

**Towards a Malawian Theology
of Laity**

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Chapter 10

The Fragmentation of Theological Education and its Effect on the Church, Grassroots Theological Education in Malawi and TEE

Volker Glissmann

Introduction

The context of theological education in Malawi is predominantly church-owned institutions who operate under the assumption that they mostly train ministers.¹ There are also two Theological and Religious Study Departments at the University of Malawi and Mzuzu University. I will not be undertaking to establish how many theological Colleges/Schools operate within Malawi, but it is fair to say that beside the well-established institutions, there are a huge number of small denominational, independent or mission-funded institutions that offer a variety of imported (accredited or not-accredited) courses or their own formal as well as non-formal theological/biblical education programmes. The fragmentation of theological education is not limited to the well-established institutions that offer formal theological education, but it also affects smaller institutions and even the non-formal theological education.² The reason is that among graduates of formal theological education here in Malawi, there is a (perceived) standard theological curriculum

¹ Though over the last number of years there has been an increase in non-ministerial (fee paying) students in theological institutions, this has thus far not yet led to a theological rethinking of the training paradigm.

² A clarification: I do not subscribe to the linguistic fragmentation of theological education into Christian education and theological education. For me this is a sign of fragmentation whereby the ability to engage and inform between these silos is lost.

and content, a way of delivering theological education that influenced both established as well as the smaller theological educational institutions. Surprisingly, this also affects grassroots theological education, though it operates under less academic accreditation requirements. Much has been written about how the fragmentation of theological education affects theological institutions and its current learners as well as its graduates.

However, in this chapter the focus is on how fragmentation affects both the laity and the church, as well as ministerial and grassroots theological education here in Malawi.³ Finally, a model of integration, namely the founding of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) in Guatemala in 1967 will be discussed in order to show a positive example of the integration of theological education.⁴

An Illustration/a Parable/a Story

A story like the following is often shared by way of assessing how successful the church is in training future ministers. The story is told of a village, somewhere in Africa, that had sent their pastor to the city to study theology. They villagers had desired to know more about God and wanted their pastor to be better prepared so he could help the church grow spiritually stronger. Initially, the pastor only studied theology in the nearest city, but when the opportunity arose he was offered a scholarship to study his theological PhD in America. The local church was very pleased and proud of their pastor and looked forward to the time when he would return to empower them.

³ For the distinction between academic theological education, ministerial theological education and grassroots theological education, see Volker Glissmann, "Grassroots Theological Education," *InSights Journal for Global Theological Education*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2019, pp. 53-67.

⁴ Within our Malawian context, TEEM, which stands for Theological Education by Extension in Malawi is widely known especially for its accredited programmes through the Board for Theological Studies/University of Malawi. However, this chapter highlights a different form of TEE which is like TEEM's grassroots training programmes here in Malawi.

Many years later he finally returned, now as a graduate with a Doctorate in theology. The local church was delighted to receive him back and after celebrating his return they took him to a child in their community that suffered for many years from a mysterious illness that prevented the child from speaking properly. Upon seeing this child our pastor exclaimed, "No, no, you got it all wrong. I am not that kind of Doctor. I studied theology not medicine. You need to take the child to the Health Centre." Astonished the church members replied, "But the child is not physical handicapped, the child is possessed Pastor! After your ten years of study, surely you will be able to drive out that demon! You studied so much, you must be very spiritually strong. Pray and deliver the child!" The whole community shouted, "Amen!" Nervously, the pastor looked around and said, "But this is not what I studied." The church members looked at him confused and puzzled. And inquired, "but you studied theology? – the knowledge of God and his ways, didn't you?" "Yes, I did," he replied." I achieved a *distinction* in my Bachelor in Theology, a *distinction* in my Master in Theology and even finished a PhD in New Testament Studies in *one of the best theological universities in the world*," said the pastor with some satisfaction. "Great," replied the church members, "Then, drive out the evil spirit, now that you have prepared yourself in the best university in the world and studied under spiritual giants." To this the pastor replied impatiently, "But this is *not* what I studied, I studied Bultmann and Moltmann and did a PhD on the economy of the Trinity." "So, you say that you can't help us?" inquired the church members confused. Without a word, the pastor turned around and slowly walked away, leaving the village behind.⁵ He mumbled to himself while leaving, "I even tried to return. How

⁵ For a similar parable see John Mbiti, "Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church," in Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (eds), *Mission Trends No 3: Third World Theologies*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976. Similarly, see also Perry Shaw, "'New Treasures with the Old': Addressing Culture and Gender Imperialism in Higher Level Theological Education," in Allan Harkness (ed), *Tending the Seedbeds: Educational Perspectives on Theological Education in Asia*, Quezon City: Asia Theological Association, 2010, pp. 47-74.

many of my colleagues are still in the city or never returned from studying abroad ..."

The Fragmentation of Theological Education

Though this story is made up, many of us recognize the essential truth that ensured that the narrative, in one form or another, is repeatedly retold in different contexts. The sad tale above ends with a disillusioned pastor as well as a disillusioned congregation, neither of the two is able to fulfil its missional role within the economy of God. The education that the pastor in the parable received unfortunately did not empower him to be a good minister of the local congregation. Ministerial theological education surely has one main and overarching aim: to train ministers to serve congregations effectively. But this was not the case here. This story highlights that something is not aligned between the pastoral and spiritual needs of the community of God's people, and the kind of theological education that theological institutions offer. In the story, the pastor is ill-equipped (through the theological education that he received as it did not nurture his initial pastoral skills), he is ill-equipped to pastorally care for the needs of the people, he is ill-equipped to understand and respond to these needs to teach and guide the congregation, he is unable to provide leadership in the situation. The story illustrates a fundamental misalignment between the needs of the grassroots church and skills that the pastor learned at a tertiary level theological education. In the story, the pastor walks away from the situation but in a real-life situation the pastor would stay and minister even though he/she unfortunately lacks the essential skills. This is a not-satisfying situation either for the pastor or the grassroots church. Yet, realistically, a pastor who studied to degree level would probably seek a more prestigious city job, even a secular job, rather than live in the village again. Once pastors were trained in the city or overseas, few wanted to become village pastors.

One solution to the misalignment highlighted above could be to dismiss tertiary level theological education entirely. Yet, higher

theological education has surely helped the church in its reflection and has produced outstanding contributions to the wellbeing of the church and our understanding of God. Secondly, deep theological thinking (which is nurtured in higher theological education) is, by its very nature, worship of God and should be part of the church's theology of worship through learning. The problem above manifests itself to the people as a problem of misalignment, however, within theological education the issue is not simply misalignment of purpose, but the fragmentation of theological education.⁶ Theological educators use fragmentation to describe an underlying cause for the misalignment of purpose. Fragmentation also refers to the breaking into fragments and the partial shattering of an initially united content. This fragmentation also implies an essential loss of usefulness of theological education. Yet, the call for the renewal of theological education and the need to overcome the fragmentation is an issue that has been raised for many years. The way forward is for the church, in its twin expression of clergy and grassroots, to engage with its theological training institutions, thus determining what kind of theological education is required for the current time and for each of the two target groups of theological education.

In doing so, the question also needs to be asked whether in all circumstances of theological education: higher theological degrees are the only way forward or, if theological training institutions, are also required to provide both for clergy and the grassroots, the access to vocational skill-based training as well as training which is based on non-formal education (like gaining an expertise in preaching through supervised practice and feedback, rather than through written academic essays or through Sunday-School Teacher Training). This

⁶ Max L. Stackhouse describes the fragmentation as misalignment of focus of theological education; he writes about theological education that, "it is beset by a rather vague discomfort, a sense that what we and others do is really not so bad, but that it also does not have an overwhelming and fully compelling focus." Max L. Stackhouse, *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization and Mission in Theological Education*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988, p. 15.

would encompass everything that can be summarized as "Life-Long Learning." It is often claimed that higher and higher degrees are necessary for an effective urban ministry, though the issue would benefit from further reflection.⁷ The danger is that it is too exclusively focused on academic qualifications for ministerial candidates, thereby limiting the choices that the Holy Spirit is allowed to bring forth for the selection of ministerial candidates.

The objectives of academic/higher theological education and the objectives of ministerial theological education are not the same.⁸ A shift from ministerial theological training to an exclusively academic training can actually hinder effective ministry (yet, the opposite can also be true, that the lack of any form of theological education significantly hinders the pastoral ministry). The above example illustrates the imbalance that can occur in theological education well, where one stream (subject area) of theological education is more consistently developed while other subject areas remain underdeveloped. The same imbalance can occur when theological knowledge is not consistently integrated into the main professional objective in ministerial theological education. Traditional academic theological education emphasizes the four historical disciplines (biblical theology, systematic theology, historical theology and practical theology).⁹ Thirty years ago Hough and Cobb already highlighted the

⁷ A PhD in theology is not automatically a hinderance to being a good minister in a congregational setting. I would be very interested to see how important ministers with degrees are for the grassroots church. My initial feeling would be that the church values spirituality more than degrees. But degrees per se are not eliminating factors for exquisite theologically-sound and vibrant spirituality. The question should be how do degrees help in fostering this kind of spirituality?

⁸ See Volker Glissmann, "Grassroots Theological Education," pp. 55-57 also, Victor Babajide Cole, "Toward Integration in the Theological School Curriculum," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, vol. 23 no. 2, April 1999, pp. 141-162.

⁹ Though of course the theological educational landscape in Malawi is still highly influenced by three of the four historical disciplines: biblical theology, systematic theology and historical theology as they predominantly formed the first theological curriculum at the University of Malawi and the adjunct Board for Theological

problem of theological education as, "theological education is torn between academic norms, defined chiefly as excellence in the historical disciplines, and modern professional norms defined in terms of excellence in performing the functions church leaders are expected to perform."¹⁰ The underlying question partially is whether or not the role of the minister is an academic role or a vocational role. Again, Hough and Cobb are helpful in providing a real important historical corrective to such a binary choice. The same question was actually present when the first modern research university in Berlin opened in 1810. Friedrich Schleiermacher was tasked to justifying the inclusion of theology as one of the distinct subjects in the new-found university. Schleiermacher argued for the inclusion of theology based on a distinct and recognizable methodology but also that pastoral ministry is the overarching unifier. In that regard, Schleiermacher argued, theology is like law, medicine, architecture or engineering. All three disciplines are integrated subjects that rely not only on contemporary academic research as well as practical-vocational skills and expertise. All of them clearly belong into Higher Education.¹¹ Farley reminds us that Schleiermacher actually made the point that theology is a "positive science," as opposed to an exclusive scholarly

Studies. The non-emphasis of practical theology (with the common exception of ethics) in the theological curriculum is indeed a significant shortfall of the curriculum that was explicitly designed to empower ministers of the church (see Board for Theological Studies, *Diploma in Theology*, p. 3, where the emphasis of the Diploma in Theology is highlighted as "expressly designed to meet the needs of those who are in training for the ministry of the Church in Malawi").

¹⁰ Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr., "Christian Identity and Theological Education," Chico: Scholars Press, 1985, pp. 16-17. It is important to note that the Hough/Cobb book is the result of a major evaluation of theological education within the ATS (American Theological Association). The evaluation itself was the second major evaluation within the ATS in the second part of the 20th century. The first was conducted in 1955-56 by Richard Niebuhr et al.

¹¹ Here is it of course noteworthy for theological education that both law and medicine have a practical focus while at the same time not every doctor and lawyer is believed to be an academic in the way that sometimes the argument is made that all pastors are theologians.

enterprise that looks at Christianity as a religion but is detached and looks at it from the outside. Theology is a "positive science" because the focus is on a particular social community and their concerns and leadership needs.¹² From the mid-nineteenth century onwards the four-fold division of theology (as a science) were: biblical theology, dogmatics or systematic theology, historical theology (Church History) and practical theology.¹³ This change also brought a fragmentation in the relationship and responsibility of the church towards theological education as it was now administered from within a theological training institute.¹⁴ This then led to a crisis in theological education as universities do not view personal, spiritual and moral formation of the trainee pastors as their responsibility.

In the beginning of the history of the church, theological education was done mainly through apprenticeships, where trainee ministers learned as apprentices under an experienced minister. The emphasis was on practical and ministerial skills as well as the formation of the individual through prayer and Bible reading. Later, especially in the middle ages an additional form of theological training emerged: Monastic and Cathedral schools. Where trainees lived, studied, prayed and served together in a community. These schools of theological learning were designed to expose the learners to more systematic learning, especially in relation to the classical texts of the church fathers. A significant change happened in theological

¹² Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001, p. 103.

¹³ Farley, *Theologia*, p. 10.

¹⁴ Ester Mombo makes the important point that though the theological lecturers in government universities are theologically astute and are theologically able to address contextual issues, nevertheless, these lecturers do not hold a position within the hierarchy of the church. She also makes the point that in her observation some denominational Colleges, which are closely aligned with their respective churches can sometimes suppress innovative contextual theological engagements. See Ester Mombo, "Theological Education in Africa," in Andrew C. Wheeler (ed), *Voices from Africa: Transforming Mission in a Context of Marginalization - An Anthology*, London: Church House, 2002, pp. 127-133 [128-129].

education with the rise of the universities, especially the scientific research universities. Friedrich Schleiermacher wanted to ensure the continued relevance of theology in an increasingly modern (enlightened) society that emphasised the rigorous methods of scientific enquiry. Scientific enquiry builds upon scientific, repeatable observations, inquiries and methodologies. The new proposed emphasis of theology was to produce new knowledge and not to apply new knowledge to concrete contexts. It was a quest for knowledge creation for the sake of advancing human knowledge. All of this, Friedrich Schleiermacher applied to the study to an unseen God and to theology. Schleiermacher succeeded in convincing the authorities to include theology as a subject in the newly founded universities.

The consequences of studying theology in the university setting had far reaching consequences still felt today: the division of the four-fold curriculum into four distinct areas of biblical, historical, philosophical, ministerial/practical studies as separate, individual disciplines with different methodologies, approaches and terminology. However, Schleiermacher ultimately envisioned that the field of practical theology would "relate the scholarship of the other theological disciplines to the work of clergy and congregation."¹⁵ This is the classical shape of most curricula. This division is often explained through the agricultural image of silos. Silos are storage units in which farmers store foods crops in order to keep the crop pure and not contaminated by other crops. The changes introduced by Schleiermacher also resulted in a shift to the professional clericalization of the ministry as well as the raise of critical methodologies in the reading of the Biblical text. It also separated (to differing degrees) the theological inquiry and training from the affairs and concerns of the church. Character and Moral formation were replaced with the enlightenment notion that cognitive knowledge will

¹⁵ Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008, p. 234. See especially the chapter: "Epilogue: Teaching Practical Theology in Schools of Theology."

automatically lead to individuals becoming more cultured who then will promote the welfare of society at large.

Yet, early on – and as a result of the tension of theology being defined as a science and not as a religion or a professional vocation, – the academic paradigm increased the fragmentation of theological knowledge, by removing a unifying purpose and centre that could hold differing objectives together. Other aspects also contributed to the fragmentation, namely the decontextualization of theological education in its removal from the church setting, and in Africa especially, from the cultural setting. Within the context of the establishment of theology as part of the first modern research university, the understanding was that theology serves a clearly defined purpose, namely the preparation of ministers for congregational service.¹⁶ The "science" approach to theological learning also resulted in the specialization of theological teachers which lead to a specialization into distinct and often unrelated academic sub-fields of study. This then accelerated the fragmentation and a loss of the unifying centre of theological education. It is not uncommon that even in related fields in one discipline like the Old Testament and New Testament courses in Biblical Studies, they are taught nearly without reference to each other. The underlying assumption is that *somehow* a graduating student who has studied fragmented theology and who has very limited positive examples of purposeful theological integration will somehow be able to integrate multiple theological fragments of learning into one consistent whole.¹⁷ This of course is not the norm. It is then perhaps not

¹⁶ The American seminaries are highly influenced by the Berlin model as faculty members from institutions like Andover and Princeton studied in Berlin and introduced this model of theological training back home (see also Farley, *Theologia*, p. 10).

¹⁷ See also Shaw who makes the same point, when he says, "in the traditional approach to theological education, students are trained through a relatively fragmented curriculum, the assumption being that it is the students' responsibility to bring the pieces together once they graduate." (Perry Shaw, *Transforming*

surprising that theological education is not always seen as essential for the wellbeing of the church.

The call for the renewal of theological education has been repeatedly voiced for over 100 years, both for the Western context as well as for the mission context.¹⁸ Numerous credible suggestions concerning the renewal of theological education as well as suggestions for partially or fully overcoming the fragmentation by identifying *the* unifying centre and purpose of theological education.¹⁹ Farley et al. have voiced the following concerns about the fragmentation of theological education: divisions into specialized sub-fields, thus losing the ability to engage across disciplines in the quest for theological knowledge;

Theological Education, Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2014, p. 4). Unfortunately, only quite gifted students are evidently able to do this well.

¹⁸ See Christine Lienemann-Perrin, *Training for a Relevant Ministry: A Study of the Work of the Theological Education Fund*, Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1981, pp. 4-5 who highlights the need to re-align theological education to the discussions at the 1910 World Mission Conference in Edinburgh. See also Robert W. Ferris, *Renewal in Theological Education*, Wheaton: Billy Graham Centre, 1990, especially pp. 7-20. Ferris highlights a call for renewal that arose out of the 1938 International Missionary Council's conference in Tambaram, Madras, India, which stated, "Almost all the younger churches are dissatisfied with the present system of training for the ministry and with its results. In many reports received from different parts of the world, it is stated that there are ministers of a poor standard of education, who are unable to win the respect of the laity and to lead the churches, that some are out of touch with the realities of life and the needs of their people, and are not distinguished by zeal for Christian service in the community." The International Missionary Council Report, pp. 188-189 cited in Robert W. Ferris, *Renewal in Theological Education*, p. 7.

¹⁹ See the works of Edward Farley, *Theologia* (1983, reprinted in 2001), Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education* (1999), Bernhard Ott, *Beyond Fragmentation* (2001), Linda Cannell, *Theological Education Matters* (2006), Ross Kinsler, *Diversified Theological Education* (2008), David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin* (2011), Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education* (2014). As well the two *Handbooks on Theological Education in World Christianity* (eds Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, Joshva Raja, 2010) and the *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa* (eds Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner, 2014), which take stock of where we are in theological education in the beginning of the 21st century.

the growing dissonance between ministerial preparation and an emphasis on the intellectual and philosophical skills of higher education (the academic paradigm seems to be one consistence throughout this – but is it helpful?); the replacing of personal (spiritual and moral) formation with critical methodologies due to the pressure of attaining academic excellence. Further, limiting our understanding of theological education to the accredited intellectual education attained through a degree or diploma programme exacerbates the fragmentation. An emphasis on clergy education while ignoring the essential training needs of the grassroots church.²⁰ The fragmentation is often not addressed as theological educators see themselves primarily as theologians rather than teachers and educators whose emphasis is on ensuring that adequate learning takes place. Finally, the fraying of the relationship between the church and its theological training institutes and the resulting overreliance on tuition-fee paying students coupled with the diversification of non-theological degrees offered by theological institutions.²¹ All of these elements contribute to the fragmentation of theological education not being adequately addressed in our context.

The continuation and acceleration of fragmentation is predominantly driven by the recognized custodians of theological learning: the

²⁰ Dieumeme Noëlliste in "Toward a Theology of Theological Education" makes the same point that the focus of theological education is on the people (*laos*) of God. However, "this emphasis on the people as the target of theological education does not make redundant the singling out of a smaller group within the wider body of the *laos* for special attention." See Dieumeme Noëlliste, "Toward a Theology of Theological Education," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, vol. 19, no. 3, July 1995, pp. 307-313 [309-311].

²¹ The introduction of non-theological degrees in theological schools is not necessarily negative, it could help students relate faith and theology to other fields of study and get a wider perspective. Yet, this kind of integration needs to be done intentionally. However, if the purpose is to subsidize the theological school by diversifying income, then this will fail. A much better way to deal with fragmentation and cost is often to amalgamate colleges and work together.

theological colleges.²² Therefore, the discussion about overcoming the fragmentation starts with the delivery of theological education through theological trainings institutions. And of course, the conversation needs to be owned ultimately by all stakeholders of the theological enterprise which includes the church. The church but not only as the institutional church through its leadership but also the grassroots church as a key recipient of graduates of theological education. Theological education has a tendency to emphasize abstract, theoretical and philosophical-theological arguments over quantitative and qualitative scientific research which is in its essence is repeatable and which tests hypotheses to see how applicable they are. Theological education is fundamentally an educational enterprise that is informed by theological thinking. The foundation of theological education is pedagogical while its purpose is theological. An interesting as well as illuminating empirical research was carried out a few years ago in India. Jaison Thomas researched the ideal "graduate profile" or in other words the priorities of characteristics that people look for in a minister.²³ He then asked three groups: church leaders, theological educators and students who had just joined a theological College. These three groups of people were asked to arrange certain theological educational objectives in order of their priority. These priorities are roughly grouped as Academic Formation, Spiritual Formation and Ministry Formation. Here is a summary of the finding:

The Students consistently prioritized Ministerial Formation (Inspiring Preacher, Successful in Church Growth and Evangelism, and Skills in interpersonal relationships), while Leaders of the Theological Institutions prioritised Academic Formation (Theologi-

²² The term Theological Colleges encompasses here all institutions that offer formal and non-formal theological education using residential or decentralized forms of theological education.

²³ Jaison Thomas, "Church Ministry Formation in Protestant Theological Education: The Contemporary Debate in Kerala, India," PhD, Queen's University of Belfast, 2008, p. 190.

Characteristics of an 'Ideal Minister' Listed according to Priorities for Graduates by Church Leaders, Seminary Leaders and Students.

<i>Church Leadership's Priorities for Graduates</i>		<i>Seminary Leadership's Priorities for Graduates</i>		<i>Priorities of Students</i>	
<i>Person of Prayer (1)</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation</i>	<i>Theological Knowledge (1)</i>	<i>Academic Formation</i>	<i>Inspiring Preacher (1)</i>	<i>Ministry Formation</i>
<i>Character (2)</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation</i>	<i>Administrative Ability (2)</i>	<i>Academic Formation</i>	<i>Successful in Church Growth and Evangelism (2)</i>	<i>Ministry Formation</i>
<i>Role Model (3)</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>Leadership (3)</i>	<i>Academic Formation</i>	<i>Skill in Inter-personal Relationships (3)</i>	<i>Ministry Formation</i>
<i>Successful in Church Growth and Evangelism (4)</i>	<i>Ministry Formation</i>	<i>Skill in Interpersonal Relationships (4)</i>	<i>Ministry Formation</i>	<i>Theological Knowledge (4)</i>	<i>Academic Formation</i>

<i>Loving Concern for People (5)</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation</i>	<i>Inspiring Preacher (5)</i>	<i>Ministry Formation</i>	<i>Leadership (5)</i>	<i>Academic Formation</i>
<i>Inspiring Preacher (6)</i>	<i>Ministry Formation</i>	<i>Successful in Church Growth and Evangelism (6)</i>	<i>Ministry Formation</i>	<i>Role Model (6)</i>	<i>n/a</i>
<i>Skill in Inter-personal Relationships (7)</i>	<i>Ministry Formation</i>	<i>Character (7)</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation</i>	<i>Administrative Ability (7)</i>	<i>Academic Formation</i>
<i>Leadership (8)</i>	<i>Academic Formation</i>	<i>Person of Prayer (8)</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation</i>	<i>Character (8)</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation</i>
<i>Administrative Ability (9)</i>	<i>Academic Formation</i>	<i>Role Model (9)</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>Person of Prayer (9)</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation</i>
<i>Theological Knowledge (10)</i>	<i>Academic Formation</i>	<i>Loving Concern for People (10)</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation</i>	<i>Loving Concern for People (10)</i>	<i>Spiritual Formation</i>

cal Knowledge, Administrative Ability and Leadership Skills) and church leaders prioritized Spiritual Formation (Person of Prayer, Character, Role Model). Jacob's research basically confirms the anecdotal evidence of the first story I told, namely, a huge gap exists between the priorities that students (and by extension the local church) values, compared to those of church leaders and leaders of academic institutions. All of this points to the fragmentation of priorities exist between the church members, church leaders and theological institutions.¹ All of this exemplifies that significant fragmentation exists.

Effects of Fragmentation on the Church and Grassroots Theological Education

Theological Educators have summarized the fragmentation into three interrelated issues,

First ... the meaning of theology has been distorted – that the unifying principle in theological education has been lost. The second issue ... the seminary's curriculum, without adequate definition of the nature and purpose of theology, devolves into a collection of specialized subjects. The third issue derives from specialization: a fragmented curriculum, organized generally into theory and practice divisions, leads to a distorted understanding of that which theological education addresses.²

And I would like to add a fourth one which develops from the previous three, namely, fragmentation of ministry. Or in other words the professionalization of ministry (of which clericalism is one prominent expression) which is too often understood as implying that church ministry is the exclusive domain of the professionally

¹ It would be very interesting to repeat this research here in Malawi in order to establish to what level the same differences in priorities exist (as someone working in grassroots theological training, I would suspect that Malawi will not be different from India).

² See Linda Cannell, *Theological Education Matters*, p. 36. See also Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*.

trained minister.³ Good ministerial theological education addresses the question of the self-identification of the minister in relation to ministry and in relation to the empowerment of the congregations for independent spirituality and ministry.⁴ This is the essence of the educational enterprise, to achieve the independence of the learner. This purpose of the theological enterprise sets Christianity apart from some of the African Traditional Religions in which the "priests" are the only and exclusive custodian of secret divine knowledge and power. This leads to pastors clinging to power and knowledge, with less desire to share what they have learned. Post-Pentecost Christianity enshrines this democratized theological vision to demand the full participation of God's people both of access to the divine as well as to source of divine power. This is one of the reasons for its extraordinary appeal and success in Malawi.

Schleiermacher had envisioned that the three disciplines of biblical, historical and philosophical theology would thoroughly and critically investigate, while practical (or ministerial) theology would assemble and reunite theology into a unit which is used within the church. However, this did not happen. Practical Theology did not become the unifying force, rather it followed the lead of the three other disciplines to critically engage. Institutions affiliated to the University of Malawi through the Board for Theological Studies, offer Diplomas

³ The other element of clericalization is the minister as gate keeper to the empowerment of his/her congregation, as Jey J. Kanagaraj poignantly puts, "The pastor's leadership style, the quality of his interpersonal relationships, and his professional competence are critical factors in enhancing or blocking the empowerment of lay involvement in the church's ministry." See Jey J. Kanagaraj, "The Involvement of the Laity in the Ministry of the Church," *Evangelical Review of Theology*, vol. 21 no. 4, October 1997, pp. 326-331 [329].

⁴ Is the minister primarily the leader of the church? The shepherd leading his (stupid) sheep? the teaching elder? Or could the pastor be a priest of priests, the washer of feet (the servant), the one who steps into the river carrying the ark, the trainer of trainers, the father leading his children to maturity? (adopted and expanded from Dorothy McRae-McMahon, "The Formation of the Laos" in John Pobee (ed), *Towards Viable Theological Education*, Geneva: WCC, 1997, pp. 109-119).

in Theology mainly in the complete absence of Practical Theology. Perry Shaw rightly highlighted a strange theological practice, where institutions expect students themselves to reassemble their fragmented theological learning once they have graduated. It is a non-starter to expect students to unify their theological learning by themselves if they have not been taught at the Theological Institution. The same difficulty exists in the transfer from general to particular, from one culture to another culture, from theory to practice and even from one language to another language, including from English into one of the Malawian vernaculars.⁵

The loss of the clearly defined unifying centre of theological education may result in individual subjects lacking a clearly stated purpose, part from transfer.⁶ Additionally, the presentation of theological knowledge as an academic abstract or theoretical discipline results in a fragmentation of theoretical and applied practical and spiritual knowledge. The lack of a curriculum-wide integration results in the compartmentalization of theological knowledge which then results in compartmentalized application of theological knowledge. Therefore, Theological knowledge is detached from wisdom and the ability to live wisely and in harmony with the community. This can be seen in the difficulty that preachers

⁵ In 2014 TEEM, as part of a promotion of grassroots church-based theological education, spoke to around 400, and one repeated appreciation of TEEM's vernacular course books by the theologically (Diploma/Bachelor) trained pastors was that it gave a vernacular expression of theology.

⁶ Recently, the TEEM Academic Staff met to discuss plans for a contextual preaching course. One of the findings was that our staff observed that preaching in the churches mostly does not connect the Old Testament to the New Testament which means that the relation between the two testaments is not clear and also that the Messianic fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies are not explicitly made to the grassroots. This is a significant sign of the fragmentation of the theological curriculum as the Old Testament courses are not connected to courses on the Gospels and the Later New Testament Writings as well as Christology from Systematic Theology is not integrated into a theological practice like preaching of theological graduates.

who are asked to preach about an Old Testament passage or even a gospel passage have, where they only provide a moral reading of the text rather than a theological reading of the text. Theological knowledge is often about contemporary academic in-house theological discussion rather than driven by the need of the grassroots church, for example, every female minister who visited my office looked at TEEM's grassroots marriage course. Why is this? Because, it is an important ministry subject that is not thoroughly discussed in most theological curricula in Malawi. Furthermore, in the absence of a contextual curriculum, theological graduates will not have been empowered to address contextual challenges in a meaningful and biblical/theologically informed manner. It must be said, that it is actually impossible to expect contextual issues to be addressed if they have not been thoroughly discussed during the theological studies.⁷ Even historical theological studies prefer to address theological issues that have been discussed for hundreds of years, where a vast amount of literatures exist and where the theological (perhaps denominational) position is settled.

One area in which the impact of the fragmentation is highly visible is in lay training or grassroots theological education. The overall impact on the church is nearly equivalent to the impact on grassroots theological education, this is because the contextual needs of an audience are rarely explicitly reflected in theological education. Grassroots Theological Education is ultimately done (either in denominational offices or in para church organizations) through graduates of local theological institutions. The questions and concerns that drive contemporary academic or higher-level theological education are not the questions that usually concern the

⁷ It would be wise in that regard, to move towards a greater use of dialogue education (even better a flipped classroom approach) to engage theological students more thoroughly while at the same time including plenty of practical case studies, open-ended stories, and simulations to promote discussion and application of theological principles. These work much better than purely theoretical discussions.

grassroots in their day to day spirituality. This includes the day-to-day reading of the biblical text where a significant gap exists in reading the text between the usually untrained and uninformed grassroots and theologically trained ministers. This observation cannot be underestimated as it shows that biblical literacy is not a skill that has been transferred to the grassroots church. Theologically, spiritually and pastorally there cannot be a justification that the grassroots do not have ownership and the level of biblical literacy to read their own holy text in a unified theological way.

The fragmentation of the unity of theory and practice as well as fragmentation between theology and discipleship/spirituality results in a miscommunication between what the minister perceives as the grassroots challenges (it is unfortunately misleading to assume that because a minister many years ago was part of the grassroots, that the minister is today able to understand, in its entirety, the grassroots). A high percentage of evangelical sermons are within the sphere of philosophical-spiritual monologue discourses (or alternatively a moral discourse about a threatening God) this seems to be the direct result both of discipline fragmentation whereby biblical passages are not looked at with the additional aim to produce a sermon – the gap is between exegesis and sermon (this is also the result too often of academic either actual or perceived standards which should inform academic theology).

The fragmentation of the audience of theological education in a training emphasis on ministerial theological education results in a significant under-investment in grassroots theological education as the majority emphasis in theological education is on ministerial theological education. Ministerial theological education is important, but so is grassroots theological education for the wellbeing of the church. The way forward would be to include grassroots theological education as an integrated subject in the ministerial theological curriculum. The grassroots are a key recipient of pastoral ministry, therefore the concerns, challenges and worldviews, as well as the

spiritual growth of the grassroots is essential in fulfilling the pastoral ministry

Integration, Please!

The answer to the persistence of fragmentation lies in the consistent and planned integration of the different streams of theological education into one constituent unity. If theological education is fragmented, then it seems logical to deduct that the individual subjects are fragmented as well and thereby deprived of their full contribution to the whole. The unity of ministerial theological education (in contrast to fragmentation) should balance academic excellence with spiritual (personal, moral) formation to equip students for appropriate ministry. Academic excellence also applies to grassroots theological education though it has to take an appropriate grassroots friendly form but it should not exclude appropriate insights arising from academic theological studies. An integrated grassroots curriculum on biblical studies would then integrate: biblical content with appropriate and selective hermeneutical (or Bible study) tools in order to empower the grassroots to theologically and meaningfully read the text on their own. The development of expertise and comprehension skills is a learning objective therefore, the hermeneutical exercises should be repeated and practised continuously. At the same time the course should be consciously and painstakingly related to the context which is the wider story of God's people in the two-testament Scripture along an appropriate theologically-sound theme (purpose). Additionally, open questions that focus on personal and discipleship application are included. Preferably, especially within grassroots theological education, the context is addressed through communal dialogue education (or in other words: TEE) and not through monologues.⁸ An integrated ministerial curriculum on biblical studies would be twofold: a replication of the grassroots curriculum as

⁸ See Volker Glissmann, 'Grassroots Theological Education, pp. 60-61.

described above followed by special set of questions and tasks that are centred around the four main areas of ministerial formation (preaching, teaching, pastoral care and leadership). Other subject or topics areas might seek the integration along slightly different lines.⁹

Fragmentation affects the whole curriculum as well as the design purpose behind the curriculum, therefore, there cannot be a simple "we will change one thing" or the "add one course" approach but the integration between the purpose of the institution and the purpose of the curriculum both in its theological approach, content and overarching purpose, as well as a pedagogical integration that is aimed at assisting in developing deep comprehension. A *theological integration* is needed that centres theological learning around a valid and theological justifiable central outcome (like "preparing God's people to participate in the mission of God"). Additionally, a *pedagogical (or educational) integration* is needed that designs theological content and theological curricula in a deliberate integrative way as to actively link ideas together, concepts and models that in the life of the church exist in a pedagogical union (including a theory-practice integration). The pedagogical integration also asks the pedagogical question of how to effectively integrate content delivery that aids best contextual learning practice; as well as a *theological purpose (or audience) integration* which asks the questions if the training is directly or are trainers of trainers trained (training the church, training the grassroots, training academic theologians or training leaders of the church or training for a specific ministry). Finally, a *grassroots theological education integration* which recognizes that the empowerment and understanding (cultural exegesis) of the grassroots is integral to theological educational enterprise (either directly or indirectly).

⁹ For the innovative integrated curriculum of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS), see Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, pp. 8-9.

Fragmentation of Theological Education and Theological Education by Extension (TEE)

What strikes me as a TEE practitioner and someone interested in the renewal of theological education, is the similarity between the identified issues resulting in fragmentation and the underlying reasons that led to a development of TEE as a theological renewal movement.¹⁰ TEE developed through a process of developments and adjustments that culminated in its start in 1963. The process involved conceptual, theological and pedagogical adjustments to address a local training challenge that faced one small Guatemalan Protestant denomination. TEE's founding vision has a lot to do with both equipping God's people for mission,¹¹ as well as the ministry by the people¹² overall, the idea was the decentralized extension of seminary education to those unable to attend full-time residential studies.¹³ TEE was not founded to be a method of grassroots theological education but rather initially focussed on ministerial theological education but, due to the need to train pastors without sufficient secondary schooling, the TEE Guatemala experiment taught immediately at a variety of academic levels in order to empower the

¹⁰ For an introduction to TEE, see also Volker Glissmann, "What is Theological Education by Extension (TEE)?" in *The Theological Educator*, 28.11.2014, under www.thetheologicaleducator.net/2014/11/28/what-is-theological-education-by-extension; or Volker Glissmann, "The Role of Community in Theological Education by Extension (TEE)" in *The Theological Educator*, 10.4.2015, under www.thetheologicaleducator.net/2015/04/10/the-role-of-community-in-theological-education-by-extension-tee.

¹¹ "Equipping God's People for Mission." This is the title of the 1982 volume of *International Review of Mission*, vol. 71, no. 282 (pp. 129-253) April 1982 which features numerous reflections about TEE.

¹² "Ministry by the People" is a landmark documentation about global developments within TEE. See Ross Kinsler (ed), *Ministry by the People: Theological Education by Extension*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983.

¹³ The journal that initially was founded bears witness to the extension idea as it was called, "Extension Seminary."

pastors which the church felt were called to the ministry but did not finish primary or secondary school education. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Guatemala in the 1960s observed that their Theological College did not produce pastors that stayed in the ministry.¹⁴ Over a period of a few years, the Seminary was moved first from the capital to a city closer to where most of the church was located. Then it moved by extension to seminaries even closer to the rural pastors as they should be trained on-the-job as this pedagogically improves the integration of theory and practice. The students were given reading material but then it was discovered that it was essential there was discussion on their reading and their comprehension of the material while trying to apply it to the ministry. This was the process of re-conceptualizing for a local context what theological education could look like.

That TEE is often, nearly exclusively in some contexts, used for grassroots theological education is an affirmation of the need for providing appropriate levels of theological engagement for the grassroots. Numerically it seems inevitable that once theological education is extended geographically and is available in the vicinity, that the grassroots church members want to fully participate in theological learning. The TEE focus was on increasing access: geographical, economic, cultural, ecclesiastical, gender, race, class, pedagogical and spiritual access.¹⁵ This is built on a vision of a theological educated church community whereby access to theological education is provided. Another emphasis has been on on-

¹⁴ A 1962 inventory disclosed that after 25 years, only 10 of the more than 200 students who had enrolled in the Seminary were still functioning as pastors. Once accustomed to urban life, many students of rural background did not return to the agriculturally rich but unhealthy and economically depressed areas from which they had come.

¹⁵ This is how Ross Kinsler summarizes the extension of access, see Ross Kinsler, "Preface," in Ross Kinsler (ed), *Diversified Theological Education: Equipping All God's People*, Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 2008, pp. 7-14 [8-9].

the-job training rather than pre-job training and the shifting of content delivery from the classroom to home-study thereby freeing the class time for a communal dialogical pedagogy. Home-study then enables learners to come prepared to class, including time for reflection on the learning content. Human beings are social communicating beings in our essence and a communal dialogue-based learning experience suits us, but is also the essential ministry medium. These two elements of TEE are self-study material and the TEE group discussion, nowadays (outside of TEE) this approach is rediscovered and called: flipped learning or flipped classroom.¹⁶ The flipped classroom approach uses self-study material for content delivery and then replaces the classroom with tutorials.¹⁷ Tutorials are usually small, less formal interactive discussion-based groups to deepen and apply course content. The flipped classroom approach is also practised within residential institutions and it is there to help especially the learners with comprehension as well as the integration of seemingly unrelated abstract proposition into a unified learning experience. Or in other words: tutorial-based theological education (which also abbreviates as TEE!). This was the process of theological and pedagogical re-conceptualization for a local context on what theological education could look like.

TEE is an interesting case study, partly because it offers a valuable blueprint that integration of theological learning is not just a utopian

¹⁶ One of my best classes as an undergraduate was a course on Contemporary Theologians at Union Theological College in Belfast because of the intensity of engagement with the material. Only three students signed up for the course, but Professor Williamson did not cancel, instead he proposed that he give us the readings beforehand and then we will meet in his office for a discussion about what we read during the week. The students were supposed to argue the same case that a famous theologian made and Professor Williamson would argue against it.

¹⁷ For an introduction, see <https://elearningindustry.com/blended-learning-vs-flipped-learning-can-tell-difference>. See also Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education*, pp. 196-197.

vision but— if desired — can be done.¹⁸ Alternative models of theological education are available. Theological education does not need to exclusively rely on a standardized form of higher education whereby most content is orally delivered through a field expert which is then tested for recollection through a standard written test.¹⁹ Theological Education should open access to the training of the grassroots church as an integral part of the theological vision. TEE practitioners very early on sought pedagogical advice on how to improve the delivery of their education which is important as theological education can only thrive if it is utilizing sound pedagogical methodologies as well as sound theological paradigms. Theological Education exists in a variety of contextual forms and all of them — jointly — are at the disposal of theological educators but of course not every method is suitable for each context.

Conclusion

The fragmentation of theological education is not just an issue affecting the preparation of clergy but actually an issue that affects the whole church. Outside of Malawi, there is a discussion going on about how to overcome the fragmentation and integrate the theological education into a consistent theological, pedagogical and contextual approach. Too often the discussion is solemnly focused

¹⁸ Other important blueprints can be found in the curriculum changes done in the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) in Lebanon as explained in Perry Shaw's book *Transforming Theological Education*. Not surprisingly, there is overlap between the two approaches, though they are not the same. ABTS also stresses the need for reflection in community through discussion (or dialogue) in relation to ministry reflection.

¹⁹ A surprising consistency among the fragmentation is the singularity of the schooling method for theological education. For a criticism see, Allan Harkness, "De-Schooling the Seminary: An Appropriate Paradigm for Effective Pastoral Formation," in Allan Harkness (ed), *Tending the Seedbeds: Educational Perspectives on Theological Education in Asia*, Quezon City: Asia Theological Association, 2010, pp. 103-128.

on clergy education or on theological education in the abstract. What needs to be considered is to address and litigate the effects of theological education on both the grassroots and on grassroots theological education. One of the visions of theological education has to be the learned church and that can only be done if the concerns, challenges and worldview of the grassroots church play a significant role in theological education. The origin of TEE speaks of a renewal movement that is conceptually tried to seek a conceptual, theological and pedagogical approach and trying to seek a greater integration of theological learning. Overall, many things could be overcome through an integrated theological curriculum or an interdisciplinary approach driven by the contextual needs of theology graduates who serve the grassroots church.²⁰

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⁴⁴ See Richard Osmer, "Toward a Transversal Model of Interdisciplinary Thinking in Practical Theology," in F. LeRon Shults (ed), *The Evolution of Rationality: Interdisciplinary Essays in Honor of J. Wentzel van Huyssteen*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006, p. 328.

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