

## **Revamping Theological Education Curriculum in the African Context for Transformative Ministry**

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### **Abstract**

This article seeks to explore how theological education could be revamped to fit into contextual, transformative and impactful ministry in the African landscape. It examines theological education as it were in Africa, tracing the roots and resemblances of western particularities and finding out their relevance in transforming ministry in the African churches *vis-à-vis* the theological education curriculum. The article explores the principles that define what content, how such a content should be delivered and why such a content should be delivered. It itemises some pragmatic, proactive concrete actionable steps towards a reconstruction of current curriculum in the light of the vision, mission and core values of an institution. The article enunciates the concept, states some principles of transformative ministry and articulates a Theobiblical basis for transformative ministry. It presents issues and trends of theological education curriculum, the need for revamping of theological education curriculum and sets out some implementation strategies in revamping theological education curriculum.

### **Introduction**

Theological education plays a crucial role in fulfilling the task and assignment of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 1:8) and in transforming society. For a transformative ministry that would have positive impact on the society, a contextualised curriculum is needed to train those who are

called of God as arrow heads to discharge the duties of impactful ministry. Hence, the theme of the academic conference, “Towards a contextualized theological education curriculum for transformative ministry” sets its toll on the intention to scrutinise theological education curriculum, such that it will be contextualised in the African context and transforming in the light of the vision, mission and core values of an institution and prevailing contextual realities of the African landscape.

As the African continent experiences significant growth in religions and societal-oriented matters, there is an increasing essential for well-trained theologians and ministers, who in turn becomes religious and societal leaders. Invariably, theological education that will produce effective human resource for societal transformation must be with peculiar curriculum that best meets the needs of the time and equally projects the future-life of the society. Theological education cannot operate in isolation from the social life of the society. This is because all of its entirety, with regards to ideological conceptions, pragmatic exploration and integration, revolve within the human society.

In recent times, theological education has been subjected to secondary or second class academic world, probably because, some feel it is not relevant to determining directly the intellectual world or creating platforms for social work within the society. It is believed that most of her operations are limited to the four walls of a religious sphere which may include church, theological institutions and or religious organisations as the case may be. On the other hand, the use of the terms “theological education,” “religious education,” and “Christian education” used interchangeably, continues to generate scholastic argument, especially recognising them as strictly separate concepts and the belief that religious education is all-inclusive (Marbaniang, 2018, p. 77).

Jackson (2018, p. 37), opines that religious education encompasses a broad range of disciplines, including theology, comparative religion, philosophy of religion, and sociology of religion. Its primary objective is to provide learners with knowledge about different religious traditions, their historical development, essential doctrines, rituals, ethical teachings, and the role of religion in shaping cultures and societies (Davis, 2019, p. 62). It includes Christian education and

other religions, such as Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist education. Meanwhile, the contention of the sameness or difference of the three is a function of the nature of their curriculum. However, the focus of this paper is basically to seek how theological education curriculum can be revamped toward transformative ministry of the African churches *vis-à-vis* the society at large.

### **An Exploration of Theological Education in Africa**

Theological education involves rigorous academic study, contemplative reflection, and practical training, preparing individuals for various roles within religious communities and academic institutions (Husbands, 2012, p. 45). Its curriculum typically covers various subjects, including biblical studies, systematic theology, church history, ethics, pastoral care, and practical ministry (Foster 2017, p. 82). The history of African theological education can be traced back to the colonial era when Western missionaries established mission schools and seminaries. Smith (2010, p. 78) highlights the role of early missionary institutions such as Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone and Lovedale Institute in South Africa, which laid the foundation for theological education on the continent.

One of the primary challenges facing African theological education is the lack of sufficient resources and infrastructure. According to Egbunu and Leshner (2018, p. 125), many institutions struggle with limited funding, outdated libraries, and insufficient faculty. This hampers the quality of education and research opportunities available to students. Also, theological education in Africa faces the challenge of contextualisation, integrating theological teachings with African cultural and societal contexts. In his opinion, Obaji (2017, p. 49) argues that many institutions continue to rely heavily on Euro-American theological frameworks, neglecting the rich theological heritage of Africa. This hinders the development of African theologies and limits the relevance of theological education to local communities. Out of the many challenges facing African theological education, these beg for quick intervention.

Equally, opportunities are noteworthy, which theological education has enjoined over the centuries. Technological developments have recently opened up new opportunities for theological education in

Africa. The rise of distance learning and online platforms have allowed students to access theological courses and resources from anywhere. Cummings (2021, p. 94) explores the potential of online education in widening access to theological training, particularly for students in remote areas. Similarly, collaborative efforts between African theological institutions and international partners have yielded positive results. Nyende (2019, p. 206) observes successful partnership models between African and Western institutions, emphasising the importance of mutual respect, shared resources, and capacity-building initiatives.

Theological education prepares people for various responsibilities within religious communities and academic institutions through demanding academic study, reflective practice, and practical instruction. However, in no equal measures, theological education in Africa faces many challenges than opportunities. These challenges impede its ability to meet the standard required to accomplish its aims. Traditional theological education refers to the historical models and practices that prevailed for centuries. Duesing (2016, p. 42) explores the early American Baptist mission and the education of ministers during the early 19th century; this era was characterized by denominational seminaries and academies that provided a systematic and comprehensive theological curriculum. Although this describes the relevance of traditional theological education, it also informs on the need for a contemporary theological education that meets the need of the present dispensation.

### **Concept of Curriculum**

The term “Curriculum” has been clarified by cliques of scholars in different ways and in their opinions. The author of this paper wish to give recognition to three of such which is apt in this paper: A curriculum is “the guideline of the chapters and academic content covered by an educational system while undergoing a particular course or programme” (Surbhi, 2017). John Dewey (1902) submits that curriculum is “a continuous reconstruction, moving from the learner’s present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies”. In the opinion of Ralph Tyler (1957) in his book, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* submits that “the curriculum is all of the learning of students which is

planned by and directed by the school to attain its educational goals”. Gleaning from the definitions stated above, it can be inferred that a well contextualised theological education curriculum is core in achieving the mission of an institution, expressing her prophetic voice and fulfilling her transformative agenda of pastoral formation which will serve churches and lead them in transforming society and the world at large. In this wise, the content of the course of actions (curriculum) through the knowledge impacted is crucial.

### **Concept and Principles of Transformative Ministry**

Transformative ministry embodies positive change and growth within individuals, communities, and society. A ministry is considered transformative when it represents all that the ministry of Jesus Christ entails during his earthly ministry. Jesus’ ministry transcended traditional notions of religious leadership and emphasised the ministry’s role in facilitating transformation in various aspects of human life. According to Smith (2019, p. 45), transformative ministry “involves a holistic understanding of human flourishing, incorporating spiritual, social, emotional, and physical dimensions.” It encompasses religious instruction, pastoral care, social justice advocacy, empowerment, and community development.

Having a balanced knowledge of the ministry gifts in Ephesians 4:11-15 gives a better understanding of a transformative ministry that touches every aspect of human life to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The Greek word for “church” in the New Testament, *Ekklesia*, does not refer to a physical structure or building; instead, it describes a gathering of people; but it is a new community, not just a group of individuals (Menn, 2021, p. 4). This points to the fact that the Church, in the true sense, is not limited to spiritual nourishment but also concerns believers' social, emotional, and physical well-being. Johnson (2021, p. 12) argues that it is rooted in the trust that all human beings are created in the image of God and possess inherent dignity and worth. The transformative ministry recognizes the potential for growth and transformation in every individual and endeavours to nurture and facilitate this process.

With regards to the principles of transformative ministry, following are considered:

1. **Cultivating Personal Transformation:** Transformative ministry begins with cultivating personal transformation. Johnson and Martinez (2020, p. 67) assert that ministers should cultivate their spiritual growth and seek to embody the values and principles they espouse. By modelling authenticity and vulnerability, transformative ministers inspire others to embark on their journey of personal transformation. The famous quote by Maxwell (2016, p. 101) that “everything rises and falls on leadership” affirms this opinion in that the minister’s life dramatically influences the followers. Hence, before the minister can help others experience transformation through his ministry; such must have been his own experience.
2. **Empowering and Equipping Others:** A central principle which transformative ministry centres on is empowering and equipping individuals and communities. As mentioned in Ephesians 4:11-15, Williams (2018, p. 92) bolstered by highlighting the importance of providing resources, skills, and opportunities for self-expression and personal agency. Jesus gifted the Church with ministerial gifts to transform the believers. Transformative ministers aim to empower others to realize their potential, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for their growth and the betterment of their communities. By implication, the believers are empowered and equipped purposely to empower and equip others within and outside the spheres of the Church.
3. **Embracing Social Justice and Advocacy:** Transformative ministry extends beyond the spiritual realm and embraces social justice and advocacy commitment. Adams (2022, p. 34) emphasizes that transformative ministers are called to challenge oppressive systems and work toward a more just and equitable society. They actively address poverty, discrimination, and inequality issues, seeking to transform social structures perpetuating injustice.
4. **Community Development:** Similar, to social justice and advocacy, transformative ministry is closely linked to community development and transformation. Davis (2019, p. 76) argues that ministers should actively participate in community

life, collaborating with local leaders and stakeholders to identify and address the unique needs and aspirations of the community. By fostering inclusivity, building relationships, and promoting holistic well-being, transformative ministers contribute to transforming the communities they serve.

### **Theo-Biblical Basis for Transformative Ministry**

The Bible portrays transformation as a central theme in God's redemptive plan for humanity. Roberts (2018, p. 42) highlights passages such as Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18, which emphasise the renewal of the mind and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit. These verses underscore the belief that through God's grace, individuals can experience a profound change in their character, values, and actions. Jesus serves as the ultimate example of transformative ministry, according to Anderson (2020, p. 63), who explores the life and ministry of Jesus, highlighting his transformative encounters with individuals. Through his teachings, healing, and personal interactions, Jesus exemplified compassion, love, and restoration, leading people to experience radical change and liberation. Jesus' ministry emphasizes the transformative power of God's kingdom and provides a model for ministers seeking positive change in people's lives.

The belief in the *imago Dei*, the image of God in every human being, forms a crucial theological foundation for transformative ministry. Lewis (2019, p. 87) explores how recognizing the divine image in each person leads to a holistic understanding of human flourishing. Transformative ministers acknowledge and nurture the God-given potential in individuals, fostering their spiritual, emotional, and social well-being. Incarnational theology provides a theological basis for transformative ministry by emphasising the embodiment of God's presence in the world. Peters (2017, p. 105) discusses how ministers, inspired by the example of Christ, are called to incarnate God's love, grace, and truth in their interactions with others. Incarnational ministry involves a deep commitment to relational engagement, empathy, and sacrificial service, leading to transformative encounters and fostering authentic human flourishing.

Theo-biblical transformative ministry prioritises spiritual formation and discipleship as critical personal and communal transformation elements. Transformative ministers engage in intentional discipleship processes, guiding individuals to grow in their relationship with God and embody the teachings of Christ (Smith, 2021, p. 124). This approach involves nurturing spiritual disciplines, fostering biblical literacy, and providing mentoring and support in the faith journey. The theo-biblical transformative ministry also compels ministers to speak publicly against social injustices and work towards societal transformation. By implication, the life of gospel ministers must first model social justice to be able to speak boldly against it as the scripture in Proverbs 28:1b describes that “the righteous are as bold as a lion”; meaning that to be able to speak boldly against unrighteousness, the ministers’ life must be above reproach.

### **Theological Education Curriculum: Issues and Trends**

The theological education curriculum is vital in shaping future leaders within religious communities. It provides a structured framework for developing the knowledge, skills, and character necessary for effective ministry. Theological education aims at equipping individuals with a solid theological foundation, fostering critical thinking, spiritual formation, and practical skills necessary for ministry (Holmes, 2018, p. 75). The rejuvenation of churches, their ministries, missions, dedication to Christian unity, and the changing world may begin with theological education (Otokola, 2017, p. 91). The curriculum provides a comprehensive framework integrating biblical studies, theological reflection, historical and contextual understanding, and practical ministry training. In this wise, there is a need to consider the significance and peculiarity of theological education in curriculum design for relevance.

Curriculum design plays a crucial role in theological education. Perry (2019, 92) emphasises the importance of intentional design to ensure coherence, relevance, and balance within the curriculum. The theological education curriculum provides aspiring leaders with the necessary intellectual and spiritual tools to engage in effective ministry (Clifford, 2017, p. 24). Effective curriculum design incorporates a balance between theory and praxis, engages diverse perspectives, fosters interdisciplinary learning, and adapts to changing



contexts to prepare future leaders for their challenges and opportunities; the significance of intentional curriculum design in shaping the educational experience (Gonzalez, 2021, p. 62). Well-designed theological education curricula ensure the integration of various disciplines, balance theoretical and practical components and address the needs of diverse ministry contexts. The following may be considered:

1. **Globalization and Interfaith Engagement:** The curriculum must address the challenges and prospects of an increasingly interconnected world, emphasizing interfaith dialogue, cultural competency, and global perspectives (Karkkainen, 2018, p. 125). Integrating courses on comparative religions, interfaith studies, and cross-cultural ministry prepares future leaders to engage with diverse religious traditions and effectively minister in multicultural contexts.
2. **Technological Advancements and Digital Learning:** Technological advancements have significantly transformed education, including theological education. Online courses, virtual classrooms, and digital resources offer flexibility, accessibility, and interactive learning experiences (Larsen & Hermanson, 2020, 82). Incorporating these tools allows students to engage with theological content and collaborate innovatively with peers and instructors.
3. **Contextualization and Practical Relevance:** Theological education curriculum is increasingly emphasizing contextualization and practical relevance. Bevans & Schroeder (2018, 92) argue for a curriculum that addresses communities' real-world challenges and equips students with practical skills for ministry. This trend calls for courses that address social justice issues, community development, and ethical leadership, fostering a holistic understanding of ministry and its relevance to the broader society.
4. **Interdisciplinary and Integrative Approaches:** Theological education curriculum embraces inter-disciplinary and integrative approaches. Cunningham (2019, 112) discusses the integration of various disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and science, into theological education. Interdisciplinary courses

promote a holistic understanding of human experience, enabling future leaders to engage with complex issues and integrate diverse perspectives into their theological reflections.

5. **Formation and Spirituality:** There is an increasing emphasis on formation and spirituality within the theological education curriculum. (Foster & Kenneson, 2017, 55) argue for integrating spiritual formation practices and character development into the curriculum. Courses that nurture personal spirituality, ethical formation, and emotional intelligence contribute to the holistic development of students as they prepare for ministry.

### **The Need for Revamping Theological Education Curriculum**

Revamping the theological education curriculum is crucial in response to the changing ministry needs in contemporary society. This essay explores the significance of revamping the theological education curriculum, focusing on the need for adaptation, innovation, and relevance. Understanding the need for revamping the theological education curriculum cannot be overemphasized. The need for revamping the theological education curriculum is highlighted thus:

1. **Shifting Ministry Contexts:** Societal shifts, cultural dynamics, and technological advancements necessitate a curriculum that equips future religious leaders to engage effectively in diverse and evolving ministry contexts (Riaz, 2020, 79). Revamping the curriculum allows for integrating relevant courses that address contemporary social issues, interfaith dialogue, and cultural competency.
2. **Changing Educational Landscape:** The changing educational landscape demands revamping the theological education curriculum. Nelson (2018, 106) discusses the need for innovative pedagogical approaches and the integration of new technologies. Revamping the curriculum involves embracing online learning platforms, interactive teaching methods, and experiential learning opportunities. These adaptations enhance engagement, accessibility, and student-centred learning experiences.

3. **Integrating Practical Ministry Skills:** Revamping the theological education curriculum involves focusing on practical ministry skills. Clifford (2017, 54) emphasizes integrating courses that equip future leaders with practical skills such as pastoral care, counselling, leadership, and community engagement. A revamped curriculum should offer opportunities for field education, internships, and mentorship programmes to provide hands-on experience and foster the development of well-rounded ministers.
4. **Interdisciplinary and Multicultural Perspectives:** Revamping the curriculum involves incorporating interdisciplinary and multicultural perspectives. It is important to stress the importance of integrating diverse voices and perspectives into theological education. Yee (2019, 67) emphasizes that, courses on intercultural studies, comparative religions, and social justice provide a broader understanding of diverse world views and promote inclusive dialogue within the faith community.
5. **Emphasizing Spiritual Formation:** Revamping the theological education curriculum should emphasize spiritual formation. Willard (2018, 112) emphasizes the significance of nurturing students' spiritual growth and character formation. Incorporating courses on spiritual practices, personal discipleship and ethics enables future religious leaders to develop a deep spiritual foundation that sustains them in their ministry and fosters integrity and authenticity.

### **Implementation Strategies for Revamping Theological Education Curriculum**

Revamping the theological education curriculum requires:

1. **A Collaborative Approach:** Esterline and Naidoo (2020, 92) emphasise the value of collaboration between faculty, students, and ministry practitioners. Engaging in dialogue, conducting needs assessments, and involving stakeholders in the process ensures a holistic and inclusive curriculum that reflects the diverse needs and perspectives of the faith community.

2. **Continuous Evaluation and Adaptation:** Revamping the theological education curriculum necessitates continuous evaluation and adaptation. Posner (2018, 145) emphasises the importance of ongoing assessment to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of the curriculum. Regular feedback from students, faculty, and alumni can inform necessary adjustments and improvements. Additionally, staying updated on emerging trends, research, and best practices in theological education enables institutions to make informed decisions and incorporate innovative approaches into the curriculum.
3. **Investing in Faculty Development and Training:** Revamping the theological education curriculum requires investing in faculty development and training. Moon (2019, 72) discusses the significance of equipping faculty with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement the revamped curriculum effectively. Providing professional development opportunities, workshops, and mentorship programmes enables faculty to enhance their teaching methods, incorporate new pedagogical approaches, and align their expertise with the evolving needs of the ministry.

## Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing discourse it is therefore, expedient that current curriculum of theological institutions conforms to contextual realities. Curriculum should also be revamped to promote relevant contextual theological education in the continent of Africa serving churches in the landscape of Africa such as those in the institutions' environs where she is located. Through her curriculum, she could engage pastors-in-training with theological conversations that promote transformation in the churches and society.

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