

Theological Education for Transformative Morality in Pastoral Ministry

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Abstract

Whether there could be a generally accepted morality is still very debatable, especially when considering a worldview such as moral relativism or pluralism. While there has yet to be a clear-cut answer to this question, further attempts to contribute to the discussion from a Christian theological background, as attempted in this paper, is a good one. A critical evaluation of current events in different societies across the globe reveals that some people are running afoul of societal moral demands. People often argue that human moral conduct is relative; most often than not, they say that neither society nor religion has the right to absolute moral dictates. To this end, the paper discusses the concepts of transformative education, morality in education, transformative theological education in pastoral ministry, and lastly, transformative morality in theological education. It affirms biblical cum theological viewpoints on human moral conduct. The biblical and theological views of human moral life are the foundation for theological education, leading to transformative morality in ministry. This paper reveals that theological education is the education that one receives in the discipline of theology, while morality is about acceptable human conduct and values. It stresses that transformative education should equip individuals to be agents for sustainable change and tackle global challenges. It further posits that graduates of transformative theological education evangelize better, preach better, administer better, and live a transformed lives, imitating the Lord Jesus faithfully. Their learning experiences prepare them better for the ministry to which God called them.

Introduction

Theological education concerns the incarnate, crucified, resurrected, and exalted Christ. It convey the message of salvation and eternal hope for sinful humankind. It is a message that all believers in Christ are bound to count the cost of and follow the Master without turning back. Thus, theological education exists to train and equip God-called men and women for the ministry, for the total transformation of humankind into Christlikeness. The need for a transformative theological education leading to an acceptable societal morality cannot be over emphasized. This paper focuses on transformative morality in theological education that enhances the ministry. In other to achieve this, there is need to clarify some terms such as transformation, theological education, and morality.

Transformation

Transformation refers to the act, process, or occurrences of transforming or being transformed. It is a process of change resulting in development. When it relates to human transformation, it implies an internal change and growth of an individual's potential, affecting his worldview, behaviour, and thoughts. In general, transformation results from an effect of the environment that changes an object or an individual. In everyday practice, it is a set of actions that changes the state or properties of different materials, goods, services, or knowledge. It is a strategy for change in structure, culture and values of a system. (Esterhuyse, 2003, p. 1-2). Gass (n.d.) enunciated that “Transformation is profound, fundamental change, altering the very nature of something. Transformational change is both radical and sustainable. Something that is transformed can never go back to exactly what it was before.” Advocates who work for innovative social change believe that society needs transformation and necessitates effecting social transformation through ways in which we work for change (*Ibid.*).

Theological Education

Theological education is the education that one receives in the discipline of theology. Here, “theology” does not merely refer to dogmatic or systematic theology but refers to that avenue or field of

study that clearly understands the Christian faith as its objective. It may be defined as the discipline that aims at a proper knowledge, interpretation, defence, and application of the Christian faith in the world. Thus, the Christian faith lies at the heart of theological education. Cheesman (2021, p. 34) defines theological education as "the training of men and women to know and serve God." He distinguishes it from Christian education in that its specific objective is the training of individuals for Christian service and leadership. Biblically, theological education is essential to unfold God's plan and economy.

Morality

Wong (2013) opines that morality is a set of codes or rules and is defined by a person's judgement, about rights, welfare and justice (Turiel, 1983). Morality comes from the Latin word, *moralis*, which means customs or manners. It points to the relationships between human beings. Morality is about acceptable human conducts and values. When speaking of people as moral or ethical, it usually means that they conform to a particular moral standard. Morality deals basically with humans and how they relate to other beings, both human and nonhuman. It deals with how humans treat other beings to promote mutual welfare, growth, creativity, and meaning as they strive for what is good over what is evil and right over what is wrong in society. There is an ethical dimension of human existence. As human beings, we experience life in a world of good and evil and understand certain kinds of actions in terms of right and wrong. When it comes to morality, we are faced with a strange anomaly (De Villiers, 2023, p. 2).

The Concept of Transformative Education

It is no more enough for education to offer basic literacy; it should now equip individuals to be agents for sustainable change and to be able to tackle global challenges. Recent discussions on the purpose of education raise the concept of 'regenerative education' – where education is framed as an essential tool to forge a path towards a more sustainable and just future. Education should provide people with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to resolve the interrelated challenges of the 21st century (UN Secretary-General, 2012).

Mezirow (1997, pp. 5-12) posits that transformative education is not a new innovation. He highlights the importance of active global citizenship and the need for the transformation of human perceptions and interpretations of the world. Transformative learning theory advocates that transformative learning means moving beyond the reproduction of knowledge toward critical reflection. It aims to use the educational process to accelerate the transformation of learners' broad sets of predispositions about the world, which stem from their social and cultural environment, to make sense of everyday life. Transformative learning often starts with what Mezirow (2000, p. 12) calls a 'disorienting dilemma,' which is a catalytic agent for transforming perspectives. It encourages students to reflect on their perceptions, understandings, and interpretations about themselves, others, and the world (Taylor, 2000, pp. 285-328).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2019) recognizes three interrelated dimensions of learning – cognitive, social and emotional, and behavioural.

Cognitive Learning refers to acquiring knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking about global, regional, national, and local issues, interdependencies, and the different aspects of sustainable development.

Social and Emotional learning refers to a sense of belonging to common humanity, shared values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity, respect for differences and diversity, and a sense of responsibility for the future.

Behavioural Learning refers to acting responsibly for a more peaceful and sustainable world.

This aligns with the four pillars of learning as identified by (UNESCO, 2001): learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together. The UNESCO Features of Education initiative recognizes a fourth learning element: learning to become. This initiative also introduces the concept of “regenerative education” – “education that heals, repairs, repurposes, and renews” and “has great potential to set the world on paths of more just and sustainable future for all.”

Transformative education is needed to encourage students/learners to reach their full potential and goes beyond cognitive knowledge to impart core values, skills, and attitudes that promote respect for human rights, equality, justice, diversity, and a sustainable future. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 4.7 suggests that education can have transformative power when it promotes sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, gender equality, human rights, global citizenship, the culture of peace and non-violence, and appreciation of cultural diversity (Pashby and Andreotti, 2016, pp. 771-778).

Education is transformative if it enables structural shifts in basic assumptions, feelings, thoughts, and moral actions. It happens in phases when learners become aware that their assumptions or beliefs may be problematic and start critically examining them, which can lead to transforming perspectives. This shift is followed by behavioural changes or actions and attempts to fully understand global challenges and acquisition of new skills and knowledge to reintegrate new perspectives into one's life. For education to be truly transformative, it needs to equip learners with skills, knowledge, and attitudes for global sustainability. Transformative education enables learners to understand and anticipate change, critical thinking, manage uncertainty, values of morality, appreciation of diversity, and empathy. This can positively contribute to finding solutions to ministry/global challenges and developing competencies needed for societal transformation (Arbeiter and Bucar, n.d.).

The Concept of Morality in Education

Morality is discussed from different theoretical frameworks. In this paper, moral absolutism or divine command theory is the theoretical framework that is engaged. This is close to the religious view on morality. Morality as a subject in religion points to moral values as standards that originated from God. In this sense, morality or moral acts are derived from the instructions and commands of God. There are moral acts that cannot be changed since they are direct instructions from God, who is absolute (Scott, (n.d). Christian faith is founded on specific moral absolutes. From the Old to the New Testament, God gives laws and instructions to guide His people. The Decalogue becomes the premise upon which the morality of people's

relationships is evaluated and, later, the foundation for the teachings of the apostles and the New Testament church (Finnish, 1991, p. 89).

Generally, the term ‘morals’ implies behaviour, and the ‘adjectives’ ‘moral’/‘immoral’ suggest acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. There is also a suggestion of ‘social criteria’ because when we talk about moral behaviour being acceptable and immoral behaviour unacceptable, we think of the acceptance, or non-acceptance, by society. Society has established norms or standards against which to measure diverse modes of behaviour to determine their acceptability or otherwise. Since society establishes them, there is a link between value-judgment, values, and morals. These are all mutually related to education. When society establishes its norms of good and bad behaviour, it makes a value judgment. It is saying that some forms of behaviour are more socially acceptable and more in the interest of the majority than others. It makes these judgments not arbitrarily or in isolation but in relation to its values. One may say that moral education is only adequate if it prepares learners to reach their own moral decision based on valid criteria and enables them to implement such decisions (Ayeeni, 2012, pp. 725-726).

This apparently ensures that moral education results in actual moral conduct and so does not merely produce an ethically bankrupt learner. Thus morality is seen as the ultimate aim of education. This, however, explains the paradox of morality in educational discourse. But whatever argument that is made about morals and morality, people still arrive at the same idea that morality, morals, and moral codes are all concerned with one primary objective namely, the establishment of the good life. Good life here may mean a ‘comfortable life’ distinct from the ‘necessary life.’ The connection between morality and education is an important one. Through education, people understand the difference between right and wrong and good and immoral conducts. Thus, since morals and education are connected, people are made to reconcile the demands made by society’s general code of behaviour and the sub-codes accepted by the smaller units within society. This makes a detailed examination of morality and its relationship with education imperative (*Ibid.*).

The moral situation is the *sine-qua-non* to moral education. In consideration of morality, it is necessary to trace its foundation to all

social science subjects. These subjects are evaluative and normative discipline and philosophy through which concepts of morality are explicitly examined. Equally, next to philosophy in importance in the discussion of moral development is psychology, which deals with the stages of moral development in the individual from childhood to adulthood. Similarly, essential is the sociological perspective, which concerns itself with the existence of morality as a social phenomenon and its role in the achievement of peace and harmony in society, as well as with the perception of morality through the process of socialization of which it is universally believed that education is a veritable agency. In the field of economics, morality is evident in the process of distributing scarce resources to meet unlimited demands. How this could be implemented without social unrest is another question. In the political realm, moral questions cannot but be raised because politics is said to be concerned with the sharing and wielding of power. Morality, whether in terms of moral conduct or discourse, involves human judgment, a value judgment between two or more alternatives, right and wrong, and the various shades between extremes (*Ibid.*).

Transformative Theological Education in Ministry

The indication of a transformative theological education leading to acceptable morality in society is the outcome of the fruit it produces yearly in ministry. The graduates of transformative theological education evangelize better, preach better, administrate better, and live a transformed life, imitating the Lord Jesus faithfully. Their learning experiences prepare them better for the ministry God called them. Seeing what the Lord is doing, such excellence in transformative theological education or training should be celebrated.

Although visitors may be impressed by a beautiful campus, a well-equipped library, and the philosophy in the prospectus, a theological education or institution is not transformative simply because of its physical environment or facilities. It is transformative because its process, purpose, and products are under biblical principles. Transformative theological education leading to acceptable morality is a community of competent, efficient, and emotionally healthy people constantly growing in their knowledge of the context and adequately resourced to serve better.

Let us now consider the factors contributing to excellence in transformative theological education in ministry. They include the following: a sound leadership team, clarity of purpose, a comprehensive strategic plan, quality teachers, and adequate facilities. These are discussed briefly, one after the other.

A Sound Leadership Team

Theological educational institutions are in the business of equipping leaders for the church, Christian organizations, and society. If a theological institution is doing well in its leadership training, it results from the clear concept of how leadership can be found, developed, encouraged, and utilized. The institution has a good leadership team that leads and models leadership. A transformative theological education shapes students' lives so God can use them as leaders for kingdom growth. Ministry and life skills are learned primarily by watching those in authority doing these things well (Walls, 2002, p. 171).

Clarity of Purpose

The training of God's servants is of paramount importance. As such, there should be a clear statement of the purpose of transformative theological education. The explicit purpose of a transformative theological institution is to equip God's people for life and ministry through the study and application of God's word. Shaw (2014, p. 154) affirms that the purpose is to lead people into a deeper understanding of God on the path to a more profound personal knowledge of God and to live the Christian life in the light of a personal relationship with Him. To develop and equip God-called servants with godly virtues that will, in turn, build and reflect such virtues in raising disciples for Christ.

A Comprehensive Strategic Plan

A transformative theological education with outstanding leadership in agreement with a clear purpose has a strategic plan. This strategic plan serves as a roadmap for creating excellence, which allows the institution and everyone else to verify whether or not they are making remarkable progress. A coherent and comprehensive strategic plan is built on the values and vision of the institution. Such a strategic plan

should include details of strengthening administration, maintenance, finances, recruitment, staffing, and governance. It should be written down in a comprehensive language and made available to everyone in the institution's community. A good strategic plan serves as a point of reference to monitor the programme's progress. A good strategic plan should be thoroughly reviewed every five to seven years (Hardy, 2017).

Quality Teachers

Teachers are the essential single resource any training institution has. Quality teachers know their students' abilities and creatively help them learn the things they need to know from the formal curriculum. They are to positively impact and influence students as their lives illustrate what they teach in the classroom. A good teaching team in a transformative theological education has appropriate, well-trained and experienced professionals in their specialization (*Ibid.*).

Adequate Facilities

A spacious campus with walkways and flowers, magnificent buildings equipped with diverse and latest electronic tools, and a library with significant volumes of books and periodicals are charming. However, these are not the primary factors that create excellence in transformative theological education. They may simply be monuments. Something must be seriously wrong if there is more pride in the facilities than in the products (graduates) that come from the institution. An excellent library is not one filled with tens of thousands of books that no one has ever looked at. Instead, an excellent library is in constant use because it contains up-to-date materials that support the curriculum and the needs of the educational community (Hardy, 2017).

Transformative Morality in Theological Education

The heart of the argument is the contention that, biblically, theological education constitutes an essential accompaniment to unfolding God's plan and economy. The writer will attempt to make a case for this assertion by spelling out the importance of transformative morality in theological education, looking at three main elements of the divine purpose: the well-being of God's people,

the advancement of God's mission, and the preservation of the Christian faith.

Theological Education and the well-being of God's People

It is biblically true that the well-being of humankind is one of God's principal concerns. The Bible begins and ends with the same happy scene: humankind enjoying bliss in the presence of God (Gen. 1:26-31; Rev. 21:1-4; 22:1-6). God's plan is the primal blessedness that began and was lost in the Garden of Eden and will be restored in the eternal city of God at the consummation of his redemptive plan. Nevertheless, God's plan for the well-being of his people continues even as the Bible places theological education at the heart of the implementation of His agenda. This should be crystal clear when one considers the transformative role theological education plays in the well-being of God's people. (Noelliste, 2017, p. 78-89).

Theological Education and the Advancement of God's Mission (Missio Dei)

It is the plan of God for humankind to advance his kingdom here on earth (Matt. 28:19-20). Since this is the case, it holds that the pertinence of theological education cannot end with its promotion of the welfare of the church. It must include its preparation for meaningful commitment to the fulfillment of the divine mission. An essential aspect of the advancement of God's mission is the *Kerygmatic* Witness (*Ibid.*). God's people are to witness God's redeeming grace and serve as a channel of blessing to the world (Gen. 12:3; 2 Cor. 5:18). Just a few moments before Christ's ascension, he admonished his disciples of this evangelistic responsibility. In these final instructions, he told them that based on his suffering, death, and resurrection, they had witnessed him. They were to "preach, in his name, repentance and forgiveness of sin to all nations beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). When the evangelistic mission got underway in earnest, Peter seized the opportunity and made good use of his theological knowledge to explain to the dumbfounded crowd what they witnessed (Acts 2:14). Theological education is established for the training and equipping of God's called men and women for transformative morality of society and the advancement of God's mission (Noelliste, 2017, pp. 78-89).

Theological Education and the Preservation of the Christian Faith

Biblically, the emergence of the Christian faith on the world's religious scene was orchestrated by God's providential and unfolding plan for the fulfillment of his purpose. All the grand redemptive events that were foundational to the rise of the Christian faith occurred in keeping with God's timing and according to His set purpose (Gal. 4:4; John 12:23; Acts 2:23). Gamaliel seems to have a hint of this when he counselled the Jewish religious leaders to stop persecuting the disciples; the followers of this new faith else they find themselves "fighting against God" (Acts 5:39). For Paul, the importance of transformative morality in theological education for the preservation and maintenance of the Christian faith is apparent from a threefold perspective: the treasuring of the faith, the transmission of the faith and the teaching of the faith. Treasuring of the Faith here means the safekeeping of the faith and preserving its authenticity and integrity. To ensure that it is preserved in an unadulterated form for future generations, Paul states in Galatians that not even angel should be allowed to meddle with the content of the faith (Gal. 1:8) (Noelliste, 2017, pp. 78-89).

With regards to the Transmission of the Faith, Paul teaches that theological education preserves the faith by assuring its transmission. Not only did Paul instruct Timothy to guard the things he has heard, but he was also given the responsibility to ensure that the coming generation receives the faith which has been treasured (2 Timothy 2:2). The faith is not only treasured for its own sake; it is preserved so that the next generation may receive it intact. Timothy is urged to entrust it to reliable and trustworthy people to ensure that the faith is transmitted safely to the next generation, leading to transformative morality. Reliable trans-mission of the Christian faith requires trained theological leadership. Left in the care of ill-equipped leaders, the faith that the next generation would inherit may be hybrid. In the words of British missiologist Andrew Walls, such trans-generational "diffusion" is the "lifeblood of historic Christian faith" (Noelliste, 2017, pp. 78-89). In Paul's view, theological education or training preserves the Christian faith by fostering reliable teaching of the faith. The faith must be treasured and faithfully transmitted to be accurately taught to God's people. Timothy is urged to train faithful people so that they will teach others (2 Timothy 2:2) (*Ibid.*).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to establish that morality concentrates on human conduct and values acceptable to societal norms and values. Transformative education advocates learning beyond the reproduction of knowledge towards critical reflection. The use of educational process to accelerate the transformation of learners' broad sets of predispositions about the world, which stem from their social and cultural environment, to make sense of everyday life is germane. The indication of a transformative theological education leading to acceptable morality in society is the outcome of the fruit it produces yearly. As such, the graduates of transformative theological education evangelize better, preach better, administrate better, and live a transformed life with a good moral standard.

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