

Academic Formation in Theological Education and Its Implications for Competent Ministry

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Abstract

The Research paper titled “Academic formation in the theological education and its implication for competent ministry” was devoted to explore implications of academic formation on ministerial competency. The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso and Catholic Theological College in United State of America were used as case study for the paper. The purpose this paper seeks to achieve were to examine nature of academic formation in theological education; to consider curriculum development of the selected theological institutions; to investigate major formations that takes place in theological schools; and to examine the implications of academic formation on ministerial competency. A descriptive research design method was adopted. Information was sourced through primary documents (internet books and library printed books and journals). Curriculum development style of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso and Catholic Theological College were used. The findings confirmed that basically, there are 3 major formations that occur in a standard theological school. The findings further reveal that academic formations help students to meet the demand of the challenging ministerial tasks.

Key words: Academic Formation, Theological Education, Competent Ministry, Curriculum

1.0 Introduction

Theological Education is a specialized education that centers on formation of the three domains of learning for holistic ministry. This implies that for any gospel minister to totally formed and prepare for ministry after training, there must have been significant development in these three domains of learning which are cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. The paper therefore seeks to promote academic formation in theological institutions that would not only give attention on

their spirituality but that would as well challenge their critical and creative thinking and practices. The writer attempts to clarify the concept of academic formation in theological institutions using The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, and Catholic Theological College, United State of America as scope. This is followed by categorization of academic formation in theological Education. The writer closes with the implications that academic formation would have on ministerial competence of gospel ministers.

2.0 Conceptual Clarification

One word that can be said to be synonymous to academic formation is curriculum design. Ogunronbi (2016, 66-74) explains curriculum using five different approaches as suggested by Aristotle's categorization of knowledge and M. K. Smith model.¹ Curriculum were seen as a planned course; as a syllabus or body of knowledge to be transmitted; as a product of measurable behavioural objectives; as a process meant for a particular schooling situation; and finally, as a praxi where ideas that widen the human horizon are brings into the center of the process of model. Ango (2016, 217) also submits that curriculum is essentially a systematic guide for any course of study, specifying the goal of such course, including the experimental activities which participants in the course must go through.²

Submission of both Ogunronbi and Ango are summed up by Ray (2016) in His comprehensive explanation on academic formation, he states that "total academic formation takes into consideration the overall growth, learning and the finished product of theological learners in the three or four years of their stay in the theological institution. It includes their academic formation, their ministerial formation and their personal formation as well."³

Looking critically at the definition of academic formation, for example in the catholic theological college, the academic course constitutes eleven semesters of full-time study which are spread over seven years.⁴ Whereas; in the Nigerian Baptist Theological seminary, a course of study for the first-degree candidate spans over four years of eight semesters. The first year in the catholic theological college emphasizes spiritual foundations that the students must have; the study of philosophy dominates the next two years. In the fourth year, students spend part of that year to

reside and work in a parish. The last two years are for in-depth study of systematic and moral theology, canon law and continuation of his work in scripture and history.

Whereas, in the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, three major programmes are being run, namely: Theological studies, Education programme, and Church music.

Theological programme for the first-year degree students covers a period of four years in addition with field experience. Students for this program are exposed to studies in biblical, theological, historical and practical field. The programme also provides basic theological instruction for men and women preparing for other church vocations and places of Christian leadership in churches, schools and denomination. (Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary's catalogue. 2015, 32).⁵

In the same vein, students for education programme are exposed to the rudiment in Christian education including biblical, theological, historical, and practical studies for persons who the church indicate have given audience of God's leadership to serve in specialized ministry. Theological instructions are also given to these students so as to be fit for churches, schools, and denomination Christian leadership. (Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary's catalogue. 2015, 32).

The third programme which music provides students who are admitted music education, including biblical, theological, historical, and practical studies. Those in for media specialist are also provided with practical media education through studio work and daily practical exercise during chapel devotion experiences (Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary's catalogue. 2015, 32).

Comparing academic formation of the two theological schools, Catholic Theological School's academic formation aims at assessing how well the students have developed an integrated view of catholic theology which he (students) can clearly expound. Whereas the main goal of academic formation in N. B. T. S. is "to provide high quality theological education and profession training for God-called, spirit led persons, to help meet the need for effective ministry in theological institutions, church and society and to facilitate the fulfillment of the great commandment and the great commission of our Lord, and savior Jesus Christ" (NBTS Catalogue).

In Donald F. (1996, 49-58) report of one of the questionnaires he administered on what purpose and goals govern present programs of theological field education, forty two percent indicated that the primary purpose is to be the integrating of academic study with practical issues in ministry. This view means that all curriculums are aimed at application after each of the course.⁶

Dreyer (1996, 1-13) in the journal of Association of Theological School (ATS) titled “Theological Education” stresses the importance of law, business and medicine as part of academic formation in theological institution. Five basic reports drawn from her researches are:

1. There should be equal emphasis on the acquisition and development of skills, values and attitudes as on the acquisition of knowledge.
2. Baccalaureate education should be broad, encompassing study in natural science and the humanities.
3. Education should prepare students to be learner through their lives.
4. The initial experience in clinical medicine profoundly affects the performance.⁷

Namsoon Kang (2011, 5-7) submits that theologians over the years have pointed out crisis of theological education. Position of those theologians who identifies this crisis differs from one another in terms of their perspective and approach; and this made it to be hardly unitary. Some theological education crises identified includes:

- a. Widespread discontent with the school from the main-line Protestant churches
- b. The current organization of the curriculum, the issue of Christian identity and of theory and praxis, especially in the school with the ecumenical spirit.
- c. Problems with the specialization of disciplines, or clarification of theological education, banishing the classical sense science.
- d. Reflection on feminist perspective and approaches into curriculum and teaching.⁸

The crisis as identified, call for consistent reconsideration of transformational theological education which will require critical thinking and reflection on the concrete context in which it operate.⁹ With this, it could be deduced that quality of theological education needed to be address in order to re-modeling/continuous assessment in terms of curriculum and practical theologizing.

In the global context, theological education today, wherever they are located in the world, share an interest in constructing new models of theological education to prepare leaders for services in a religious plural and culturally diverse world.

New model of theological education can only survive where there is a shared standard and means for ensuring uniform quality in theological education. What constitutes quality in theological education is a shared understanding that various denominations and church traditions in various regions of the world can share and implement.

Again Namssoon Kang (2011, 1-7) says new model for theological education can become mobilizing and effective tools that will promote the fundamental religious values of dignity, equality of every individual human being regardless of one's race, ethnicity, gender, class, ability, sexuality, nationalization, religious affiliation; theological educator will need to reconstitute the nature of the quality in the theological education to engage the universal of justice, equity, freedom, human rights, which must be done without any colonial imperialist or Eurocentric implication (Romans 2:11).

Ravi Tiwari (2011, 44) in support of the view of Namssoon on theological education, says that theological education could be improved upon through the following ways:

- i. E- theological education to counter isolation
- ii. Distance theological education.
- iii. Theological education in multi-religious setting.¹⁰

While the first two ways are being properly integrated into theological education across the world, the last one still suffers major set-back because of denominational bias on the part of the proprietors of the theological schools.

3.0 Categorization of Academic Formation in Theological Education

Ray (2016, 241) opines that theological education primary aim is to prepare, train, and equip people for Christian work both in the church and in the society.¹¹ The total formation of theological learners is a complicated but essential outcome of all theological education. This means that the

theological education does not only interest in academic formation of students but also on other aspects of their lives.

Pressing further, Ray (2016, 243) states that integrated theological education categories student formation into three areas. Specific basic features that are inherent in each of the three formations are stated below.

3.1 ACADEMIC FORMATION: Classical disciplines; Academic skills; Critical thinking; Contextual issues; Interdisciplinary; Integrated courses; Research oriented; and cultural relevant.

3.2 PERSONAL FORMATION: Spiritual formation; Personality development; Etiquette; Interpersonal relation; People Management; and physical well-being.

3.3 MINISTERIAL FORMATION: Discipleship; Communication skills; Language skills; Interpretative skills; Writing skills; Contextual issues; Culturally sensitive; and Apprenticeship.

It could be deduced from the foregoing discussion that academic formation of a typical integrated theological education at graduate and post-graduate level revolves round basic features analyzed by Ray P. It should be noted that no matter how important the academic formation may be, it must be integrated into other two formations to bring about a holistic formation.

In addition, academic formation in the theological education should be design in such a way that it could integrate the contextual concerns of the immediate cultural group as well as the wider concerns of the country. In other words, some elements of global concerns should reflect in academic formation in order to make it pleasing to the foreign scholars and to attract international endorsement.

4.0 Implications of Academic Formation in the Theological Education on Ministerial Competence

Academic formations widen the scope of students and thereby equip them for ministerial practices outside the wall of theological schools after some number of years of training. Formation through

these academic exposures has a great influence on their performance on the field. Students who avail themselves for thorough training will better meet the demand of the contemporary age.

Over the years, theological students after graduation exhibit what they have been taught. The three essential formations which took place in the seminary may have imparted their lives such that their ways of live, manners, approaches to issues of life, response and reactions may change positively or negatively. To some extent, individual student has capacity as to the effect of those formations on his/her ministerial formation. Ray (2016, 247-249) states some implications of academic formation in theological education. The writer of this paper shall adapt these implications to explain how some of them can aid ministerial competency.

- i. The learner will be ethically sound. Students in theological institutions are expected to demonstrate high level of ethical lifestyle. Thus, some of the courses taking during their process of academic formation have tendency to expose them to correct ethical standard that must be demonstrated in pastoral ministry.
- ii. The learner/ student will be culturally rooted yet understanding and respecting different culture. Of course, every academic formation must be developed out of a particular context and culture. Hence, when theological education takes into consideration cultural values during academic formation of pastors in training, this would help them to be culturally sensitive when demonstrating their ministerial skills.
- iii. Students will be a responsible member of the family, society and country. One of the fundamental criteria for entering into ministerial according to Paul is that one must be able to manage family very well. Academic formation in theological schools exposes students to how to become more responsible in the family whether as husband, wife, or children.
- iv. Practices of the multilingual, multi-faith, and multi-racialism will be greatly influenced. Hardly will there be a theological institution that would not have “church History” as basic course for students. The knowledge from this course should make all students understand reasons behind different denomination with little doctrinal differences. Thereby, making us to live in unity for the sake of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

v. Academic formation makes students to adopt, continues to learn and keeps space with rapid development all rounds. Proper Academic formation will expose students to new ideas that would transform their lives and their ministry.

vi. Students will be able to practice physical, social and mental wellness. When students in theological education are properly exposed to sound academic formation, this would not affect part of their lives but all of their lives.

Other implications of academic formation on competent ministry include the following:

- a. Deliberative attitudes and constraints of traditional bond society will be overcome.
- b. Academic formation makes students to appreciate numerous challenges that the nation faces and meager resources available to meet those needs.
- c. Student will develop personal code of value of ethics through exposure to ministerial ethics.
- d. Students will not be overwhelmed by constraints but rather grabs the opportunity for services.
- e. Academic formation helps students to become active participant and contributor in the transformation of society.
- f. Students will not be afraid to accept challenges at work place and will be willing to work with others.
- g. It increases ability to think reason and deal confidently with future.
- h. It enables students to identify, assimilate, and integrate information through critical thinking.
- i. It helps students to look at life as an integrated whole rather than as spiritual, physical or even “worldly.”
- j. Students will be able to exhibit self-esteem and adaptability in real world situations.
- k. Student’s courage and conviction to face all adversity will improve.
- l. Ability to integrate knowledge and experience and apply them to the issues in the current context.

- m. Students will be able to strive hard for continual improvement of self and society; and helps to demonstrate personal, social, civic, economic, and environmental responsibility.
- n. It helps students/pastors to be proactive in surmounting all constraints, inspires, motivates and draw-out the best from others.
- o. Academic formation will help students to demonstrate problem solving, decision-making, and group-process skills.
- p. Ability to be able to think independently and creatively; and articulate and expresses well has a zest for life.

The above-mentioned implications and many more are positive resultant effect of academic formation in theological education for competent ministry. Though to some non-theologians, more emphasis is place on spiritual formation or personal formation of students in theological schools which is just sub-set of academic formation. This might be so, if they could not see any link between theological education and academic. To many, spirituality of the pastor is all what theological training should focus. Considering these implications, maximal effort should be geared towards academic formation by both the students and the lectures in theological schools.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has addressed the topic “Academic formation in theological education and its implications on ministerial competency. It is clearly argued out in this paper that academic formation is of necessity for ministerial competency by clarifying the word “academic formation;” what academic formation in theological education is all about; stating general formations that occurs during theological training and by enumerating its implications on ministerial competency. In this paper, more emphasis is laid on the three categories of formations which are academic, ministerial and personal.

Therefore, theological education should take academic formation very important by focusing more on some courses that will expose students to contemporary challenges as well as how to tackle them. Students in theological Education should also submit themselves to rigorous task that academic formation involves. Also, efforts should be geared towards ensuring that relevant

information are pass across to students by their lecturers so as not to deviate from the goal and objective of theological education.

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