

An Apology of Theological Education: The Nature, the Role, the Purpose, the Past and the Future of Theological Education

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Summary

Since formal theological education is sometimes considered unnecessary, this article offers an apology of academic theological education, claiming that doing theology is not only the privilege of elite theological circles, but of all believers. If that is the case, then the discussion should not be focused on arguments for or against theological education, but on the questions of what kind of theology to do and how qualitative it should be. The author offers a short historical survey of the development of theology as an academic discipline, speaks about current challenges with which theological education is faced, and discusses its future. The author sees the future of theological education in the use of the Bible as the foundation for theology, in the importance of practice as the final goal of theological education, and in serving and helping the church to reach maturity and unity of faith.

Key words: *theological education, praxis, church, Bible, the relationship between the academy and the ecclesia.*

Introduction

In the daily discourse of believers, theology is sometimes characterized as something futile and abstract, while those who deal with it are considered “good for nothing” for they only indulge in idle talk and speculations. They are often

reproached for their lack of practice and living according to what they say. Although this is sometimes true, such a judgment of theology is, in fact, not a prejudice toward theology in general, but rather a prejudice against “false” theology. In other words, people who criticize theology and those who deal with it, criticize their own wrong conception about theology, for theology should never represent something abstract, sublime or impractical. Therefore, this popular negative perception of theology can be generally discarded and condemned as something wrong and of no real use. However, it still remains to ask: What is, in fact, the nature, the role and the importance of theology and theological thought for Christianity and particularly for the church?

The thesis of this article is that dealing with theology cannot be avoided, and if theological education is to have a future, it cannot allow itself to become a purpose in and of itself and lose its emphasis on the Bible as its foundation; it must not neglect the importance of praxis as the ultimate goal of theological education; it must be in service of the church; and it should assist the body of Christ in reaching maturity and unity in faith (Eph 4:12-16), as well as assist in the renewal of the catholic dimension of the church.

Therefore, I will present a critical and constructive work regarding theological education, indicating briefly the true nature, role and importance of theological education generally, and in the context of Evangelical Christianity in the Republic of Croatia. In the end, I will briefly submit the history of theological education, the present challenges, and the future guidelines which theological education must follow if it aims to be and remain “actual” (Kuzmič, 2009, 104).

The Nature, Role and Importance of Theology

Generally speaking of the nature of theology, the following can be said: theology should have its foundations in the Holy Scriptures, meaning in God’s revelation which has been given to people, and not in philosophy, logic, socio-humanism, or in human wisdom. The ultimate goal of theology should be the shaping of lives and practice of believers and the church. This “kind” of theology should not suffer any judgment by anyone since this kind of theology is what the church needs. However, how is this kind of theology supposed to be present in the life of the church? This question allows for three possible answers: theology should assist in revealing scriptural truths; theology should enable people to ask uncomfortable questions; and theology should assist in exposing doctrine and church practice to sound critical thought.

David Wells argues that the nature of Evangelical theology consists of the disclosure of what God has said in and through the Scriptures. This means that

doctrine cannot be changed in every new generation, rather, theology reveals and proclaims afresh to each generation that which was said in the Bible (cf. Wells). Daniel Migliore has a similar idea when he says that the mission of theology is to continuously search for the fullness of God's truth. This does not mean that theology is a mere repetition of traditional doctrines, but instead it represents a determined search for the truth which includes a readiness to raise questions and reassess one's own postulates (cf. Migliore, 2004, 1-2). Finally, Miroslav Volf (2011) states the following: "Will theology be an apology of the existing state of the Church or the society, or would it keep its critical distance? Theology needs to have a critical distance toward the Church, but not in a sense of separation from the Church, but rather in the sense of being the critical thought of the Church."

The Nature, Role and Importance of Theology among Evangelical Believers in the Republic of Croatia

In considering Evangelical theology in the Republic of Croatia and the relation of Evangelical churches with it, the following impressions have been formed. First of all, *all believers* deal with theology (regardless of whether they admit it or not), but the question is what kind of theology they have. Whoever says, "The Bible says...", "God has said...", "Jesus wants to tell us that...", etc., deals with theology.¹ The question, however, is whether or not the interpretations which follow such sentence openers represent a true, authentic and thorough theological thought. In other words, even those who oppose formal theological education cannot avoid dealing with "theology." D. P. Davies testifies to this as he asserts in his article "Who does Theology", that *all people* actually deal with theology because they all share the common experience (more or less) of awareness of the existence of a dimension of life which exceeds the familiar human dimension of life. Since theology deals with human experience and its interpretation, all people deal at least indirectly with theology (cf. Davies, 2008, 73, 75-77). However, if we apply this definition of theology to Christianity (thus, if we wish to perceive it as an activity of analysis and interpretation of our human experience or the experiences with

1 However, dealing with theology does not have to include such obvious statements as the aforementioned. William C. Placher thus says that all Christians deal with theology constantly because theology includes reflection upon one's own faith. Therefore, when we attempt to explain the death of a child, for instance, declaring that "God did not intend for this to happen" or "He is now in heaven", we deal with theology. Furthermore, when we explain to someone that they cannot partake of the Lord's Supper if they are not baptized, or when we sing a song like "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so", such things represent theology (cf. Placher, 2003, 1).

the Judeo/Christian God), it is inevitable to conclude that all believers deal with theology, except that some of us deal with it professionally (Davies, 2008, 79).

If everyone deals with theology in one way or another, from where, then, comes the objection toward the formal study of theology? Although the reasons may be many, A. Scott Moreau may provide the answer to this question. Speaking of the fundamental modern conflict smoldering toward the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, Moreau emphasizes that in the United States of America, this conflict affected even the leading denominational universities, thus many fundamentalists began founding Bible institutes (as a polarity to the colleges and universities) because they considered being educated as equal to being theologically liberal (cf. Moreau, 2011, 8). According to this understanding, a formal theological education is an enemy to Christianity since it represents a kind of liberal theology which brings fundamental Christian theological postulates under the microscope.² But, is this really so?

Second, Evangelical churches have their own tradition and way of functioning, therefore, the question arises as to whether or not, and to what extent, such churches are willing to examine their tradition, practice and beliefs, as well as to ask uncomfortable questions. Avoidance of examination and a lack of willingness to ask uncomfortable questions bring about a danger for such churches to become entrenched in wrong theology and practice, and thus make it a tradition which is not subject to query since such a thing would represent an apostasy. Carson (1984, 14) warns against the danger of being unwilling to hear that which the biblical text speaks:

Careful handling of the Bible will enable us to 'hear' it a little better. It is all too easy to read the traditional interpretations we have received from others into the text of Scripture. Then we may unwittingly transfer the authority of Scripture to our traditional interpretations and invest them with a false, even an idolatrous, degree of certainty. Because traditions are reshaped as they are passed on, after a while we may drift far from God's Word while still insisting all our theological opinions are 'biblical' and therefore true. If when we are in such a state we study the Bible uncritically, more than likely it will simply reinforce our errors.

Finally, there is a tendency to perceive every critique of the existing condition, constitution and activity of the church as criticism and an attack on the church community (attack on authority?), as if it is meant to bring harm. But why would a critique by itself represent something negative? Davies (2008, 78) argues that the critical dimension of theology is a necessity, though it can also be distressing:

2 For more information on this subject in the Croatian language see: Jambrek, Stanko (2003). *Crkve reformacijske baštine u Hrvatskoj*, Zagreb: Bogoslovni institut, 175-80.

Adopting such a critical stance will almost certainly bring the theologian into conflict with authority, both within the community of faith and outside. It is not unknown for theologians to clash with Church hierarchies, and today we hardly need to look far for examples of theologians in conflict with the political powers that be. And that is as it should be. All education, or in this specific case doing theology, poses a challenge to those with a vested interest in preserving the status quo.

The imposed conclusion is that church communities which reject critical theological thought fall into an apology of their existing condition which does not necessarily have to be a bad thing unless it is used to defend false beliefs or wrong ways of church life and activity.

The History of Theological Education

Looking from a biblical perspective, terms such as “theology”, “theological education”, or “theological college” are not strictly biblical terms (cf. McGrath, 2006, 156-57). Therefore, the following question can be asked: if Evangelical Christianity founds its faith on the creed *sola Scriptura* (Scripture only), can theology and the existence of Bible colleges be justified?

If, under the term “biblical”, that which has been written or mentioned in the Bible is implied, then it leads to the activity of “studying”. The Jewish model of education according to which a family played an important role in teaching about God, the three years of Jesus’ life which he invested in teaching his disciples and others, and the teacher’s ministry in the church all speak to the fact that the Holy Scriptures recognize the activity of teaching about God. Therefore, the *form* within which the teaching is being done may be different (a family, a local church, a group of people, etc.), but the emphasis is not so much on the form as it is on the *activity of teaching* and on the *content* of that which is taught.

Applied to theology, that is, to theological teaching, it could be said that the Bible does not recognize a *form* called “theological school”, thus they are not “biblical” in that sense. However, since theological schools carry out the activity of studying and teaching about God, their existence is “biblical”³ in that sense. From this, it follows that only if theology remains in the service of the church and con-

3 A similar example of this can be found in the existence of “mission (para-church) organizations”. Do the Scriptures explicitly recognize the concept of “mission (para-church) organizations”? No! However, it recognizes the concept of mission and commission. As in the case of the theological schools, as long as there is an activity which is biblical, the form within which such an activity is carried out does not have to be necessarily explicitly mentioned in the Bible in order to be called “biblical”.

tinues to be actively involved in its life and work, avoiding at the same time the entanglement of becoming an autonomous academic discipline separated both from society and the church, then it will truly be “biblical”. But how did theological schools come into being in the first place? Following is a brief and concise historical review of this development.

Harold Rowdon (1971, 75) notices that there is meager information on the formal training of church leaders in the early church. He finds the reason for this in the charismatic nature of the ministries of apostles, prophets and teachers who did not need formal training, but whose spiritual gifts – *charisma* – contributed significantly to the teaching and direction of the newly born church in apostolic times. However, this conclusion leads to contemporary theological education being seen as the result of a lack of *charisma*. Through attentive reading of the New Testament, it is notable that the existence of *charisma* does not exclude training, teaching, admonition and encouragement for growing in truth, in the knowledge of the Lord, and for remaining faithful to the revelation which was given in Jesus Christ (see Mt 28:20). In other words, the early church was also involved in the “theological” education of its believers though they did not have actual theological schools, faculties and “Bible” schools. However, in the second century, the church conducted a dialogue with the Jews and the pagans, while being, on the other side, confronted with the challenges of Gnosticism and heresy. All this inevitably pointed to the need for the systematic education of church leaders as well as of a clearer determination of Christian doctrine, the canon and teachings in the authoritative interpretation of the sacred writings (cf. Rowdon, 1971, 76).

In the Early Middle Ages, (from 500.-1000., A.D.), theological education was present only in monasteries. Rowdon (1971, 77) links this to the fact that the church at that time was faced with the penetration of barbarians and the need to convert them while also preserving the Roman culture which was somewhat Christianized. Theology experienced a shift in the 12th century when Western-European universities were founded, and theology became one of three higher levels of faculties. Until then, theology had dealt with issues such as prayer and spirituality, and not with theoretical subjects, thus it was present in cathedrals and monasteries. However, with the establishment of universities, the study of theology gradually passed from the monasteries and cathedrals to the universities. At that period, a struggle was going on as to whether theological study would be considered a speculative and theoretical discipline, or a practical discipline (cf. McGrath, 2006, 157).

Parallel to these changes, critics of theology appeared such as Jean Gerson and Nicolas Poilevilain (de Clemanges) who criticized theological studies for becoming more preoccupied with the scholastic speculative way of studying theology. Gerson criticized the then theological education by emphasizing its futility

since it dealt primarily with extreme speculations and absurd themes. He also criticized theologians who were inclined toward discussions on implausible and absurd themes besides the Bible and moral theology, while using a language understood only by experts (cf. Ozment, 1980, 75). Clemanges, however, advocated for practice as the only goal of theology. According to him, the primary task of a theologian or a preacher was to live according to God's commands, and thus imitate Christ (cf. Ozment, 1980, 780). But, as McGrath (2006, 157) notes, although the Reformation attempted to rediscover anew a practical emphasis of theological study, "the latter protestant writers, who were working in the university environment, have generally returned to the medieval understanding of theology as a theoretical subject, although they clearly designated its evident practical implications in the area of spirituality and ethics."

Speaking of Evangelical theological education, Larry J. McKinney (2003, 2) lists the emphases which characterize such an education:

1. **Commitment to Biblical Training:** A thorough knowledge of the Bible has always been central to our institutions' educational goals. Serious devotion to the Word of God as the authority for all of life, both with respect to how we think and how we live, has always been a hallmark.
2. **Commitment to the Great Commission:** The spread of the gospel has been a primary desired outcome for our education programs. A desire to produce world changers and infect students with a passion to win the world for Christ has been paramount.
3. **Commitment to Holy Living:** Issues of character, lifestyle, integrity, and godliness have always been important. There is a concern about belief and behavior, right thinking and right living.
4. **Commitment to Ministry Formation:** This has been the *raison d'être* of evangelical colleges and seminaries, to equip students for meaningful church-related ministries. Most, if not all, of the characteristics of the institutions associated with ICETE⁴ could be summed up with the word 'training'.

However, McKinney points out that the contemporary realities facing theological education demand changes. The new circumstances include the following: a) students in the past were focused on obtaining diplomas which would grant them knowledge or work within a church, while today many churches in the USA require pastors to have a Masters degree; b) globalization brought about a greater mobility of students, schools, changes within the content and the way of presenting lectures (distance learning for example), as well as changes in the structure of the student population. However, these changes are not necessary only because of

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the new situation, but also due to the models of theological education which have proved to be inadequate and futile (cf. McKinney, 2003, 3-4).⁵

The Contemporary Situation, Challenges and Problems

Considering the new situation and the relation between education in the West and in developing nations, along with the appearance of “distance learning” as a key problem, Louis McKinney (1982, 88-89) emphasizes the tension between academic excellence and spiritual shaping – a shaping which includes the work of the Holy Spirit in the life on an individual:

Sophisticated urban churches and advanced level theological schools throughout the world need national leaders with superior academic qualifications. With this we will all agree. The danger in pursuing academic programs is not in diplomas or degrees in themselves-the danger is in what these programs can do to people. The elitist, professional pastors who emerge from some of our theological institutions are the antithesis of the servant-leaders churches need. Degrees can be helpful; elitism and professionalism certainly are not. Can we have one without the other?

Reflecting on the influence of the Western educational system on developing nations, missiologist Harvie M. Conn notices that the equation of learning with schooling, the equation of teaching missions with Western missions, the equation of theory with knowledge and the equation of practice with praxis (interaction between reflection and action, theory and practice) represent false assumptions which generate institutionalism, elitism, alienation, abstractionism and pragmatism (cf. McKinney, 2003, 4). Anil Solansky, former dean of *Union Biblical Seminary* in India concludes that theological education does not need only innovations or better methods, but a radical change in the concept of education which he calls “learning as experience” versus gathering content and a body of information. Students must be treated as persons, and not as boxes to be filled gradually with logically arranged packets of information. Students are expected to develop their abilities and to grow in their experiences of walking with God (2 Pet. 3:18) (cf. McKinney, 2003, 5).

McKinney also refers to the opinion of Ken Gnanakan who asserts that theological education should return to its foundations, and the foundations include: “cultivating in learners a longing to know God, a focus on ministry to people, a life shaped by biblical values, and relevant expressions of faith in cultural context”

5 Also see Louis McKinney, “Why Renewal is Needed in Theological Education,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (April, 1982): 85-86.

(McKinney, 2003, 5); and to the opinion of Robert Ferris who advocates for the renewal of theological education on the basis of a biblical understanding of the church and the leadership's role within the church (cf. McKinney, 2003, 5).

While discussing the challenges and problems of theological education, it is worthwhile to mention the ICETE⁶ document called "Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education" in which, along with some defined enclosures,⁷ the actual challenges to Evangelical theological education are identified, and some directions "for a better future" are offered. The *Manifest* highlights that theological education should introduce and empower the following activities: a) *contextualization of theological education* to be accomplished through the constitution of the curriculum and the content of each subject within the curriculum, and thus making the provided subjects appropriate for the context in which they are taught; b) *theological education must be in the service of the Christian community*, that is, fully aligned with the needs and expectations of Christian communities; c) *strategic flexibility* which implies flexibility of approach and in the model of education, in providing possibilities for education of all kinds of leaders, and not only some (for example, educating people only for pastoral ministry), and in the area of the academic level of education; d) *development of the theology of theological education* in order to ensure that theological education be founded in God's integral truth and plan; e) *sustained evaluation* of the enforcement of theological education; f) *establishment of theological programs which reflect a Christian standard of fellowship*, meaning that theological schools should cease to represent "manufactories" that produce graduates, rather they should be communities where people play, work, socialize, dine and praise God together; g) *development of integrative programs* to encompass spiritual and practical goals within the academic goals; h) *development of an education* which will form and establish a servant's character in the students, and not elitism; i) *development of new and innovative methods of teaching*; j) *development of programs which lead to a model of holistic thinking* and highlight biblical truths as an integrative core of reality; k) *development of programs* which will provide the students a *basis for lifelong learning and growth*; l) *encouragement of cooperation between various theological programs*.

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7 For example, the document highlights: "The Manifesto is not trying to present a comprehensive model for quality theological education. Rather it is attempting to identify certain specific gaps in our achievement of such a model. Nor is the Manifesto seeking to designate every form of renewal which ought to be pursued. Rather it is attempting to identify those particular aspects on which consensus now seems to exist....The Manifesto is intended therefore not as a final step, but as a specific, practical first step in an ongoing cooperative venture in renewal."

The Future of Theological Education

The aforementioned statements about current problems and challenges in theological education do not reflect or represent a portrait of all theological education. However, in the era of globalization, interconnection and interdependence, they certainly reflect the condition of a major part of the overall corpus of theological education. Therefore, it is appropriate to ask a question as to what the future of theological education may hold, and how theological education can remain actual, and not false and spurious. Markham (2010, 157) brings up an interesting observation which seemingly speaks in support of the discontinuation of theological education:

Yet one challenge for the leadership of theological education is this: the traditions that spend most on theological education are declining, while those who spend much less are getting stronger. So, for example, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has some of the finest seminaries in the world (Princeton Theological Seminary and Columbia Theological Seminary), but the Presbyterian Church lost two hundred thousand members from 1999-2004, which is more than any other mainline Protestant denomination during that period. Contrast this with Pentecostalism, which as David Martin explains, “includes about a quarter of a billion people” and in the United States alone has some ten million members and growing. The training for these pastors is often very limited and informal. Much of the congregational leadership is raised up from within and learning is limited to the Bible college. This comparison seems to suggest that the better the theological education, the less effective the congregational leadership.

However, does this mean that the way to church growth necessarily leads to the abrogation of theological education? Does this mean that theology is actually a brake and an obstacle to church growth? The answers to these questions are, of course, no.

Contrary to Markham’s stand which is “less theology – better church leaders,” I believe that theological education in the future will remain an important factor in the life and work of the church. It is questionable whether or not it will be possible to bring theological education back into churches and monasteries since that would mean the termination of the work of schools and colleges. However, the academy as such, should by no means be separated from the *ecclesia* because, as Barth argues, theology is a *church discipline* in which the church constantly analyzes itself according to the standard which represents Jesus Christ as witnessed in the Scriptures (cf. Migliore, 2004, 16).

In accordance with this, if academic theological education is to avoid the negative consequences indicated by Markham, it must consider four things: 1) it must avoid becoming a purpose in and of itself, thus losing its emphasis on the

Bible as its foundation; 2) it should not lose sight of the importance of practice as the final goal of theological education; 3) it must be in the service of the church and assist her to reach maturity and unity of faith (Eph 4:12-16); d); and finally, 4) theology has the potential to renew the catholic dimension of the church. Hereafter is an analysis of these statements.

The Bible as the Foundation of Theological Education

It is not necessary to waste words on the importance and role of the Bible in theological education because the Bible, as the Word of God, Holy Scripture and an inspired account of God's revelation, represents an irreplaceable element of Christian theology. Therefore, it should have primacy ahead of any theological thinking based on human reason (human thinking), experience or church tradition. This does not mean that these elements are unnecessary, but they are secondary compared to the Bible. However, in theological education, the Bible is often faced with two challenges: one challenge is the adoption of new subjects which supersede biblical subjects, and the other is biblical criticism.

Because of new scientific disciplines, the Bible finds itself being pushed out of existence within the curriculum of theological schools. Take, for example, the need for "contextualization" of the Christian faith. What does that mean? It means that if a particular theological school wishes to direct its focus on the contextualization of the Christian faith, then it must make room in its teaching plan for courses which deal with studying the context, that is, the specific society within which theological education takes place. Thus, a door is opened for a kind of "sociological theology". If we want to study worldviews and the beliefs of a particular society, again, this will require more room in the curriculum for studying philosophy. Psychology as a study of the human psyche could also take a significant place in the teaching plan. Also, it is possible to study "unpleasant" questions from a theological perspective which, again, would require the adoption of corresponding courses in the curriculum of a particular theological school. So the list goes on... However, since the curriculum cannot withstand unlimited expansion, theological schools are faced with the choice of subjects which will be taught: will the emphasis be on the Bible or will the Bible yield its place to more "modern" and "actual" fields of study.

The second challenge is biblical criticism which partially explains the reason why the Bible yields space to other humanistic subjects. According to Walter Wink (1973), the historical-critical method to which the Bible is often exposed makes the Bible irrelevant or, as he puts it, "bankrupt": "It is bankrupt solely because it is incapable of achieving what most of its practitioners considered its purpose to be: so to interpret the Scriptures that the past becomes alive and illu-

mines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation.” Furthermore, Wink asserts that the consequence of such an approach to the Bible is that the Bible gets reduced to a “dead letter”, and in this schema the Bible becomes “sterile” and we are left “empty”. “The outcome of biblical studies in the academy is a trained incapacity to deal with the real problems of actual living persons in their daily lives” (Wink, 1973). For this reason, Michael C. Griffiths (1990, 7) notes that many theology students spiritually feel as if they were in a “desert” during their studies, and he emphasizes that such an experience is not felt only by students in Evangelical theological universities, but also in Evangelical colleges and schools.

However, in which way and to what extent is the Bible represented in theological schools in the Republic of Croatia? It is impossible to offer a concrete and precise answer, first of all, because it is impossible to offer such an answer only on the basis of the study of the syllabus and program of a particular school. Also, partially because the presence of the Bible in a certain teaching plan does not tell from which perspective the Bible is being approached: with the historical-critical method or some other perspective. Also, the Bible may be present in various courses whose title does not include the name “biblical...”, “Old Testament/Old-Testament...” or “New Testament/New-Testament...” However, daring to compare the presence of the Bible in the theological education of particular schools in the Republic of Croatia solely on the basis of their teaching plans leads to the following:⁸

The *Evangelical Theological Seminary* in Osijek (ETF), in the description of its teaching plan and program in the manual “Graduate Study Program, Theological Study” 2005/2006, gives a review of their five-year program consisting of ten semesters. Out of 78 required subjects total (minus eight electives), 15 subjects fall into the category of subjects which are primarily or exclusively based on the Bible. These 15 subjects include an introduction into the study of the Bible, an introduction and exegesis of particular books of the Bible as well as biblical theology of the Old and the New Testaments (Graduate Study Program, 16-19). Although this data is out of date, it can still be indicative.

8 Determination of the representation of the Bible in the theological education of a particular school is a somewhat ungrateful and subjective issue because the Bible, Bible texts, ideas and concepts are extended throughout all courses. Therefore, I will restrict this review to those courses which include in their titles the term Bible, some of the biblical books or serve towards studying biblical content. Biblical languages are not included in the category of subjects based on the Bible. Elective subjects may, or may not include courses which are primarily or exclusively based on the Bible, therefore they too, are not included in the category of subjects which are based on the Bible.

The theological faculty *Matija Vlačić Ilirik*⁹ (MVI) gives a description of their three-year program consisting of six semesters. Out of 56 required subjects total (minus ten electives), ten subjects fall into the category of subjects which are primarily or exclusively based on the Bible. In the first year, they offer subjects such as *Introduction into New Testament* I and II as well as *History of the Context of the Bible*; in the second year, *Introduction into Old Testament* I and II; while the third year includes 4 courses of exegesis (two of each Testament) and a course titled *Introduction in Exegetic Methods*.

The *Catholic Theological Faculty* in Zagreb¹⁰ (KBF) gives a review of their five-year program for the philosophical-theological course of study which includes 82 required subjects in total (minus 15 electives), out of which ten subjects fall into the category of subjects which are primarily or exclusively based on the Bible. They include an introduction to the Scriptures, introductions and exegesis of particular biblical books as well as biblical theology of the Old and the New Testaments.

The *Bible Institute* in Zagreb¹¹ (BI) offers a review of their three-year undergraduate study of theology which consists of six semesters. Out of 52 required subjects in total (minus six electives), 12 subjects fall into the category of subjects which are primarily or exclusively based on the Bible. These 12 subjects include an introduction to the Bible, reviews of the Old and the New Testaments, exegesis of biblical books as well as biblical theology of the Old and New Testaments.

In percentages, biblical subjects make up 19.23% of the program at ETF, 17.85% at MVI, 10.97% at KBF, and 23% at BI.

The Practical Purpose of Theological Education

The practical side of theological education demands that those who teach theology should (as much as possible) possess knowledge which is combined with experience in the area they teach, and the training of students should not be reduced to a mere transference of information, but should include spiritual formation as well as equipping the students to put their studies into practice and conduct various Christian/church ministries.

Although Bill Johnson (2006, 80) does not work in academic theological education and could be regarded as a doubtful authority in this area, still, I believe, he rightfully criticizes the American culture (and thus indirectly other cultures too)

9 See the link: <http://www.tfmvi.hr/program-studija/index.html>.

10 See the link: [http://www.kbf.unizg.hr/upload/files/392_180-lectures 2012.pdf](http://www.kbf.unizg.hr/upload/files/392_180-lectures%202012.pdf).

11 See the link *Academic Programs, Bachelor of Theology*: [http://www.bizg.hr/attachments/051 Curriculum – BA Theology.pdf](http://www.bizg.hr/attachments/051Curriculum%20BA%20Theology.pdf).

which has “castrated the role of the teachers” in the following way: “It is possible to attend college, get a business degree, and never have received any teaching by someone who ever owned a business.” But the problem lies in the following: “We value concepts and ideas above experience with results” (Johnson, 2006, 80). Similarly, John Paver (2006, 1) argues that the structure of the curriculum in modern education is based on Friedrich Schleiermacher’s division which has separated theory from practice while giving privilege to the rational and universal ways of realization at the expense of other ways of realization. Paver (2006, 3) believes that “field training” was not sufficiently integrated into theological education and thus, consequently, its potential was mostly unrealized.

I believe that Johnson and Paver are correct in their forecasts for the future of theology. This does not mean that concepts and ideas are not important, but rather, concepts and ideas which are combined with experience and results represent the fullness of what theology really is, and thus prevent it from becoming an activity of “idle talk” which is useful to nobody. Thus the instances of professors teaching theology with no practical experience in the field they teach, or who lack witness in their way of life, would be considerably diminished. Or, to put it differently, lessons about God’s love and faithfulness should not be taught by people who cause division in the body of Christ, or divorce from their spouses on their own initiative; lessons on church growth or ministry should not be taught by those who have never been involved in church growth or ministry; lessons on homiletics and evangelism should not be taught by those who never preach or evangelize, etc.

On the other hand, students are also responsible to do more than fill their heads with information, and should be sure to get equipped for work and ministry through their formal education. As early as 1912, Roland Allen (1912, 139) wrote regarding theological students who cannot manage in the work of church communities:

We have set up a purely artificial standard of learning as the necessary qualification for the Ministry. We have required a long and expensive college education as a preparation even for the office of deacon. We have taken the youngest men and trained them to occupy the position of authority, such very limited authority as a native may exercise under the supervision of a foreign priest-in-charge.¹²

12 From his own experience as an Anglican missionary in China and based on his work in India, Africa and Canada, Allen writes in the context of criticizing the Western way of doing missionary work which makes the local believers dependent on the missionaries, and places forms of work upon them which the local believers do not understand, and eventually they become counterproductive.

Another problem is that people who are being educated in schools are not effective after their return to their church communities:

The young men so educated are sometimes, by that very education, out of touch with their congregations. They return to their people with strange ideas and strange habits. They are lonely, and they have to struggle against the perils of loneliness. They are not even the best teachers of people from whose intellectual and spiritual life they have so long been absent. They do not know how to answer their difficulties or to supply their necessities. They know so much Christian doctrine and philosophy that they have forgotten the religion of their country. The congregation has not grown with them, nor they with the congregation. They come, as it were, from outside, and only a few exceptional men can learn to overcome that difficulty (Allen, 1912, 141-42).

In order to avoid such situations in which theologians return to their churches full of knowledge and information, but lacking a connection to the church community they serve, or feeling unable to help people in their life problems, theological education needs to be closely connected to the church and its goal should be to equip people for a practical life of service.

The Relationship between the Church and Theological Education

As is obvious from Allen's observations, if we separate theological education from the church, then it does not serve the church, but rather itself, while the academy becomes a separate body which has its own language (which people outside the academy sometimes have difficulty understanding), culture, values, life, etc. Therefore, McKinney warns that the renewal of theological education will follow only when efforts are directed toward the church, and its ministry is put in the center. A focus on education for ministry/service will sharpen the goals of education; it will bring about the creation of an adequate curriculum, holistic planning, contextualization of theological programs and other positive movements (cf. McKinney, 1982, 91).

Focusing on the church and training for church ministry will direct theological education toward other values. McKinney (1982, 90) thus asserts that if the purpose of theological schools is education for ministry, then the effectiveness of some schools is not measured by the number of books in the library or the percentage of the staff with doctoral degrees, but, instead, by the percentage of those who have completed their education and serve in churches.

We need to understand that Christ established the church, not theological schools and faculties, and that he desires for his bride to grow and develop. Therefore, the academy needs to strengthen the church and take part in God's plan in order for the church to become a place for equipping God's people for works

of service so that the body of Christ as a whole may be built up, resulting in unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, maturity, and attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:12-13). Fáinche Ryan (2009, 75) also confirms that academic theology is not an enemy to the growth and maturity of the church by referring to Thomas Aquinas who believed that dealing with theology is a sacramental activity which leads to the sanctification and salvation of the souls of those who deal with it. Although his statement was made in the context of Roman Catholic theology, there certainly exists a basis for it because if theology is focused on God, not on people (cf. Ryan 2009, 85), then the knowledge of God has the power to change and sanctify a person and make that person a participant in God's life (in the sense of sanctification, transformation and godliness) (cf. Ryan, 2009, 82). Therefore, Ryan (2009, 87) rightfully poses the question: "Do theologians, indeed does the Catholic Church, expect students to become formed and transformed through the doing of theology?"; and he concludes, "The theology that is a *sacra doctrina* is both noun and verb, a content as well as an action, it can transform those who practice it, but only if they believe" (Ryan, 2009, 88).

Revisiting Paul's methodology for establishing churches, Allen notes that Paul spent about six months in a particular church and taught the converted believers about the basic elements of faith, established the necessary ministries and then moved on, however, the churches continued to grow in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Allen, 1912, viii). Allen was criticizing theological education as ineffective in equipping church workers at the beginning of the 20th century (cf. Allen, 1912, 139-42), so how much greater must the challenges be now for contemporary theological education in this era? Peter Kuzmič (2009, 146-47) summarizes the contemporary challenges of theological education as follows:

We live in a world of great changes and increasingly complex spiritual challenges. Christ's followers are expected not only to be attentive to what God speaks through biblical revelation, but also to understand what the world and their contemporaries speak in their search for the truth and the purpose of life. Every Christian, especially priests, is rightfully expected to know how to read not only his own Bible, but also the signs of the time they live in... The streaming of various ideas, courses of thoughts and spiritualities which are indifferent toward biblical Christianity or even oppose it directly, dictate a new reconsideration and sharpening of the Christian thought and message... The changes brought by the general advancement (which should equally be reexamined) and the free movement of persons and ideas require finding new ways to bring the old unchangeable Gospel in a fresh and understandable way to the 'new' man and time. Repetition of old Christian models and biblical quotations here would not be sufficient.

Since contemporary theological education requires not only an understanding of biblical revelation, but also a knowledge and understanding of world views and ideas, the integration of theology with other disciplines such as philosophy (see Thomas, 2002, 17-20), sociology, anthropology, psychology, linguistics and others (cf. Osborne, 1991, 367) presents even greater challenges to theological education than in Allen's time. In other words, theological education, faced with countless possibilities and challenges, can lose its focus, goal and purpose more easily than in past times, however, in order to avoid that, the focus of academic theological education should be primarily on the knowledge and love of God as well as on the keeping of his commands; the outcome of this would be a focus on serving the church and the world.

Peter Wagner (2010, 118) holds the opinion that today's academic theological education is an outdated model based on the academic model of classical European universities which equips theologians-theoreticians who are unable to manage in real life with practical life problems. Such an education creates a critical mind in students, making criticism the virtue that is being rewarded.¹³ Faculties equip future pastors with knowledge of the Bible, original languages, church history, philosophy, theology and church politics, however, they fall short in teaching them about spiritual life, culture, evangelism and other practical segments of the ministry (cf. Wagner, 118, 121). Wagner (2010, 128) thus assumes that in the future, church communities, instead of traditional theological faculties and Bible schools, will be the primary places and polygons for training servants. According to this, churches which are part of the "new apostolic reformation" will create such educational programs which do not require an academic level of education, but, instead, the emphasis would be on passing on the ways and the anointing for a productive ministry, and not so much on getting information. Furthermore, there would not be any exams or grades, 80% of the program would include direct practical application for active ministry, and 20% of the program would consist of a theoretical part which would provide biblical and theological foundations (cf. Wagner, 2010, 132-33).

Wagner assumes a quite negative future for academic theological education, but I believe that he is wrong in the following: traditional theological faculties do not exclude the need for the existence of biblical schools within church communities and vice versa; therefore, I consider such a dichotomy to be unnecessary. However, both models of education have certain advantages and strengths which can become their greatest weaknesses. Bible schools (whether those in local

13 It might be a matter of translation from English to Croatian, but to my understanding, critical thinking is not the same as criticism. The former is necessary and positive; the latter is negative and should be rejected. I hope that Wagner differentiates between these two.

churches or those which are not a part of academic education), place an emphasis on the *practical application* of the knowledge which is passed on, while academic schools offer less practice, but more qualitative knowledge/information. Offering a superficial and insufficiently qualitative knowledge¹⁴ can become a weakness for Bible schools, while academic theological schools can become schools which generate people who have “big heads” but “narrow hearts”. The challenge for both sides is to overcome the dichotomy between academic theology and training for ministry, and to integrate cognitive learning together with concrete practical learning (cf. Anderson, 2004). Accordingly, the future of theological education is not a necessarily pessimistic one as Wagner argues, but just needs to successfully overcome these challenges.

Theological Education and the *Catholicity* of the Church

Although it is often possible to hear Christians say that there is only one true church of Jesus Christ, in reality, we are witnesses of the existence of many denominations and divisions among Christians. Not only is it a fact that there are different definitions and views concerning who makes up the true church, and who is not a part of it, but, besides that, Christians have a problem with recognizing, determining and cohabitating in that *catholic* and *universal* dimension of the church. To make the situation worse, Christianity in and of itself is divided by different theologies, theological systems and views which are often mutually exclusive.

In such a situation, the mention of seven ecumenical Councils in the history of the church (between the years 325 and 787) whose ecumenicity lay in the fact that at these Councils there were Christians present from the whole world (cf. Campbell, 1996, 23), seems like an impossibility. Speaking of the seven ecumenical Councils, *The Encyclopedia of Christian Literature* highlights the character of the decisions adopted at them:

The creeds produced by these councils were consensual as they sought to represent the united agreement of the faithful, confessional in their function catechetical and liturgical expressions of orthodoxy, Christological in seeking to clarify theological questions and controversies concerning the nature of Jesus Christ and the Trinity, and catholic in their ecumenical focus... (Conniry, 2010, 54).

14 The statement of Robert Banks (1999, 8), while speaking about Bible schools in the USA, serves as a confirmation to this: “Over the years, in fact, most Bible and missionary colleges have progressively become more academic in their character.”

Although nowadays there is an ecumenical movement where the participants from different church denominations participate in theological discussions, it is rather difficult to expect that in the future we will again experience a gathering of all Christians at such Councils in a manner which will be equal to, or even resemble, those ecumenical Councils from the past. However, can theology make a positive movement in that direction?

One of the characteristics of these Councils was the gathering of all Christians *from all sides of the world* for discussion on specific problems. Viewed from the perspective of the churches of Reformation heritage in the Republic of Croatia, it is possible that local churches of a particular denomination foster a certain dialogue, but inter-denominational dialogue is hardly heard. Even if such a dialogue exists, it is questionable whether or not there is a readiness to learn from “the others” without reducing the dialogue to mere defences of one’s own theological postulates and argumentation that the “others” are in the wrong. Although the church communities and denominations may not have the need or desire for mutual theological dialogue and learning, academic theology can encourage and be a catalyst and a context for fostering such discussions. As members of particular denominations (which by the nature of their work should be apt to listening and learning from others), theologians can assist their local churches and denominations in accomplishing dialogue between churches concerning church doctrines and beliefs. Indeed, theology can assist churches in fostering theological dialogue which exceeds the scope of denominational determination and thus contribute to the identification, teaching and accepting of other parts of the church. Put another way, “If churches will not communicate between themselves, then theologians will do it instead of them.”

Conclusion

Christ established the church, not academic theological institutions, but that does not mean that training and teaching were not an integral part of his ministry as well as part of the life of the church. This means that the academy should come from the ranks of the church and be actively involved in it because that would help prevent the existence of the negative dichotomy, that is, the existence of dissonance between the church and the academy. Theological education which is not connected to the church and does not assist the church in the development of her ministry lacks purpose. However, if it does assist the church, then the church community serves as a necessary corrective and protection for the academy, preventing it from becoming a speculative theoretical discipline while also providing a context in which the acquired knowledge can be applied. Bacon’s saying, “knowledge is power”, in the life and work of the church does not have

much value if those who acquire some “knowledge” do not know God, if they are not anointed by the Holy Spirit, have no experience in that which they teach, and have no witness in their lives between what they teach and say and what they do. If we add to all of this the appearance of globalization, the circulation of various ideas and the appearance of new disciplines, the founding of Evangelical theological education on God’s revelation – the Bible, not only becomes an imperative, but also a key factor which will ensure that theological education is protected from sinking into the abundance of human wisdom.

Thus, this kind of theological education is positive and necessary for the development of the church, so believers should not stay away or run from academic theological education as from something negative and destructive for their spiritual life. D. A. Carson introduces an interesting perception by asserting that studying the Bible in the context of theological study requires the student to submit themselves to a process of “distancing”. When a person which is honest and devoted to God, which cultivates a fervent prayerful life and desires to gain a better knowledge of God’s Word is suddenly faced with Greek morphology, syntax, syntactic diagrams and the like, they can react in one of three possible ways: they can choose a defensive pietism which rejects and despises any kind of intellectualism; they can become involved in an intellectualism in which there is no room for worship; or they can somehow endure until their graduation when they will be redeemed by their return into the real world. However, Carson advocates for the process of “distancing” which is uncomfortable, but it brings positive results.¹⁵ Since the biblical text is often ascribed with meanings which are not included in it (which are often a consequence of tradition and conceptions gained from others), if we want the Word of God to complete the work of continuous renewal within us, we must hear the Word anew (cf. Carson, 1984, 14). Therefore Carson (1984, 21-22) says:

Whenever we try to understand the thought of a text ... if we are to understand it critically - that is, not in some arbitrary fashion, but with sound reasons, and

- 15 While this process brings positive things to the life of an individual, the same individual can cause problems within a local church community. Namely, theological study can open new and broadened perspectives for the student. However, the individual can return to a local community which does not share these understandings and broadened perspectives and may not be as ready as the individual to change some things. This fact alone can cause problems for the local church as well as for the particular individual. It is exactly for this reason that some pastors of local churches hesitate to send a person for theological studies and oppose theological study because they consider it a threat: maybe because they believe that the more educated individual represents a kind of threat to their pastoral position, or maybe because of negative experiences in the past when individuals within their churches completed theological studies and then tried to “forcefully” make changes which caused some negative consequences.

as the author meant it in the first place - we must first of all grasp the nature and degree of the differences that separate our understanding from the understanding of the text.... only then can we begin to shape our thought by the thoughts of the text, so that we truly understand them.... It follows that if an institution is teaching you to think critically ... you will necessarily face some dislocation and disturbing distancing. A lesser institution may not be quite so upsetting: students are simply encouraged to learn, but not to evaluate.

Whereas theological studying of the Bible has its purpose in connecting and shaping our understanding according to the message of the text, distancing is not something negative. Moreover, "Christian life, faith and thoughts which result from this dual process will be even more robust, even more spiritually awake, with a greater ability of distinguishing, even more in accordance with the Bible and more critical than normally" (Carson, 1984, 22).

That is why Christian academic theological education which is based on the Bible, whose goal is to assist the church in growing and which equips believers for the work of the ministry, represents something positive. It can be negative and painful, but only insofar as it forces us to reject our wrong interpretations and assumptions. Therefore, the solution is not in the abolition of academic theological education, nor in the rejection of developing a critical mind as Wagner suggests, but rather in the "redemption" of theological education from theorizing and impracticability while putting it into the context of the Bible and the church, while practicing it, and while developing critical minds (not criticism or critical spirits – all of us are able to criticize, but it is hard to be critical) which will help us to receive and recognize that which is good and reject that which is not.

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Apologija teološkog obrazovanja: Narav, uloga, svrha, prošlost i budućnost teološkog obrazovanja

Sažetak

Budući da se ponekad formalno akademsko teološko obrazovanje smatra nepotrebnim, ovaj članak nudi svojevrsnu apologiju akademskog teološkog obrazovanja tako što ističe kako bavljenje teologijom nije privilegija samo "elitnih" teoloških krugova, nego svih vjernika. Ako je to tako, onda se rasprava ne bi tre-

bala usmjeravati na argumente za ili protiv bavljenja teologijom, nego na pitanje kakvom vrstom teologije se bavimo i koliko je ona kvalitetna. Autor nudi kratki povijesni pregled razvoja teologije kao akademske discipline, prikazuje sadašnje izazove s kojima se teologija suočava i nudi smjernice za budućnost teološkog obrazovanja. Budućnost akademskog teološkog obrazovanja autor vidi u korištenju Biblije kao temelja za teologiju, važnosti prakse kao krajnjem cilju teološkog obrazovanja, te u služenju i pomaganju Crkvi ne bi li ona dosegla zrelost i jedinstvo u vjeri.