

RECALIBRATING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR THE CHURCH'S MISSION

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Byang Kato was born in a rural town in Nigeria. But his life journey was to become the leading voice for evangelical Christianity in Africa.¹ His studies led him from African schools to Dallas Theological Seminary where he earned his Doctor of Theology in 1973. Soon after his return to Africa, Kato became instrumental in establishing renowned theological institutions and evangelical fellowships. He strongly advocated for theological education at all levels and for all people in Africa, from non-formal to graduate level training. He spoke often about the need for continental-wide biblical and theological development for the sake of the African church. Speaking in South Africa in 1975, Kato expressed one of his deepest concerns, “The Church without a sound theological basis is like a drifting boat in a storm without an anchor. The wind of every doctrine is blowing against the Church today.”²

It has been nearly 50 years since Kato made that statement. Recently, I traveled to seven countries on four continents over ten weeks and interacted with hundreds of theological education leaders from the most informal to the most formal. I had candid conversations about theological education, especially as related to how well it is serving their local churches. Every one of these conversations included comments about rapid church growth, but a lack of adequately prepared church leaders to biblically guide congregants. Kato’s statement still rings true, and it rings true not only in Africa, but in most parts of Latin America and Asia. I do wonder as well how much his statement might even ring true in the West today.

Kato tragically drowned in December 1975, just a few months after his message in South Africa. He was thirty-nine years old. Although he made a lasting impact in the evangelical church in Africa, his concern remains

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¹Aiah Dorkuh Foday-Khabenje, *Byang Kato* (Carlisle: Langham Publishing, 2023), 85.

²Foday-Khabenie, *Byang Kato*, 151.

today: churches drifting without an anchor. The future of the global church will depend on the extent to which Kato's concern holds merit in the months and years to come. Over the course of this article, I will briefly discuss the church leadership challenge. In essence, a global concern exists about church health due to a lack of biblically grounded leaders who can help anchor the church. This article will also touch on a long-standing gap between theological education, especially the more formal type, and the church. To rightfully address the leadership challenge, we must have a closer ecclesial nexus between the academy and the church. Lastly, this article will propose a missional recalibration for theological education. The whole of theological education must be recalibrated towards its missional purpose to serve the church for the sake of her mission.

Throughout this article I will occasionally insert global reflections about theological education. Through my recent travels and interactions, the Lord has allowed me to glean aspects of theological education I did not previously appreciate. While these reflections are still somewhat in process, I will attempt to impart them in the most useful manner possible.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

The global church leadership demand before us is monumental. The challenge is highlighted when we draw a contrast with the United States, where there is one trained pastor for every 230 people. By comparison, majority world churches have one trained pastor for every 450,000 people.³ This colossal leadership training imbalance is only likely to expand. Even as far back as 2010, the "Cape Town Commitment" from the Lausanne Movement lamented the state of the church and leadership development. The Commitment declares that the "rapid growth of the Church in so many places remains shallow and vulnerable,"⁴ mostly due to leaders who themselves have not been discipled and lack the "ability to teach God's Word to God's people."⁵ Cape Town was concerned that existing leadership training was not producing enough pastors who were well discipled and equipped to rightly pass on the truth of the Scriptures. Of course, Kato had raised the same concern years earlier within the African context. More recently, we have additional data to further elevate the concern over

³"The Need," Training Pastors Worldwide, January 18, 2019, <https://bobinthebush.com/training-leaders-international/the-desperate-need-for-theological-education/>.

⁴Lausanne Movement, "The Cape Town Commitment," January 25, 2011, 87; <https://lausanne.org/statement/ctcommitment#capetown>.

⁵Lausanne Movement, "The Cape Town Commitment," 88.

church leadership.

According to the Global Alliance for Church Multiplication (GACX), the church in Asia, Africa, and Latin America has grown from 30 percent of the world's churches in 1970 to 70 percent by 2022.⁶ In addition, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), representing churches in over 130 countries, estimates there are 50,000 new baptized believers each day.⁷ Considering the data and our otherwise anecdotal awareness of church growth, we need hundreds of new trained church leaders every day for majority world settings. If we are not able to do so, we run the risk of having churches that are drifting without an anchor and subject to every wind of doctrine as Kato noted in 1975. These types of churches are perilous and simply not sustainable over time.

Craig Ott, a missions professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and missiologist, expresses caution about church growth as a movement:

If current leaders do not develop new leaders who will spiritually shepherd and further guide the movement, it will become susceptible to conflict, false teaching, syncretism, and other problems. The churches will neither be transformational at a deep level nor be sustainable over time.⁸

Theological education must guard against Ott's warning through the equipping of leaders prepared to disciple and teach God's Word for a transformational and sustainable church.

It was not too long ago that I interacted with a missionary in the Philippines. His name is Skip, and he commented, "Stop trying to come in and plant churches. There are so many that have failed, and mostly due to false teachings, and then the congregants from those closed churches run to the mega churches that doctrinally are no better."⁹ There are countless stories about churches falling away, due to false teachings and a lack of sound pastoral leadership. In fact, a few years back GACX indicated that up to 70 percent of new churches fail within the first year, and often due

⁶GACX, "Framework," accessed January 21, 2024. <https://gacx.io/about/framework>.

⁷Thomas Schirrmacher, Virtual meeting with author, August, 4, 2022.

⁸Craig Ott, *The Church on Mission: A Biblical Vision for Transformation Among All People* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 115.

⁹Skip Moran, Virtual meeting with author during the "Tell Me Something (TMS) Conversations," April 19, 2021.

to a lack of pastoral training.¹⁰ Kato was pressing us to do better. We must do better for the sake of our Lord's church.

The International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) has over 850 Bible colleges and seminaries within its global hub plus several partners and associates heavily involved in theological education at all levels.¹¹ ICETE keeps moving us to do better. In essence, ICETE's global community is about quality and connections in theological education, and by doing so helps to accelerate improved contextual training worldwide for all God's people. When considering its seven regional associations and the institutions, ministries, and programs connected to ICETE, it is equipping nearly 300,000 future leaders worldwide through its constituents for Christ's service. ICETE was founded in 1980 and developed the ICETE Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education in 1983. During its global consultation in November 2022 in Izmir, Turkey (ICETE C-22), ICETE revealed a second declaration about global theological education known as the ICETE Manifesto II: Call and Commitment to the Renewal of Theological Education. It was developed over two years with input from theological education leaders from every sector of training and each region of the world. The document includes several poignant comments and reflections about theological education for today, including the following:

Theological education must be accessible to all God's people. Special attention must be given to groups of people who have traditionally had and still have limited access to education: Neither gender nor social status, neither skin colour nor nationality, neither geographic location nor lack of personal connections should exclude people from theological education.¹²

¹⁰Ramesh Richard, "Training of Pastors: A High Priority for Global Ministry Strategy," *Lausanne Global Analysis* 4, no. 5 (September 2015), <https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2015-09/training-of-pastors>. In this article, Ramesh Richard offers this statistic from being personally present. Though not globally oriented, Aubrey Malphurs indicates a 30-40% failure rate within the first few years of a church plant in North America http://malphursgroup.com/the-need-for-church-planting-and-revitalization/?_ga=2.66591534.1654217729.1618950198-1603102877.1618950198.

¹¹ICETE, "ICETE Constituents," International Council for Evangelical Theological Education, July 14, 2023. <https://icete.info/constituents/overview/>. ICETE's updated mission statement as of 2020 places the church as its primary focus: ICETE advances quality and collaboration in global theological education to strengthen and accompany the Church in its mission.

¹²ICETE, "ICETE Manifesto II: Call and Commitment to the Renewal of Theological Education," International Council for Evangelical Theological Education, July 12, 2022, 11; <https://icete>.

ICETE's global constituency continues to explore how many could have greater access to training. If we are going to have church leaders able to soundly lead their congregants, we must continue to ask the difficult questions about access for those in more remote locations and typically with less resources than found in more urban areas. Pastoral leadership training must be considered in various contexts and through various means.

Even so, increased access to training cannot be at the cost of impact, especially through non-conventional and more distant means. As I have traveled and interacted with many educators and ministers, a consistent theme I have reflected on has to do with impact. Those training leaders at all levels expressed the concern that although they were confident in their content and that they were increasing the numbers reached, they were much less confident about the transformational impact of their programs. Since then, I have grown in my conviction that impact needs to be measured beyond the content delivered. The ICETE Manifesto touches on this, especially as related to distance learning access models:

We see the benefits of diversification, flexibility and extension which enhances accessibility for many more people, however, we also critically observe the challenges this means for holistic and integrated learning processes. . . This includes effectively accomplishing by new means spiritual and character formation, and practical training for ministry.¹³

For the sake of the church, all training, no matter the level, must assess not only the quality of content, but the transformation of character. If we cannot assess the transformation of character, then no matter how sound the content delivered, Kato's concern will remain.

Ramesh Richard has been a global leader in thinking through the need for pastoral church leadership training. He has led large global gatherings on this topic, including his most recent GProCongress II gathering of nearly 600 pastors in Panama. The theme was "Multiplying the Quantity and Quality of Trainers of Pastors." During the event, Richard stated the case in these terms: "Pastoral health affects church health, and church health affects societal health."¹⁴ Richard also brings to the forefront the need for

info/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/ICETE-Manifesto-II_FinalDraft18Jul2023.pdf.

¹³ICETE, "ICETE Manifesto II," 16.

¹⁴Ramesh Richard, "GProCongress II Homepage," GProCongress, accessed June 14, 2023, <https://www.gprocongress.org/>.

training that is truly transformative and exercises long-standing impact upon the churches and ultimately the societies in which they minister.

The global church staying ready, fit, and on mission is not just a majority world concern. According to Gallup, we have gone from 76 percent of Americans claiming church membership in 1945 to 47 percent of Americans in 2020.¹⁵ Pew Research shows similar statistics if not quite as drastic.¹⁶ In November of 2021, the Barna Group indicated that 38 percent of pastors in the United States thought about quitting in 2021. Forty-six percent of these pastors were under 45 years of age.¹⁷ It has also been reported that 4,000 churches closed in 2020.¹⁸ The church persevering for the Lord is, therefore, not just a majority world concern. As noted in the introduction, although Kato was speaking 50 years ago about Africa, his concern might unfortunately apply today to churches in North America and Europe. The symptoms might be different, but the root cause is the same for all churches worldwide—churches are too often poorly led, adrift in a storm, and unable to remain faithful to their Lord Christ.

In consideration of this, we might be at the most consequential global church crossroads. The majority world church continues to surge and spread but without ample trained leaders. Meanwhile, the Western church continues to be contested and at times curtailed, even while it is rich with seminaries, pastoral and leadership training options, workshops, seminars, retreats, libraries and literature, technology, finances, and countless other resources. The tenuous state of the churches in the West, despite all their

¹⁵Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time," Gallup, March 29, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

¹⁶Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>. The research shows a drop from 78% to 65% between 2009 and 2019.

¹⁷Barna, "38% of U.S. Pastors Have Thought About Quitting Full-Time Ministry in the Past Year," Barna, November 16, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-well-being/>. Mainline denominations accounted for 51% of those considering leaving versus 34% who were from non-mainline denominations. This article also states, "'We started seeing early warning signs of burnout among pastors before COVID,' says David Kinnaman, President of Barna Group. 'with initial warning bells sounding in Barna's The State of Pastors study in 2017. Now, after 18 months of the pandemic, along with intense congregational divisions and financial strain, an alarming percentage of pastors is experiencing significant burnout, driving them to seriously consider leaving ministry.'"

¹⁸Brody Carter, "New Barna Survey Finds That 38% of US Pastors Have Considered Leaving Ministry," CBN, November 16, 2021, <https://www2.cbn.com/news/us/new-barna-survey-finds-38-us-pastors-have-considered-leaving-ministry>. When these churches closed in 2020, about 20,000 pastors left the ministry.

resources must lead one to conclude that the challenges of the church in majority world settings will not be solved through resources alone.

As I recently traveled, many of those who interacted with me were terribly curious about the wide breadth of resources found in the United States, especially as related to church leadership development. I often found myself acknowledging that indeed we have a rich abundance of resources, but that the church in our context is not doing all that well. My point in saying so was to help them grasp that there is far more required beyond resources for sound church leadership development. If that were not the case, Western churches would be thriving. Majority world leaders often seek resources in various forms from the West believing those resources will help to solve most, if not all their challenges. Certainly, resources can help, but sound leadership development for the sake of global church health cannot rely upon resources alone.

Rather, the church today needs more than ever bold, biblically grounded, relevant, and transformational leaders deeply impacted by their training, so much so that they cannot help but pass these qualities to others. However, institutions of theological education, particularly in the more formal streams, have to a large extent not produced those types of leaders. In part, sound leadership development is dependent on the nexus between theological education and the church and the extent to which theological education willingly steps into its missional purpose with the church. These two topics will be the focus of the next two sections.

THE ECCLESIAL NEXUS GAP

In order for Kato's church concern from 1975 to be addressed not only in Africa, but in other contexts, even in the West, there must be a lessened ecclesial nexus gap between church and theological education. The ICETE Manifesto II addresses this gap:

The academization of theological education has opened a gap between the needs of the church in mission and the agenda of academia. Programmes and institutions of theological education as well as the church are challenged to take concrete measures to bridge the gap between church and academy.¹⁹

¹⁹ICETE, "ICETE Manifesto II," 8-9.

This type of declaration does not stand alone. Over the years many have expressed similar concerns. There are practical challenges that restrict lessening that gap. Linda Cannell published a book in 2006 that still speaks to this issue. Cannell stated:

Today many churches, frustrated with the graduates of theological schools, are challenging existing systems and joining their efforts to find new models. Schools, worried about economic survival, seek to retain current church constituencies while attracting new markets . . . many schools are still worried they may not survive, and many churches continue to experiment with alternatives.”²⁰

Especially in a post-COVID-19 era, schools more than ever are struggling to stay open, many having to regularly look at ways to generate revenue and cut expenses, with programs in the West not exempt. Additionally, unimaginable circumstances often found outside the West, due to wars like in Ukraine and the Middle East, political fallout, social pressures and unrest, or other cultural challenges, place an enormous burden on schools worldwide. Most theological education leaders in these regions have minimal margin for long-term planning and strategic thinking, including greater connectedness with their local churches. As Cannell noted, economic survival is near the forefront of theological education no matter the location. With all this upon academic leaders, and sometimes even more, the concern remains that the church will decreasingly define the goal of theological education as institutions turn inward to preserve and survive, rather than extending outward to prepare and serve.

Unfortunately, on the church side of the gap a waning confidence exists that theological education institutions, especially those of the more formal type, can provide the ready graduates needed for effective church leadership. As a recent example, a gathering of church planters from nearly 60 countries met in February 2024 in Indonesia. In part of their proceedings, the role of Bible colleges and seminaries in church planting was considered. An ICETE representative who led workshops documented the overwhelming sentiment among attendees that “the curriculum in the seminaries requires a huge lot of tweaking, if not at all irrelevant, to

²⁰Linda Cannell, *Theological Education Matters: Leadership Education for the Church* (Newburgh: EDCOT Press, 2006), 19-20.

what church planters need in their work.”²¹ Globally, it is not uncommon for church ministries to create their own training programs to meet their immediate and contextual needs. Church planters have increasingly done so, illustrating a broader trend that lessens reliance on more formal training.

Kato saw the growing need for less formal church-based training during his time, too. Even so, he never lost sight of the importance of the more formal academic institutions serving local church needs. Today we find the churches are less willing to reach for theological education or explore greater alignment between the two. As does theological education, the church turns more inward. In the end, if this trajectory continues— theological education turning more inward to survive and the churches becoming more self-reliant—the gap may likely increase.

Still, hope remains for a theological education recalibration to set in motion an adjusted trajectory, one initiated through the academy. Other terms have been used in the past to reorient theological education. Often, we have used terms such as the “resetting” or the “renewal” of theological education. But theological education has been undergoing “renewal” for decades with little meaningful progress. The term “recalibrate” helps to signify that a drift in theological education from its true course has occurred. In turn, a correction must be sought. Just as a ship at sea might drift from its true heading and need recalibration to reach its intended destination, so theological education today needs to recalibrate if it will rightly serve the church, foster a greater ecclesial nexus, and reach its intended destination.

As I traveled, I found that most in the more formal spaces of training were reluctant to acknowledge the existence of an ecclesial nexus gap. They either pretended that it did not exist or that, if it did exist, they had found a way to somehow eliminate that gap with their local churches. Perhaps some of them have done so. But, as conversations unfolded, I adjusted the way I communicated about the gap. I found it far more productive not to accuse theological education leaders of having an ecclesial nexus gap, but rather asked them to imagine how their programs might further come to life. Often, I would suggest that theological education is most alive when it accompanies the church through her current realities and anticipates her future troubles. By expressing the “gap” in this fashion, I was attempting

²¹Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, Email message to author, February 26, 2024. The correspondence included a summary from his workshop on “Theological Education and Church Planting” at the Global Church Planting Network 2024 Batam Gathering. Roughly 180 people attended from nearly 60 countries.

to empower theological education leaders to think of ways their programs might be more relevant to the current needs of the church and proactively help her anticipate what might come down the road.

If theological education cannot produce future church leaders who are equipped to navigate through the current real-life and upcoming challenges of the church, then it will remain disconnected from and irrelevant to the church. It will slowly continue to drift off course and eventually find itself completely lost, and perhaps too far off for correction with no hope for any ecclesial nexus. Certainly, that is not the story we want to see written about theological education.

Another reflection from my travels which could help avoid that type of story being written has to do with voices to be included within theological education. These are somewhat related to the current realities and future troubles of the church. There are aspects of church life and culture that are not represented enough within theological education. Often, I have expressed this by saying that the future of theological education will depend on the voices it is willing to embody and elevate. As I traveled some became evident: women within the church, oral learning, peace and reconciliation, the global diaspora and migration, trauma and abuse care, contextual use of the arts and music, missions training, and others. One voice that particularly stood out was next-generation leadership. Theological education must more intentionally consider its role to connect and foster relational teaching and learning across multiple generations for the future church. Church leaders prepared to navigate the complexities of these voices and others depending on context will most likely lead relevant and sustainable churches.

The global demand for church leadership training requires more from theological education. The ecclesial nexus gap must be lessened for it to provide more. But perhaps progress in lessening that gap may take place as theological education further embraces its missional role for the sake of the church's mission.

A MISSIONAL RECALIBRATION

Certainly, each training program typically has a mission statement, and those are important to have. But, in this section I am not focused on that type of mission. Instead, I am focused on God's mission and the church, and the missional role of theological education to come alongside and strengthen the church for God's mission. Kato understood the

vital importance of this when he expressed his concern about the church drifting like a boat in a storm without an anchor and being subjected to every wind of doctrine. For many in theological education, this will require some recalibration. ICETE's Manifesto II encourages that recalibrated missional aim for theological education. The ICETE Manifesto II states:

Perhaps the most formative insight of recent decades is the call for the integration of mission and theological education: Theology and theological education need to become missional in their very essence and orientation. The purpose of theological education must be defined within the framework of the *missio Dei* and a missional self-understanding of the Church.²²

ICETE is not alone in this declaration. Lausanne's Cape Town Commitment likewise points out that "theological education stands in partnership with all forms of missional engagement. We will encourage and support all who provide biblically faithful theological education, formal and nonformal, at local, national, regional, and international levels."²³ Lausanne leaves no room for doubt that the missional purpose of theological education is the church when it further declares, "The mission of the Church on earth is to serve the mission of God, and the mission of theological education is to strengthen and accompany the mission of the Church."²⁴

More recently, Mark Young, president of Denver Seminary, in his book, *The Hope of the Gospel: Theological Education and the Next Evangelicalism*, clearly articulates the missional role of theological education for the sake of the church. He introduced the content of his book by emphasizing that "a school's mission and vision must be formulated on the basis of shared theological convictions about the nature of God's mission in the world, the role of God's people in that mission, and the unique contribution theological education can make to that mission."²⁵ Recalibration requires

²²ICETE, "ICETE Manifesto II," 8.

²³Lausanne Movement, "The Cape Town Commitment," 107-108.

²⁴Lausanne Movement, "The Cape Town Commitment," 107. The statement continues, "Theological education serves first to train those who lead the Church as pastor-teachers, equipping them to teach the truth of God's Word with faithfulness, relevance and clarity; and second, to equip all God's people for the missional task of understanding and relevantly communicating God's truth in every cultural context."

²⁵Mark S. Young, *The Hope of the Gospel: Theological Education and the Next Evangelicalism* (Grand

that theological education be missionally understood, chiefly centered on strengthening the people of God, the church, that she may stay on mission.

The missional self-understanding of theological education as existing for the church finds biblical support. Within 2 Corinthians 11:1-4, Paul expresses his concern that the church would be “led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ” through a different Jesus or a different gospel.²⁶ Philippians 2:14-16 shows Paul asking the church amid a crooked and twisted generation to hold “fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain.” In 2 Peter 3:14-18, the letter closes with a reminder to the church to “take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.”²⁷ Lastly, within 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20 Paul expresses how desperately he wanted to visit the church. He wanted to assure himself that she was on mission, not having drifted under heavy opposition to his teachings. For Paul, this assurance was utmost because at the coming of Christ—she was to be his crown of boasting, his victory, and his proof that he had not run in vain.²⁸ Paul Barnett notes, “Paul as an apostle operates within a distinct eschatological framework.” “The ongoing fidelity of the church in prospect of the end time is his concern.”²⁹ Within the New Testament there exists a consistent motif of the missional self-understanding of the church, and the early church trainers fully embraced their duty under Christ to do all they could to help her stay on mission until his return. A recalibrated theological education with a missional self-understanding

Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2022), 1. Young later further explains, “Not seeing the Bible as that one true story, creates the tragic inevitability that we will live by another story . . . Theological education for the next evangelicalism must be conceived and imbued with the startling claim that the Bible is cosmic history, that Jesus is the centerpiece of that history, and that our faith is a unique telling of it” (78-79).

²⁶All scripture passages are from the English Standard Version.

²⁷Other verses that seem to speak to the same are Eph. 5:25-27; Col. 1:21-23; 2 Tim. 2:1-2; Heb. 10:23-25; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Jude 17-25.

²⁸Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 124. Paul uses the term here in the sense of a “crown of pride” like the victory wreath placed on the heads of victorious military commanders or the winners of athletic contests to signify their achievement. For Paul the Thessalonians were like a victory wreath of which he could be proud at the coming of Christ. They were a proof of his toil and achievement for Christ as a missionary to the Gentiles.

²⁹Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 498-499. For more on this this issue, but relying on Eph. 5:25-27 and Rev 19:6-9, see Craig Ott, *The Church on Mission: A Biblical Vision for Transformation Among All People*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 20-21.

would likewise embrace this duty.

The ICETE Manifesto II further helps this recalibration by viewing theological education more holistically. The manifesto asserts that “we understand theological education in a broad sense includes formal and non-formal education and learning.”³⁰ “Formal and non-formal theological education are equally important for church and mission. They should be offered in mutual respect and partnership.”³¹ A recalibration of theological education must move us towards a common agenda across the training sectors to seriously address the need for church leadership expressed earlier in this article.

During my recent reflections on global theological education, I have come to use the term “flatten” when speaking of the different sectors. Often, I have expressed that the formal, non-formal, and informal polarities in theological education need to flatten to foster a greater global collegiality. As I have done so, I try to emphasize that the point of doing so is not replacement. Historically, the sectors have remained fragmented for fear that one would attempt to take over and replace the other. I have assured many that this is not about replacement, but rather reinforcement. A recalibrated theological education focused on its intended missional purpose is not concerned about being replaced but about how to reinforce one another for the sake of that common missional purpose. If this flattening could take place, it would naturally lead towards greater community, collegiality, and even collaboration across the whole of theological education.

ICETE has endeavored to model and facilitate this type of missional recalibration for theological education towards greater flattening and collaborative postures across the sectors. ICETE has had 18 global consultations on theological education over its forty plus years. The last consultation was in November 2022 in Izmir, Turkey, and is known as ICETE C-22. The theme for the gathering was “Formal and Non-Formal Theological Education Beyond Dialogue.” This was ICETE’s largest gathering and included more than 500 delegates from 80 countries representing over 290 worldwide training ministries to envision a more collective and common global approach to meet the growing leadership demands of the church. As mentioned above, theological education, no matter the form, has a long history of being fragmented with minimal connectedness and collegiality. Such inward postures make training even less accessible and weaken the

³⁰ICETE, “ICETE Manifesto II,” 9.

³¹ICETE, “ICETE Manifesto II,” 8.

collective capacity to prepare leaders for the Lord's church. During ICETE C-22 this was our opening collective prayer: "Lord, may ICETE C-22 Izmir not be measured by our numbers, but by our mutuality in one common aim—to strengthen Christ's church." That prayer is ongoing, and we trust the Lord has used ICETE C-22 to move us closer to theological education recalibration centered in one common aim, lessening fragmented inward postures, and increasing more emboldened outward, collegial postures.

Especially since ICETE C-22, ICETE has embraced a more holistic view of theological education which is more in tune with the times and has already engendered greater unity between all forms of church leadership training. For example, although ICETE continues to serve formal theological education, the scope of ICETE's global hub has expanded. There is a growing worldwide awareness that the task to develop church leaders is so monumental that there is no way any one program or sector of theological education can fulfill the needs alone. Non-formal training ministries are connecting with ICETE like never before, organically fostering greater collegiality across the theological education spectrum. As this occurs, seminaries become better aware of pew-level realities and can adjust their programs to produce more field-ready graduates through insights gleaned from their non-formal colleagues usually more closely connected to church life.³² Certainly, progress can be then realized to lessen the ecclesial nexus gap.

As we look ahead, ICETE further plans to facilitate a missional recalibration for theological education through its next global consultation. ICETE C-25 will take place March 3-7, 2025. The theme will be "Next for Theological Education." The in-person event will be preceded by a year-long process of online forums, virtual meetings, webinars, and communication platforms to foster dialogue and exchanges of ideas worldwide about areas of church leadership training that need to be elevated. As ICETE leads in this fashion, there will be distinct opportunities for theological education leaders worldwide to consider more carefully adjustments needed to be closely aligned with the current realities and future troubles of the church.

A missional recalibration for theological education begins with acknowledging the gap that has historically existed with the church. Even so, we

³²Michael A. Ortiz, "Theological Education Can't Catch Up to Global Church Growth," *Christianity Today*, June 2, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/may-web-only/theological-education-global-church-growth-icete.html>. Ortiz further illustrates in this article the importance of the different sectors working more closely together and highlights the role ICETE has recently played in encouraging progress in this regard.

must not simply accept that gap as perpetual. We have an opportunity to write a new story based upon a more biblically centered understanding of the role of theological education, particularly through highlighting a missional understanding of the church. A recalibrated theological education, regardless its form, must stand within a missional-ecclesial framework. Theological education cannot operate on its own, within a silo apart from its role as an instrument of God's mission, but must be carried out through the church, God's missionary people. ICETE has offered timely global declarations about theological education through its Manifesto II, and ICETE continues its consultations, offering global leaders opportunities to build community and explore collaboration to strengthen the church in her mission.

CONCLUSION

Byang Kato, the Nigerian theologian, still challenges those of us in global theological education to help the church not to drift and become subject to the winds of doctrine, but rather to be anchored in her mission for Christ. The church, especially in majority world settings, continues to grow with inadequately prepared leaders to meet the needs. The churches in the West struggle to keep congregants and remain culturally relevant. Kato's concern from the early 1970s extends beyond Africa and applies to all of us today.

Progress will require that theological education be recalibrated. Theological education ought to be truthful about its relationship with the church, especially in the more formal sectors. There may be ways to lessen the ecclesial nexus gap in various contexts worldwide, but the churches in many parts have lost confidence in theological education. It will be incumbent on theological educators to take the initiative. Recalibration will also require a missional self-understanding. The common aim among all forms of theological education is to strengthen the church for her mission. But a good portion of theological education has moved off this course.

Still, there are some signs of promise. Globally, there is a new collaborative attitude that is gaining momentum. In part, this is due to many recognizing the need for mutuality on one common aim—to strengthen Christ's church. ICETE has played a vital role in adjusting the global direction of theological education, especially through encouraging more outward, collegial postures recalibrated to that common aim.

As we look ahead, we have an opportunity to shape a new story about theological education: A story wherein theological educators understand and meet the needs of church leadership, intentionally initiate ways to close the gap with the church, and recalibrate their course to help the church stay on mission until our Lord Christ returns.