

Seminary Training Going Beyond Church Shepherds

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Abstract

The topic of training leaders who are not pastors or workers within the local church has not received much attention from various contributors. However, the current state of the church in Africa and the requirements of the Great Commission, as outlined by the Lord Jesus Christ, necessitate that seminaries and pastors' schools should cultivate a diverse leadership that can effectively address the numerous challenges faced by Christian communities and African society. In this article, the researcher contends that in addition to the conventional training provided to pastors or shepherds of local churches, theological and biblical training institutions must now place particular emphasis on equipping missionaries, evangelists, individuals with multiple vocations serving God, and other valuable workers who will help address the needs of our environment and African society at large. The progress of the church and society in Africa demonstrates that this need has become a calling for Christian training institutions operating on the continent today.

1. Introduction

The role or place of seminaries and Bible schools in training God's servants has been and continues to be the subject of much debate. On this subject, Vance C. Kirkpatrick (Kirkpatrick, 1998) once wrote that "The Lord will be back before experts agree on the exact nature and approved methods of theological education."ⁱ Many Christian leaders and scholars on the continent have even devoted large volumes of books to reflecting on the quality of the impact that theological and biblical training institutions have on the life of the local church and the African community in all its socio-economic, political, and cultural dimensions. At this level, quick scrutiny of the table of contents of the book *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*ⁱⁱ shows us that rich and profound reflections on the effectiveness of theological and pastoral training institutions on the African continent are already being undertaken by African leaders themselves. Many relevant topics are addressed with rigor and an open mind. Contributors to the 2013 series emphasized the need for training that is theologically rich for the African man in an extremely pluralistic context; however, despite the richness of this volume of self-assessment by African theological

educators, ⁱⁱⁱ we have to admit that the subject of training beyond the classic and traditional targets is not addressed properly.

Indeed, training leaders other than pastors or workers within the local church has not attracted the attention of the various contributors. Yet, the current situation of the church in Africa, and the very requirements of the Great Commission as given by the Lord Jesus Christ, demand that seminaries and pastors' schools should develop a sufficiently varied leadership, that is a varied leadership that will be able to respond to the multiple demands facing Christian communities and the African society in which they live and share life.

In this article, it is argued that beyond the classic training offered to pastors or shepherds of local churches, our theological and biblical training institutions must now give special attention to the training of missionaries, evangelists, multiple-vocation servants of God and many other useful workers that will help meet the need of our environment and our African society in general. The development of the church and the society in Africa shows that this need is becoming a mission for Christian training institutions operating on the continent today (Harold and Ronnie 2021).

To do justice to such a subject, several issues need to be addressed, but, for the limited scope of this article, I shall consider the following: What is the role of theological seminaries, Bible schools, and pastoral training institutions in equipping professional leaders other than local church pastors? Can today's theological training institutions deliver respectable credentials for missionaries, evangelists, church planters, chaplains, counselors, and others? How can pastoral training itself be reframed to produce mission-minded pastors, shepherds who see the Great Commission as the *raison d'être* of their mission in the church, and who mobilize their communities to invade the nations so that they (the nations) become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ?

2. A Historical Overview of the Role of Theological Training

Reading Matthew 28:20b, we understand that the Lord Jesus Christ's order included training all those who believed. Indeed, the expression, "...teach them to observe all that I have commanded you," ^{iv} applies to all disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ from every nation. Theological and biblical training must necessarily target the whole body of Christ. To

accomplish this task of equipping the body of Christ, Paul affirmed, “And he gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry and the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). This statement by Paul teaches us many truths, including the following two:

-Truth #1: Many workers carry out the ministry. The whole body of Christ must be involved in ministry. One person, regardless of his giftedness cannot do it alone and he pastoral ministry in a local church will not be enough to fulfill the Great Commission.

-Truth #2: The leaders involved in the mission of training or equipping the saints are multiple: Paul identified apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers as people God makes available to the church for the training of the saints and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. If the above two points are true, we can ask ourselves why our seminaries and training schools in Africa focus solely on training pastors. What about the others?

Another valuable argument is the one that the history of theological education reveals to us. Providing a historical overview of the creation of theological training institutions, Andrew Walls (Walls, 2013) ^v argues that it is possible to demonstrate that classical theological institutions as we know them today arose primarily “out of the Church’s need to nurture, strengthen and instruct its members, and to explain the Christian faith to the outside world in terms of contemporary globalizing culture.” ^{vi} In summary, Walls asserts that from the very beginning, Christian theological institutions were created for two main purposes:

- **Purpose #1:** To train, equip, and edify local church members, but also
- **Purpose #2:** To help equip all local church members to minister to non-Christians to win them to Christ.

Walls argues that the same truth is well perceptible in the age of radical Christianity and its monasteries. He argues that the theological and biblical training of that period of church history was not aimed solely at doctrinal and moral purity alone. Some monasteries were training men and women for evangelism and direct ministry to people outside the faith community.

Yet, according to Walls, these two objectives for which theological training

institutions were created have never been faithfully preserved. During its expansion and growth, the Church and its training institution lost its concept of Christ-centered leadership. The Church developed a universal organisational strategy to maintain orthodoxy in its struggle against heretical groups such as Simon Magus' Gnostics, Marcion's Marcionites, and the Montanist movement. From Irenaeus of Lyons onwards, the idea of apostolic succession developed. Church leaders bore distinctive titles such as bishops, presbyters, deacons, readers, and janitors. Commenting on the origin of the development of hierarchical leadership in the Church, Kenneth Scott Latourette (Latourette 1997) wrote:

From the beginning of the second century, a distinct division began to appear between clergy and laity, despite the fact that every Christian was considered a priest to God in the first century. By the end of the second century, the clergy had clearly become a distinct "order", a designation probably derived from that given to Roman magistrates in a tightly stratified society. ^{vii}

The adverse consequences of this hierarchical structure affected the whole body of Christ, even the theological education system. Fulfilling the Great Commission became the burden of a select few Christians. Relegating most of the Church to the rank of laity, some men and women were trained in rigorous monastic schools. Christianity, which had begun as a movement of ordinary people, became the work of a few professionals. Although the reformers were instrumental in reforming doctrines, there was no substantial change in their understanding of leadership. Four types of leadership emerged during the Protestant reform movement. They were the educated and ordained clergymen, the rule of the elders or the council of the Pietists and the Anabaptists, and the leadership of the renewal movements such as the Methodists and Baptists. According to Douglas McConnell (McConnell, 2000), the latest style of leadership existing in contemporary ecclesiology and missionary endeavors is the charismatic style. ^{viii} This type of leadership involves strong charismatic personalities who have attracted many followers, creating an interdenominational movement.

In Africa, specifically, Christian leadership has developed under various influences. African culture, colonialism, and the Western missionary agencies that penetrated the continent have had an indelible mark on the type of leadership found on the continent today. First and foremost,

colonial masters and early missionary organizations introduced the concept of reading and writing in many parts of Africa. Literacy and the language of the colonial masters became the distinguishing factors of civility and social integration. Work opportunities and social status depend on one's level of education. In churches or at the local justice or police station, the important role of those who knew how to write and read English, French, or Portuguese became inescapable. In the French colonies, the problem was even more complex because of France's system of direct administration. The first churches planted on the continent received leaders who were trained according to the Western model. The language of instruction belonged to the colonial masters. Peter Falk (Falk, 1979) assessed the educational efforts of the early missionaries as the cause of the emergence of the independent African Church. He observed that Church members were uneducated, and the clergy were thoroughly trained in a style disconnected from their culture. ^{ix}

In short, without exaggeration, we can say that the elitist clergy leadership syndrome of the medieval period in Western Europe negatively impacted the theological training system in Africa. Indeed, we must remember that our theological and biblical training seminaries have inherited a very complex tradition. First, they are influenced by errors originating from the church of the medieval period, which the churches of the Reformation did not sufficiently correct up to the period of the colonial churches. Colonial times' theological and pastoral training institutions did not find it necessary to train people from outside the clerical body.

Their focus was on training pastors, the leaders of the local churches, because they envisioned the idea that these (the shepherds of the local churches) would train and equip the members of their community to carry out the mission in society. Unfortunately, this strategy did not work. Therefore, we believe that our leadership training and equipping institutions need to extend their efforts towards training people other than the shepherds of local churches.

Secondly, we can also conclude that African culture has something to do with the necessary changes in the training structure. African culture is not sufficiently democratic when it comes to sharing knowledge. We do not have the culture of sharing knowledge by writing; worse, we reserve knowledge for a closed circle of initiated people. For example, blacksmiths will share their knowledge with their family members alone.

We can therefore state with some ease and certainty that theological and pastoral training institutions were and continue to be seen as sacred forests reserved for the training of “sacred men” called pastors, reverends, or bishops. This article is a call to openness. Our pastoral and theological training institutions must target people other than pastors who work within the local church. Our training institutions must add another that is more missional to their pastoral vocation. Training leaders capable of serving God directly in society is a requirement from which our training institutions cannot evade. Such a responsibility is a role reserved exclusively for our seminaries and schools of pastoral training.

3. The Role of Seminaries and School of Biblical Formation in Training of Workers other than Pastors

Some Reasons for Training Workers other than Local Church Pastors

We affirm that seminaries and schools of biblical, theological, or pastoral formation on the African continent must widen or open their doors to training leaders and workers other than the pastors-shepherds of local churches. There are several reasons for this, including the following eleven:

1. **Reason #1:** The Great Commission requires everyone’s contribution. As clarified above, the Great Commission has not been entrusted to religious specialists and professionals. It has been entrusted to all disciples—to the church without exception.

2. **Reason #2:** The fall of man has had harmful consequences whose ramifications extend to all aspects of human life. This being the case, we must understand that the consequences of the fall are not limited to the spiritual dimension of human life alone. It has a detrimental impact on work, government, the environment, communication, and life. Many Christians are involved in these different areas of life. It is therefore normal, even urgent, for Christian training institutions to seek to involve themselves in training brothers and sisters working in non-ecclesiastical professional environments. At this point, we can parallel Paul’s argument by posing a series of rhetorical questions that follow:

How will they defend and testify to the faith they are not certain and convinced of? And how will they be convinced of it if they have not been educated? And how will they be educated in it, if no seminaries and biblical institutions make it a priority in their training program?

And how will there be Christian workers and leaders other than pastors and shepherds in local churches if they are not also seen as people to be sent out to positively impact this world? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who announce peace and bring good news! ^x

To take up Walter Rauschenbush's well-known message, theological and pastoral training institutions in Africa need to go beyond the traditional training of pastors and engage in the training of leaders who can be directly involved in the "Christianization of the social order". This means training people who will help end child abuse, who will care for "street children," and other marginalized people in today's rapidly urbanizing cities.

3. Reason #3: Historically speaking, seminaries or Christian training schools were created to help churches solve problems their faithful in society faced. Today, these problems are diverse, complex, and multiple. Training Christians directly from seminaries and Bible schools is not a competition against local churches. Such an initiative would be welcomed by local churches, who would be relieved and helped in their task of equipping community members to serve God in society more effectively.

4. Reason #4: A monastic, inward-looking faith always weakens and loses the battle. Suppose formation institutions remain closed and do not seek to address the needs that society presents to Christians. In that case, they will end up distancing themselves from reality by shutting themselves away in the classrooms of their schools.

5. Reason #5: The survival of seminaries and training schools requires variation and innovation in the types of training they offer people. For example, the rate at which churches are being planted on the continent does not match how Christians respond to the call to serve God in full-time pastoral ministry. Today, many Christians prefer to serve God without giving up their professional activity. Training institutions need to respond to the needs of this new generation of the gospel ministry workers.

6. Reason #6: Churches in Africa need to prepare the leaders necessary to face the multiple challenges imposed on them by development, urbanism, globalization, and even the progress of the Gospel on the

continent. Christians must be present on the political stage and in the public and private sectors. We believe that our theological training seminaries can influence these new generations of Africans at an early stage if they accept to diversify their training program.

7. Reason #7: Seminaries and traditional training schools have human and material resources unavailable in local churches, vocational training centers, and government schools. For example, spiritual, moral, and ethical biblical training is increasingly rare in public training institutions, which are increasingly liberal and anti-God.

8. Reason #8: For local denominations or church associations, training in a seminary or Bible school ensures good follow-up, making it easier for everyone to be responsible and accountable. It will be very difficult to track the doctrinal and ethical quality given by each local church if we have to leave them in charge of training workers without the involvement of the denomination to which they belong.

9. Reason #9: The financial burdens of training leaders can be minimized and well amortized when several churches agree to contribute to support seminaries or Bible training schools.

10. Reason #10: Seminaries and theological training schools are not constrained to serve the local church alone. They must serve man in his socio-economic, political, and cultural environment. Without competing with local churches, we believe that theological training institutions must become more involved in educating society. Consequently, they must diversify their training programs to include professional and liberal education. Pastoral and theological training schools can combine ethics, morality, and *savoir être* with competence or know-how.

11. Reason #11: Finally, seminaries and pastoral training schools not directly involved in missionary work will eventually disappear or become extremely liberal institutions. Indeed, Yemi Ladipo's maxim (Ladipo, 1989) that "A church that is not involved in mission will always remain a mission field" ^{xi} should apply to training structures where the church's pastor has been trained. When the training structure is not missional, the leaders trained there will not be nor will the churches they lead.

A. The Role of Seminaries and Bible Schools in the Training of Workers and Leaders Other than Pastors or Shepherds of Local Churches

The role of theological and pastoral training institutions in Africa is manifold. To enrich our reflection, we have drawn up a list below, which is far from being exhaustive.

1. Developing academic curricula that meets the needs of the training sought is an inescapable duty for our institutions.
2. Recruiting the right teachers or trainers for the training required is a major challenge that may seem insurmountable, but it must be faced.
3. The use of training methods that motivates and facilitates the commitment of the target audience is paramount. As an example of innovation, training institutions can use the decentralized training method with new technology.
4. Offering sufficiently competitive costs for the type of training sought can reduce competition with public and private schools.
5. Developing partnerships with appropriate structures interested in the vision and objectives of the seminary or pastoral or biblical training school for the type of training sought is a strength that our training institutions must explore.
6. Seeking government accreditation is a responsibility that falls to our training institutions. Suppose the diplomas awarded by our theological and pastoral training institutions are to be accepted by our governments. In that case, they must satisfy, as far as possible, the requirements laid down by the state. Still, suppose the requirements contradict the ethical and moral values of theological and biblical training institutions, including those of partner churches. In that case, we believe they (the training institutions in question) must remain faithful to God by preserving their doctrinal integrity.
7. Communication with local churches and Christian denominations is a key responsibility. It is up to training institutions to communicate their vision and new training programs to the churches.
8. The development of appropriate didactic and pedagogical resources

will highlight the serious nature of the project. The major challenge to be met is the development of teaching resources. Partnerships with Christian universities elsewhere in Africa and the world can help to meet this challenge.

9. Understanding the needs or challenges presented by African societies today is a task not to be neglected. Training programs must take account of African realities. There's no point in offering students degrees and skills that will not be useful in the field.

10. Creativity in training non-literate people is also a challenge. Literacy remains a major problem for African peoples. Our theological and pastoral training schools and seminaries would gain enormously by developing appropriate methods for training this large part of the African population.

11. Preserving the spiritual and sacred atmosphere within African theological and pastoral training institutions remains a focus. Offering training programs to students other than pastors can lead to moral and ethical laxity within the institution. The challenge of maintaining rigor in conduct and ethics falls to the leaders and teachers who work there.

4. What Solutions can be found for Diplomas?

Diplomas remain a major challenge in education in Africa and elsewhere. We are living in the age of diplomas. The situation is worrying in that some people prefer to buy diplomas and titles without any skills in the given field of knowledge. Another diploma-related challenge is that of specialization. Very often, our theological diplomas, such as bachelor's or master's degrees in theology, are general. For example, someone with a university education in mathematics up to a master's level is more specialized in his or her field than someone with a master's degree in divinity. To deal with the problems of diplomas that need to be issued to recipients of the new open training program for lay people and workers other than shepherds in local churches, we suggest a few solutions, including the following:

1. **Solution #1:** What should we choose between competence and diploma? The first solution can be called competence plus attestation. In other words, training institutions must not allow themselves to be limited and paralyzed by the psychosis of accredited

diplomas. Competence must take precedence over diplomas and their accreditation. Indeed, skills in fields such as environmental management, rural health, inter-community conflict management, and others can be acquired without a high level of literacy. For example, mechanics and other workers in the informal sector do not necessarily have diplomas, yet they are very useful and efficient in their field.

2. A solution to accreditation problem #2: A second solution to the degree problem is collaboration or partnership with existing Christian universities. There are Christian universities on the continent today. For example, Baptist seminaries and theological and pastoral education schools in Nigeria can easily be accredited by Bowen University in Iwo, Nigeria. At this level, I believe that Baptist conventions in French-speaking countries can do the same.

3. A solution to accreditation problem #3: The third possible solution is to meet the state's requirements for the degrees offered to be recognized in the country. The University of the Christian Alliance of Abidjan (UACA de la FATEAC) in Côte d'Ivoire is an example of this possibility. This university, the fruit of the work of the Christian Alliance Church, fortifies the work done by FATEAC (the Faculty of the Christian Alliance Church).^{xii}

4. A solution to the accreditation problem #4: A fourth solution to the diploma problem is regionalizing our training efforts. For French-speaking African countries, theological and pastoral training institutions need to standardize their curricula and training programs to offer sufficiently credible diplomas.

5. A Solution as we give priority to specialized degrees in a field of practical knowledge #5: To avoid confusion between degrees obtained for pastoral ministry and other non-pastoral ministries, we believe it is necessary to find appropriate titles to the field of training offered to students who are not interested in pastoral ministry. For example, a bachelor's or master's degree in social relationship management or in marriage counseling will be very specific and would be of more interest to any Christian who does not necessarily want to become a full-time pastor. Degrees in apologetics, evangelism, cross-cultural communications, Bible translation, leadership and

administration, crisis management and reconciliation, rural and urban ministry, church planting, and many others are well suited to people who look forward to working outside local churches.

The five examples of solutions given above are not an exhaustive list of the difficulties our seminaries and Bible schools may encounter if they agree to broaden their scope to include workers or Christians other than church pastors or shepherds. The five examples above show that where there is a will, there will always be a solution to the difficulties we may encounter if we accept the flexibility of making the necessary changes that yield results.

5. Developing a Missional Theological Institution

A careful reading of Michael McCoy's contribution (*Handbook of Theological Education in Africa: 523-9*) shows that our theological, biblical, and pastoral African institutions must make radical decisions to develop a transformational training policy. For example, courses such as biblical hermeneutics, preaching, church history, or even the Christian doctrine of salvation or man can be taught well by considering missiology as the common thread in every class presentation. Such an approach is possible when the teacher keeps missiology at the center of his or her teaching. Yet, missiology is considered a separate discipline from the other disciplines taught at the seminary.

Secondly, it is important that all teachers, whatever their academic discipline, are missiology-initiated. They must practice missions by having a practical personal ministry in the community. Seminaries and theological training institutions must insist that all teachers, whatever their academic field, have a personal and practical ministry in the community.

Better still, as we wrote earlier, theological and pastoral training institutions in Africa would do well to diversify their academic credentials. Like theological institutions in the USA and Canada, Seminaries and Bible schools in Africa need to offer degrees in evangelism, church planting, and sustainable development. When we talk about training leaders in the field of sustainable development, we are talking about people who can work in the social, economic, and environmental sectors. We believe that these community activity areas need Christian ethics and the message of redemption that only the Great Commission can offer.

Other than changes in the subjects offered in our seminaries, our training institutions will be able to achieve their goal of training leaders other than local church pastors if they agree to enroll non-residential students. The residential training system is increasingly showing its limitations. It is very expensive for the training institutions and the students, who are obliged to work and care for their families.

Another radical change that needs to be made if our theological and pastoral training seminaries are to develop a missionary mentality and culture, in my opinion, is to require that all the teachers and workers who work in our seminaries or pastoral training schools are engaged in practical ministry that requires them to have regular personal contact with the community. The reason is simple. One cannot teach effectively and zealously what has not been personally experienced. To have a global mission and action, you need a global vision.

6. Conclusion

At this stage of our discussion, what should we retain? Let's remember that our training institutions in Africa have reached a critical point where they need to examine themselves and ask the following question: Are we fulfilling the mission entrusted to us by the Lord Jesus Christ by limiting our field of action to the training of local church pastors or shepherds only? Did the Lord Jesus Christ not have all believers in view when he gave the Great Commission? Must we continue to make the same mistakes handed down to us by our elders? This article is a direct and unequivocal response to the fact that the time has come to broaden our fields of action for the formation of the body of Christ. Such a decision will not only contribute to the progress of the Gospel, but it will also help revitalize our seminaries and pastoral training schools. By deciding to widen the circle of people to be trained and equipped for the work, our training institutions will free themselves from the prison in which many monasteries imprisoned themselves in the past.

Indeed, such innovation will not happen without our formation institutions facing major challenges and difficulties. But is this not where God's promises become a source of encouragement for us? For He says, and let's quote it well, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all simply and without reproach, and it will be given to him." ^{xiii}

7. Notes

- i. Vance C. Kirkpatrick, “Theological Education and Missions: An African Case Study” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* edited by John Mark Terry and Co (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 526.
- ii. Handbook of Theological Education in Africa is published by Regnum Studies in Global Christianity (formerly Global Theological Voices Series). The main aim of the editors of this 1000+ page book is to explore and discuss the challenges facing “global Christianity”, with a special focus on churches in Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Africa. Isabel Apawo and Dietrich Werner are the main editors for the 2013 series, which gave special attention to theological training institutions in Africa.
- iii. Readers of this article will be able to appreciate the quality and relevance of the various topics covered on theological education in Africa by consulting the table of contents of the electronic copy of the Handbook of Theological Education in Africa available on the net at <https://www.ocms.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Handbook-of-Theological-Education-in-Africa.pdf>.
- iv. The Great Commission described in Matthew 28:19-20 was not entrusted to scribes, Pharisees, priests, in a word, it was not given to temple professionals. He entrusted the mission of making disciples of all nations to ordinary men and women, workers, sinners, simple folk, some of whom had no formal academic training.
- v. Andrew Walls, “Theological Education from its earliest Jewish and African Beginnings” in *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, 47-8.
- vi. Idem.
- vii. Kenneth Scott LaTourette. *A History of Christianity : Beginnings to 1500*, ed. 123-34.
- viii. Douglas McConnell, “Leadership”, in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, edited by A. Scott Moreau 566.
- ix. Peter Falk. *La Croissance de l’Église en Afrique* (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1979), 483-90.
- x. Romans 10: 14-15. Paul was thinking of all those who had received the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. He was not referring to a limited group of professional churchgoers in the leadership of a local church.

xi. Yemi Ladipo, “Developing an African Mission Structure,” *East African Journal of Evangelical Theology* 8: 19-24.

xii. L’UACA de FATEAC L’UACA de FATEAC pour plus d’information voir <https://www.uacafateac.org/de-la-fateac-aluaca/>.

xiii. James 1:5.

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Author’s Declaration

The author declares that there is no financial gain or personal relationship(s) that inappropriately influenced him in the writing of this article.

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