

Missional Curriculum for Theological Education: Designing for Purpose

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“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.” (Lausanne Movement’s Cape Town Commitment (2011, II.F.4)

The Cape Town Commitment highlights the mission of theological education, emphasizing that it exists to serve the church in fulfilling God’s mission (*missio Dei*). In this context, theological education refers to institutions that equip individuals within Christian contexts and academic settings to participate in God’s mission in the world. As the mission of the church is part of God’s broader work to the world; the mission of theological education does not exist as a separate, independent endeavor. The main task of theological education is to equip students to work alongside the church in every way to accomplish God’s mission in the world, which is to redeem and restore the world. Therefore, theological education is expected to be a training ground for the church. It plays a significant role in strengthening vision, equipping the saints, and sending them into the world to participate in His redemptive mission. Consequently, to accomplish this task, theological education must be missional.

However, we must not limit the meaning of a missional curriculum to merely a series of courses in Missiology, Theology of Missions, or Evangelism offered within an academic program. The meaning is broader and deeper than courses explicitly related to missions or evangelism. Also, we must not assume that a seminary offering a course in mission will, by default, indicate the missional nature of the institution. Rather, being missional goes beyond that by infusing a missional mindset into the entire curriculum and educational experience, including subject matter, pedagogy, ministerial training, and learning management. It is the heartbeat of a theological institution. Instead of viewing mission as just one course among many, a missional theological institution integrates a mission perspective into its identity and activities.

The goal of a missional curriculum is to foster transformative learning that prepares students to embody and advance the mission of the church in today’s complex and diverse world. A missional curriculum must be oriented toward joining God in His work of redeeming and restoring the world. Only when the curriculum is designed and developed to be relevant and responsive to what God has been doing will bring transformation to the lives of the students who are sent out, making a significant impact on society and the world. Everything that

theological institutions offer – whether Biblical studies, Theological studies, Church History, or Practical ministry – should be oriented towards participating with God in His work. It aims to provide an educational framework to equip learners with a deep understanding of what God is working towards and to prepare them to engage actively with the world as transformative agents of God’s mission in both contexts and global ministry. For theological education to be missional, it must be intentional and integrative. A missional perspective and activities must be woven into every aspect of educational settings. The following are some attributes of a missional curriculum that should be considered when designing or developing a curriculum to be missional:

The Missional Curriculum Emphasizes Scripture Engagement

Theological students should not simply read and interpret the Bible but encounter God’s Word in a real and transformative way. Instead of presenting Scripture in fragments, students should grasp the unfolding story of God, who acts to reveal Himself to people of all nations. They should understand God’s purpose: to love and be loved. The result of being trained in theological education should be a life of worship, demonstrated through loving obedience to God. It is the responsibility of theological education to cultivate a “heart-burning” experience for them as they engage with the Bible. The passion for the Word will not remain confined to the classroom but will extend to the community they serve.

Missional Curriculum Privileges Missional Hermeneutics

Missional hermeneutics centers on the mission *Dei* as the overarching narrative thread of the Bible. It involves reading the Bible with a focus on God’s mission in the world. It also seeks to understand biblical texts in terms of their broader redemptive purpose and how they call communities to participate in God’s ongoing mission of reconciliation and transformation. Reading and preaching the Bible through a missional lens can strengthen a sense of calling when integrated into the curriculum. Students can discover their identity and ministry within the context of God’s mission, helping them to understand their place and role clearly as they continue to advance God’s kingdom.

Missional Curriculum Integrates Theological and Contextual Understanding and Practice

The curriculum needs to facilitate the relevance of the Bible to contemporary contexts, reflecting in preaching and teaching, discipleship and leadership, counseling, and worship in church life. A missional curriculum should provide the tools for cultural exegesis and social analysis, which include a deeper exploration of cultural contexts, global perspectives, and practical engagement in ministry. This requires interdisciplinary approaches and engagement with various disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and others, connecting with theological studies (biblical studies, theology, church history, and practical ministry). The integration of theology and context will inform and enrich one another, revealing how God's Word and God's world work together to reveal God Himself.

Missional Curriculum Leads To Ministerial Formation

Ministerial formation seeks to see church leaders being formed and transformed to reflect the image of Christ. Then, they are sent out to fulfill the Great Commission through the church. They are commissioned to engage in God's mission equipped with knowledge and wisdom (head), a passionate commitment to proclaiming God's Word (heart), and proficient ministerial skills (hand).

Missional Curriculum Values the Significance of Contextual Spiritual Studies

Spirituality is multidimensional and dynamic. These dimensions interact and intertwine to form complex lives for people. It is shaped by cultural contexts, traditions, and worldviews. Diverse cultures have unique spiritual practices, rituals, symbols, and beliefs that contribute to the richness and diversity of spiritual experiences and expressions. As a result, individuals seek meaning, purpose, and connection with the sacred, which are distinct across cultures and traditions. Therefore, studying spirituality involves exploring the dynamics of human spiritual aspects to understand human experiences towards the sacred. In turn, this understanding informs how the church provides hope to those who seek it.

The Missional Curriculum Should Not Put an Over-Emphasis on Academic Output and Outcomes But Seek to be Grounded and Focused on Mission-

Theological education today is increasingly dominated by academic priorities, often losing sight of its purpose in mission and character formation. In some countries, governmental policies have pushed theological programs into the university system, placing excessive importance on accreditation. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to hear of graduates who, upon completing their studies, choose not to return to church or engage in mission work. Therefore, a missional curriculum should be at the center, with other disciplines being driven by it.

Missional Curriculum Is the Result of a Shared Vision Between Theological Education and Local Churches

Missional theological education and a missional church can develop effective missional curricula when both entities share the same vision to advance God's kingdom. The clearer the sense of mission, the more educational philosophy and pedagogy will align with that vision. This is a participatory action when local churches and theological seminaries come together to discern God's action in the world and how it would play out in the contemporary context. It is a communal process that requires continuous improvement to lead to more meaningful and impactful action. It is a fellowship in service with one accord, prioritizing *missio Dei*.

CONCLUSION

God has called men and women throughout history to advance His kingdom. Theological education has been invited to participate in God's mission by pouring our efforts into equipping those men and women to be sent out into the world. Our missional endeavor is demonstrated through the instrument we use – a missional curriculum that will assist those who commit themselves to run the racecourse and finish the line that God has called them to accomplish.

RESOURCES

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