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The Theology of Theological Education

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> Evangelical theological education as a whole today needs earnestly to pursue and recover a thoroughgoing theology of theological education.[1]

What is it that makes something *theological* education? The obvious answer for many is that it is *the content*. That is, it is education that is specifically about theology, about God (or, for some, about the experience of God). It is also possible to suggest that *the purpose* is definitive of what makes something theological education. After all, is it enough to say that knowledge is sufficient to qualify something as theological education if it does not also intend to develop character and skills in life and holiness? Then again, does *the method* play a role in defining theological education? What process is to be followed? Does it involve academic research or is it a personal search to find the ultimate good?

Many involved in theological education would also suggest that *the ethos* is as important as the content and the method. The spirituality, both individual and communal, which permeates the educational process, is critical. Of course, this relates to *the context* in which the education takes place. Some prefer the academy, others the church and some the wider community. The difference is theologically significant. One cannot really discuss the defining characteristics of theological education without also paying attention to *the people* involved. Does the faith of those involved define in some way

1 International Council for Evangelical Theological Education, *Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education* (2nd edition 1990).

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some education as being theological even if the content is not overtly so?

So, given these seven important dimensions of the education, what is it that makes it *theological* education? It is not hard to conclude that theology actually permeates the whole enterprise. It is even less difficult to see that the numerous possibilities mean that there can be significant differences in what is considered theologically central for the educational enterprise. Inevitably some forms of theological education stress one or other aspect more than another and may insist that one or other is absolutely fundamental.

This paper maps out the similarities and differences in four broad approaches to theological education. It begins with an assessment of David Kelsey's classical—vocational, bipolar approach to theological education in which he describes the poles as 'Athens' and 'Berlin'. To this is added Robert Banks' missional approach, referred to as 'Jerusalem' and then I add a fourth, confessional model that is also identified geographically as 'Geneva'. This schema of four basic models creates a typological map that can locate specific theological education programs and institutions and their emphases, assist in their self-definition and indicate possibilities for movement to a new location in the theological education environment.

Athens and a classical education

In *Between Athens and Berlin: the theological debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) David H. Kelsey examines theological education using an a-historical typology in which the terms 'Athens' and 'Berlin' represent two very different approaches. These are, he maintains, 'the two normative types of theological education'[2]—at least as it exists in North America. Everything, he says, moves around an axis comprising these two poles.

By 'Athens' he means that the goals and methods of theological education are derived from classical Greek philosophical educational methodology. He argues that the early church adopted and adapted this model. The primary goal of this form of classical education is the transformation of the individual. It is all about character formation, the cultivation of excellence and knowing the supreme good, which, when applied to theological education means knowing God. Theological education is thus not so much knowing *about* God as it is about *knowing* God. It is not primarily 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.

Wisdom is sought, not simply knowledge, and theological education is fundamentally aretaic (that is, it is the development of the *virtues*, the *arete*—the excellence of the soul). It is the transformation of character to be God-like. The emphasis therefore falls upon personal development and spiritual formation. In that sense the focus is very much upon the individual though it is not necessarily individual-

2 David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: the theological debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 27.

istic in the modern sense for it began, in the Greek context, as something orientated towards the *public good* rather than *private interest* and it was undertaken in communal context.

The early church adopted this educational philosophy not only because it was present culturally but also because of its obvious connections with biblical and theological emphases on holiness and the development of individual character. In theological education virtue is important and holiness essential. This approach affirmed the need for a complete, inner, personal, moral and spiritual transformation. In the case of *Christian* classical education, the sacred texts were scripture rather than the philosophers, although the study of the philosophers was still important and was understood to produce great reward. This educational emphasis on character was entirely consistent with a theologically grounded obedience to Christ worked out in the power of the Holy Spirit and depending on corporate worship, the close interpretation of scripture and pastoral care. It is no surprise that the early church soon adopted this model of theological education.

If theological education is understood in this way, in terms of *theologia* and the transformation of the individual, then holiness and moral, spiritual transformation are central to the educational task. Any assessment of a program of theological education on that basis would consider essential, for example, whether the curriculum adequately addressed issues of personal, moral formation and whether the values of the faculty and the institution as a whole were consistent with this approach.

Berlin and the reflective practitioner

The second pole of Kelsey's typology is what he refers to as 'Berlin'. In his evaluation of it, Robert Banks prefers to call it the 'vocational' model in contrast to the 'classical' model of Athens.[3] Whereas the classical model is derived from antiquity the Berlin model is derived from the enlightenment. Berlin represents this approach to education because the University of Berlin was deliberately founded as a new form of research university as part of the Prussian reform of education undertaken along enlightenment lines.

In the new enlightenment universities theology had to justify its place. Previously, it had been the Queen of the Sciences because it was understood to be derived from divine revelation rather than by natural observation or deduction. But the palace revolution of the enlightenment meant that revelation was dethroned and reason reigned supreme. Whereas the classical model accepted the sacred texts (whether philosophers or Scriptures) as revelation containing that wisdom which is essential to life, now reason demanded that these texts be subject to critical enquiry. They could no longer be accepted on the basis that they were received authorities and they had to be proved. In a research university the texts are not rejected but they are treated differently, there is disciplined, orderly, rigorous enquiry.

The goal is no longer personal formation based on the study of authorita-

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

tive, classic texts. The research university seeks to train people in rigorous enquiry, to find theory and to apply it to solve practical problems. It broadened out from the narrower classic approach in which the sources were limited to the ancient texts and now the whole panorama of human endeavour, including the natural sciences, physics, chemistry, the social sciences, arts and humanities became the legitimate focus of study. The PhD became the standard educational achievement and the aim was to establish a scientific theory that could then be applied to specific situations. Chemists developed theory, summarised in the periodic table of elements that could then be applied in chemical engineering. Physicists searched for the integrating laws of motion, gravitation and light. Engineers devised formula for safe and efficient building and biologists, medical practitioners and lawyers all learnt their theory and then practised their profession.

In this context, if theology was to be admitted as a science within the academy and the university, it had to demonstrate that it had both a body of theory and a practical function. It was thus argued (to the subsequent regret of some) that theology was indeed an area of *theoretical study* rather than of personal development and that its practical function was the *building up of the church*, primarily through the formation of ministers. Theological education was now ministerial training, rather than spiritual formation. The aim was the training of leaders for the church, to provide people able to apply theory to the life of the body and the emphasis fell on the development of hermeneutical skills, the interpretation of scripture and upon bold, visionary leadership.

If theological education is understood in this way then a review of a specific program of education will need to determine whether the context, the people and the methodology are appropriate for that task and whether, at the end of the educational program, it produces theoretically aware and practically effective ministers.

However, the presence of another clearly defined alternative model also allows for a comparative examination. In contrast to the classical model it becomes clear that while a strong understanding of theory and practice is important to the life of the church, the vocational model does tend to leave personal, moral, spiritual development in the background. It is also possible to ask whether the strong focus on research skills, gaining all that is necessary to develop a sound method in hermeneutics, is as appropriate for practitioners in the local church as it is for researchers in the university. Do professors working as researchers model what the local church needs? Or does it create pastors who preach like professors?

The contrast with the classical model also inevitably raises the question as to whether an enlightenment methodology that is associated with high levels of doubt and scepticism is ultimately healthy for theology.

It is clear that when the typology places two different models side by side it raises important questions about theological education and its underlying theology. A third model allows for an even more dynamic set of contrasts.

From Jerusalem to the ends of the earth

Kelsey hints at the incompleteness of his bipolar model when he notes that Tertullian's well known question was 'What has Athens to do with *Jerusalem*? rather than 'What has Athens to do with Berlin?'[4] This points to the possibility of a third type of education. But, having paused to consider this possibility, Kelsey immediately moves on with the comment, 'Whatever the theologically normative case might be, however, it is the case that modern North American Christian theological education is committed to "Athens" and "Berlin", and it is committed to both of them for historical reason.'[5] And so, leaving behind what he describes as potentially theologically normative, Kelsey proceeds for the rest of the book to deal with the *de facto* situation.

This omission is unfortunate and that is a view shared by Robert Banks who, in his *Revisioning Theological Education*, develops a 'Jerusalem' model to stand beside Athens and Berlin. It is a missional model and its basic theology is derived from Kahler's dictum that 'missiology is the mother of theology'. Theological education is seen as a dimension of mission. It is an aspect of the teaching ministry of the church, involving specialized testimony to the kingdom, and the goal is the conversion of the world.

In the classic model 'formation' was personal transformation while in the vocational model it was ministerial training, but in the missional model formation is a turning towards mission. Mission must have reference to all dimensions of life: family, friendships, work, neighbourhood. It encompasses the whole ministry of the whole people of God. Notice that it is a *mission* model, not a *missiological* model. In the latter case missiology is an important discipline, perhaps even the most important discipline within the full range of disciplines, but educationally speaking, a missiological approach is a specific form of the *vocational* approach which takes place within an academic, university style context rather than in the context of actual mission work in the wider community. A missiological approach to theological education may demonstrate the importance of mission to the life of the church, but if it does this by *providing a particular content* rather than by *transforming the process* itself, then it is not a missional model. For Banks the new content demands a new *style* of theological education.

Geneva and the maintenance of tradition

While the addition of Bank's missional model to Kelsey's classical and vocational approaches is useful, a fourth approach is also needed in order to better describe the actual state of theological education. Using the same form of geographic identification, I call this fourth approach the 'Geneva' model of education, although it could just as easily be referred to as 'Rome' or any other city identified with a particular confessional approach. In a confessional approach to theological education the goal is to know God through

4 Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, p. 5.
5 Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin*, pp. 5-6.

the use of the creeds and the confessions, the means of grace and the general traditions that are utilized by a particular faith community. There is an emphasis on formation through teaching about the founders, the heroes, the struggles, the strengths and the traditions that are distinctive and formative for that community of faith. Formation occurs through *in-formation* about the tradition and *en-culturation* within it. For it to be effective it needs to have reference to all dimensions of life, including family, friendships, work, community and ministry.

The nature of the Geneva model is illuminated by a set of contrasts. Firstly, the appropriate *context* for theological education in the confessional model is the seminary and this stands in contrast to the classical approach that is grounded in the academy, the vocational that is intrinsically connected to the university and the missional that undertakes training in the wider community. Secondly, the *goal* of the confessional model is to enable people to know God through a particular tradition while for the classical approach the aim is the transformation of the individual. The vocational model aims at the strengthening of the church and the missional model aims at converting or transforming the world.

Thirdly, in Geneva *theology* is understood as the process of knowing God while in Athens theology is intuited wisdom. In Berlin theology is a way of thinking and applying theory to life and the church and in Jerusalem theology is missiological. These contrasts show that the typology as a whole can make clear that the various debates about the specifics of theological education are actually debates about fundamental theology.

The typology in diagrammatic form

CLASSICAL Transforming the individual **ATHENS** Academy THEOLOGIA	Knowing God **CONFESSIONAL** **GENEVA** Seminary DOXOLOGY
MISSIOLOGY **JERUSALEM** Community Converting the world **MISSIONAL**	SCIENTIA **BERLIN** University Strengthening the church **VOCATIONAL**

Limitations of the typology

The kind of typology that is demonstrated here is not above criticism. An understanding of its potential limitations may persuade educators that its use is inappropriate or, more optimistically, it may enhance its use by enabling potential pitfalls to be avoided.

The first potential limitation is that the typology may provide a theoretical framework where actual forms of theological education are pressed into categories that are not really accurate descriptions of their characteristics. Its validity in that situation depends upon the level of sophistication and understanding of those who use it. If it is perceived as reflecting reasonably accurately the nature of theological education as it exists, then it may prove to be helpful as individuals and institutions undergo self analysis in the light of the typology.

Secondly, the typology is not, of course, comprehensive. It deals only with four major approaches to theological education and it would be possible to add a fifth or even a sixth approach. On the other hand, one of the strengths of the typology is its simplicity. Absolute comprehensiveness may come at the expense of usefulness. A third potential limitation is that some may find the use of the geographic identifications to be unhelpful. They may prefer the descriptive terminology of classical, vocational, missional and confessional.

Fourthly, there is no doubt that the typology is western in form and style. It largely relates to theological education conducted by mainline churches and white, male, professional, first world people in formal academic institutions. Its attempt to incorporate other forms of theological education through the missional model may, or may not adequately reflect the real situation. And it may not relate very well in non-western contexts. It should also be noted that the typology is primarily theoretical and academic in form. Who should determine what theological education should be? Should it be theological educators, ministry practitioners, ecclesiastical leaders or the whole community of faith? So the typology is subject to the criticism that theological education is not a simply higher stage of education for some, but a dimension of everyone's Christian education.

Finally, some may consider that the identification of a particular characteristic with one or other model implies that it is exclusive to that particular type. That is not intended. No doubt there are other limitations as well. Those who intend to use the typology are encouraged to consider them, especially as they relate to their own context.

Conclusion: a case study

Many programs of theological education as they actually exist today are actually a mix of the types noted here. Those involved in these programs can use the typology to map out where they stand and to consider where they perhaps ought to be. If we consider for a moment a hypothetical example, it is possible to see that reality and theory can be related though the typology.

Consider, for example, a Methodist theological education program. According to the typology it could be located at a variety of points on the the-

ological scene and have any number of different emphases, all of which are consistent with Methodist theological principles. It could take a *confessional* approach, deliberately stressing Methodist theology, traditions and spirituality. It could also lean towards the *classical* model because spiritual formation, holiness and sanctification are significant in the Methodist tradition. A *vocational* approach to Methodist education would be one that stressed the need to develop theoretical skills for practical ministry within the church while a *missional* model could well flow from Wesley's evangelistic focus and the conviction that 'The world is my parish'.

These different emphases are not inconsistent and can be combined, but if, for example, the decision is made to locate the program in the wider community then it shifts the educational process very significantly towards the missional end of the spectrum and may (or may not) mean that other aspects of confessional training, personal development and ministry practice become secondary. It is likely that many forms of Methodist theological education will actually be mixed models with an emphasis in one or other direction. The nature of the mix is what makes a particular program distinctive. It is hoped that others will find the typology a helpful tool for analysis and development

A survey

The typology which is outlined above could become the basis for discussion by various educational institutions. The following very informal survey may provide fruitful discussion material for those involved in particular institutions, especially if administered to a group prior to the reading of the accompanying article. It is not intended to be used to gather quantitatively valid statistical information, but rather as the basis for a discussion on the nature of theological education by those with an interest in that area.

1. Theology can be described in many ways. Which one of these statements would you place *first* in your prioritized list of what it involves?
   1. Theology is wisdom, knowing God.
   2. Theology is a tool, a way of thinking about the world.
   3. Theology is developing a knowledge of God.
   4. Theology is missiology.
   5. Theology involves all of the above and any separation is entirely arbitrary and unhelpful.
   6. Theology is .....(if you don't choose one of the above please complete the sentence yourself).

2. Theological education also involves a number of dimensions, but which of these do you think *best* describes its goal for the student?
   1. Personal, spiritual, moral growth and transformation of life and character
   2. Vocational, ministry training to strengthen the church
   3. Growth in the knowledge of God and the ability to think theologically.
   4. Enhancement of missiological knowledge and abilities.
   5. This is another false forced choice; it has to be all of them!
   6. None of the above, rather it is .....

3. Which of the following statements

best describes the role of the teacher/ professor/ lecturer/educator?

1. Model and provide the student with access to, and teaching concerning, the intellectual, spiritual and moral disciplines needed in the Christian life.
2. Be an experienced and knowledgeable researcher who works with the student to enhance their knowledge of particular areas of study and the related research and analytical skills.
3. Demonstrate the life of one who knows God and is able to stimulate and help students think theologically.
4. Be an experienced practitioner who is able to share in and actively help students develop their gifts for ministry and mission.
5. They have to be all of the above.
6. My alternative, preferred definition in twenty words or less is .....

4. Many things are learnt in theological education. Some of them are probably helpful. Which of the following statements would you rate as *most* important?

1. It is important for students to study the Scriptures in order to be personally transformed.
2. It is important for students to develop the skills to be able to examine, critique, understand and teach the Scriptures.
3. It is important for students to study the Scriptures in order to discover the character and nature of God.
4. It is important for students to study the Scriptures in order to understand the ministry of the church and to be able to apply Scriptural principles in their own ministry.
5. Not only are all of the above needed, but none of them has any priority.
6. It is important for students to study Scripture because .....

Evaluation: When all four questions have been answered, the next step is to see whether a pattern has emerged. The first four statements in each of the questions relates, respectively, to the classical (Athens), vocational (Berlin), confessional (Geneva) and missional (Jerusalem) approaches to theological education. The fifth option in each case suggests that each is equally important while the final option allows individuals to express themselves on the matter. This may help clarify where an individual stands on the matter and it is possible to compare results for a number of people in the one institution. The aim of the process is to clarify and to enhance the reflective process.

Expanded typology

Accompanying the article and the questionnaire is an expanded version of the typology in tabular form. It includes nine dimensions of the four types and allows for an easy comparison of the various approaches. The comments are rather cryptic and are more suggestive than definitive. Like the questionnaire it may provide a useful basis for discussion.

Symbol	Athens	Berlin	Geneva	Jerusalem
Model	Classical	Vocational	Confessional	Missional
Context	Academy. It is public education. Individually based yet it requires a communal atmosphere. It is a shared task.	University. It is public education. It takes place in association with the church. It requires an open, scholarly community.	Seminary. It is a specifically ecclesial education usually undertaken in the context of a coherent, believing community	Community. It is mission education and it takes place in the context of mission, the wider community
Goal/purpose	Transforming the individual. The goal is *paedia*—character formation—the cultivation of excellence or knowing the good (God). It is the development of the virtues.	Strengthening the church. Training of leaders for the church, those able to apply theory to the life of the church. Practical thinkers, reflective practitioners needed.	Knowing God. A way of life expressing the life of the believer in God. Objective knowledge of God combined with subjective union with God.	Converting the world. Mission—discipleship. Theological education is a dimension of mission and has a special mission context.
Emphasis	Personal formation. Disposition. Knowing who…	Interpretive skills. Functional. Knowing how…	In-formation. En-culturation. Knowing what…	Mission. Partnership. Knowing for…
Scope	Whole church—spiritual guides	Clergy—skilled leaders	Clergy—teachers.	Whole church missionaries/ministers.
Formation	It began, in Greek context, as something for the public good but became individualized and focused on inner, personal, moral and religious transformation.	The task of theology is to 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 neighbourhood.
Theology	Theology is the knowledge of God, not about God. It is wisdom that is intuited.	Theology is a way of thinking, applying theory to life. Theology is applied: spiritual, missiological, vocational.	Theology is knowing God through a specific tradition.	Missiology is the mother of theology. It involves action—mission.
Source of authority	Searching inquiry into texts. It starts with an assumption of their authority (antiquity is good) based on revelation. Theology is the queen of the sciences. It is theology from above.	Radical critical inquiry into texts. It begins with a search for justification of authority and is much more self conscious about method. Authority based on reason. It is theology from below.	Analysis, systematization, application of confessional texts—scriptural, historical and contemporary. It is theology from the past.	The mission of Jesus, his disciples making ministry. It is theology for the future church.
Teacher	Provider: of indirect assistance through intellectual and moral disciplines to help the students undergo formation. The teacher is also searching and models the process.	Professor: the teacher is a researcher whom the students assist. Teacher qualities: researcher and able to develop research abilities in others.	Priest: knowledge of the tradition. Lives and exemplifies it as well as knows it.	Practitioner/missionary: the teacher is not removed from practice. Discipler, involved. Teaching involves sharing lives as well as truth.
Student	*Theologia* cultivates the individual's spirit, character and mind to develop a disposition (*habitus*).	Becomes theoretician able to apply theory to practice.	Initiated into the tradition, the beliefs, the vocation, the ministry	Discipled to become disciple-maker