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# Connecting Curriculum with Context

*A Handbook for Context Relevant  
Curriculum Development in  
Theological Education*

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# Introduction: The Challenge of Context

## 1. Background

Educational institutions globally are under increasing scrutiny as to whether the education that they provide is relevant to the local and global communities that they serve. Some of these questions deal with the kind of return on investment students expect from the high cost they pay for post-secondary education. *The central question is whether these institutions are being responsive to increasingly volatile and fast-changing social, economic and political contexts, and pluralistic societies.*

Seminaries are not immune from these questions. Until recently, most seminaries operated on the basis of imparting a core of knowledge that comprised of the foundational truths of the Christian faith. There were additional courses on homiletics and practical theology, namely, the skills needed for pastoral practice. The curriculum was a fairly standard package that could be transported across cultures and continents and was not sensitive to local culture, traditions and values.

Some institutions have been more sensitive to context and have a graduate profile, which identified the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to be effective in pastoral ministry in a specific context. This profile usually provides a template for the institution to ensure that its courses and training are focused on ensuring that the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes are acquired by the time of graduation. The profiles of some institutions also provide a framework for the graduate to continue learning

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over a lifetime. In some cases, the graduate profile would have been based on a formal or informal assessment of needs at a specific point in time within the churches where the graduates serve. However, most seminaries do not have a systematic and responsive mechanism that connects a changing context with the curriculum.

The issue of context raises the question as to what is the focus of seminary training. Is the focus to train the students to become pastors who are able *to do the work of the ministry* through activities such as evangelism, leading Bible studies, counseling, and preaching? Or is the focus on training the students *to enable and equip* church members to mature in Christ so that they are able to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12–15)? If the focus is only on the student to become a pastor, then any evaluation of effectiveness of the institution is based on whether the student completed the curriculum and was successfully trained. If the focus of training is on the graduate being able to equip a local church “for the work of ministry,” then an evaluation of the effectiveness of the curriculum does not end with the student successfully graduating, but on the graduate’s progress to equip the church where they minister.

While some seminaries would say that they do the latter, their courses may not reflect this. They may have courses on evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and what it means to be a missional church. But there would be little on how to equip church members to be effective in their ministries. The result is that often the pastor does all the “work of ministry” while the church members are not involved in meaningful ways. There is often little discussion on what impact on society and maturity of a congregation would actually look like (what does “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” mean).

## 2. The Problem

With the volatile changes taking place in so much of the global south, there are new factors that are impacting churches. The question is whether there are leaders who can guide and shepherd congregations through these times. There is a growing need for leaders who can move beyond merely trying to protect their churches from decline and decay and see God given opportunities for ministry and for declaring the Kingdom of God. There is a need for leaders who know more than the basics of biblical truth and preaching the Word, and

who are also able to address the issues in society confronting their church and its members from a biblical perspective – to be salt and light in their communities. The question of relevance is becoming increasingly important.

Part of the answer to these challenges lies in how the seminaries are responding to a changing environment. Are they asking questions about the relevance of their training and curriculum to the contexts that their graduates will be living and ministering in? These questions need to be addressed at a number of different levels:

- What theological understanding do the students need in order to understand and interpret their social, political, economic and religious contexts? While contextual theology may make some nervous because of the fear of deviating from what they understand to be the core tenets of the Christian faith, being able to develop contextual theology is critical in ensuring relevance of the revealed Word of God in a specific context.
- Do the students also have the tools for cultural exegesis and social analysis in order to understand a changing and volatile context? What implications does cultural exegesis and social analysis have for the training in practical theology, whether it is in preaching, teaching, training in discipleship or counseling?

The core of the problem is that most educational institutions (seminaries are no exception) do not realize that they operate within dynamic and complex social, economic, political and religious systems, and as a result do not have the administrative mechanisms that are able to identify changes in society and in the church and then respond accordingly, while maintaining the core of biblical truth.

### **3. Context, Theology and Theological Training**

It would be naïve to believe that anyone could read the Scriptures without the lenses of their own culture, gender, social and economic status, life experiences, season of life, political ideology, and value system. In order to become effective pastors, it is critical that seminary graduates understand the lenses of their church members. Trinity Lutheran Seminary professor, Mark Allan Powell, gives an example of life experiences influencing how one reads the Bible. He had his American students read the parable of the

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prodigal son in Luke 15:11–31, close their Bibles and then retell the story as faithfully as possible to their student partner. Powell notes that not a single one of his students mentioned the famine in Luke 15:14. Sometime later, while teaching in St Petersburg in Russia, he asked fifty participants to do the same. Forty-two of the fifty mentioned the famine. Why the difference? The Russians remembered or had been told first-hand of the Nazi siege of the city during World War II when 670,000 died from starvation. Their experience influenced how they read the Bible. Powell notes that for them, the parable was about God rescuing them from a desperate circumstance. While for the American students, who had never experienced a famine, the parable was about a disobedient son who repents and returns to his father, who in turns forgives him.

This is known as *domain specificity*. It means that a person's reactions, mode of thinking and intuition is dependent on the context in which the matter is presented. It is "what evolutionary psychologists call the 'domain' of the object or event . . . We react to a piece of information not on its logical merits, but on the basis of which framework surrounds it, and how it registers with our social-emotional system."<sup>1</sup>

Theology and context are integrally linked and this needs to be reflected in the training at seminaries. Princeton University theologian Daniel Migliore articulates the need to be aware of context and values. "Confession of Jesus Christ takes place in particular historical and cultural contexts. Our response to the questions of who we say Jesus Christ is and how he helps us is shaped in important ways by the particular context in which these questions arise."<sup>2</sup>

For a long time, theology focused on articulating the core and essence of the Christian faith systematically, referred to as "Biblical and Systematic Theology." It was believed that this constituted a corpus of truth that was not only unchangeable in the way it was articulated but was complete in and of itself. Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall describes that the challenge of Systematic Theology relating to context is in the very nature of what Systematic Theology is meant to be. He writes:

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1. Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2010), 53.

2. Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 197.

Systematic or dogmatic theology has been slow to learn the lessons of contextuality, especially its place-component, and one cannot avoid the conclusion that a (if not the) predominant reason for this lies in the character of the enterprise as such. The very adjectives *systematic* and *dogmatic* . . . betray a predilection to permanency. It so easily happens that a . . . desire to “see the thing whole,” to integrate, to describe connections, to honor the unity of the truth, and so on becomes, in its execution, an exercise in finality.<sup>3</sup>

However, over time the understanding of what theology is has moved beyond this to try and understand the relevance of our faith and spirituality in an increasingly complex and pluralistic world where moral dilemmas are pushing against boundaries that have not previously existed.<sup>4</sup> Migliore writes about this **process**.

Theology must be *critical reflection* on the community’s faith and practice. Theology is not simply reiteration of what has been or is currently believed and practiced by a community of faith . . . when this responsibility for critical reflection is neglected or relegated to a merely ornamental role, the faith of the community is invariably threatened by shallowness, arrogance and ossification.<sup>5</sup>

From the 1920s to the 1950s one of the things Karl Barth focused on was the **attitude** that is required as the community of faith seeks to examine itself in the light of revealed truth. “Theology is an act of repentant humility . . . This act exists in the fact that in theology the church seeks again and again to examine itself critically as it asks itself what it means and implies to be a church among men.”<sup>6</sup>

Alister McGrath defines the **understanding of theology**. He writes that Christian theology “is therefore understood to mean the systematic study

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3. Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 45.

4. The Gospel and Our Culture Network, <http://www.gocn.org/> is “A network to provide useful research regarding the encounter between the gospel and our culture, and to encourage local action for transformation in the life and witness of the church.”

5. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, xv.

6. Karl Barth, *God in Action* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1936), 44.



of the ideas of the Christian faith<sup>7</sup> which include the issues of sources, of development, of relationships, and of applications.<sup>8</sup> With specific regards to applications he says, “Christian theology is not just a set of ideas: it is about making possible a new way of seeing ourselves, others, and the world, with implications for the way in which we behave.”<sup>9</sup>

So while truth is universal, theology is contextual because it influences how we live out our faith and spirituality. Most of the basic understandings in systematic theology evolved and crystalized as a result of questions or challenges to the Christian faith during specific periods of history. So in effect, all theology is contextual. For example, John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* are his **theological method**. Though Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli wrote extensively, they never systematized their theology. Calvin’s *Institutes* is one of the earliest major systematic presentations of the core of Reformation theology. In retrospect, the *Institutes* are a reflection of Calvin’s attempts at developing theology in the context of sixteenth-century Europe, and then applying theology to daily life, specifically in Geneva. For Calvin, theology was not just an academic discipline developed in isolation, but it was developed and applied in context.

Gustavo Gutierrez, the Peruvian theologian and Dominican priest, often referred to as the voice of Liberation Theology, states the obvious:

People today often talk about contextual theologies but, in point of fact, theology has always been contextual . . . When Augustine wrote *The City of God*, he was reflecting on what it meant for him and for his contemporaries to live the gospel within a specific context of serious historical transformations.<sup>10</sup>

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7. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 5th. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 101.

8. The “sources” address the sources on which Christian ideas are based and include the Christian Bible, tradition, reason and experience. “Development” looks at how ideas have evolved over time. This is the field of historical theology. “Relationships” looks at how the various Christian ideas relate to each other – “the interconnected network of ideas”. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 101.

9. *Ibid.*, 102.

10. Daniel Hartnett, “Remembering the Poor: An Interview with Gustavo Gutierrez,” *America, the National Catholic Weekly* (2003), 3 February, accessed 14 December 2010, [http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article\\_id=2755](http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2755).

Yale Divinity School theologian, Hans Frei's *Typologies of Christian Theology*<sup>11</sup> describes the spectrum of **theological engagement with specific contexts**. On one end of the spectrum is theology as a unique academic discipline (and not necessarily Christian), which is universal in its content and has no specific relationship with context, if any. On the other end of the spectrum is Christian self-description (different from academic theology). This defines itself solely from Scripture and Christian experience, which is usually influenced significantly by personal experience, context and culture.

Hans Frei's colleague at Yale, Richard Niebuhr's taxonomy on *Christ and Culture* elaborates on engagement with context.<sup>12</sup> The understanding of how Christ relates to culture has a profound impact on the content of theological training curriculum to ensure relevance of content to culture. His taxonomy consists of five categories:

- *Christ against Culture* – This is based on 1 John as well as John 2:15–17 and 5:5, where the world is understood as the society that is outside the church. Niebuhr writes that in this category, “The counterpart of loyalty to Christ and the brothers is the rejection of cultural society.”<sup>13</sup>
- *Christ of Culture* – Christ is seen as the pinnacle of human achievement. Niebuhr writes, “In every culture to which the gospel comes there are men who hail Jesus as the Messiah of their society, the fulfiller of its hopes and aspiration.”<sup>14</sup> A pioneer in this thinking was Bishop John Nicol Farquhar in India whose book in 1913 entitled *The Crown of Hinduism* focused on the theology of “fulfillment,” in that Christ not only came to fulfill the law and the prophets (Matt 5:17) but also all the world's “higher religions.” It is in this sense that he stated that Christ is the “crown” of Hinduism.
- *Christ above Culture* – In Matthew 22:21 Jesus exhorts his disciples “to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” So according to Niebuhr, there is the realm where we live amidst culture, and the realm where Christ is. So

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11. Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, eds. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

12. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951).

13. *Ibid.*, 47.

14. *Ibid.*, 83.

culture is separate from Christ. Niebuhr writes, “The synthesist alone seems to provide for willing and intelligent cooperation with non-believers in carrying on the work of the world, while yet maintaining the distinctiveness of Christian faith and life.”<sup>15</sup>

- *Christ and Culture in Paradox* – The believer and the world exist in tension. The starting point of dealing with any cultural problem must be God’s act of reconciliation through Christ. The believer who lives in this duality and tension “knows he belongs to the culture and cannot get out of it, that God indeed sustains him in it and by it.”<sup>16</sup>
- *Christ the Transformer of Culture* – While there is a profound influence of sin upon the world, Niebuhr recognizes Christ as the redeemer. Niebuhr agrees with the theology of Augustine who saw Christ as the transformer of culture, the Christ who “redirects, reinvigorates and regenerates that life of man, expressed in all human works.”<sup>17</sup>

Baptist theologian and ethicist James McClendon elaborates on the concept of theological engagement with specific contexts. He states that there are two facts that undergird the development of theology and Christian ethics. The first of these is that theology is not without hard struggles. This struggle is seen in the interaction between the world and the theology held by the church. He states that theology, which is the basic points of view of the church, and the perspective of the world, are not the same. He writes, “The church’s story will not interpret the world to the world’s satisfaction.”<sup>18</sup> This difference cannot be diminished. He explains, “Conspiring to conceal the difference between the church and the world, we may in the short run entice the world, but we will only do so by betraying the world.”<sup>19</sup>

The reason theology will always struggle with the world is because there is a moral dimension rooted in a biblical worldview in theology’s interaction with culture. The gospel will always confront the evil in culture and society. Veteran missionary and missiologist Paul Heibert warns that contextualization is not an indiscriminate adopting of culture, customs and values:

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15. *Ibid.*, 143.

16. *Ibid.*, 156.

17. *Ibid.*, 209.

18. James McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology Vol. 1*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 17.

19. *Ibid.*, 18.

The foreignness of the culture we add to the gospel offends and must be eliminated. But the gospel itself offends. It is supposed to offend, and we dare not weaken its offense. The gospel must be contextualized but it must remain prophetic. It must stand in judgment of what is evil in all cultures as well as in all persons.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore attaining the right balance in interacting with the world is a challenge. Mennonite theologian Thomas Finger states that the church cannot be separated from the world, though, as he states, the Anabaptists have sometimes attempted to do this. Finger writes, “Theology is always in dialogue with its cultural contexts . . . including the academic sphere. Theology tests the church’s current beliefs and often revises them through conversations with its culture. Anabaptists should not only celebrate their distinctives but also recognize how preoccupation with distinctives can encourage narrowness, exclusivity and a false sense of superiority.”<sup>21</sup>

The second fact McClendon states is that because the church is not one congruent whole, there are divided theologies. He refers to German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, whom he considers the father of modern theology, who argued that any given theology must represent and refer to the doctrine of some particular Christian body at a particular time.<sup>22</sup> So the various theological approaches and streams arise from specific contexts at specific times, which may or may not be relevant in other contexts in different periods of history.

British theologian and missiologist Andrew Walls refers to the “translation principle,” when the gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, is communicated in different cultures and places. Walls writes, “Incarnation is translation. When God in Christ became man, divinity was translated into humanity . . . The first divine act of translation thus gives rise to a constant succession of new translations. Christian diversity is the necessary product of the incarnation.” While this translation includes language and culture, one wonders if it should also include patterns of thought and reasoning, as well as philosophical frameworks and worldviews. While the gospel message

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20. Paul Heibert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 86.

21. Thomas N. Finger, *Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 96.

22. McClendon, *Ethics*, 18.

is universal, it is contextual in the way it is translated and understood in different cultures and socio-economic groups.

Theology needs to be systematic, but it also needs to be relevant in each and every context where the church is present. Contextualization will always result in the gospel standing in judgment of society and therefore there needs to be critical reflection by the church on what God has to say about issues of injustice, social concern, traditions, culture, and values in a specific context. The local church does not exist in a vacuum, separate from society, but is an institution in the community. Douglas John Hall points out that a focus on a single systematic and dogmatic theology in its “reluctance to open itself to the great *variety* of worldly contexts . . . has again and again resisted criticism from the perspectives of those whose worlds were virtually ignored or excluded in the great systems of Christian thought. This is not a mere academic concern, for the excluded ones have not just been individuals, or tiny minorities, but whole populations, whole races, whole economic and other groupings.”<sup>23</sup> *Any Christian ministry or Christian ethic and the church’s response to social issues need to flow out of the understanding of contextual theology.*

Theological training ultimately is meant to train individuals to minister in specific contexts. Eugene Peterson writes as a pastor, that all theology is rooted in geography. “Now is the time to rediscover the meaning of the local, and in terms of church, the parish. All churches are local. All pastoral work takes place geographically.”<sup>24</sup> If this is true, then do the graduates have the ability and the tools to understand the local?

#### 4. Models of Training

The effectiveness of the type of training for Christian vocation is directly connected to the context within which the graduates will be ministering. While distinctions are made between the types of training provided by a Bible school, a seminary, and the theology department of a university, these categories with their courses and graduation requirements are in no way standardized and the categories are not discrete.

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23. Hall, *The Cross*, 48.

24. Eugene Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 128.

There are three commonly accepted models of theological education. The original thinking was developed by David Kelsey of Yale Divinity School as a bipolar approach of **classical** versus **vocational**, reflecting “the two normative types of theological education.”<sup>25</sup> To this was added Robert Bank’s **missional** approach.<sup>26</sup>

**The classical model**, sometimes referred to as “Athens,” defines theological education as Christian character formation or *paideia* (παιδεία). It is derived from classical Greek philosophical educational methodology and literally means child rearing or education, and is a process of molding character. It was a system of cultural education for older children that included rhetoric, grammar, mathematics, music, philosophy, natural history, and gymnastics – all the subjects that were valued in ancient Greek culture. The objective was to produce well-rounded and fully educated citizens.<sup>27</sup> The concept of *paideia* does not start with the individual person and their potential but with the concept of the ideal person. So the process of education was to educate and mold human beings into the ideal man who represented human nature in its truest form. Philosophers, artists, sculptors, educators and poets drew their inspiration from the concept of an ideal man. The goal of classical education was the transformation of the individual.

The early church adopted and then adapted this model. Some of the church Fathers saw the Christian faith as a form of *paideia*, that in order to grow in one’s faith, one’s character had to be formed. By the medieval and monastic period it had become the dominant educational philosophy. For Gregory of Nyssa the goal of Christianity was *deificatio* (Latin, meaning “making divine” or edification), and *paideia* (character formation and molding worldview) was the way to achieve it. *Paideia* also influenced Basil of Caesarea in the development of his monastic rules.<sup>28</sup> The objective was to enable individuals to develop a holistic vision that understands and grasps the totality of life, including the world. Rather than just knowing about God, the focus was on

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25. David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 27.

26. Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

27. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993), 29–30.

28. Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 90. St. Basil’s *Wider and Shorter Rules* became the model for eastern monasticism from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onward. They influenced the development of the monastic orders established by St Benedict of Norcia, St Dominic, and St Francis of Assisi.

knowing God. Brian Edgar at Asbury Theological Seminary writes, “It is not about *theology*, that is, the formal study of the *knowledge* of God, but it is more about what Kelsey calls *theologia*, that is gaining the wisdom of God.”<sup>29</sup> The emphasis was on holiness and the transformation of the individual. Edgar states that in this model of theological education, holiness, and moral and spiritual transformation are central. He states that the implication is that curriculum needs to address the issues of personal and moral formation of the student, and the values of the faculty and institution need to be aligned in a way to accomplish that.

**The vocational model**, referred to as “Berlin” and with its roots in the Enlightenment, sees theological education as being a preparation for a professional Christian vocation and therefore needed to be situated within the context of a university as an academic discipline. The term *wissenschaft* is a German term that means a study or science that requires systematic research. The origin of *wissenschaft* as a model for seminaries is Friedrich Schleiermacher’s (1768–1834) pioneering work at Humboldt University in Berlin. This was rooted in the debate that originated in seventeenth-century England and Holland, of the need for modern theology to be a critical discourse where the parameters are not necessarily set by tradition or Christian doctrine. There was also the need for theology to develop as an academic discipline so that it could be classified as a system of knowledge institutionalized within a university. The goal was no longer the moral and personal formation of individuals through the study of authoritative texts, but in training students in rigorous enquiry in order to move from theory to practical applications.

Schleiermacher’s task was to design a curriculum that would train professional ministers for the State Church in Germany, within the context of defending theology’s status as an academic discipline. He built on the fourfold structure of traditional theological curriculum from during the Reformation that was used to train pastors and teachers. This consisted of Biblical Studies, Church History, Dogmatics (referred to as Systematic Theology in more recent curriculums), and Practical Theology. He adapted it to a modern university context. While philosophy and history from the four areas of study fit well within the university disciplines, the challenge was to

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29. Brian Edgar, “The Theology of Theological Education,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3 (2005): 210.



establish practical theology as an academic discipline. For the critics, practical theology was like any other vocational skill, trade or craft that could be taught in a “trade” school such as a seminary and should not be part of a science university. Schleiermacher’s argument was that the university had a mandate to train clergymen; their training was no different than that of practitioners of medicine and law. In all three disciplines there was a progression from theory to professional practice.<sup>30</sup> Adopting this model of study was at the loss of *paideia* and personal, moral and spiritual formation.

Schleiermacher’s model is still very much the framework that is used in most theological training today, though the specific content of the four areas of study may have changed. There is an understanding that both knowledge and skills are needed for pastoral ministry. Unfortunately, there are few connections between the study of the Bible and theology, and practical ministerial practice. Charles Wood at Southern Methodist University, points out that ministerial practice does not inform the theological disciplines, and there is little relevance between the “important” and “foundational” studies in theology and ministerial practice.<sup>31</sup> However, evangelical seminaries incorporate elements of both the classical and vocational models in their curriculum. There is an emphasis on character formation and the molding of worldview, as well as the “professional studies” required to be a pastor or in some kind of Christian ministry, though the emphasis is on the theory and knowledge.

The last commonly accepted model, **the missional model**, as developed by Robert Banks is referred to as “Jerusalem.” The missional model sees mission encompassing all aspects of life – family, friendships, work and neighborhood. For Banks, mission is not just being mission-oriented but “an education undertaken with a view to what God is doing in the world, considered from a global perspective.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore theological education is seen as part of mission. It’s a model that provides a connection between action and reflection. A missional model of theological education “places the main emphasis on theological mission, on hands-on *partnership* in ministry, based on interpreting the tradition and reflecting on practice with strong spiritual

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30. Friedrich Schleiermacher and Terrence Tice, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study: Revised Translation of the 1811 and 1830 Editions*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 137.

31. Charles Wood, *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Studies* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 13.

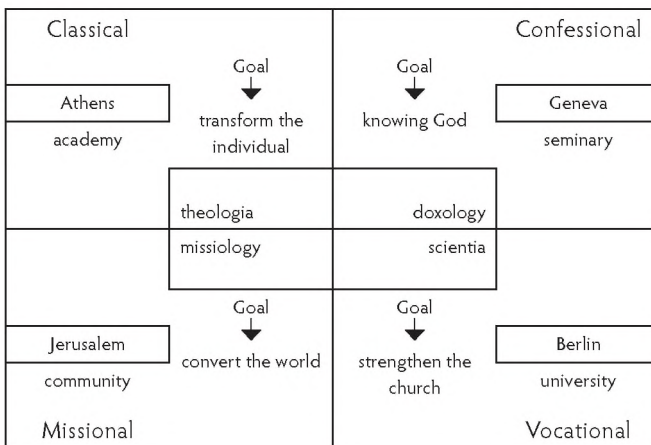
32. Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 142.



and communal dimensions.”<sup>33</sup> For Banks, the best theological education and spiritual formation is partly field-based, stretching students to do what they are studying, encompassing all of life, and addressing mission opportunities. Classrooms then are in effect “in-service equipping” to be faithful and effective in ministries the students are already involved in. Leadership formation and theological education is most effective when theory and practice, and action and reflection are combined.

The thinking on the three categories has been further developed to incorporate other models of theological education. Brian Edgar, professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, adds a fourth model called **the confessional model**. Referred to as “Geneva,” the goal of theological education is to know God through the means of grace and the traditions in a particular faith community, and more specifically through the creed and confession of that community. This involves “formation . . . through *in*-formation about the tradition and *en*-culturation with it.”<sup>34</sup> This is done through teaching about the founders, the heroes, the struggles, the strengths, and the traditions that are both distinctive and formative for that community. Examples of this are denominational affiliated seminaries and training institutions of specific mission agencies.

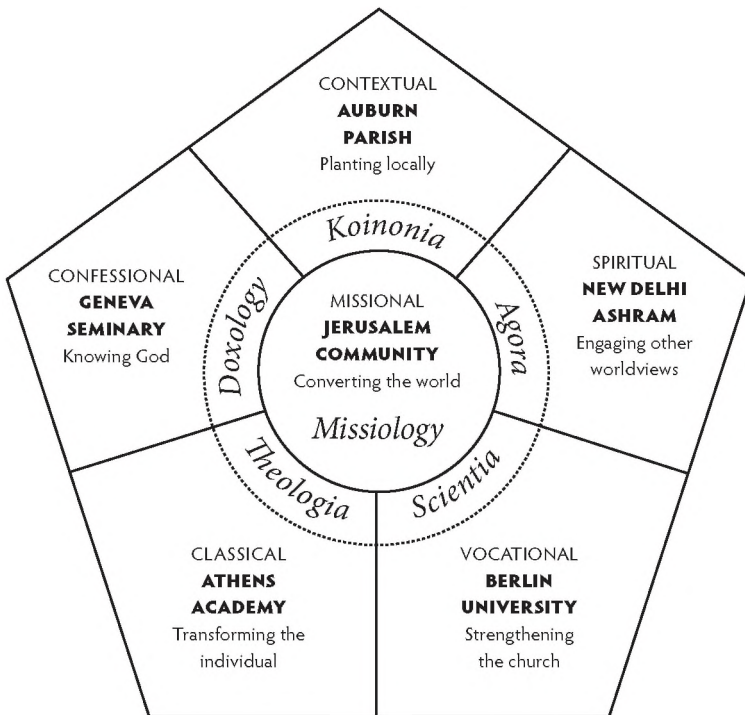
Fig. 1.1 Four Models of Theological Education<sup>35</sup>



33. Ibid., 144.

34. Edgar, *The Theology*, 213.

35. Adapted from Brian Edgar, “The Theology of Theological Education,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3 (2005): 213.

Fig. 1.2 Six Models of Theological Education and Missional Spirituality<sup>36</sup>

Darren Cronshaw, mission researcher at the Baptist Union of Victoria in Australia, adds two further models.<sup>37</sup> The first is **the contextual model** and referred to as “Auburn.” According to Cronshaw, theology and mission need to be expressed in specific contexts such as those in his local neighborhood of Auburn.<sup>38</sup> Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, writing about pastoral ministry states, “I do not think that the geographical parish can ever become irrelevant or marginal. There is a sense in which the primary sense of neighborhood must remain primary, because it is here that men and women relate to each other

36. Adapted from Darren Cronshaw, “Reenvisioning Theological Education and Missional Spirituality,” *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 9, no. 1 (2012): 13.

37. Darren Cronshaw, “Reenvisioning Theological Education and Missional Spirituality,” *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 9, no. 1 (2012): 9–27.

38. John Franke, *The Character of Theology: An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 90.

simply as human beings and not in respect of their functions in society.”<sup>39</sup> So theological training for the contextual model deals with understanding local context and learning how to build community (*koinonia*). The concept is that the “parish” is an “open set” (using terminology from Paul Heibert). The church as a covenant community is a bounded set at the center of the parish (so in effect the parish is a centered set). It is this community that lives out the gospel and in the process the boundaries dissolve. Together they experience community and demonstrate the love of God so that others may belong and one day believe.<sup>40</sup>

The second model that Cronshaw adds is **the spiritual model**, also known as “New Delhi.” This is a model for a multicultural and pluralistic world. Cronshaw writes:

A New Delhi context for missional spirituality is the ashram.<sup>41</sup> As the balance of global power and Christian influence is shifting to the global South, Kraig Klaudt artfully suggests that certain Indian ashrams feature helpful characteristics that theological education can adopt. These ashrams: are located “in the world” without fences; are open to all; offer community living that is engaged in service; emphasize simple living and spiritual maturity more than publishing; provide a holistic curriculum of intellectual, spiritual, political, aesthetic and relational development; and create time and space for spirituality and self-awareness. Locating theological education and missional spirituality in New Delhi reminds me to engage with the worldviews of my neighbors and to welcome the alternative model of the ashram.<sup>42</sup>

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39. Lesslie Newbigin, *Sign of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 64.

40. Stuart Murray, *Church After Christendom* (Bletchley: Paternoster, 2005).

41. An ashram is a hermitage or a monastery. A Christian ashram is a unique place of retreat that is Christ-centered, and where an individual has the opportunity to explore questions regarding the Christian faith and life.

42. Cronshaw, “Reenvisioning Theological Education,” 12.

Table 1.1 Models of Theological Education<sup>43</sup>

Symbol	Athens	Berlin	Geneva	Jerusalem	Auburn	New Delhi
Model	Classical	Vocational	Confessional	Missional	Contextual	Spiritual
Context	Academy	University	Seminary	Community	Parish	Ashram
Goal/ Purpose	Transforming the individual	Strengthening the church	Knowing God	Converting the world	Planting locally	Engaging other worldviews
Emphasis	Personal formation: Knowing who ...	Interpretive skills: Knowing how ...	In- formation, en- culturation: Knowing what ...	Mission, partnership: Knowing for ...	Local, community: Knowing where ...	Multi- cultural, pluralistic: Knowing others ...
Formation	Individualized and focused on inner, personal, moral and religious transformation	Clarify vocational identity as the basis for Christian practice	Discursive analysis, comparison and synthesis of beliefs	Learning has to have reference to all dimensions of life, family, friendships, work and neighborhood	Learning how to be relevant locally	Learning to co-exist respectfully while retaining one's identity
Theology	Theology is the knowledge of God, not about God	Theology is a way of thinking, applying theory to life. Theology is applied: spiritual, missio- logical, vocational	Theology is knowing God through a specific tradition	Missiology is the mother of theology. It involves action – mission.	Theology is about being spiritually relevant locally	Theology is about under- standing the revelation of God in other religions and worldviews

43. Adapted from Brian Edgar, "The Theology of Theological Education," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3 (2005).

Teacher	Provider: of indirect assistance through intellectual and moral disciplines to help students undergo formation	Professor: The teacher is a researcher whom the students assist	Priest: Knowledge of tradition; lives and exemplifies it as well as knows it	Practitioner / missionary: The teacher is not removed from practice; teaching involves sharing lives as well as truth	Pastor: The teacher leads by being relevant in the community	Apologist: Where the teacher not only defends the faith but also builds bridges
Student	Cultivates his mind, character and spirit	Becomes a theoretician able to apply to practice	Initiated into the tradition, beliefs, vocation and ministry	Discipled to become a disciple-maker	Learns to serve the community	Learn to build bridges and defend the faith

## 5. Theological Training and Need

In order to understand the implications of the six typologies of theological education in today's world, Brian Edgar suggests asking the question, "What is it that makes something *theological* education?"<sup>44</sup> There are six dimensions to the answers:

- *The Content* – that it is about theology and about God.
- *The Purpose* – this would include not only knowledge but also the development of character, holiness and skills for life.
- *The Method* – defines how the training is to be done.
- *The Ethos* – is the individual and communal spirituality that permeates the whole process of education and training.
- *The Context* – identifies where the training takes place.
- *The People* – how does the faith of those involved define the education – both the content and the process?

In looking at the various models of theological training outlined above and connecting them to the context of the church today and the needs of

44. Edgar, *The Theology*, 208–217.

the congregations and for appropriate leadership, there are four kinds of theological training.

The first is **training in theology** for the laity in the churches. The purpose is to teach Christians about their faith, to answer their questions and doubts, for them to understand how to express their faith in their churches and community, and to have the appropriate tools to study the Bible. The objective of lay theological training is to enable Christians to find the foundations of and coherence in one's faith.<sup>45</sup>

The second is **training in ministerial theology** for full-time and bivocational Christians to become pastors, ministers and teachers for the ministries of the church. The purpose is to equip them to minister effectively through preaching, teaching, discipling, and meet the practical, emotional and social needs of a congregation. In order to do this they need both academic and practical theology. This would include skills in Bible study and biblical exegesis tools, an understanding of the biblical narrative(s) and subsequent church history, systematic and historical theology, as well as a biblical perspective on issues that Christians and the church face today. The practical theology skills would include training in homiletics, teaching, counseling, evangelism, discipling and mentoring. The purpose of any pastoral ministry is defined in Ephesians 4:12–13 “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

The third type is **training in professional theology** for the educators of those involved in ministry. Professional theologians are academics and are not necessarily involved in church ministries but should understand the needs of the church and the various ministries where the graduates minister. They are not only professional theologians but also know how to train ministers of the gospel.

The final type is **training in academic theology**. Situated in a university, academic theology is not necessarily rooted in Christian doctrine, theology or philosophy. It is the study of God and is rooted in anthropology, philosophy and world religions. Schleiermacher is attributed to have been the originator

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45. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, *Who needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 29–30.

of academic theology. James McClendon, writing about the impact of Schleiermacher on the study of and training in theology, writes:

In the eyes of his critics, Schleiermacher's liberal Protestantism has reduced theology, understood as doctrines about God, to anthropology, merely doctrines about human states and feelings. But to his followers, he had diminished pretentious rationalism in religion to make room for (affective) faith.

Schleiermacher went on to specify that all Christian proposition can be regarded as descriptions either of human states or of divine attributes, or of the constitution of the world (a triad he made basic to the structure of the *Glaubenslehre*), and pointed out that traditionally all three forms of doctrinal expressions have coexisted.<sup>46</sup>

From the nature of academic theology it is assumed that there is no connection with the local church.

## 6. Exercises

- A. Look at the six models of theological training described in section 4. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each.
- B. What elements of each model would be appropriate for your seminary or Bible college and the context within which it is located?
- C. Look at the chart opposite on the four kinds of theological training described in section 5. Identify the type of theological training that your institution is involved in or would like to be involved in. Is there is a different type of theological training that is appropriate for your context? Once you have identified the type of training, fill in the appropriate boxes by answering the questions in each line in detail.

This process will start to define the theological education you provide or would like to provide.

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46. James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Doctrine, Vol. 2* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 26.

	Questions	Theological Training for Laity	Training for Ministerial Theology	Training for Professional Theology	Training for Academic Theology
Content	<b>What</b> is the content of the training?				
Purpose	<b>Why</b> is this training being done?				
Method	<b>How</b> is this training to be done?				
Ethos	What <b>values</b> and <b>spirituality</b> permeate the training?				
Context	<b>Where</b> is the training conducted?				
People	<b>Who.</b> How does the <b>faith of those involved</b> define the education?				