective means of *learning how to do* a given task, emphasizing the practical aspect of doing what has been learned. Then, in question 22, they were to rank seven more educational activities to determine the most effective means of *learning about a given subject*, highlighting the intellectual component of learning.

In an attempt to gauge the overall perception of the effectiveness of a given method, a net score was attributed to each response based on whether the respondent described a particular academic exercise as more or less effective. For example, the

method that was scored as a one (1), considered by the respondent to be the most effective, received a net score of +3. The second most effective means, scored as a two (2) was given a net score of +2, and the third most effective, a three (3), received a +1. The exercise ranked with the number four (4) was in the middle between the most and least effective and therefore received a net score of 0 reflecting its neutrality on the scale. The academic exercises that were ranked 5th, 6th and 7th received net scores of -1, -2 and -3 respectively.

For the first question, “Rank the best way to learn how to do something from most effective (1) to least effective (7)”, the respondents were asked to rank the following seven options:

- Teaching – instructing someone else how to do it
- Practice – repeating the doing of the task
- Demonstration – watching someone else do it
- Discussion – talk about how to do it with others
- Writing – write about how to do it
- Reading – read about how to do it
- Listening – listen to someone explain how to do it

When the net scores were applied to the responses, three activities had overall positive scores, one came out virtually neutral, and three others had decidedly negative scores.

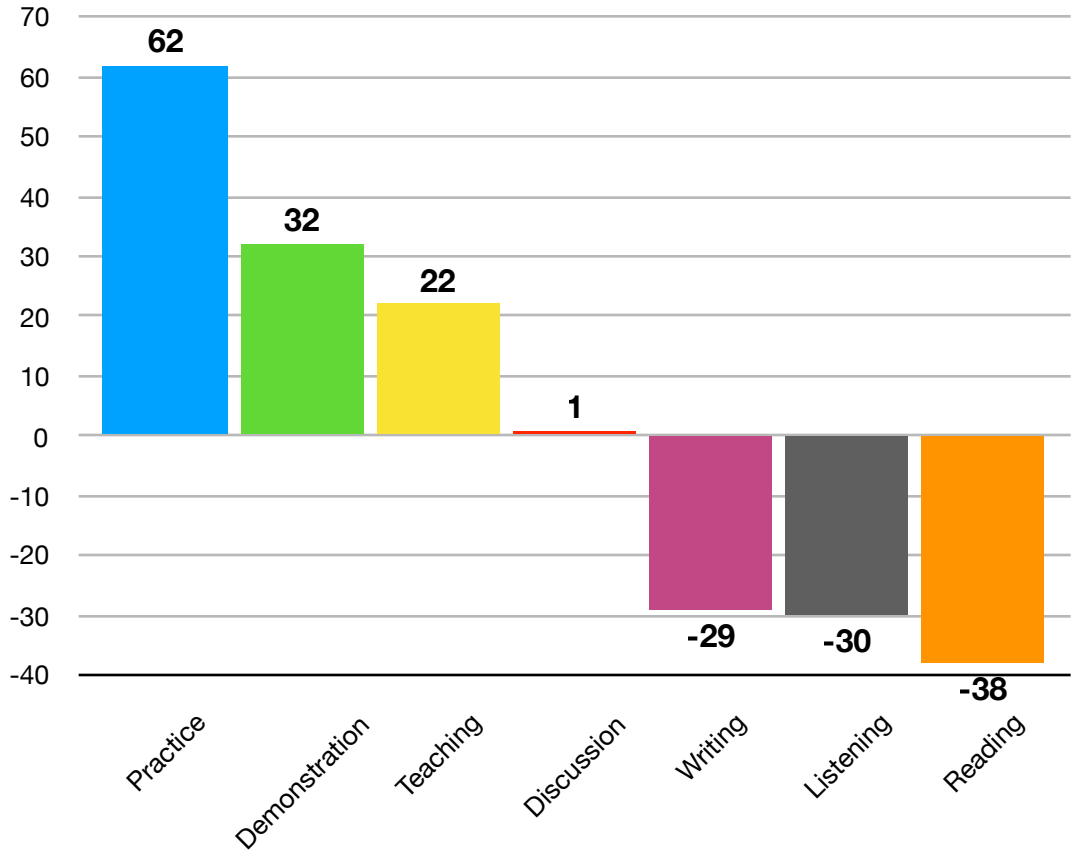

Figure 4.5: Effectiveness of Activities for Learning How To Do a Task

The activities that involved practical action on the part of the respondent were ranked as the most effective means of learning to do a task, with practicing the activity itself considered as the most effective, followed by watching a demonstration and teaching others how to do the task. Discussing how the task should be done received a net score of +1, showing that as many students felt positively about it as felt negatively. The three activities that focused on the theoretical or intellectual aspect, writing about how to do a task, listening to someone explain how it is done, and reading about how to do it, were deemed to be the three least effective means of learning how to actually perform a given task.

When considering how to learn *about a subject*, admittedly a more theoretical exercise, one might naturally expect to see responses trend more highly toward the academic exercises used in traditional Western education. Although there was an upward trend in the traditional methods of listening to a lecture, reading, and writing a paper from the previous question, those methods were still not deemed by students as particularly effective as indicated by their negative net scores shown in Figure 4.6 below.

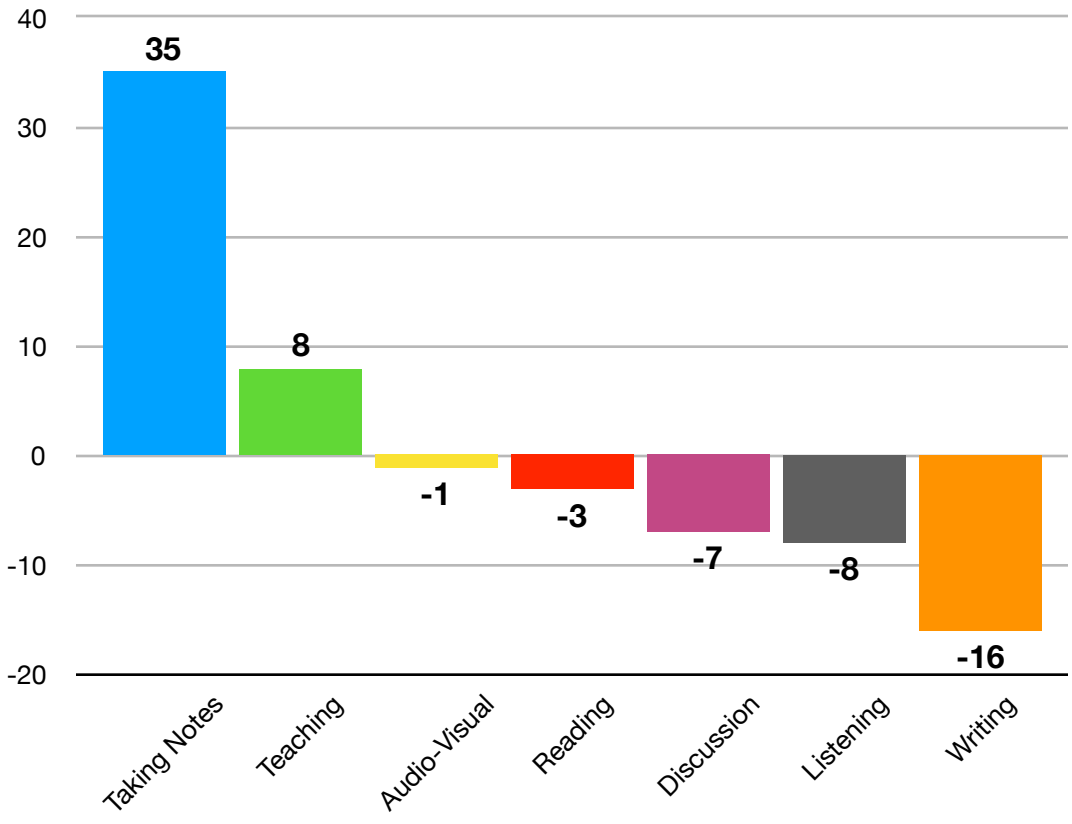

Figure 4.6: Effectiveness of Activities for Learning About a Subject

Considering the net scores attributed to the responses in the two questions of section three, reading enjoyed a change of +35, listening to a lecture +22, and writing a paper on the subject +13 when a student needed to learn about a given subject compared to the use of these activities when learning how to do a particular task. This

upward trend serves to demonstrate that these exercises, which often receive heavy emphasis in traditional Western education, are significantly more effective in producing intellectual, theoretical understanding than in assuring the practical application of that understanding in the carrying out of a given task. On the flip side, both discussing a subject with others (-8) and teaching a subject to others (-14) were deemed to be less effective for learning about a subject than they were for learning how to do a task, as seen in the difference in net scores between the two questions.

The data produced by these two questions has profound implications for ministry training and, therefore, warrants serious consideration. The common goal of the three schools that make up the subject of this research is to train African men (and women) to carry out gospel ministry in the context of the African church, yet the three methods most frequently used in Western-model theological training — listening to lectures, reading and writing — were deemed by students to be the most ineffective methods for actually learning how to do a task. In other words, the data of this research shows that following the traditional Western model that is used in most evangelical theological schools in Africa does not effectively prepare students for the task that the schools are designed to train them for — practical ministry in the local church. Even when interactive components such as discussion and asking questions are added into the mix, the data shows that results are still overwhelmingly ineffective.

This research further shows that in order to adequately train men and women for ministry in the context of the African church, the students in theological training schools in Africa not only need to have appropriate ministry modeled for them (demonstration) but also need to be given the opportunity to engage in ministry themselves (practice) while they are being trained. Perhaps the lack of this kind of training in our theological schools explains why a mere six percent (6%) of students responded that their Bible school/seminary training produced the greatest change in their abilities as a servant of God while forty-four percent (44%) felt that the greatest change came in their knowledge

of God and the Bible. The other 50% of respondents indicated that a change in their heart toward God and his people was the primary result of their training. This gives indication that the theoretical, informational training is perceived by the students as not only serving to fill students' heads with knowledge but also to produce transformation in their hearts. Although this is an important element of the theological education process that cannot be discounted, we also cannot underestimate the importance of providing practical training *alongside of* the solid theological content. We are not maintaining that what students learn in systematic theology or church history courses, for example, are not essential parts of their formation. Instead we are insisting that there should be greater exploration and application of these truths in the African context. The application becomes pertinent when teachers cannot only explain but also demonstrate these truths in a real-world context and when students not only listen but also have the opportunity to practice what they are learning in the classroom. Only when our theological training begins to use more culturally appropriate methods of training, which actually equip students with the skills they need to be effective ministers of the gospel, will our schools become more effective in preparing students for ministry in the African church. Further attention will be given to this point in the next chapter as we focus on considerations for creating more effective and contextualized theological education in Africa.

Educational experimentation

In addition to the quantitative survey, the researcher has been experimenting over the last four years with a curriculum revision as well as alternate instructional and evaluative techniques. The experimentation was conducted in an effort to assess if changes in these areas will produce observable changes in the students' motivation for learning as well as their application of what they are learning in their ministry contexts. This experimentation took the form of reevaluating the curriculum offered in the masters program and using different methods of instruction and evaluation in the classroom. The

effects of different teaching methods on the students has had both an observable and, by the students' own admission, transformational effect.

Curriculum revision

The process of experimentation began with a complete reworking of the structure of the masters program in the institution with which the researcher was associated. Previously, the masters program had been comprised of only twelve credits[222] which were offered through four courses in one additional year of residential training after the completion of the undergraduate program. Students were then expected to write a 75 pages thesis as a culmination of their additional studies. In an effort to bring the program up to date with standard academic norms for a masters degree, the decision was made by the leadership of the institution (at the suggestion of the researcher) to restructure the program to include a minimum of eight courses (24 credits) in addition to the research and writing of a masters thesis (6 credits). Courses were specifically chosen for the new program to address subjects that were not covered in the undergraduate program and that were deemed to provide necessary theological information (Covenants and Dispensations, Theology of the Kingdom, Apologetics, Biblical Theology of the Old Testament, and Biblical Theology of the New Testament), to address particularities of the African context (African Christian Ethics, The African Christian and Traditions, Contemporary Worldviews, Introduction to Islam, Missiology), or to enhance valuable ministry skills (Advanced Hermeneutics and Principles of Effective Communication).

Due to the increased number of courses in the restructured program, the decision was made to transform the masters degree from a one year residential program into a two year modular program in which courses would be offered in two week blocks three times a year. Naturally, such a significant restructuring included a trade-off which needed to be considered. The fact that the teaching staff's access to the students who

[222] Since the school was started by an American missionary, the program of study follows the American credit system as opposed to the European Credits Transfer System (ECTS).

would no longer reside on campus would be significantly reduced (six weeks per school year, twelve weeks total) was balanced against the practical aspect of the pastors continuing their training while being involved in ministry in their local church throughout the year. The researcher maintained ongoing contact with the students as the new program was unfolded in an effort to gauge the feasibility of the modular system and the applicability of the courses to what they were facing in their ministries. The modular system was widely appreciated and even allowed a number of students to participate in the program who would not have been able to attend in residence. Many students highlighted the fact that continuing their education while serving in pastoral ministry provided them with the opportunity to relate what they were learning in the classroom into practical ministry situations. Consequentially, the new masters program intentionally began to take on a more practical emphasis than it had previously.

In addition to receiving input from the masters students going through the program, the researcher conducted occasional, informal phone calls and face-to-face interviews with former students in order to understand what they felt was lacking in their theological training. Since all of these men had spent several years in the ministry since their graduation from the same institution, they were able to provide important insight into the curriculum revision. The overall tenor of the responses from these former students indicated that the program needed to take on a more significant emphasis on the application of the theory that was learned in class. For example, one student made a general observation that among the pastors there was “a problem when it comes to applying certain doctrines in the church,” while another highlighted the fact that the class he received on biblical counseling “was more theoretical and didn’t touch the realities of African life.” These interviews, coupled with the researcher's own observations over the past six years, formed the basis for an ongoing reevaluation and readjustment of the masters curriculum.

This ongoing evaluation has resulted in the adjustment of the courses offered in order to facilitate the insertion of two new courses into the curriculum which address significant issues graduates are facing in their ecclesiastical context. The first course stemmed from the observations of the researcher regarding the heavy emphasis on the law in the African church as the means to live the Christian life. Many pastors, even those who have received solid theological training, attempt to keep their church members "in line" by erecting the barriers of the law around them instead of seeking to attach their hearts to God by an understanding of his grace. For this reason, the researcher developed a course entitled "Theology of Grace" which exposes the biblical doctrine of grace from a biblical and socio-historical perspective so that believers might no longer try to finish by the flesh what they began by the Spirit (Gal 3:3).[223]

Contrary to the first example, the second course was initiated completely by former students who, after graduating from seminary, found themselves being solicited to teach in various schools but having no training for that particular type of ministry. Several of these students approached the researcher requesting that he provide them with some instruction, whether individually or in the form of a seminar, on how to teach in a formal setting. This request, therefore, gave birth to a second course which was added to the masters program which seeks to address the theory and techniques of Bible teaching specifically adapted for the African context. A number of graduates involved in teaching in Bible schools were also invited to audit the first offering of the class.

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[223] This teaching on grace was first developed for the context of a church seminar and has subsequently been taught in three different classroom settings. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, although not without questions and concerns being expressed. On the one hand some believers, including many pastors, expressed the response to grace that the Apostle Paul addressed in Romans 6, "If we teach grace won't that just encourage people to live in sin?" There are others however, including a large number of pastors, who have found the biblical teaching on grace to be a breath of fresh air, thus demonstrating their frustration with trying to live the Christian life through the power of the law. One pastor, who is also the director of a Bible school in another region of the country, was so touched by the teaching of grace that he commented at the end of the week: "You have no idea how far this teaching on grace is going to travel; we're going to spread it everywhere!" Another student remarked that the course on grace has completely revolutionized his life and ministry, making him a completely new person both in his interactions at home with his family members as well as with his church members.

Instructional and evaluative techniques

Along with the experimentation on the curriculum level, there was also a process of experimentation with the content and presentation of certain courses to put a heavier emphasis on the practical aspect of the learning process. The content of a number of courses in the program was adjusted, at times requiring an entire rewrite of the syllabus and course notes, so that the courses became less focused on information and more geared toward application and transformation. The goal of changing the course content was that students would not only have the necessary information but would also be forced to interact with that information on a practical level.

Often the rewriting of the course material was accompanied by an altered approach to the presentation of that material in class. The traditional lecture method was all but abandoned in favor of a model which favored much more dialogue and interaction among the participants in the class. In order to engender a feeling of liberty in discussion and to encourage students to express their thoughts, the researcher opted to reorganize the classroom itself. Instead of maintaining the standard, high power distance classroom configuration in which the teacher is placed in front of the room with all the students facing him, the researcher instead placed the tables in a rectangle so that both teacher and students sit together in a way in which each person can see one another and learn from each other. In an attempt to provide a more relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, the teacher also provided coffee for the students which they were free to drink and refill throughout the class. At times the class even left the confines of the classroom for a less formal setting in order to better facilitate discussion of the topic at hand.[224]

[224] The small class size facilitated the reorganization of the class into a more informal setting. A larger class of ten or more students would likely have changed the dynamics significantly and would have required a more traditional structure or a different venue.

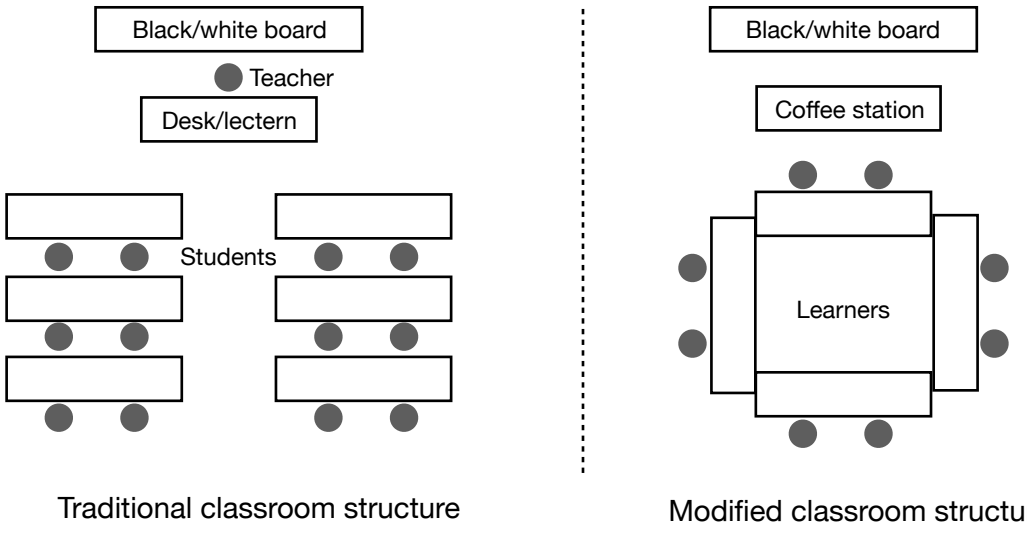

Figure 4.7: Traditional vs. Modified Classroom Configuration

This informalization of the classroom experience became particularly important in some of the courses such as African Christian Ethics and The African Christian and Traditions that lie outside of a Western educator's realm of knowledge and experience. By removing the traditional lecture method from these courses, the researcher adopted the position of a facilitator of learning, which included much more dialogue and discussion with the students often taking the lead and sharing from their knowledge and experiences in their own cultures. After a student had an opportunity to share his experiences, the rest of the class posed questions and engaged in dialogue, searching to bring the truth of Scripture to bear on the particular situation. During these times the teacher/facilitator would direct the conversations by highlighting biblical principles or asking follow-up questions. For these more highly interactive courses, a portion of the students' grade, sometimes up to 30%, depended on their level of participation in class. This encouraged students to take an active role in their learning rather than just sitting passively to receive information.

During the classroom time, the teacher also sought to increase student participation by employing a variety of instructional methods. In the class on Contemporary Worldviews (which included three students from a previous cohort) the students were asked to work together in small groups to create a list of important elements of an African worldview. After a time of discussion in small groups, a spokesman for each group would present the group's findings to the class and further discussion with the entire class ensued. When studying Christian Ethics in the African context, students were asked to choose one topic from a list provided to them and to prepare a group debate. Throughout the week, the students used their evenings to prepare their arguments together and to search the Scriptures to find biblical truth relative to the issue of how to handle the conversion and integration of a polygamous man into the church. On the last day of class the students debated the issue in class, evaluating various biblical and cultural contours of the topic before coming to a general consensus.

In the same class, the students were given the freedom to direct the discussions in class, choosing the ethical topics that were most pertinent to them in their ministry context from a list provided in the class notes. In this way, the class notes became a resource for the students and a guide for the classroom discussion rather than a master that dictated what would be discussed in class. In a similar vein, another common instrument of traditional classroom learning, the black/white board, was used mostly to write pertinent questions and responses from the students or to place drawings that helped to illustrate the discussions in class[225]. Other classes, of necessity, included more traditional lecture as the students had not had significant exposure to the subject prior to the class. However, even in classes such as Principles of Effective Communication or

[225] In an effort to ensure reproducibility, the researcher intentionally refrained from using some modern technology, such as PowerPoint, in class. Since teachers in more remote ministry contexts in Africa may not have ready access to laptops, projectors, or stable internet or generators, more simple and easily reproducible materials were used throughout the program.

Theology of Grace which introduced students to much new material, there was still a heavy emphasis on discussion and the application of the theory taught in the classroom.

In addition to having students draw parallels to their own life and ministry in class discussion, the requirements for these courses were also specifically designed with an emphasis on the practical. When reading was assigned, the teacher sought to choose books and articles that were written by African authors for African students addressing African issues so that students could relate the information they were reading to their own ministry context. In the academic world, term papers are often necessary to satisfy the school's expectations and to prepare students to write their end of program thesis paper. In the cases where students were required to write a term paper, the requirement was always oriented toward biblical reflection and self-analysis — how a student had grown or changed personally through the course or what he could apply in his current ministry situation. One such paper required each student to identify a traditional practice that they have seen creep into the church, to analyze it according to Scripture, and to propose how a Christian should respond to the practice — specifically by proposing a Christian alternative in the case that the practice was deemed to not be in accordance with biblical teaching.[226] For some courses, students were asked to prepare and give a series of sermons or teachings on a given theme relative to their course of study, which was designed to help them think through the material not just for themselves but in a way that would permit them to help others understand and put the teaching into practice. Case studies, in which a fictitious scenario which approximated a real-life experience was created and presented to the students, were also used to encourage reflection and application. The requirement was for the students to integrate the principles that they

[226] This reflected Hiebert's process of Critical Contextualization, which will be discussed further toward the end of chapter 5.

had learned from one or two courses and apply them to the case study in such a way that demonstrated their mastery of the material studied in the classes.[227]

Evaluation of the experimentation

A couple of important factors must be considered in evaluating the educational experimentation that was described in the preceding pages. First, the researcher experienced certain limitations regarding the overall structure of the masters program. Although the researcher was granted considerable freedom to structure each individual class as he deemed necessary — a privilege afforded to all professors at the institution — in the restructuring of the masters program a certain number of practical courses which focused primarily on the African context and the problems faced by African pastors, were rejected in favor of courses that are more theoretical. Ironically, most of these were courses which had been previously written and integrated into the masters program by other Western educators who hold more tightly to the traditional pedagogical model of education. As a result of this decision, the more theoretical courses that were maintained in the program were either taught by other professors or restructured internally in terms of content and presentation to place greater emphasis on the practical application of the content in the lives and ministries of the students who took the courses.

A second factor which impacted the research is the relationship among the researcher and the four students in the masters program who became the test subjects. The researcher had previously taught all four of these students in their undergraduate program in the same institution, and therefore, there was a significant degree of preexisting familiarity among the teacher and students. Also, the students were well

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[227] Case studies proved to be a particularly effective exercise as the students were able to view a number of parallels to their own life and ministry as they examined the scenario through the eyes of “another.” Several students commented that the scenarios presented in the case studies “weren’t real … but were real.” Students often referred back to these case studies even in subsequent class discussions.

acquainted with one another not only through all being former classmates but also because they are each pastoring in the same denomination. Because of this, each student is not only personally familiar with his fellow students but also understands the broad lines of the ecclesiastical context in which his fellow students are ministering, thus producing a spirit of fraternity among them. The familiarity and fraternity among the teacher and students produced a unique classroom environment which favored an openness and interchange that likely would not have existed otherwise. We maintain that this spirit of community and proximity between teacher and students does not invalidate the research conducted but, on the contrary, serves to illustrate the importance of the relational dynamic in the African context and the doors that such a relationship can open for transformation in the theological education process.

The effectiveness of more contextualized methods of theological education in this research process were gauged by two means: 1) student reactions and interactions both in and out of the classroom and 2) student responses, either collected from the students' written assignments or provided orally, whether spontaneously or in answers to the exit surveys conducted at the end of the masters program.

The four students[228] consistently demonstrated a spirit of openness and freedom in learning and a joy of being together to learn in the classroom. On several occasions the students (and teacher) became so engaged in the discussion at hand that the time was completely forgotten and the classroom time exceeded the regularly prescribed hours without anyone realizing that the time had passed. During the class on Christian Ethics, the students even requested additional classroom time in order to be able to further discuss aspects of topics which were particularly relevant to their ministry contexts. In the exit interviews, each of the students testified to a marked difference in the classroom atmosphere from their previous program of studies. When commenting on

[228] The students were promised that they would be referred to by the pseudonyms Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to protect their identities and encourage openness in their responses.

the difference between the undergrad and masters programs, John observed that in the undergrad program “we didn’t always want to be in the classroom because we didn’t have the freedom to express ourselves.” He added that students also felt significant pressure to repeat what they had learned in order to receive a good grade. The same sentiment was echoed by Matthew, who admitted to feeling very stressed in the undergrad program and seeing his teachers as “tormentors” or “task-masters” who were to be feared and avoided as much as possible. Mark made allusion to the same attitude in speaking of a latent tension that reigned in the undergrad classrooms between the teacher and students. In contrast, all of the students expressed an appreciation for the classroom atmosphere of the masters program, often using terms such as “freedom” and “liberty” to describe the classroom ambiance. Mark appreciated that the students were treated like adults and not like children which, according to John, produced “a joy to be in class and to dig more deeply [into the subject at hand].” Several students openly expressed similar ideas to Mark who said, “It’s now, at this level, that we have learned to love school” and Luke who confessed “When the modules are over I want the time to pass quickly so that I can come back because I have such a desire to learn.”

Each of the students, independently of one another and unprompted by the interviewer, made the link between the classroom atmosphere and its structure. They observed that the modified structure of the classroom used in the masters program matched the typical African gatherings where everyone sits in a circle so that they can all see each other and participate in the discussion. Both Matthew and Mark noted that this style creates a feeling of proximity and togetherness which is important in the African culture and which promotes openness and participation. John observed that the Western classroom structure where the teacher is in front of the students “creates a sentiment of inferiority in which the student will never feel free to open up and speak.” According to Mark this structure was a colonial imposition which came with *l’école des blancs* (the white man’s school) and which the Africans were forced to accept even though it is not

native to their culture. Luke commented that returning to the more typical African circle helps the student feel more at home and allows him to understand that what is being discussed “doesn’t just concern the white man, but concerns every one of us.”

In addition to the classroom ambiance, the students also greatly appreciated the practical nature of the classes and the emphasis on the application of what they were learning in the classroom. While each of the students highly valued the training they received in the undergrad program, especially the solid doctrinal foundation which allowed them to be biblically and theologically rooted, they also expressed that they often experienced challenges in applying all the information they had learned. Luke noted that when courses are more theoretical “it makes putting them into practice more difficult,” but continued to say that more practical courses which put a greater emphasis on application allow the students to “see the link between the information we’re learning and our ministry context.” He also highlighted the aspect of being involved in the ministry while studying saying, “The experiences that we have had allow us to see other things … the errors that we have made.” Matthew also noted that the practical courses “open my eyes to new things and allow me to question things that I have done in my local church” while Mark added that a more application-oriented learning “provides competency in the ministry.”

According to the students themselves, the courses in the masters program have produced a genuine transformation in their lives and ministries. Each of the students regularly shared with the class concrete ways in which his learning has produced changes in his personal life, his family, and his ministry. In his exit interview Matthew confessed “Before, I didn’t want to hear people speak to me about certain things, but now I have learned how to approach people, to listen to them, to be patient with them, and to seek to understand them … I have learned how to analyze their background to know how to adapt the message to them rather than being uncompromising and causing them to avoid me or to be hypocritical around me.” When evaluating himself before and

after his masters studies, Luke remarked “I see two completely different people … In my family and in my local church I have made so many changes … and people are seeing the difference.”

One particularly delightful result of this style of training is the camaraderie which developed among the four students in the program. Beyond the obvious collegiality that was demonstrated in the classroom, the students shared that this has spread to their relationships outside of class to the point that it is rare for a week to go by without the students calling one another. They have already begun being involved in ministering in each other’s churches and have also developed a plan to periodically visit each other after the masters program is completed, even though one of the students lives a considerable distance (12+ hours) from the others. This led one of the students to confess “We have developed a spirit of collaboration that I have never seen or experienced before.”

The researcher’s observations combined with the student testimonies regarding the impact of the educational experimentation give credence to the hypothesis that a system of theological training which biblically addresses African issues while placing a heavy emphasis on practical application and which is accompanied by a classroom environment that is more adapted to African sensibilities will be more effective in producing transformed servants of God who are adequately prepared to minister in the African context. When placed alongside of the results of the quantitative survey, the path forward for contextualizing theological education in Africa becomes clear. It is to these recommendations that we will turn our attention in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Recommendations for a More Effective and Contextualized Theological Education in Africa

If we desire to create a system of theological education that is specifically adapted to the African context, we as Western missionaries need to start the process of contextualization long before we ever arrive at the theological school by readjusting our thinking regarding missions as a whole. This implies that we can no longer think in a purely theological manner but must also bring anthropological, sociological, and educational discoveries to bear on the way in which we approach the task of missions in general and theological education in particular. Before we arrive at making specific applications to theological education in Africa, let us examine two general domains where missionaries would do well to examine the way they live as foreign ambassadors for Christ in the African context — areas which equally apply to those involved in theological education in Africa.[229]

Thinking contextually about mission in Africa in the 21st century

As missionaries, we cannot insist on seeing the world only through our Western lenses but must realize that there are numerous systems through which people see the world. Each system produces behaviors that seem different, and at times even deviant, to those of other worldviews. Rather than dismissing these different beliefs and behaviors of African cultures as strange or primitive, a missionary must first seek to free himself from the natural imprisonment to his own cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions, learning to make a distinction in his own beliefs between what is truly

[229] Many of these principles could equally be applied to ministry in any intercultural context, but given the scope of our study, we have chosen to focus specifically on Africa. By extension, the term “Western” or “Westerner” is equally applicable to those from missionary sending nations outside the West such as South Korea or Brazil.

biblical and what is merely cultural. It is important for us to realize that we are as much a product of our Western culture as Africans are of their own.

Understanding the generalities of the cultures of Africa as presented in the third chapter has only limited usefulness unless that cultural knowledge is subsequently analyzed against local realities and consciously applied to the process of gospel communication in a particular target culture. Rather than searching to provide simple, formulaic answers as to how to do ministry in Africa, we will instead highlight a couple of tensions that should be contemplated and discussed further in each particular context in an effort to determine the most effective way to communicate the gospel in a culturally appropriate manner. Since it is impossible to adequately address all the conundrums that a missionary will face on the field, we will limit our discussion to two domains which have a profound impact on a missionary's life and ministry in Africa.

Learning to adapt to the African context

The first job of the Western missionary, upon arriving in Africa, is learning to adapt to a new cultural context. This implies that we must spend time learning before we begin teaching. Rather than immediately passing judgment on the behaviors that we see happening around us, we would be wise to first spend significant time studying the culture, praying that God will increasingly give us African eyes through which we will begin to see and understand things as they do. We must be tireless in asking questions and show a genuine desire to learn about others. This process will take a considerable amount of time during which the missionary must make every possible effort to adapt themselves to African culture and worldview rather than expecting Africans to adapt to their Western way of seeing and doing things.

The process of learning in another culture requires a certain degree of humility. Since the period of the Enlightenment, we from the enlightened West have been led to believe that we have the answers for the problems of the rest of the world and that we have a duty to take those answers to them no matter the cost. Tones of this belief,

represented in the words which Rudyard Kipling put to verse in his poem “The White Man’s Burden,” have even crept into the Western church through the centuries. Unfortunately, many Western missionaries, perhaps most particularly those who have spent years receiving advanced theological training, often arrive on their fields with a strikingly similar mentality, wanting to share the knowledge that they have been blessed to receive in their own process of theological education. Though understandable from a Western perspective, when missionaries arrive in Africa to do or to teach rather than to learn, they bypass one of the most important elements of adaptation to their new culture. Sending churches and mission agencies need to become increasingly conscious of this fact and should begin sending first term missionaries out with the sole goal of learning as much as they can about the language and culture in their first few years on the field rather than expecting them to be “productive” and “fruitful” in ministry from the beginning. Missionaries must first come as learners before they can become effective teachers.

If we have been tasked by God to communicate the gospel in Africa, we must not focus our attention solely on the content of the message and ignore the culture of those who will receive that message. Because people interpret ideas in various ways based on their values, beliefs and assumptions, it is incumbent upon those who are entering into these cultures to learn how to effectively convey the gospel in a way in which it will be heard accurately and applied faithfully. We must, therefore, learn to recognize and admit our own cultural biases and to assimilate a new set of cultural values — what Stallter refers to as cultural intelligence (CQ).[230] We should seek to immerse ourselves in the culture with the goal of developing African eyes, ears, and minds in order to see the gospel through their eyes and to become capable of transmitting the unchanging truth of Scripture in a culturally relevant manner. By incarnating the gospel in African cultures in a culturally appropriate manner, we will, by the grace of God, make genuine disciples of Christ who are capable of living as followers of Christ in their various cultural contexts.

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[230] Tom Stallter, “Cultural Intelligence: A Model for Cross-Cultural Problem Solving,” *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol 37 No 4, October 2009, p 543-54.

That being said, Western missionaries must also realize that there is a delicate balance to maintain between the two extremes of remaining entirely Western and "going native." While a Western missionary should seek to adapt himself to the culture as much as possible, there are points where cultural adaptation is either impractical or undesirable. No matter how much we try to adapt to the culture, we can never fully divest ourselves of our westernness, nor do the nationals expect us to. In fact, a missionary who attempts to fully "go native" and live completely as the nationals do will often be misunderstood by the nationals and may even find that this lifestyle is ultimately unsustainable. When, in a misguided attempt to adapt to the culture, we go to an unrealistic extreme, we can unknowingly discredit both ourselves and the message that we are seeking to bring. At times it is even necessary for missionaries to be intentionally counter-cultural in order to model a biblical ideal while at other times that same biblical ideal may best communicated using a relevant cultural form rather than a Western one. Therefore it is imperative for a missionary to learn the complexities of his host culture so that he can understand when, where, and why to be counter-cultural. Otherwise his attempts at being "biblical" may simply come across as being "strange" or "foreign."

One illustration of this can be seen in the way in which we model humility in a society that maintains a high power distance, as many African societies do. As has previously been mentioned, the goal of every missionary in Africa should ultimately be to find the most appropriate way to incarnate Christ in his local cultural context. This means humbling ourselves as Jesus did and becoming a servant in the culture we are trying to reach with the gospel. But as Duane Elmer has stressed, missionaries must learn to define servanthood as others understand it, rather than imposing their own definition of servanthood from their foreign cultures.[231] Along with our African brothers and sisters, we need to seriously ask and reflect on important questions such as "What does servant leadership look like in Africa?", "How does servant leadership as we have defined it

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[231] Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.

impact the culture?", "Are there cultural elements that will be changed or destroyed by a Western style of servant leadership?", "Do these elements really need to be changed or destroyed?", "What will the implications be on the society when that happens?", "What does a Western style of servant leadership really communicate in the culture?", etc. When these questions are honestly evaluated and ultimately answered through a serious study of the African cultural context and the Scriptures, then missionaries will be better prepared to incarnate the message of the gospel not only through their words but also through their walk.[232]

When a missionary begins to settle into life in African culture, perhaps one of the most difficult values of which he needs to begin to divest himself is the Western individualist mentality. Though there will be times when a missionary may have to decline certain requests for his own health or for the sake of his family or ministry, he should also learn to make an active and concerted effort to think more collectively than he is accustomed to. This implies learning to act in a way that promotes harmony and the best interests of the group as well as being generous in Africans' eyes — two elements that do not come without sacrifice. Living in an African culture usually means lots of face time and implies lots of sharing. The highly organized missionary, who is used to operating by a clock, calendar, and budget, will need to learn to set those Western constructs aside at times — even if it means sacrificing his own preferences and conveniences in order to invest the time and resources necessary to cultivate deep relationships for the advance of the gospel. While some missionaries may understandably be hesitant to sacrifice their time to attend extended events with no definitive ending time or to sacrifice their health by eating questionable foods, the refusal to do so, even if accompanied by valid excuses (to the missionary), is likely to be

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[232] Paul Hiebert refers to this as the process of "Critical Contextualization." A given cultural practice must be first analyzed in its cultural context by asking relevant questions in order to better understand that practice. Then, we must analyze the Scriptures to understand the biblical truths and principles relative to the particular issue. Only then can we make a decision whether to keep, reject, or modify the practice for the given culture.

interpreted as a refusal of the people and their culture as a whole. Such a refusal could have the unintended consequence of straining relationships and limiting the sharing of the good news of Christ. While no general prescription can be unilaterally applied in all settings, missionaries should subject these kind of decisions to careful consideration and prayer.

Another important part of adapting to another culture comes with the language — the vehicle by which we enter into a culture. For English speaking missionaries in Africa, it is often first necessary to become fluent in another colonial language such as French, Spanish, Portuguese, or Arabic in order to communicate across a broad number of ethnic groups as well as to conduct official business in the country. However, missionaries should also consider that, if they are going to learn to truly communicate clearly and deeply in the African context, they may not be able to content themselves with simply learning one Western, colonial language. In order to attain a more profound level of understanding of a particular culture, it might prove useful and even necessary to learn one or more local languages. This will allow the missionary not only to understand a particular culture's terms and ways of thinking but will also facilitate communication of the gospel in their own heart language. Though this will likely be a process that takes years, or in some cases a lifetime, beginning by learning simple greetings or phrases in a local dialect can quickly endear a missionary to a people as his speaking their language validates their ethnic identity and culture.

Once a missionary does learn the language, whether a colonial or local language, the natural tendency is to want to begin teaching or preaching right away. However, a missionary would be wise to resist this temptation and instead heed the admonition of James and "be quick to listen and slow to speak" (1:19), especially if he is considered to be "expert" on a particular topic in his own culture. When we speak too rapidly, especially without being sufficiently versed in the culture, nationals are likely to accept the ideas of the missionary "expert." This can take place even when they do not

truly agree with or understand the missionary's ideas in order to preserve harmony in the group and honor the foreigner among them. For this reason, the missionary who is engaged in preaching and teaching would be wise to provide opportunities for nationals to discuss the lessons in groups and then report on their communal understanding and application before the missionary pronounces his position on a given topic. As we preach, teach, and interact with nationals both individually and in groups, we should look for ways, as Jesus did, to strike the balance between truth and humility. Not everything that can be said needs to be said, and not everything that needs to be said needs to be said immediately. If we as missionaries would first spend time living among the nationals in a culturally appropriate and godly way, having learned to learn and live in their culture, we would likely find that when we do speak, our words will have a much more profound impact in the hearts of the people.

When it comes to living and communicating in a high-context society, one key is to find a reliable national cultural informant who will accept the missionary's assertion that, rather than being an expert, he is ignorant and needs someone to help him navigate the complex web of intercultural communication. It is through the help of this cultural informant that a missionary can begin to understand elements that will otherwise remain hidden from his understanding. In order to truly penetrate the intricacies of a culture, it will be necessary to have an insider's (emic) perspective on the culture's worldview and practices. Understanding the particularities of context and nonverbal communication will help the missionary to communicate biblical truth in a culturally appropriate manner.

An additional advantage to learning to communicate culturally is that the more we learn about communication in Africa, the more adept we will be at avoiding unnecessary conflict — although a certain level of conflict is inevitable in any ministry. The Western educational system has geared those it has trained toward solving problems and critical

thinking, but cross-cultural conflicts can produce a considerable amount of stress, as highlighted by Stallter:

> There are problems to be solved in any ministry, but they are more complex in a culture that is not our own. Before we even get to ministry problems, adaptation to a second culture presents its own set of problems that need to be solved. The stress and anxiety that accompany this process make culturally relevant, yet efficient problem solving crucial for mental and physical survival in the second context.[233]

One of the things that makes dealing with conflict in a second culture so difficult is that, rather than processing each event as a completely new situation and evaluating all the various elements from an intercultural perspective, "the stressor event strikes us as something we have already dealt with in our experience and have categorized as wrong, inefficient, rude, or obnoxious."[234] Because of the complexity of the situation, our brain creates mental short-cuts which produce subconscious "gut reactions" based on our system of cultural values. These reactions, however, often serve to create additional stress and confusion because they short-circuit the critical thinking process which is so important in cross-cultural problem solving. Rather than reacting to conflict, then, we must learn to apply the intercultural realities we have learned to these situations in order to enable us to handle conflict with cultural intelligence.

> Using the components in cross-cultural incidents requires resources and contextual information not naturally available to us, however, and depends on our willingness to engage the problem in its cultural setting. Our usual assumptions and shortcuts will not work. When we add to cognitive intelligence the dimension of cultural value recognition … and apply these components skillfully to problems in cross-cultural settings, we are demonstrating cultural intelligence.[235]

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[233] Stallter, "Cultural Intelligence," p 544.

[234] Ibid.

[235] Ibid., p 545. Stallter goes on to describe "the components" that are to be used in cross-cultural problem solving in the subsequent pages of the article. He speaks of culture general understandings, culture specific understandings, cultural self-awareness, skill sets for adaptation, and aptitude for cultural adjustment.

In the African context, Western missionaries must realize that conflicts are usually handled in the context of the group and involve much collaboration and discussion. In order to solve problems contextually and effectively, we cannot impose a Western ideas upon an African situation.

> Our own cultural, mental categories will not help, so we must be learners, using cultural informants and entering discussions with host nationals … in a non-threatening, culturally relevant way. If a problem arises among the host nationals, we will have to see the obstacles and possible outcomes through their cultural framework, experience, and the mental maps these have given them. Their observations are all important to the outsider. Only by being aware of them will we be able to decide what arrangements, events, or objects will be needed to solve the problem. Injecting our own experience into the selection process, as practical as it seems to us, will bring interpersonal confusion and usually, when the problem involves the host group, distrust. … Missionary and national relationships have suffered a great deal over the centuries because the missionaries did not recognize that a problem really was one for the two groups to handle together.[236]

Since the Western style of open confrontation is not practiced in most of the cultures of the African continent, conflict resolution ought to be handled carefully with wisdom and sensitivity to the practices of the host culture. This is especially true when we consider that the goal is to see hearts and lives changed and transformed by the good news of Jesus Christ. In Africa the solutions to problems are generally believed to appear on their own, which leads to a much more passive and patient approach toward problem solving than a Westerner will be accustomed to.[237] Problems are rarely discussed openly in the presence of those not immediately involved, as indicated by the popular proverb "*Le linge salle se lave en famille*" (Dirty laundry is washed within the family).

As a general rule, therefore, a Western missionary in Africa should be very careful in engaging in conflict resolution. Engaging in direct confrontation, especially in public and with those who are leaders in a community, can cause irreversible damage to

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[236] Ibid., p 550.

[237] Ibid., p 552-53.

a relationship when an African is forced to publicly lose face. In most cases, especially where a missionary has not had significant experience in observing the cultural styles of handling conflict and confrontation, it is preferable to use a godly African as a mediator when confronting someone with a problem.[238] In the events where a mediator is not available and the situation has to be dealt with immediately, the missionary would be wise to use indirect language such as using the passive voice ("this task needs to be done" rather than "you need to ___") or employing the more nebulous "we" rather than the direct "you" (the more impersonal "on" in French lends itself particularly well for indirectness). Stories, parables, and proverbs are also effective and culturally appropriate means of transmitting truth but these can also be easily misunderstood if the missionary is not sufficiently versed in their usage.

Living within a patronage system

Another part of the adaptation process for a foreign missionary will doubtless involve grasping the privilege that our status as Westerners affords us in the African context. Unfortunately, in our depraved world, many of the noble and even biblical values of African culture such as collective orientation and generosity have often been abused by egotistical leaders to the point that a hierarchical, corrupt, patron-oriented system has been engrained into the fabric of many African societies. Since the rich and powerful are

[238] The idea of directly confronting another person, even in non-Western cultures, is often justified by Westerners who appeal to Matthew 18:15-17, specifically because of the verb ἔλεγξον (often translated "tell or point out his fault") and the qualifying phrase μεταξὺ σοῦ καὶ αὐτοῦ μόνου (between you and him alone). However it should be understood that this command seems to be given specifically with a mind to avoiding public shaming of an individual or causing him to lose face. Joseph Thayer defines the verb ἔλεγξον as "to convict, refute, confute, generally with a suggestion of the shame of the person convicted" (Joseph Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*), which would explain why it was to be done in a sensitive way and only between the parties concerned. Thus, while a direct confrontation was prescribed, it was done in the spirit of being culturally sensitive and helping someone to avoid public shame. Also it should be noted that this method is prescribed in Matthew 18 takes place between equals — "If your *brother or sister* sins against you." However, when in the case of two non-equals, such as a high-status Western missionary or pastor and a lower-status national, it may be necessary to employ a more culturally appropriate method such as using a mediator who understands the culture and how to frame the message so that it can be received and produce the desired effect. It seems that the goal of the passage is to encourage restoration rather than to insist on a precise form of confrontation.

respected and feared due to their ability to do good or evil to a community or individual, they often use their wealth and influence to their own advantage in order to gain additional position and power in society. Many of these leaders, despite the immorality of their actions, are never openly declared to be wrong, and thus the common people, who need to remain in their good graces or to avoid their wrath or obtain their favor, must pay the high price of loyalty.

There are two extremes that missionaries face in response to such cultural abuses. On the one hand, missionaries might be tempted to seize upon the ruthless abuse of the values, beliefs, and assumptions of African society by evil men as a pretext for rejecting an African worldview altogether and substituting it with their own, seemingly superior, Western one. However, we should instead seek to identify biblical values inherent in the African worldview in order to find points of gospel commonality through which we can infuse the truth of the gospel into the mindset of the culture. Although it will require significantly more effort on the missionary's part, implementing this method will prove much more effective in making disciples of Christ for the long term than perpetuating the cycle of "cutting and pasting" Western cultural ideals into African culture.

On the other hand, missionaries ought to be careful not to go to the other extreme and exploit the *gentillesse* (kindness and indulgence) of African culture to their advantage, either as a means of continuing in their ignorance ("It's okay; they know I'm a foreigner") or of using their honored position to manipulate people so that situations will turn out the way they desire. The result of either of these extremes can be the creation of a latent hostility among our African brothers and sisters, not only toward ourselves but more importantly toward the Christ we claim to represent and the gospel we come to proclaim. The difficult task for the missionary is learning how to incarnate himself into the culture as Jesus did, maintaining the necessary tension between espousing the values, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors of his culture and those of the kingdom of God.

One particular difficulty that Western missionaries face in adapting to African culture is being viewed as a rich patron. In the introduction, we spoke of the difficulties that a lack of understanding of the patronage system caused for our missionary predecessors. Fortunately, the concept of patronage is increasingly coming to the forefront in missiological discussions, which will only serve to help Western missionaries better adapt to the cultural contexts in which they find themselves.[239]

Vulnerable Mission

Upon reflecting on the history and impact of patronage on mission endeavors over the last several centuries, it has become evident to many in missiological circles that the status quo must change in terms of the way in which missionaries live and conduct their ministries with and among their national brothers, especially those serving in Africa. For too long nationals have suffered abuses, injustices, or simple misunderstandings from first-world[240] missionaries who often have a completely different understanding of life, ethics, and social relationships. These missiological reflections have engendered much discussion and a few proposals that warrant consideration. One particularly interesting idea stemming from the African context is the concept of Vulnerable Mission championed by Jim Harries and his Alliance for Vulnerable Mission (AVM) which directly opposes and counters the patronage model.

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[239] In 2000, David DeSilva began to unlock the importance of this theme in his book *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity*. Other books which focused on biblical backgrounds and the socio-cultural world of the Old and New Testaments such as Bruce Malina's *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* also shed important light on this issue. More recently attention has been drawn to the theme of patronage as a sub-set of the treatment of the Honor-Shame culture. Over the last 5 years authors such as Jayson Georges (*The 3-D Gospel, Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures, Ministering in Patronage Cultures), Jackson Wu (One Gospel for All Nations, Saving God's Face, Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes), Werner Mischke (*The Global Gospel*),* and Randy Richards and Brandon O'Brien (*Mistreading Scripture with Western Eyes*) have all drawn attention to this important socio-cultural aspect.

[240] Throughout this paper we have used the term "Western" specifically in reference to the style of theological education that came out of Europe and North America. Here, however, we use the term "first-world" to include other financially advantaged countries not belonging to the "West" but from where missionaries are coming to Africa such as South Korea, Brazil, etc.

Harries' proposal of a vulnerable model of mission stems from his years of experience as a missionary in Africa and his desire to help missionaries to avoid the traps and pitfalls into which many previous missionary colleagues have fallen in the past, especially that of the dependency mindset with often accompanies the patron-client system. "Vulnerable mission by Western missionaries in Africa is that ministry which operates in the language of the people being reached without outside financial subsidy."[241] In this way, missionaries can identify more closely with their national counterparts and more accurately reflect God to them by removing many of the obstacles caused by power and status which Western missionaries are forced to deal with from the moment they arrive on the field.

The primary tenet of Vulnerable Mission is that a missionary should seek to strip away the vestiges of power that usually accompany Western missions and live in a way which would seem vulnerable to many from the West but authentic and natural to those in the society among whom the Western missionary is seeking to minister. Vulnerable Mission proposes that this be done in two primary ways: 1) through using the language of the people being reached in ministry, a strategy which reduces the intellectual and linguistic power of the missionary, and 2) by conducting ministry using only locally available resources, thus stripping away the power inherent in having a pool of Western resources from which to draw.

Harries readily admits that vulnerable mission can come across as radical or extreme and is not necessarily to be adopted by all missionaries. Despite these caveats, Harries maintains that a vulnerable model of mission is preferable in that it most closely reflects the biblical model and enables the missionary to become most effectively integrated into the community which he is trying to reach with the gospel. These claims will be examined further as we assess the strengths and weaknesses of Vulnerable Mission.

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[241] Jim Harries, "To Compromise on Missionary Vulnerability in Africa? - a response to critics of 'Vulnerable Mission'." *Global Missiology*: April 2016, p 1.

Vulnerable Mission does, in fact, address a number of pitfalls inherent in the patronage model of missions stemming from the colonial era. First, it advocates a rejection of the Western cultural domination as well as the associated structures of dependency that accompany a patronage-based mission model. By insisting that the missionary come into a community as a learner of the local language, Vulnerable Mission precludes the missionary arriving with pre-packaged, Western answers to the problems the community is facing. Additionally, when the power distance that comes with foreign finances is removed, missionaries must learn from locals and understand their strategies for addressing a problem rather than simply throwing Western money at the issues. This carries the secondary benefit of building ministries using indigenous solutions which, consequently, are sustainable without Western funds.

A second, corollary strength of Vulnerable Mission is that, in approaching ministry in a vulnerable manner, the identity and worth of local believers is affirmed and validated. Rather than making nationals passive recipients of the Western missionaries' generosity, thus implying that they have little or nothing to offer themselves, a vulnerable model of mission exalts national ingenuity and resources by turning exclusively to them to accomplish ministry in the local context. Furthermore, when a missionary takes time to learn a local language, he communicates that he sees that language as important and not just as a secondary, inferior means of communicating. Since the language of an ethnic group is closely tied to their identity, a missionary who learns another's language is validating that person's identity and worth as well as affirming the image of God in them.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Vulnerable Mission puts the missionary in a position of weakness in which he is forced to adopt a posture of humility and reliance on God. No longer can the missionary simply rely on his own intelligence or his reserve of funds from his home country to resolve problems faced on the field. Instead the missionary himself knows what it means to be vulnerable and dependent on God for

everything that needs to be accomplished. The effect of this vulnerability will not only draw the missionary closer to God but also those to whom he is ministering as the missionary will share in the experiences of his national friends. This in turn will allow the missionary to more accurately reflect the God who took on flesh to those among whom the missionary is ministering.

The aforementioned strengths are certainly not negligible for the missionary who seeks to give a faithful and biblical representation of God to those around him. However, this represents only one side of the coin, for although Vulnerable Mission makes a number of valid points, the ideology is itself vulnerable on a number of other fronts which we will now examine.

Even with a cursory reading of the arguments for Vulnerable Mission, one can identify several significant holes in the position. These vulnerabilities include the fact that it self-identifies as not being applicable to everyone, that it puts vulnerability in all-or-nothing terms, that it romanticizes the idea that less power equals fewer offenses on the part of the missionary, and that it borders on duplicity for a missionary to himself have access to Western resources yet not use them in ministry. There is, however, a more glaring weakness to which we will turn our attention, namely that Vulnerable Mission does not adequately account for the ingrained patron-client mindset found in many, if not most, African societies, nor does it seem to understand the biblical perspective on patronage as previously discussed in the preceding pages.

Vulnerable Mission accurately acknowledges that Western missionaries are viewed in terms of the patron-client relationships prevalent across the African continent.

> A missionary who moves from the West to Africa today does not enter a historical vacuum. Certainly in the case of parts of Africa here under scrutiny, presuppositions held by Africans as to the nature of 'Westerners', typically Whites, already abound. A new visitor to Africa from the Western world already has an identity before they open their mouth or put their foot on the ground.[242]

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[242] Harries, "To Compromise on Missionary Vulnerability in Africa?", p 6.

Harries then cites Maranz's depiction of patronage in Africa to provide further perspective:

> The subjection of clients to wealthy patrons is not a system introduced by 'the West.' The system was already there and deeply ingrained. The role frequently given to Westerners in Africa is clear — they are patrons … There are privileges that should be welcomed and obligations that should be fulfilled by patrons and clients. Failure to properly meet these will cause misunderstanding and tensions.[243]

Despite his accurate assessment of the patronage system in Africa, Harries insists that the Western missionary can and should completely reject this system of operation, stating: "To be known as offering the Christ of the Scriptures, a Western missionary may well have to opt out completely from their conventional Western identity as a resource person."[244] This, however, appears to be an overly simplistic and naïve perspective on patronage in Africa, for if a missionary's identity as a patron is already given upon his arrival, as Harries maintains, then his failure to act accordingly can only cause the misunderstanding and tensions of which Maranz spoke. Jonathan Bonk highlights this fact when he observes that "when the missionary fulfills only a part of expected behavior associated with the status and its accompanying roles, there are problems, and people can feel deeply betrayed or angry."[245] The simple fact that the missionary arrived on an airplane, often with his family and a number of suitcases in tow, cements his image as a person of resources in the minds of the nationals. For the missionary to then withhold those resources from those around him opens him up to the accusation of being stingy, which, in addition to being one of the most grave cultural sins in Africa, is itself condemned in Scripture.

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[243] David Maranz cited in Jim Harries, "Vulnerable Mission as an Alternative to Failing Aid Paradigms: facing reality on reaching Africa." Global Missiology: July 2013, p 4.

[244] Harries, "To Compromise on Missionary Vulnerability in Africa?", p 8.

[245] Jonathan Bonk, *Missions and Money (Revised and Expanded): Affluence as a Missionary Problem*, American Society of Missiology Series Book 15, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006. Kindle Edition Location 4942-3.

In addition to naïvely assuming that the missionary can simply "opt out" of the patronage system, Harries also views it to be anti-biblical for the missionary to act in such a role when he affirms that "the Scriptures are themselves, it seems clear to me, an intentional and overt contradiction of the patron client system … Christ's incarnation itself epitomizes his rejection of the patron client system, well illustrated by the well known hymn recorded in Philippians 2:6-9."[246] This affirmation begs the question: "Is the patron-client system itself anti-biblical?" or, perhaps better stated, "Did Jesus and Paul reject patronage by their teaching and actions?" A reading of the text of Scripture in its historical context suggests that, rather than rejecting patronage, both Jesus and Paul redefined the cultural system of patronage in a way that was in keeping with the character of a righteous person as outlined in the Scriptures. This, then, becomes the challenge for the contemporary missionary in Africa — to redefine the African system of patronage in such a way that he can act in the role of patron in which he is viewed by those around him while at the same time acting in a righteous and God-honoring manner. It is this redefinition of patronage, which we can term "vulnerable patronage," modeled in Scripture by both Jesus and Paul, that should be practically fleshed out by missionaries in the African context.

Vulnerable Patronage

The term "vulnerable patronage" seems to present a paradox due to the fact that a patron, as the possessor of wealth and influence, is seldom in a position of vulnerability. However, as the proponents of Vulnerable Mission have correctly identified, it is precisely vulnerability that is "needed for a missionary to acquire the perspective of the people being reached, and is a pre-requisite to speaking to them truthfully and honestly about the true God."[247] This vulnerability does not necessitate, however, that

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[246] Ibid., p 11.

[247] Ibid., p 6.

the Western resources must be completely removed from the table or hidden from nationals.

Harries maintains that “the way to turn people to God instead of to a culture is not to try to display it, show it off or claim to be superior,”[248] thus insisting that Western resources should not be used in ministry. However, it seems more biblically faithful to encourage those who have resources, regardless of their origin or amount, to live in such a way that shows that those resources are not their greatest treasure (1 Tim 6:17-19). It is in this way that a Western missionary can be truly vulnerable by generously using the resources that God has put at his disposal to advance the kingdom of God. It was this very paradox of vulnerable patronage that made the ministries of both Jesus and the apostle Paul incredibly effective with some, such as the tax collectors, prostitutes, and those of a disreputable life, yet completely misunderstood by others, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, and even Judas.

While Jesus obviously did not have great earthly possessions (Matt 8:20), he did put what was at his disposition at the benefit of those he came to serve. The fact that Jesus “emptied himself by taking the form of a servant” (Phil 2) does not imply that he completely divested himself of all of his divine privilege, as evidenced by the fact that he healed the diseased, cast out demons, multiplied bread for thousands, and even raised the dead. In doing so Jesus was understood to be a patron of sorts and consequently had crowds of would-be clients numbering in the thousands that followed him — many who did so only for the physical benefits they would receive (John 6:26). But Jesus’ patronage was a vulnerable one as he depended on others for his own physical needs (Mark 15.40-41) and constantly made himself available to care for people’s needs, at times even to the detriment of his own (Mark 3:20). He genuinely cared for people created in the image of God, which involved not only caring for their physical needs but their spiritual needs as well. The point of this type of vulnerable patronage was not

[248] Ibid., p 13.

simply to attract a great following and increase his own honor in the eyes of the people as the Pharisees did but to honor his Father. For this reason, at times Jesus seems to have deliberately discouraged those who were following him solely for the physical benefits they would receive by making the conditions of being his disciple extremely difficult if not impossible to accept (John 6:53; Matt 16:24-25; Luke 14:26). In this way Jesus acted quite counter-culturally, thus seeking to redefine and redeem the cultural system of patronage that had been twisted to serve the patron more than the clients. In so doing, however, he drew the ire of many who misunderstood him, including Judas, the disciple who ultimately betrayed him and the Pharisees who sought their own honor.

Following in the steps of Jesus, the Apostle Paul also conducted a ministry that was characterized by a vulnerable patronage. As an apostle of Jesus, Paul had certain "rights" or privileges that accompanied his office, including the right to receive financial support from the churches so that he could give himself full-time to the ministry (1 Cor 9:4-12). At times, Paul took advantage of this right, as he did with the Philippians, while at other times, as with the Corinthians, he refrained from using his rights so as not to hinder the advance of the gospel. Much of this had to do with the mindset of those in the particular context in which he was working. Since the Corinthians had a very carnal mindset, Paul spent much of his time explaining his actions so that no one could accuse him of abusing his privileges as an apostle. Additionally, we see that with the Corinthians Paul came not in the strength of an apostle but in weakness — even exalting the Corinthians while humbling himself. Paul also chose to adapt his lifestyle to those among whom he was serving in order to remove any potential obstacles to the message of the gospel that he was preaching (1 Cor 9:19-23). In these ways Paul, despite being a notable apostle, chose to make himself vulnerable so as to better serve the body of Christ. It is this same type of service that first-world missionaries should strive to embody as they serve in Africa.

Exactly how vulnerable patronage is to be fleshed out in a given location is a complex subject that should be analyzed and evaluated, giving attention to the history and particularities of the individual context in which each missionary is working. Western missionaries, who are often painfully aware of the difficult reality that they cannot be a patron to every would-be client, can take solace in the fact that even Jesus himself did not meet every physical need of those around him, though he was often pressed to do so. And because there are times "when helping hurts,"[249] missionaries need God's wisdom to know whom and when they should help. Once a missionary has made the decision to enter into a patron-client relationship, however, some basic guidelines can aid the missionary who seeks to reflect the character of Christ in Africa through vulnerable patronage.

Be a godly patron, not just a "good" one: Since the goal of vulnerable patronage is to reflect Christ, a missionary should work to transform the local view of patronage to conform with the biblical truths about God. Being a patron, then, is not just about handing out resources but using those resources to create authentic relationships thereby honoring those whom we seek to serve and furthering the kingdom of God. Scripture has much to say about how a rich person (a category that most if not all Western, first-world missionaries fall into compared to their African brothers and sisters)

[249] The questions surrounding the issue of providing financial aid to nationals (To whom?, How much?, How often?, etc.) can be one of the most thorny and frustrating issues that a missionary faces, especially knowing that giving in such a way that creates dependence is not always the right solution. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert have addressed this reality both in the North American and Majority World contexts in their book *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor … And Yourself*. Other works have also addressed the issue of poverty and aid such as *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, And How To Reverse It* by Robert Lupton, which focuses primarily on the North American context, as well as Dambisa Moyo's *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa*. Due to the complexities of this topic, the individual contours of each case, and the limitations of this paper, we cannot fully treat the issue here.

should use their riches for righteous means.[250] Wright asserts that "the mark of righteous riches is when those who possess them use the social power they confer for the benefit of the powerless and to confound those who victimize them."[251] Such a use of resources may bring additional vulnerability to the Western missionary either through the diminishing of the resources available for his personal use or through his increased association with the oppressed at the cost of his association with the oppressors (Heb 10:32-35). However these same situations will also provide him with the opportunity to flesh out the gospel of grace that he proclaims.

Look for opportunities to reverse roles: Missionaries should not automatically assume that they must always have the superior role in a patron-client relationship. In fact, one way to honor our African brothers and sisters is to reverse the roles and become a client of our clients (cf. the centurion in Luke 7). This role reversal can be seen in the ministries of Jesus and Paul — they each operates as spiritual patrons, yet at times they reversed the roles and depended on their own clients for certain needs. In a similar way, missionaries should also look for opportunities to take on the role of the client instead of the patron, such as when learning local languages and customs or by seeking help with basic needs or tasks. This confers honor on others when we put ourselves in an inferior role by expressing our own need and providing others with an opportunity to be the one to provide. This kind of role reversal will foster a spirit of interdependence and community that will serve to deepen the relationships with national brothers and sisters.

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[250] In the seventh chapter of *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem*, Jonathan Bonk develops what he refers to as a Missiology of the Righteous Rich. Bonk, after examining numerous biblical texts concerning the righteous use of riches notes, "That such texts will be applied to wealthy missionaries by the poor among whom they live and work is both a certainty and a divine necessity. The challenge for any wealthy missionary will be to make sure that he or she is perceived as righteous according the the standards of the group in which he or she lives and works, and above all, in ways that consistently reflect the mind of Christ whom he or she represents." The concept of the righteous rich is also treated in significant depth by Karen Shaw in *Wealth & Piety*, Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2018.

[251] Christopher J.H. Wright, "The Righteous Rich in the Old Testament," *The Other Journal:* Aug 5, 2010, p 8.

Seek true honor: If first-world missionaries are to be godly patrons, we cannot fall into the trap of seeking the honor and praise of men lest we fall under the same condemnation as the Pharisees. This is a difficult prospect for many missionaries who can be tempted to evaluate their actions primarily based on how they will be perceived by others. Instead, we should follow the example of Jesus and Paul who refused to bow to the whim of public opinion and instead sought to glory in their weakness and vulnerability in order to deflect all honor to God, pointing to him as the supreme patron to whom all honor is ultimately due. If we seek to be viewed favorably as patrons, let it not be so that others will look favorably on us but rather that in seeing our good works they will glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:16).

Although the idea of patronage is generally met with disdain in the West today, largely because of its past colonial connotations and its frequent abuses seen across the African continent, this system can be both redeemed and redefined through the concept of vulnerable patronage, modeled after the ministries of Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Such a method seeks to contextualize its approach by operating within the patron-client system that is deeply ingrained across much of Africa rather than rejecting it outright. In this way, the missionary conducts his ministry in ways that are familiar to the African mind, all the while seeking to reshape the category of patron to conform with the biblical exhortations and examples of the righteous rich. As such a missionary can faithfully steward his God-given resources in a way that does not lord them over his national brothers and sisters in a self-serving manner but in a way that honors others, advances the kingdom of God, and ultimately points to God as the supreme patron of all mankind.

Learning to adapt to a new culture and to live within the patronage system in the African context are two of the more complicated issues that the Western missionary is likely to face when ministering on the African continent. A missionary who is to succeed in these two domains must be willing to examine his own culturally informed presuppositions in order to more fully adapt himself to the African context in which he

lives and ministers. It is the missionary who has first learned to successfully adapt himself to his host culture who will be able to most effectively contextualize his methods of theological education.

Implementing critical action steps in theological education

Speaking of contextualizing our methods of theological education to the African context is a complicated proposition due largely to the fact that the ideals rarely match up with reality. At times this can be caused by complex cultural factors outside our control and understanding or it can be due to certain mission structures already set in place. Sometimes these structures have been constructed over the course of decades, which make establishing an ideal situation in the immediate present virtually impossible. Contextualizing theological education, therefore, cannot happen in a vacuum but must wrestle with the past and present realities of the given context in which it is to be carried out. However, before arriving at the realities of contextualizing theological education in existing institutions of theological training, it is helpful to address a number of ideals which can and should be applied to theological education irrespective of the local context. Whether a missionary is starting a new theological school or ministering in an established training institution, any contextualized theological education in Africa should incorporate the following critical action steps: 1) base theological education out of the local church, 2) make relationships the foundation for contextualized training, and 3) address cultural issues that continue to plague theological education in the African church.

1. Base theological education out of the African church

The church must be the foundation for ministry not only in Africa but also across the globe. Jesus himself established the church as the center of his plan when he promised his disciples, “I will build my church” (Mat 16:18). This implies the priority of the local church in all aspects of ministry, which means that theological schools should exist

to serve the local church rather than expecting the local churches to exist to serve the Bible school or seminary. Contextualized theological education cannot pit the theological institutions against the African church but must ensure that the two work together for the advancement of Christ's work through the church.[252] This is a truth that all Western missionaries need to be careful to live out, for as one African pastor observed, "Many missionaries say that they believe in the priority, the supremacy of the local church, but they don't really practice it. It sounds good and is nicely elaborated on paper, but they often act independently of the local church."[253] This same pastor encouraged missionaries to begin by being faithful church members and developing authentic relationships within the local church context. When this happens, ministry programs and national partnerships will then flow naturally out of the local church rather than being imposed on the church by the missionary. If Western missionaries set a precedent of working independently of the African church, they should not be surprised when the students they train duplicate the same practices which were modeled before them.

Theological schools must serve the African church

The subservience of the local church in Africa to the theological institution can be seen in a number of different ways. One subtle evidence that theological institutions are viewed as superior to the local church surfaces when pastors receive honor or climb the proverbial ladder of hierarchy in their church or denomination based primarily on their academic achievements rather than their service in the local church. In such cases, a pastor may be esteemed among his peers or by denominational leaders simply because he has received an advanced theological degree, regardless of whether that training is producing true biblical transformation in the life of the pastor and his congregation. Another indication that a theological institution may view itself as superior to the local

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[252] Insights from an interview with Andy Matoke, pastor at Redeemer Bible Church and teacher at East Africa Baptist School of Theology in Nairobi, Kenya, November 29, 2018.

[253] Interview with an anonymous African pastor.

churches can be seen when theological schools poach pastors from local churches in order to provide themselves with quality professors, without first consulting those churches or helping them to find a suitable replacement. When Bible schools or seminaries deprive the local churches of the leaders who were trained to serve in those churches, they weaken the very churches they are purported to serve in order to strengthen their own institution. Additionally, Bible schools or seminaries can elevate themselves above the local church by placing undue pressure on the local churches to finance their operations or to populate its student body at the expense of their own needs. A small local church that may already be having difficulty supporting its own pastor should not be further burdened with the added financial responsibility of supporting a Bible school or seminary or of financing the theological studies of one of their members simply because the Bible school needs more students.

If Western missionaries desire to see the work of theological education flow out of the African church, then they must work with local leaders to ensure that the church is the engine that drives the theological institution and not vice-versa. Theological schools in Africa should not be competing with local churches but instead working in cooperation with the churches to further the mission that God has given them in African societies. This is what is signified by the insistence that any theological education effort should be based out of the church. A church-based theological education does not imply that theological education must necessarily be housed in the local church but rather it must be designed by and for the local church. The ICETE Manifesto notes the importance of centering theological training around the needs of the local church community which it is to serve:

> Our programmes of theological education must orient themselves pervasively in terms of the Christian community being served. We are at fault when our programmes operate merely in terms of some traditional or personal notion of theological education. At every level of design and operation our programmes must be visibly determined by a close attentiveness to the needs and expectations of the Christian community we serve. To this end we must establish multiple modes of ongoing interaction between programme and

> church, both at official and at grassroots levels, and regularly adjust and develop the programme in the light of these contacts. Our theological programmes must become manifestly of the church, through the church and for the church. This we must accomplish, by God's grace.[254]

If Bible schools and seminaries are indeed seeking to train pastors and leaders for the African church, then the church itself must have an instrumental role in laying the groundwork for the training that its future leaders should be receiving. Having a "churchward orientation" means that there should be an ongoing dialogue between churches and theological institutions to establish the curriculum by which theological institutions seek to fully equip servant leaders for ministry in the African church. An important result of this dialogue between churches and theological schools will be an integrated program in which students are not simply taught theological theory but in which attention is given to the development of godly character as well as the opportunity to flesh out that theory outside of the classroom. The ICETE Manifesto describes such an integrated program in these words:

> Our programmes of theological education must combine spiritual and practical with academic objectives in one holistic integrated educational approach. We are at fault that we so often focus educational requirements narrowly on cognitive attainments, while we hope for student growth in other dimensions but leave it largely to chance. Our programmes must be designed to attend to the growth and equipping of the whole man of God. This means, firstly, that our educational programmes must deliberately foster the spiritual formation of the student. We must look for a spiritual development centered in total commitment to the lordship of Christ, progressively worked outward by the power of the Spirit into every department of life. We must devote as much time and care and structural designing to facilitate this type of growth as we readily and rightly provide for cognitive growth. This also means, secondly, that our programmes must foster achievement in the practical skills of Christian leadership. We must no longer introduce these skills only within a classroom setting. We must incorporate into our educational arrangements and requirements a guided practical field experience in precisely those skills which the student will need to employ in service after completion of the programme. We must provide adequately supervised and monitored

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[254] "ICETE Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education" available at https://icete.info/resources/manifesto/ accessed Dec 26, 2019. The ICETE Manifesto can be found in it's entirety in the Appendix section.

> opportunities for practical vocational field experience. We must blend practical and spiritual with academic in our educational programmes, and thus equip the whole man of God for service. This we must accomplish, by God's grace.[255]
>
> Through our programmes of theological education students must be moulded to styles of leadership appropriate to their intended biblical role within the body of Christ. We are at fault that our programmes so readily produce the characteristics of elitism and so rarely produce the characteristics of servanthood. We must not merely hope that the true marks of Christian servanthood will appear. We must actively promote biblically approved styles of leadership through modeling by the staff and through active encouragement, practical exposition, and deliberate reinforcement. This we must accomplish, by God's grace.

An integrated program of theological education based in and flowing out of the African local church will serve to prepare God's servants for ministry in the African church. Even Western training models which do an excellent job of intentionally giving priority to the local church[256] are coming to Africa in pre-packaged form from the West and may be limited in their applicability to the African context. This trend is beginning to change, however, as Africans are increasingly seeking to develop holistic models of theological and ministry training which empower African pastors to think about theology

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[255] Ibid.

[256] One example of this training is the Biblical Institute for Leadership Development (BILD International) and their Antioch School, which has developed a highly structured program that puts significant emphasis on the local church. The goal of this training is described as being an "effort to accelerate church-planting movements worldwide by training leaders in 'the way of Christ and His Apostles.'" (Handbook: Antioch School of Church Planting and Leadership Development, p 1). The emphasis is placed on practical church-based training which offers academic degrees without exporting the Western schooling paradigm (Handbook p 3). (In 1992, Jeff Reed, the founder of BILD and the Antioch School, proposed a new paradigm of Church-Based Theological Education in a presentation to the North American Professors of Christian Education in a paper entitled "Church-Based Theological Education: Creating a New Paradigm.") The focus of the training provided by the Antioch school model is competency based and includes training in character development, ministry skills, and knowledge (based largely on doing biblical theology rather than presenting conclusions of systematic theology) in real-life ministry settings (Handbook p 9-11). Although the Antioch School has undoubtedly developed an excellent model of theological and ministry training that addresses many of the issues raised here, there is a danger in claiming that this model is "the way of Christ and His Apostles" — namely that it seems to leave very little room for adaptation of the model to fit the cultural context.

and ministry in ways which address the particular needs and challenges of the African continent.[257]

Theological schools must give authority to the African church

Western theological educators would do well to humble themselves and learn from their African brothers and sisters by intentionally coming alongside them in a genuine partnership so as to further a more appropriate contextualized theological training in the context of the African church.[258] In order to accomplish this, it will be necessary for Western leaders of existing theological institutions to turn over not just the responsibility but also the authority of the Bible schools and seminaries that they have worked to establish. Turning over responsibility to nationals is relatively easy endeavor, for in doing so we are asking them to take a primary role in doing the work of the ministry while we continue to maintain the ultimate influence and control over the institution by making the final decisions and holding the purse strings. On the other hand, handing over the authority of an institution is the more difficult step, for it means that we no longer have a hold on the wheel and are therefore powerless to change the direction once we have let go. Western missionaries must learn to trust those who they have trained, realizing that they not only have the Spirit of God in them but also understand their own cultures in a way few Westerners can.[259]

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[257] More than a Mile Deep (MMD) Global is an organization which seeks "to devise a contextually appropriate African set of courses, written in view of the competencies the African pastor would require to function effectively and efficiently in a specific region in Africa." (Jusu, "Partnering Together to Deepen the African Church," https://www.entrust4.org/post/ecl-partnering-together) This is a collaboration of members of the African church who are developing contextualized African training for African pastors to effectively minister in the African context. More information about MMD can be found at https://www.entrust4.org/mmd.

[258] Insights from an interview with Chopo Mwanza, pastor of Riverside Baptist Church and teacher at Central Africa Baptist College and Seminary in Kitwe, Zambia, November 27, 2018.

[259] Insights from an interview with Saidi Chisimba, pastor of Evangel Baptist Church in Lusaka, Zambia and teacher at Central Africa Baptist College and Seminary in Kitwe, Zambia, November 29, 2018.

Handing authority over to the African church requires that Western educators reject the neocolonial attitude that insists that things be done “our way” in order to serve the needs of the African church as seen by African leadership. They must accept a reversal of the traditional roles where Western missionaries are working alongside of national leadership, supporting their vision, and putting themselves at their disposition. Although difficult, this is a necessary step in the contextualization process for as long as Western theological educators have the final say over a Bible school or seminary, true contextualization will likely never truly take place.[260]

Handing the responsibility for a Bible school or seminary and the authority to make decisions over to the African church is insufficient, however, if these schools cannot be supported at the national level. This is why Western-style infrastructure which nationals are not able to maintain without Western presence or finances should not be foisted upon theological schools in Africa. Many times theological schools begin by erecting buildings or constructing an entire campus for training men and women for ministry, however imposing such infrastructure communicates to the African church that the school is a Western project and not their own. It is, therefore, little wonder that these infrastructures are often left to deteriorate when Westerners are no longer present or able to finance the ongoing operations of the school. Ideally, the initiative for theological schools should be coming from the African church so that there can be true buy-in from the local churches. When the initiative for theological training comes from the local churches it implies that the same local churches see the need of the training and are ready to put their existing resources to use to ensure the success of the Bible school or seminary. When this happens, the local churches who are invested in their project will

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[260] It has been said of contextualization, “You’ll know when you’ve done a good job contextualizing because you probably won’t like the way it looks.” As long as Western theologians continue to hold the reins of the theological institutions, we will likely never get to the point where we “don’t like how it looks” because we will always fashion the institution according to our preferences and values. This is why it is necessary to hand over both the responsibility and the authority to national leaders who can shape the institution in a way that will likely fit the culture far better than anything we from the West could ever create.

continue to work to ensure its continuity even in the absence of Western missionaries or finances.

In the case of existing theological schools which are already saddled with a significant Western infrastructure, Western missionaries would be wise to work alongside of national leadership to develop contextually appropriate local revenue streams so that the schools do not continue to depend entirely on foreign funds for their existence but can begin to enjoy a long-term financial stability. This does not mean that Westerners should necessarily foist the Western ideal of financial independence on the African local churches, as this is not necessarily a contextually appropriate response to the problem of dependence which has afflicted mission work in Africa from the beginning of the modern mission era. Instead, Western missionaries should seek to work alongside of the African church in a spirit of partnership and interdependence in order to make the work of theological education belong as much, and even more, to the African church than to a Western missionary or mission organization.[261]

2. Make relationships the foundation for contextualized theological education

In addition to basing theological and ministry training out of the local church, if we wish to train pastors for ministry in the African church in a way that is both biblically and culturally appropriate, we must reexamine our presuppositions regarding the way that theological education is done in order to more accurately reflect the Trinitarian and African priority of relationships. Effective instructional techniques, while playing an important role in theological education, will ultimately prove fruitless if they are not accompanied by an emphasis on relationships, as Mark Olander notes:

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[261] In her book *Cross Cultural Partnerships: Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010) Mary Lederleitner details how missionaries can foster genuine contextualized partnerships with nationals in order to promote harmony, dignity, and collaboration and to minimize misunderstandings, judgments, and division.

> Those of us who live and work in Africa recognize how important relationships are to the African people. We can use all the best teaching and learning methods possible, but if we don't have a good relationship with our students, we will ultimately be ineffective as teachers. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that we be very intentional about establishing good healthy relationships with our students. They really don't care how much or what we know, unless they know that we genuinely care for them and respect them as individuals who are valuable in God's sight and ours.[262]

In the African context, contextualizing theological education presupposes a relational method of theological training. Relationships form the fabric of society in the African culture, therefore any attempt at theological education in an African contact should take this relational priority into consideration. Ultimately, when we are training leaders in the African context, we should not train leaders in a relational way simply because the culture demands it but because it is the pattern modeled for us by our Triune God. Because God himself is deeply committed to relationships as seen within the Trinity as well as outside of the Trinity in his establishing of relationships with his creation, we should also share his commitment. The two great commandments to love God and love our fellow man are rooted in relationship — that is to say they cannot be carried out theoretically or abstractly but must happen relationally.

Part of mankind being created in God's image is his natural capacity and even need for relationships. Jesus modeled this kind of a relational commitment in his ministry. God's plan for the salvation of humanity was that "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Even in his youth we find Jesus "in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions" (Luke 2:46) — learning in community. Jesus' earthly ministry also revolved around relationships, not only with his disciples but also with the unlovely and unloved of society. All aspects of Jesus' life and ministry were relational.

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[262] Mark Olander, "Creative Teaching Methods in Theological Education," *African Journal of Evangelical Theology (AJET)*, Vol 31, No 2, 2012, p 142.

Throughout Scripture we see numerous examples of the relational model of training leaders. Many apprentices spent time learning from their teachers before eventually replacing those teachers when they passed away or undertook a different ministry. Joshua was said to have been Moses' aide from his youth (Num 11:28) and eventually finished Moses' task of leading the people to the promised land and completing its conquest. Elisha was appointed to be successor to Elijah (1 Kin 19) but ministered alongside of Elijah for a time until God took his master up to heaven (2 Kin 2). In the New Testament, we see that when Jesus called his disciples "he appointed twelve that they might be with him …" (Mark 3:14). For three years the disciples followed Jesus and shared life with him, watching his ministry and learning from his teaching. The apostle Paul also demonstrates the relational model in his ministry when, from early on in his missionary travels, he took first Timothy and then others along with him, training them along the way. At the end of his life Paul could say to Timothy, "What you heard from me keep as the pattern of sound teaching with faith and love in Jesus Christ" (2 Tim 1:13) and "you know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings… But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it" (2 Tim 3:10, 14).

Wan and Hedinger have observed, "In our globalized, multicultural world, leaders will not be those who master technique and method. Leaders will know the Lord in a deep relationship, and they will be able to form deep, healthy relationships with people across all kinds of cultures."[263] These are the kinds of church leaders that Africa needs. In order to produce these kinds of leaders in our theological schools across Africa we must let go of our own cultural preferences regarding methods of theological education in order to more effectively train the next generation of servant leaders for the church in Africa. We must do away with the elitism that so often accompanies the educational

[263] Wan and Hedinger, *Relational Missionary Training*, 295.

process in order to form relationships through which both teachers and students can be both informed and transformed. We must find creative ways to blend formal, nonformal, and informal education with apprenticeship and mentoring in order to prepare pastors with both full heads and transformed hearts to accomplish the mission of God in this world. This can happen through a process of revisiting the goals and methods of traditional theological education, revising the traditional curriculum of theological education, and developing and implementing a relational model of theological training.

Revisiting the goals and methods of theological education

It is necessary to begin the process of contextualizing theological education for Africa with a reexamination of the goals that drive the Bible schools and seminaries on the continent. While it may be accurate to say that a school's goal is to train pastors for ministry or to prepare students to live out the gospel in their context, formulations of this kind are ambiguous and therefore will ultimately prove to be less than useful unless further precision is given as to how the students will be trained to accomplish these goals. Regardless of how the goals are described, two elements should be part of a theological institution's goals if a contextualized program of education is to be relational in focus and, therefore, have a significant impact in the student's life and ministry.

Goal 1: Training for Ministry Competency

The first element that should be present in any theological school on the African continent is training students for ministry competency. In other words, Bible schools and seminaries must ask themselves, "What does a student need to be, to know, and to have the skills to do in order to be an effective minister of the gospel in his context?" By asking this question, theological schools look to address not only the cognitive aspect of theological education (what a student knows) but also the affective (what he feels about God and people) and the behavioral (what skills he possesses) aspects as well. Posing this question from the outset allows a theological school to structure their own curriculum

according to the needs of the target culture rather than merely choosing a course of study by cutting and pasting from another institution.

Competency based training applies principles of andragogy by treating students as adults, validating their previous knowledge and life experience, and realizing that the motivation for learning has to come from within the student. One danger which exists in some programs of theological education is that students are treated as if they know nothing about what they need to learn and, therefore, the school dictates to the student every class that he will take. When this happens, the school wrests away both the control and the motivation to learn from the students since they treat their students more like children than adults. In this scenario, the theological school takes on the factory model of theological training in which every student is forced into a certain mold and is expected to come out looking, thinking, speaking, and acting in a similar manner. In some cases, when a student who was trained in this factory model does not fit into the prescribed mold in his thinking, speech, or actions, he can be labeled as a rebel or a trouble maker and consequently may be blacklisted by the teachers or administration of the school where he was trained. This, in turn, causes much undue frustration for the student and risks causing him to turn away from the biblical and theological truth which he was taught. In the end, the factory model may even end up having the reverse effect of what was intended by accepting a student into the training.

In addition to ignoring andragogical realities, a factory approach to theological training disregards sociocultural and theological truths as well. Bible schools need to accept that there are a variety of cultural and ministerial contexts in which students will minister and prepare each student accordingly. Theologically, the leadership of the theological schools must embrace the truth that each student has been gifted by God in different ways and tasked for different ministries. Teachers and leaders of institutions of theological education cannot make the mistake of thinking that every student should be trained in the same way. For example, although all pastoral students need to understand

theology, not all will become “professional” theologians who can write clearly and concisely in order to lay out theological truth for the African church.[264]

When the goal of theological education is to train students for competency in the particular ministry they will be engaged in, the focus appropriately shifts from the desires of the school to the needs of the students. Competency based training often involves a certain core of courses which provide the essential biblical and theological elements which all students will need regardless of their ministry. Additionally, it can include different tracks of study which provide specialized instruction and training for particular types of ministries. Schools may go even further in the specialization process by giving their students the freedom to tailor their educational experience. In this model, students are required to take a certain number of core courses after which they may choose electives which have a particular application for their life or for the ministry for which they are being trained. Such a model approaches theological education with the explicit goal of preparing students for ministry in their particular context and forces the theological school to be flexible with its programs in order to adequately respond to the needs of the students. If such a goal is not made explicit from the outset, it is likely that the theological training provided will prove to be more rigid and informational than flexible and transformational.

Goal 2: Training for life transformation

While a properly contextualized theological education is important for training students for competency in their specific ministry, this competency alone will not be

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[264] An example of the differentiation in the curriculum may be helpful here. Students who are being trained to be pastors may take the systematic theology courses which form part of their academic core, whereas students who have demonstrated an aptitude for advanced theological thinking can be introduced to the more advanced realm of biblical theology. This discipline trains them to search the Scriptures in order to find biblical themes that they can then apply to concrete realities in the African context, thus developing a more Africanized systematic theology for the African church. Also, students who demonstrate an aptitude for advanced theological thinking and writing could be placed into a track which develops their skills of analytical thinking and writing, while those who do not have the same abilities could follow a track which puts heavier emphasis on the practical aspects of ministry in the local church.

sufficient if the students have not also experienced an inner change as a result of their training. Pastoral ministry itself is predicated primarily on character and not on a person's knowledge or abilities. Of the characteristics that Paul described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 as being necessary for one who wishes to be a pastor/elder, only one of those characteristics relates exclusively to his knowledge and/or skills.

Table 5.1 : Paul's Lists of Characteristics Required for a Pastor/Elder

1 Timothy 3:2-7	Titus 1:6-9
above reproach	blameless (mentioned 2x)
faithful to his wife	faithful to his wife
sober (temperate ; not given to excesses)	disciplined
self-controlled	self-controlled
respectable (modest)	not arrogant (overbearing)
hospitable	hospitable
**** able to teach**	**** holds firmly to the doctrine (in order to teach it and refute opponents)**
not given to drunkenness	not given to drunkenness
not violent, rather gentle	not violent
not quarrelsome	not quick tempered
not covetous (a lover of money)	not greedy (pursuing dishonest gain)
manage his family well	have believing children / not disorderly
not a recent convert	
good testimony (reputation w/ outsiders)	
	loves what is good
	upright
	holy

Scripture makes it evident that who a person is before God and others is vastly more important than what he knows or is able to do. For this reason any program of theological education should aim to produce transformation in the character of its students so that they can be who God desires and requires them to be. This is the very heart of the Great Commission that Jesus gave to his disciples before he returned to heaven: "teaching them *to obey* everything that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20). Theological education must go beyond providing information to helping students become disciples of Jesus Christ who live out their faith in him everywhere they go. If this is to take place, it means that theological training needs to transcend the cognitive elements and seek to stir the student's heart to produce a love for God, for Jesus himself said, "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15).

Duane Elmer noted that one practical outworking of a change to the goal of life transformation in theological education will be an increased humility in the lives of pastors and church leaders who are being trained in these institutions. A program which is mostly comprised of informational training has a tendency to produce a spirit of arrogance among graduates who assume that upon having graduated Bible school they now have all the right answers to the questions they face in ministry. This assumption of "rightness" on theological matters has led many a graduate down the road of debate and division which ultimately produces unbiblical separation over relatively minor questions of doctrine or practice. Sadly, the body of Christ has repeatedly been fractured by puffed up pastors and church leaders who have used the knowledge they received in their theological education as a trump card to stop all dialogue and insist on their own interpretation of a particular situation.[265] The consequences of this attitude have been disastrous not only for the African church but also for the institutions of theological education when this attitude is regularly modeled by its leadership. On the contrary,

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[265] Comments taken from Duane Elmer's workshops given at the first annual ABWE Summit on International Theological Education hosted at ABWE USA headquarters in Harrisburg, PA, May 15-18, 2018.

theological educators who train for life transformation will seek to instill humility in their students by teaching and modeling humility for them, much like Jesus did before his own disciples. Elmer observed that Jesus came to earth in two roles: first as the Messianic King and second as a humble servant. While Christians are never called to follow Christ in his lordliness, they are to model his humble servanthood.[266] A student who learns humility through a deep understanding of the gospel of grace in the process of his theological education will doubtless exhibit a transformed life when he goes out into ministry and will become a model of such transformation to others around him. This is why theological education must not only train for ministry competency but also for life transformation.

Methods of achieving the goals of theological education

A serious reassessment of the goals of theological education should also produce a reassessment of the methods which are often used in theological and ministry training institutions in the African context. In order to permit programs of theological education in Africa to achieve the goals of training for ministry competency and life transformation, it is necessary to incorporate principles of andragogy and orality to better suit theological training to the African context. Rather than expecting students to come as blank slates upon which the necessary theological information will be written, theological educators need to encourage students to be self-motivated learners by helping them understand the relevance and importance of a course of study to their particular life-situation. Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy proves particularly applicable at this very point. While most pedagogical systems focus on laying the theological foundation using the first three levels of Bloom's hierarchy — knowing, understanding, and applying — we must deliberately look for ways to incorporate the more advanced objectives into the latter half of our training programs in order to enable us to adequately address African issues. Once the proper theological foundation has been laid, we must lead

[266] Ibid.

students along the path on which they analyze and evaluate their current context in light of the scriptural and theological truths they have learned. Then they can create new ideas and practices which will make the Scripture live in their context.

Applying Bloom's top-tier objectives to traditional customs and practical questions in the African context is what Paul Hiebert referred to as the process of critical contextualization "whereby old beliefs and customs are neither rejected nor accepted without examination. They are first to be studied with regard to the meanings and places they have within their cultural setting and then evaluated in the light of biblical norms."[267] In the process of critical contextualization it is important to first evaluate the practice in its cultural context in order to understand and analyze it. This involves gathering information through question and discussion before one ever criticizes the practice. Once sufficient information has been gathered in order to provide a full understanding of the custom, then one must search the Scriptures to see what the Bible has to say about it. Hiebert stresses that this process cannot be done by the Western missionary alone, but must include the national believers so that they have ownership in the process. Then the nationals must make a decision regarding the practice — either to keep it, to reject it or to modify it. Modification can take place through creating a new practice or by borrowing a practice from another culture or from biblical or church history. This practice of critical contextualization is illustrated in Figure 5.2 below.[268]

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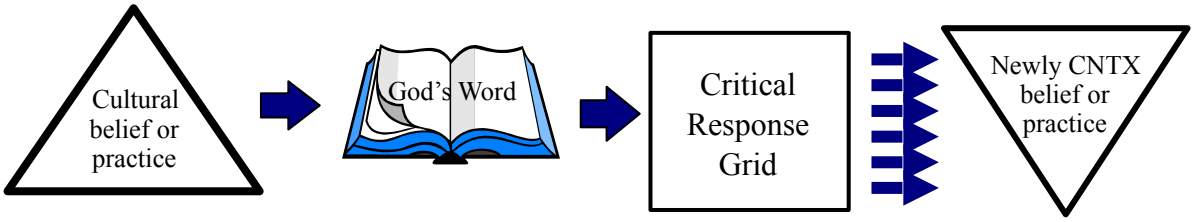
[267] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, p 186.

[268] Stallter, "Contextualization for Meaningful Ministry" course notes, July 2013.



Analysis of cultural belief or practice when there is question as to biblical application (not evaluating biblically but understanding the ins and outs of the practice first).

Church may need to confront:

- Fetishes / amulets
- Polygamy
- Dowry
- Ancestor worship
- Animistic village music
- Initiation rites

Need to ask questions

- Who does it?
- What do they do?
- When do they do it?
- How is it done?
- Where do they do it?
- What is the purpose?
- How does it serve our survival?
- Why is it important to us?
- What are the abuses of it?
- What do people think of those who do it?

Analysis of Scriptures that speak to all parts of the belief or practice

(Uses, abuses, teaching, implication, advice, examples, etc.)

Use biblical tools such as concordances, word searches, etc.

Critical response

Keep it

Reject it

What are the consequences of rejecting it?

what are the functional substitutes

Modify it

Need to create new indigenous forms to replace the old system and help to implement them

Substitute symbols or rituals from another culture (but BE CAREFUL with this)

Adopt from biblical or church history

New practice implemented in the context of the community of believers

The national leaders (along with some help from the missionaries) monitor the readjustment of the community and help them to understand and implement them.

Figure 5.2: Stallter's Flowchart of Critical Contextualization (adapted from Hiebert)

The ways in which learning is brought to bear on these situations must also be adapted to the African context. A Western theological educator in Africa should be willing to be flexible in his thinking in order to accommodate the cultural preferences of those who wish to learn. Whereas Western learners often begin by learning theories and then applying them to concrete realities, African learners will often start with a concrete experience. They will then ask questions about that experience which will lead them to the development of a theory which can then be tested in the same or another similar experience.[269] Though this may seem "backward" to the Western educator, the adaptation of his methods to fit the thought processes of his students will doubtless have an impact on their learning. This is where implementing David Kolb's Experiental Learning cycle mentioned in Chapter 3 is particularly useful for the African context because it centers on a concrete experience about which students are encouraged to think, to formulate theories, and to test those theories in the real world. In this way, theological theories are never left in the abstract realm, but are always brought around to concrete experiences to help the African students understand them and related them to real life.

One further way of adapting teaching methods to the African context is to understand and adapt to the importance of oral media in the life of the African society. Much of the Western educational system is based on high literacy elements of reading and writing, components which are largely foreign in traditional African society. In response to those who may say that an African can simply adapt and learn to learn through reading and writing, Bauta Motty declares that "the persistent non-reading attitude of the people [of Africa] greatly suggests that orality is a powerful virtue of the society, and trying to abolish it will mean killing the psyche, life, and morality of the

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[269] W. Jay Moon, "Teaching Oral Learners in Institutional Settings," in *Beyond Literate Western Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts*, ed Samuel Chiang and Grant Lovejoy, Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2013, p 148-49.

people."[270] In other words, an African will always have an oral preference in communication and learning, even if he or she is perfectly capable of using literate methods of reading and writing. Motty makes this explicit when he insists "No matter how educated an African is, he or she is an oral being."[271] This preference for oral methods is seen in the prevalence of proverbs and stories used to communicate meaning. One popular African proverb even speaks to the African aversion to the written text: "If you want to hide something from an African, put it in a book."

When this preference for oral methods of learning is combined with the difficulty of procuring solid theological books on the African continent, the necessity of increasingly using oral methods in theological education becomes even more evident. Across the continent of Africa, there is a relative dearth of theological resources that are readily available to pastors and theological students. For those which are available, the cost of these resources is often prohibitive, especially considering the limited income of many African pastors. In non English speaking countries, the situation is even more dire as very few solid theological resources are being translated into French, Arabic, or Portuguese[272] — the primary colonial languages used across Africa — or are being written by African authors. Thus many Bible schools and seminaries, especially those in

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[270] Bauta Motty, "Contextualizing Theological Education in Africa: A Case of ECWA Theological Seminary, Jos, Nigeria (JETS)" in *Beyond Literate Western Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts*, ed Samuel Chiang and Grant Lovejoy, Hong Kong: International Orality Network, 2013, p 153.

[271] Ibid., p 155. Motty gives ten reasons rooted in African culture to support his belief in the primacy of orality in the African context: 1) To be oral is to be relational and people oriented, 2) To be oral is to be culturally relevant, 3) To be oral is to be transformative, 4) To be oral is to be dramatic, 5) To be oral is to be practical, 6) To be oral is to be dialogical, 7) To be oral is to be event oriented, 8) To be oral is to be traditional and contextual, 9) To be oral is to be participatory, and 10) To be oral is to be situational rather than abstract (p 155-61).

[272] In an effort to combat this problem, the Gospel Coalition has launched an initiative entitled "Theological Famine Relief" which seeks to get solid theological resources into the hands of those around the world who need them. This process is fraught with many challenges, however, including the logistics of transporting the books overseas as well as the continued oral preference of many African pastors.

the francophone, arabophone or lusophone worlds, frequently bemoan the lack of theological texts that can be used in the classroom.

In order to address this problem contextually, institutions of theological education would be wise to adapt their curriculum to use more dialogical methods of instruction and to rely significantly less on traditional Western methods of reading and writing. This does not mean that students should not be expected to read books and articles or to write papers, but this should not necessarily form the bulk of the academic curriculum, especially for those who will be ministering primarily in an oral, pastoral context.[273] A contextualized theological instruction which has been adapted for the African context should employ more of the Socratic method in which questions are asked which lead to group dialogue and cooperative discovery of the truth. In their examination of the importance of transformation in education, Wan and Hedinger define transformational education as "a type of adult education that encourages the learner to question basic assumptions." Since this type of questioning is usually not favored in a more rigid, informational program, it is necessary to modify the standard theological training curriculum to include greater degrees of dialogue and group reflection in order for genuine transformational education to take place in the African context.

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[273] In addition to the oral preference of the majority of African theological students, there is a certain linear logic that is assumed in the writing of an academic paper. African students, most of whom think using the system of cyclical logic that is prevalent across Africa, will likely experience great difficulties when being asked to write a typical Western, academic paper. Unless students are well trained in how to conduct academic research and write academic papers in their course of study, asking them to produce a Western-style academic paper will certainly result in much frustration both for the student as well as for the teacher who is to read and correct it. Forcing African students into this type of academic exercise, especially without the appropriate training, is the antithesis of contextualized theological education.

A more contextualized option could be to separate students into small groups and require them to research a topic and then give an oral presentation or to perform a skit in class demonstrating what they learned through their research. For the end of their training, in the place of having students write a formal thesis paper, students could instead be asked to organize a conference in which each student presents a different aspect of the theme that has been chosen.

Revising the traditional curriculum of theological education

If we are to attain the goals of providing transformational training which is designed to enhance ministry competency in the African church, we need to be willing to revise our curriculum in order to ensure that we are providing training in biblical character and practical skills as well as theological content. Savage has observed that in "the classic curriculum found in most seminaries and Bible colleges … the emphasis has been placed on the digestion of packets of knowledge rather than on bringing each student to spiritual maturity and effective ministry."[274] This curriculum has proven itself to be ineffective in preparing national believers to face the theological and practical challenges presented by their own culture. If we are to affect a transformation in international theological education, we should begin by reevaluating the structures of the theological schools in which we teach. Though this will be a courageous and difficult task, it is not one that we can afford to overlook, as McKinney affirms: "We must not be so committed to any structure that we are unwilling to change it when it becomes counterproductive in terms of our ultimate goal of preparing leaders for the church."[275]

Revising the explicit curriculum

One way we can revise our curriculum to promote more contextual and practical international theological education in Africa is to place a greater emphasis on the reflection on and application of truth rather than simply transmitting truth to students.[276] If we bring about this change in our curriculum, it will not only be reflected in what and how we teach, but also in the way in which we evaluate a student's understanding. Tests and papers which require students to reproduce information that they have learned in class or through course reading should be replaced by those which demand that the student

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[274] Savage, "Four Crises in Third World Theological Education", p 4.

[275] McKinney, "Why Renewal is Needed in Theological Education", p 6.

[276] Robert Ferris, "Ministry Education for the Global Church", *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January 2016, p 5-7.

be able to process the information and apply it to practical situations in their lives and ministries. Case studies or critical reflection papers hold a particular value here in that they ask students to apply the information they have learned to a fictitious scenario or to their own life and ministry experiences. Only when students are capable of this kind of practical reflection can we be assured that the student has grasped both the meaning and significance of the truths that they are being taught.

Another way of improving the curriculum for international theological education is to introduce more practical courses which focus on elements such as spiritual formation, Christian character, and conflict resolution. This implies that we may have to combine or eliminate some courses that have often figured in the traditional curriculum of theological education. Although this may disturb the status quo in a number of theological schools, it is an important consideration, as Hardy notes: "Everything that we include in our curriculum needs to contribute to getting our students from where they are to where they need to be. We do not simply teach courses because they have always been taught."[277] For example, some of the traditional courses on systematic theology[278] could be reduced and combined to make room for other courses. In this way students receive courses which both give them a solid theological foundation and those which help them develop practical ministry skills. Another perhaps more preferable option would be to remake the traditional courses into more integrated courses which provide a greater link between the theoretical and the practical and provide students with the ability to flesh out the theological truths they are learning in life and ministry.

In highlighting the need for reformation in theological education, Charles Kraft details four different types of education[279] that theological institutions would be wise to

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[277] Steven Hardy, *Excellence in Theological Education: Effective Training for Church Leaders*, Carlisle, United Kingdom: Langham Global Library, 2016, p. 95.

[278] The study of systematic theology usually includes courses such as Bibliology & Theology Proper, Christology & Soteriology, Anthropology & Harmartiology, Pneumatology, Angelology & Demonology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology.

[279] Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, p 275-77.

include in their training curriculum (see Table 5.3). Most theological institutions offer a system of formal learning, but Kraft includes nonformal, informal, and apprenticeship/discipleship as other indispensable methods of learning, especially in a non-Western context. Scott Moreau highlights the importance of these varied methods by noting, "Each has strengths and weaknesses; for the deepest learning to take place, all are necessary."[280] Whereas formal learning is scripted — often through the use of syllabi and pre-prepared notes given by the teacher — and nonformal education is also planned, although not as rigidly, the informal education is usually much more spontaneous and happens through the course of normal everyday life interactions.

Table 5.3 : Kraft's Four Different Types of Education

Formal	Schools are the most prominent type of formal educational procedures. In Western societies, they tend to be centered around the classroom, a fairly large group of students, and a professional teacher. They make use of specialized paraphernalia such as books, buildings, desks arranged neatly in a row, and other symbols of institutionalism.
Nonformal	Nonformal education is planned and usually directed toward adults. Seminars and workshops aimed at facilitating change in a semi- or non-directive way fall into this category.
Informal	Most education, whether in Western or nonWestern societies, occurs informally. Informal procedures require much more life involvement between teacher and learner. They tend to be more learner centered, with the initiative taken more by the learners themselves. Informal education is often person to person, involving modeling and observation, informal talking (as opposed to lecturing), storytelling, informal reading, and the like. It often happens in addition to formal or nonformal education.
Apprenticeship/ Discipleship	A formalized relationship between a teacher/expert and one or more students/learners within which most of the teaching/learning is done nonformally and informally. Apprenticeship/discipleship relationships frequently extend over long periods of time and involve learning a broad range of information and behavior. The focus is seldom on information for its own sake, nor does learning ordinarily occur in contexts divorced from real life.

[280] Moreau, *Contextualizing the Faith*, p 55.

Jesus modeled this type of informal education as he traveled about with his disciples and took the happenings of everyday life to teach important lessons and to model how ministry should be done. This kind of education, along with the apprenticeship/discipleship model, requires the teachers and students to exit the classroom and be involved in life and ministry together. It is life touching life and it is in this way that students will best learn practical ministry skills such as evangelizing, preaching, counseling, etc.

Proper, contextualized theological education for the African context demands much more than simple in-class training. We need to intentionally develop the implicit curriculum of our theological institutions in such a way that it incorporates the nonformal and informal aspects of theological education in addition to the formal. Informal learning is largely absorbed by what we see happening around us and is the way in which most children receive basic life education. In theological education in the context of Africa, teachers must be in frequent contact with their students so that they can model the Christian life for them. Non-formal education is often more structured than informal learning and is usually distinguished from traditional, formal education in that, although it is organized intentionally, it usually happens outside of a standard classroom. Non-formal learning takes the form of seminars and conferences, hands-on workshops, correspondence courses, and even mentoring relationships or apprenticeships.

The practical and transformational training that we are seeking to accomplish in the African context best takes place through the last two types of education in Kraft's list. Through these methods, students are given the opportunity to test and evaluate the theories that they are learning through the formal and nonformal teaching and even to question the basic assumptions inherent in both the cultural and theological learning to which they have been exposed. Without this kind of practical learning, a theological student's ministry training remains largely theoretical and abstract, which does not develop competency for ministry in the African context. When theological students are

trained using a relational model, however, not only does the teaching style match the relational nature of their culture but it also equips them to develop transformational relationships as they minister in their local churches.

Since the majority of learning takes place through informal and non-formal means in the African context, mentoring relationships and internships in local churches during the course of study should not merely be encouraged but should become an integral part of the curriculum. Every student should be mentored by a teacher or staff member to encourage spiritual growth, address personal struggles, and encourage practical application of what he is learning in the classroom. Students should also be provided with the opportunity to serve alongside a pastor during the course of his studies so that he can experience the realities of the ministry and learn to relate the classroom theory to actual ministry to brothers and sisters in the context of a local church. In this way, we can work to ensure that a student's learning will serve to further the advancement of the local church and not just his social mobility. Although these elements tend to be absent in many Western programs of theological education, we must not allow our Western proclivity toward formal education to close our eyes to other important ways of preparing men and women for local church ministry.

Recognizing the impact of the implicit (hidden) curriculum

The questions of the content that we teach in the classroom and the methods used to transmit that content are not the only issue that needs to be addressed in relation to curriculum. Questions concerning the courses to be taught and the methods used to communicate truths concern the explicit curriculum of an institution of theological education, but there is another, perhaps more important, body of knowledge to consider. The implicit or hidden curriculum concerns what is caught rather than taught as Perry Shaw describes:

> The hidden curriculum are those pervasive environmental features of education that include such things as the nature of behaviors which are

> encouraged, the type of relationships modeled, and the values emphasized in the learning community. The hidden curriculum is subtle but is in fact far more powerful than the explicit curriculum, as the messages we communicate through *how* we teach embed themselves deeply within the psyches of our students and influence their attitudes, motivations, and behaviors in a way that our words rarely accomplish.[281]

We should give careful attention to what we communicate to students through our implicit curriculum for they will go out and reproduce the things that they have seen modeled more than the things they have heard taught to them. If, for example, our hidden curriculum promotes a power distance between the teacher and his students, is it any wonder that the student, when he finishes his training and becomes a pastor, will seek to maintain a similar power distance between himself and the members of his congregation? The hidden curriculum demands that we not only be good teachers but good models for the students that we are to be training. This is another reason that we must prioritize interaction with our students outside the classroom. According to Mark 3:14, it was in this very way that Jesus taught his own disciples: “And he appointed twelve *that they might be with him* and that he might send them out to teach.” In order for theological education to attain the goal of being transformational, teachers need to develop a closeness with their students so that the students can learn from their lives as well as their lectures. In order to facilitate this kind of learning, it is important to develop and implement a relational model of theological training.

Developing a relational model of theological education

In theological and ministry training in Africa, it is not sufficient for teachers to simply dispense information in the classroom, but they must share life with their students in more informal ways, serving as mentors to them in their spiritual journey. It is only through the nurturing of deep relationships that theological education moves from being merely informational to transformational. True transformation does not take place in a

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[281] Shaw, “The Hidden Curriculum of Seminary Education”, p 26.

vacuum. Although it certainly involves having biblical truth (Rom 12:2), it is not based on information alone but is brought about through the sharpening effect of life-on-life contact (Prov 27:17). In carrying out theological education for the African context, we should not fall prey to the cultural myth that teachers must maintain a distance from their students. The elitist mentality must instead give way to Scriptural teaching and precedent. Perry Shaw maintains that:

> If we are serious about nurturing Christian attitude and character, it is not going to occur through maintaining a formal emotional distance in the classroom but rather through a relationship of love in which we mentor and model a life of quality to those God has called us to develop as future leaders of his church.[282]

This idea of mentoring implies that teachers should develop deep, open relationships with their students that extend beyond the classroom. It is only in this way that we will see the truths of Scripture transform the lives of students who can then work to transform the cultures around them to conform to a biblical worldview. Lingenfelter concurs with Shaw's point, making specific application of it to the African context :

> Christian teachers must build relationships with students before they can teach effectively. Among a great many tribes in Africa, a wealth-in-people concept rather than a wealth-in-information concept predominates. The teacher is seen as someone who comes alongside students to help in their struggle to learn, which involves cooperative, not individual, effort.[283]

This coming alongside students takes place very effectively in a mentoring relationship. Julius Muthengi describes mentoring as "an ongoing relationship of learning, dialogue, and challenge" — a relational process of informal, direct communication between a person (mentor) who is seen as having knowledge or

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[282] Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, Carlisle, UK: Langham Press, 2014, p 72.

[283] Lingenfelter, *Teaching Cross-Culturally*, p 42.

experience that the other (protégé or mentee) lacks.[284] James Plueddemann uses the metaphor of a pilgrimage to describe the learning process, with teachers and students traveling the road together, each having their own unique contributions to make along the journey. The goal of the learning pilgrimage is not simply to gain knowledge but to aid one another in applying what is being learned through the experiences they face along the road.[285] This pilgrimage is a life-long journey in which pilgrims are constantly interacting with others on the road, at times walking side by side, at other moments separating from one another to walk a different part of the path with other pilgrims.

When theological educators adopt this pilgrimage metaphor, their teaching takes on a much richer and deeper significance. No longer are teachers simply giving out theological information in a classroom, but they are walking alongside their students, mentoring them in a relationship in which students and teacher learn with and from each other in an effort to help one another live out the common faith which they profess. One of the main advantages of implementing a mentoring model in theological education is that it intentionally seeks to integrate theory and practice. Plueddemann postulates that "the main problem in education worldwide is the lack of integration between ideas and practice, between truth and life, between the biblical content and the cultural context."[286] However, when ministry training involves a practically oriented mentoring process in addition to the theoretical information obtained in the classroom it enables the student to make progress in living out a biblically informed and theologically robust faith.

Mentoring in theological education provides a process in which the mentor-teacher walks alongside his students and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, helps to

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[284] Julius Muthengi, "Effective Mentoring and Its Implications for Student Personal and Professional Development" in *African Journal of Evangelical Theology (AJET)*, Vol 32 No 1, 2013, p 21.

[285] James Plueddemann, *Teaching Across Cultures: Contextualizing Education for Global Mission*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018, p 15-18.

[286] Ibid., p 26.

ensure that the theological theory learned in the classroom is regularly linked with the cultural context through guided, practical experiences and applications. This relational model requires trust, openness, and intimacy between the teacher and his students as Muthengi highlights:

> Mentoring must be nurtured through relationship building. Through the practice of friendship and hospitality, trust and intimacy in mentoring is built. Spiritual mentoring as a relationship of trust and emerging intimacy is predicated upon a friendship shared with one another and with the Lord Jesus Christ. A mentor should courageously share his/her vulnerability with the mentee by offering to discuss life experiences. Experiences both negative and positive should be shared with integrity and confidence, since trust has already been established. Hospitality marked with nurture, growth and refreshment with occasional eating together is important in this kind of mentoring.[287]

Such a model of mentoring not only responds to the biblical precedents that we see in Scripture[288] but also fits the relational nature of the African context. If we are to truly contextualize theological education for the African context, then it is important to include mentoring and life-on-life contact which allows teacher and students to walk side by side on a journey of learning and living out their faith in their particular context.

Relationships become the foundational element of theological education when the goals of training for ministry competency and life transformation drive a reassessment of the methods and curriculum used in theological training. When a relational priority is given to theological education, the training often moves beyond the formal instruction in a classroom to encompass nonformal and informal styles of teaching in the context of a mentoring relationship between teacher and students. When this kind of theological education is based out of the African church and adapted to the African context in this way, it will pave the way for the third critical action step.

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[287] Muthengi, "Effective Mentoring and Its Implications for Student Personal and Professional Development," p 26.

[288] Examples of this type of intimate mentoring model include Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Jesus and the apostles, specifically Peter, James and John, and Paul and Timothy.

3. Address cultural issues plaguing theological education in Africa

The third critical action step that is necessary in order to contextualize theological education in Africa is to address the issues plaguing the process and product of theological education across the continent. This does not mean that theological education will ultimately find a way to address some of the primary social issues of the African continent such as poverty or HIV/AIDS, although these are important issues. Despite man's best efforts over the last several decades, these problems continue to trouble the continent. This third critical action step will, however, seek to help the African church set its own house in order by addressing the problems in its midst. Issues of church leadership, tribalism, syncretism, polygamy, family relationships, worship forms, divergent doctrines such as the "prosperity gospel," transfer of leadership and other similar problems will be most effectively addressed by African nationals who have received contextualized theological training and who are able to apply that training to their individual context. Two problems specifically related to the process of theological education which are also plaguing the African church will be addressed here. These issues, having been largely left unchecked, are causing disastrous consequences across the continent both in the educational and ecclesiastic settings.

Leadership Criteria: Age vs. Training

One cultural problem related to leadership that needs to be addressed in the African church is the cultural understanding of what makes a good leader. In the West, leadership positions are often granted based on an individual's level of training whereas leadership in African society is more often based on one's age, experience, and important connections. The Western schooling-as-education model even favors the training of young men with fewer social responsibilities (families, jobs, etc.) and makes it more difficult for older men who may wish to receive training. The fact that Western missionaries have often chosen leaders for African churches based on the Western criteria of their level of theological training rather than on the African penchant toward

age and experience may explain why so many African churches are full of women, young men, and children but very few older men who are the real leaders in and transformers of African society. It may also help to explain why the church has had so little impact on the greater African society over the last century and a half. A church-based, relational style theological education can help to address this deficiency of trained older men by providing appropriate, contextual training so that older men who are naturally looked to as leaders in the society and the church will be able to make wise decisions for the body of Christ based on Scriptural truth and not just the traditional wisdom of the culture.

Developing an African Theology

In order to become fully relevant to African life and culture, evangelical theological education in Africa must begin to seriously address theological questions that are unique to the African context. In 1973, Byang Kato lamented the fact that:

> Theology in Africa has left much to be desired in its orientation. Problems relevant to the African situation have not been tackled adequately. Theology in Africa needs to address itself to African traditional religions and culture, the spirit world, Christian home, polygamy and other peculiar situations. Evangelicals have been too slow in dealing with these contemporary issues.[289]

Sadly, almost fifty years later, evangelical theologians have yet to satisfactorily address these issues. In many evangelical theological schools across the continent, Western systematic theology, which does not address the issues of which Kato spoke, continues to form the foundation of the theological curriculum. As a result, many of the issues plaguing the African church are not dealt with comprehensively and systematically from a biblical perspective. This is not to say that no African theologian has attempted to broach these topics, but rather that they often have not been addressed in a way which

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[289] Byang Kato, "The Problem of Theological Education in Africa," unpublished transcript of an address presented to the Professors of Mission at a meeting in Kansas City, MO in Nov of 1973, p 6.

holds to the ultimate authority of Scripture. Many theologians outside of the evangelical circles have sought to “Africanize” Christianity, which has more often than not resulted in a theology whose primary allegiance is to traditional beliefs and practices rather than to the Scriptures.[290]

If theological education in Africa is to bring the light of Scripture to bear on the issues that are in the forefront of the African mind, seminary students need to be trained to do biblical and missional theology[291] so that they can search the Scripture and bring out biblical truths and themes which can then be brought to bear on these important cultural issues. In order to facilitate this process, Western theological educators must be willing to loosen their grip on the heavy orientation toward systematic theology that they themselves received in their theological training. This does not imply that doctrine should no longer be seen as an essential issue nor that theological schools should abandon the teaching of systematic theology altogether; this would only lead to theological relativism and additional syncretism. Instead, however, Western theological educators must humbly accept that systematic theology “is not a systematic summary of all that the Bible teaches about everything. Rather, it is a summary of those questions we have posed and that were important in our own reception of the gospel.”[292] Africans have questions that would not cross the Western mind but which must be answered by the Scripture. Stallter gives an example of some of these questions when he speaks of the entrance of the gospel in the Central African Republic and Chad at the hands of Western missionaries:

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[290] Ibid., p 6-7.

[291] Biblical theology refers to the process of tracing out a particular theme through the Scriptures, paying particular attention to the historical context in which revelation was given and its place in the overall progression of revelation. This is the process that theologians undertake in their development of Systematic Theology. Missional theology involves asking questions of the text of Scripture that are particular to a given cultural context.

[292] Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, p 338.

> Most Africans were glad to know about Christ and to understand something of the God who was supreme over creation, but the zealous Western implications of it left them with questions. How were adolescents to be formally accepted as adults in the society and learn the responsibilities of married and social life so important to a communal society [without initiation]? What would happen to their children and their society without this? Who would mix the age old remedies and perform the traditional rites that would ward off sickness when no medicine could help? How could they turn their backs on ancestors who had been with them so long as a part of everyday life by saying they simply did not exist? The missionary did not give answers to these problems in his Gospel and often the Africans were afraid to ask the questions.[293]

Yet these are the very questions that need to be asked and answered biblically in order for theology to be truly Africanized. The question of how to deal with African Traditional Religions is not something that can be superficially addressed through one class, but it must undergird the entire program of theological education so that every topic of study is brought to bear on the traditional African worldview.[294]

Contextualized theological education in Africa will recognize the importance of helping theological students to begin to think through African issues in light of scriptural truth as opposed to simply imposing the Western questions and answers of systematic theology on them. Instead of offering only traditional theology courses where Western theological conclusions are presented to the students, theological education for Africa should also include contextualized theology courses so that students are introduced to the principles of how to draw out themes and truths from the whole of Scripture. Once they have a basic understanding of this method of biblical theology, the teacher and students can together embark on a journey of discovery of theological truth that is relative to the questions that African students and the African culture would ask of the biblical text (missional theology).

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[293] Stallter, “An Orientation to Intercultural Ministry in the Central African Republic and Chad,” p 239-40.

[294] Interview with Andy Matoke, Nov 29, 2018.

This process would have a profound effect on theology in Africa in two ways. First, it would firmly plant theology's feet on African soil and make the Scriptures relative to African issues. Second, it would equip students to be life-long learners by introducing them to the theory and practice of biblical and missional theology and then by helping them practice using tools that they would subsequently be able to use for the rest of their lives. In this way, when students formulate additional questions as they minister in different contexts, they will be prepared to find the answer to their questions in the pages of Scripture, even if they are never able return for more formal schooling.

As Western theological educators begin to think more contextually about the way they do mission in Africa in the 21st century by learning to learn in the African culture and adapting to living within a patronage system, they will begin to contextualize themselves to the African context. This self-adaptation is a necessary prerequisite to contextualizing theological education for Africa. Only after Western missionaries have adapted themselves to the context, can they begin to make efforts to adapt their methods of theological education by implementing the three critical action steps mentioned above. Regardless of the particular situation in which one undertakes theological education, the critical action steps of basing theological education out of the local church, making relationships the foundation for contextualized training, and addressing cultural issues that continue to plague the African church will help to make the process of theological education one that is transformational for the individual, for the African church, and for African society as a whole.

Chapter 6
Conclusion

Theological education has an important role in the growth and strengthening of the global church, especially on the continent of Africa. While the African church is growing in both numbers and maturity and African theologians are increasingly taking the lead in efforts of theological education, Western missionaries still have a place on the scene of evangelical theological education on the continent. However, it is necessary for them to understand the part they are to play if the ministry of theological education in which they are involved is to have a positive impact on the African church.

In order for any program of theological training to be effective, it must be biblically based in its purpose and content as well as being appropriate for its people and context. Theological education is not just for the purpose of transmitting right knowledge but encouraging right thinking and action, therefore any program of international theological education undertaken in Africa must be transformational at its core. This transformation is not likely to take place, however, if the methods of training used in theological education programs are not adapted to the African context. Unfortunately, many Westerners continue to bring their Western theological education programs to Africa with them, which has led Nigerian theologian Bauta Motty to contend that "theological education in Africa is in dire need of culturally-relevant curriculum and sensitive ethnomethodology in training local pastors and teachers."[295]

In order to work toward the achievement of this goal, Western missionaries need to learn to think critically and contextually about their mission endeavors, specifically the way in which they carry out theological education in the African context. Developing a culturally relevant curriculum and sensitive ethnomethodology implies an understanding of the African worldview that shapes the student's beliefs and relations as well as a

[295] Motty, "Contextualizing Theological Education in Africa," p 161.

proper application of effective educational methods which take into account the African learning style. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Western theological educators to first come to Africa as humble learners before coming to be teachers. In order to produce a contextual template of international theological education in the African context, it is important to reject the natural tendency to copy and paste a traditional Western model of education. Instead, Western theological educators need to learn from and work alongside their national brothers and sisters to help them develop a culturally adapted program. Such a program should regularly and intentionally evaluate both its explicit and implicit curricula as well as the educational methods it uses. In doing this, Western and African theological educators will work together to ensure that the men and women who pass through the doors of evangelical theological institutions in Africa have been trained to combine sound doctrine with appropriate practice for ministry in the African church. It is through a proliferation of transformed servants of God who have been prepared for ministry in the African context that the African church will be strengthened and become much more than “a mile wide and an inch deep.”

Appendix 1 : Theological Education Methods Survey

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this survey, which is part of a doctoral research project to evaluate the effectiveness of our theological educational methods in training men and women for ministry in Africa. Our desire is to understand how to most effectively educate men and women in Africa so that they not only know God and His Word, but also have their hearts stirred to love God and their fellow man and are equipped with skills to effectively apply what they have learned in their lives and ministries on the African continent.

We believe that your school shares in this desire, and possesses particular qualities which make them good models for theological education in Africa. It is for this reason that we have reached out to three schools who have given us permission to survey their current and former students for our research. While we highly value each school surveyed, we realize that no human effort can ever be perfect and therefore wish to identify areas for growth and improvement. Our goal in this research is not to criticize any individual school, but to see how, collectively, we can do better in our efforts of training men and women for ministry in Africa.

For this reason, your responses to this survey will be completely anonymous and confidential and will be compiled and presented in a general manner in the research report. It is very important to us to protect the reputations of the schools surveyed as well as the identity of those who respond to the surveys. In an effort to encourage honest and open answers to the questions, no personally identifying data will be collected from the respondents. The demographic questions at the end are included to help quantify the responses.

We encourage you to respond thoughtfully and honestly to the questions below in order to help your institution as well as others across the continent more effectively train men and women for the Lord’s service in Africa.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this survey.

Important Characteristics of a Teacher:

Select only one response to each of the following questions

1. Which characteristic is more important to you in a Bible school/seminary teacher?

    ____ A teacher who gives the maximum amount of information on a subject in his lectures

    ____ A teacher who is flexible in his teaching and allows for questions and discussion

2. Which characteristic is more important to you in a Bible school/seminary teacher?

    ____ A teacher who incorporates practical exercises to aid in applying the subject taught

    ____ A teacher who requires reading and writing for deeper reflection on the subject

3. Which characteristic is more important to you in a Bible school/seminary teacher?

    ____ A teacher who is available to his students outside of the classroom

    ____ A teacher who arrives on time, uses the class time fully, and finishes on time

4. Which characteristic is more important to you in a Bible school/seminary teacher?

    ____ A teacher who is a gifted communicator in the classroom

    ____ A teacher who regularly demonstrates patience with his students in class

Reflecting on your teachers as a group:

Think of all your Bible school/seminary teachers as a group and select only one response to each of the following questions

5. How satisfied were you with all of your teachers?

    ____ I was happy with all of my teachers

    ____ I was happy with most of my teachers

    ____ I was happy with some of my teachers

    ____ I was not happy with most of my teachers

    ____ I was not happy with any of my teachers

6. How would you rate your teachers' preparedness to teach?

    ____ My teachers were always well prepared for class

    ____ My teachers were usually well prepared for class

    ____ My teachers were well prepared for class about half of the time

    ____ My teachers were not usually well prepared for class

    ____ My teachers were almost never well prepared for class

7. How would you rate your teachers' approach to teaching?

    ____ My teachers were most concerned with covering all the material in the course notes

    ____ My teachers were most concerned that students understood what they were teaching

    ____ My teachers were most concerned that students apply what they were teaching

8. How would you rate your teachers' style of teaching?

    ____ My teachers spent almost all of the class time lecturing with little time for questions or discussion

    ____ My teachers spent the majority of the class time lecturing with some time for questions or discussion

    ____ My teachers split the time equally between lecturing and discussion

    ____ My teachers spent the majority of the class time asking questions or in discussion

    ____ My teachers spent almost all of the class time asking questions or in discussion

9. How would you rate your teachers' openness to student participation in class?

    ____ My teachers insisted that students speak frequently in class

    ____ My teachers usually allowed students to speak in class

    ____ My teachers sometimes allowed students to speak in class

    ____ My teachers rarely allowed students to speak in class

    ____ My teachers almost never allowed students to speak in class

10. How would you rate your teachers' availability outside of class?

____ My teachers were always available and interacting with students outside of class

____ My teachers were usually available and interacting with students outside of class

____ My teachers were sometimes available and interacting with students outside of class

____ My teachers were rarely available to interact with students outside of class

____ My teachers were almost never available or seen outside of class

Reflecting on your favorite teacher:

Think of your favorite teacher in Bible school/seminary and select only one response to each of the following questions

11. How would you rate his/her preparedness to teach?

____ He/she was always well prepared for class

____ He/she was usually well prepared for class

____ He/she was well prepared for class about half of the time

____ He/she was not usually well prepared for class

____ He/she was almost never well prepared for class

12. How would you rate his/her approach to teaching?

____ He/she was most concerned with covering all the material in the course notes

____ He/she was most concerned that students understood what they were teaching

____ He/she was most concerned that students apply what they were teaching

13. How would you rate his/her style of teaching?

____ He/she spent almost all of the class time lecturing with little time for questions or discussion

____ He/she spent the majority of the class time lecturing with some time for questions or discussion

____ He/she split the time equally between lecturing and discussion

____ He/she spent the majority of the class time asking questions or in discussion

____ He/she spent almost all of the class time asking questions or in discussion

14. How would you rate his/her openness to student participation in class?

____ He/she insisted that students speak frequently in class

____ He/she usually allowed students to speak in class

____ He/she sometimes allowed students to speak in class

____ He/she rarely allowed students to speak in class

____ He/she almost never allowed students to speak in class

15. How would you rate his/her availability outside of class?

____ He/she was always available and interacting with students outside of class

____ He/she was usually available and interacting with students outside of class

____ He/she was sometimes available and interacting with students outside of class

____ He/she was rarely available to interact with students outside of class

____ He/she was almost never available or seen outside of class

Reflecting on your <u>least</u> favorite teacher:

Think of your favorite teacher in Bible school/seminary and select only one response to each of the following questions

16. How would you rate his/her preparedness to teach?

____ He/she was always well prepared for class

____ He/she was usually well prepared for class

____ He/she was well prepared for class about half of the time

____ He/she was not usually well prepared for class

____ He/she was almost never well prepared for class

17. How would you rate his/her approach to teaching?

____ He/she was most concerned with covering all the material in the course notes

____ He/she was most concerned that students understood what they were teaching

____ He/she was most concerned that students apply what they were teaching

18. How would you rate his/her style of teaching?

____ He/she spent almost all of the class time lecturing with little time for questions or discussion

____ He/she spent the majority of the class time lecturing with some time for questions or discussion

____ He/she split the time equally between lecturing and discussion

____ He/she spent the majority of the class time asking questions or in discussion

____ He/she spent almost all of the class time asking questions or in discussion

19. How would you rate his/her openness to student participation in class?

____ He/she insisted that students speak frequently in class

____ He/she usually allowed students to speak in class

____ He/she sometimes allowed students to speak in class

____ He/she rarely allowed students to speak in class

____ He/she almost never allowed students to speak in class

20. How would you rate his/her availability outside of class?

____ He/she was always available and interacting with students outside of class

____ He/she was usually available and interacting with students outside of class

____ He/she was sometimes available and interacting with students outside of class

____ He/she was rarely available to interact with students outside of class

____ He/she was almost never available or seen outside of class

Most effective methods of learning

In this section rank what you consider to be the most effective (1) to least effective (7)

21. Rank the best way to learn how to do something from most effective (1) to least effective (7)

    ____ Learning by teaching – If I teach someone else to do something, I will really grasp how to do it

    ____ Learning by practice – If I practice doing something, I will really grasp how to do it

    ____ Learning by demonstration – If I watch someone else do something, I will really grasp how to do it

    ____ Learning by discussion – If I discuss how to do something with others, I will really grasp how to do it

    ____ Learning by writing – If I write about how to do something, I will really grasp how to do it

    ____ Learning by reading – If I read about how to do something, I will really grasp how to do it

    ____ Learning by listening – If I listen to someone explain how to do something, I will really grasp how to do it

22. Rank the best way to learn about a subject from most effective (1) to least effective (7)

    ____ Learning by listening – If I listen to a lecture, I will really grasp the subject

    ____ Learning by taking notes – If I take notes during a lecture, I will really grasp the subject

    ____ Learning by audio-visual – If the lecturer uses the black/white board or PowerPoint as he speaks, I will really grasp the subject

    ____ Learning by reading – If I read about a subject on my own, I will really grasp the subject

    ____ Learning by writing – If I write a paper about a subject, I will really grasp the subject

    ____ Learning by discussion – If I discuss or debate a subject with others, I will really grasp the subject

    ____ Learning by teaching – If I teach a subject to someone else, I will really grasp the subject

General questions

Select only one response to each of the following questions

23. When you attended Bible school/seminary, for what role did you desire to be trained?

    ____ A lay leader

    ____ An evangelist

    ____ A pastor

    ____ A teacher/educator

    ____ Other (please specify): _____

24. How do you feel about the following phrase : “My Bible school/seminary training sufficiently prepared me for ministry.”?

    ____ Strongly Agree

    ____ Agree

    ____ Not sure

    ____ Disagree

    ____ Strongly Disagree

25. How much of your Bible school/seminary learning took place in a classroom?

    ____ All of the learning took place in a classroom

    ____ Most of the learning took place in a classroom

    ____ About half of the learning took place in a classroom

    ____ Most of the learning took place outside of a classroom

    ____ All of the learning took place outside of a classroom

26. My Bible school/seminary training produced the greatest change in ...

    ____ My knowledge of God and the Bible

    ____ My heart toward God and his people

    ____ My abilities as a servant of God

General questions

Select only one response to each of the following questions

27. How long ago did you attend Bible school/seminary?

____ I am a current student

____ Graduated 1-3 years ago

____ Graduated 4-6 years ago

____ Graduated 7-9 years ago

____ Graduated 10+ years ago

____ Graduated 15+ years ago

28. How old were you when you started Bible school/seminary?

____ Under 18

____ 18-24

____ 25-29

____ 30-34

____ 35-39

____ 40-50

____ 50+

29. When you attended Bible school/seminary where did you live?

____ On campus

____ Off campus

30. Where did you come to seminary from?

____ A rural area (village)

____ An urban area (town/city)

31. Where do you currently minister?

____ A rural area (village)

____ An urban area (town/city)

32. What is your current level of theological studies?

____ Secondary (currently enrolled)

____ Secondary (completed)

____ Bachelors (currently enrolled)

____ Bachelors (completed)

____ Masters (currently enrolled)

____ Masters (completed)

____ Doctorate (currently enrolled)

____ Doctorate (completed)

Short answer

Respond briefly to the questions below. If you do not wish to answer a particular question, simply put "No comment" in the box.

33. What do you feel your Bible school/seminary training best prepared you for ?

34. What do you feel your Bible school/seminary training did not prepare you for ?

35. What aspects of your training do you feel were the most useful for you in your ministry ?

36. What aspects of your training do you feel were the least useful for you in your ministry ?

37. What would you add to your Bible school/seminary training to make it more effective ?

38. What would you remove from you Bible school/seminary training to make it more effective ?

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