

## **Title - What is the role of the teacher as a person in the task of theological education?**

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There is no society, community, family unit, and nation without teachers. The teacher therefore plays a very important role in giving knowledge to individuals or to a nation. Be it theological education or education in general, it takes place at different levels, be it formal or informal. The writer of “Effective Educational Leadership” says, “By being a teacher, it entails the exercise of influence over the beliefs, action, and value of others. What may be the different is how that influence is exercised and to what extend.”<sup>1</sup> The teacher or teachers help to shape one’s world view. I remember my grade one teacher in 1953, how she taught us the Bible stories. The education that she gave me at that time became the foundation of my bible knowledge. The question to be discussed here is, “What is the role of the teacher as a person in the task of theological education?” But, who is the teacher? In short the teacher teaches. The word teacher has many dimensions: The teacher may be known as the instructor, the one who guides giving directions, communicator, counsellor, steward, trainer, and the adviser. The list is long. We may say the teacher is someone who gives knowledge in what ever way one does it. The teacher does something which makes one or many persons to know. The teacher is a resource person for a particular subject or area. But here we are looking at the teacher in theological education. There are many ways and methods of teaching. Raymond B. Williams says, “There are many ways to teach. Each of us needs to find our way.”<sup>2</sup> If what I have said above is correct, then the teacher may be found playing many roles in the career as the teacher in theological education. What it means again is that the activities of the teacher are not confined in the class room, but they go beyond. The teacher occupies a very important position in theological school and the community. The eyes of many people are watching and nicknames are given accordingly. The teacher is expected to be role model with ability to give answers and information concerning the

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<sup>1</sup> Nigel, Bennet, Effective Educational Leadership, The Open University...Chapman Publishing 2003 p186

<sup>2</sup> Ramond, Williams, “The Teaching Career and Life” in Teaching Theological Education Oct. 1997 P 181

<sup>3</sup> Gregory, Jones, (Eds.) The Scope of Our Art: Vocation of the Theology Teacher, Grand Rapids P 120

areas of specialization and life in general. When a theological teacher goes to the church where there are classes for Bible study, the members of the class, for example, would be happy because the person to give them answers of the questions they had is present. Whether the teacher teaches Old Testament or New Testament, that is not the point. What they know is that the resource person is present.

#### THE TEACHER AND THE STUDENTS MEET FOR THE FIRST TIME

Let me begin by quoting what L. Gregory Jones says, “Truth is partner to hope and the truth is, these students are creatures of our own making. Thus, if teaching is to remain a ministry of hope even of joy, we must probe the world of our students to wrestle with what makes them strangers to us and we, most certainly, to them.”<sup>3</sup> It is true that the teacher and the students are strangers. They are meeting for the first time. However, the main aim of the teacher is to teach, train and help the students to achieve the desired goal. It is a very important role to be played by the teacher and the students have their role to play too. Both sides need tolerance, patience and discipline. The two hold different positions. The teacher has an advantage over the students. The students are new comers while the teacher has experience in the theological education. The students are waiting to be taught and be given instructions. Parker Palmer has a point when he “reminds teachers that their inner life and identity are central to teaching and learning”<sup>4</sup> The teacher is in a position of steward; a steward of students’ needs and the word of God. The responsibility of the teacher has; needs to be guided by the love of God, to create a conducive environment for learning. The students need a careful handling because some of them have very weak back grounds. Earl Thompson Jr. says, “Many students enter theological education as the result of painful and often paralyzing spiritual crisis of faith, hope, and especially love. They come, either depleted and demoralized seeking renewal

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<sup>4</sup> Ramond, Williams, “The Teaching Career and Life” in *Theology and Religion* 7:4, Oct.2004 p 181  
5 J. Earl, Thompson Jr, “Theological Education as Pastoral Care” in *Theological Education*, 1997 p29  
6. Ramond, Williams, “The Teaching Career and Life” in *Theology and Religion* 7:4, Oct. 2004 p181

or fresh from a victorious struggle with their adversaries.”<sup>5</sup> The students need to be in the hands of caring teacher, for this also will help them to nurture their emotional and spiritual competence. The teacher should work hard to discover the short comings of each student. And possibly; do what the teacher would like them to do to him if he was in their position. But what is important to note is that they need each other. There can be no theological school if one of them is missing. As time goes on the strangers should find a way to move ahead together.

### THE TEACHER AND THE AUTHORITIES

The good name the teacher may make; makes both theological school and the church leaders to grow feathers of happiness. The students come and go, but the theological school and the church remain. For that reason strong relationship must be maintained with the institution the teacher is serving. The students can make good or bad remarks in the streets about the teacher, but that may not last. The written and lasting remarks are made by the institution being served. A point was made again by Parker Palmer when he said, “Never the less, the vocation of the teacher is always communal, not private and detached. Each teacher must reflect on teaching from within a particular context, handcuffed to personal and social histories and locations.”<sup>6</sup> The teacher must have the ability to understand that the service being given is for the public. The teacher must learn and be able to be part of the community and works from within. The questions which should be answered are: Why is this theological school here? And what are they aiming to achieve? The answers to these questions should help the teacher to work together with the authorities of theological school for better results.

The theological school is not the church, but it is part of the church. What the church stands for has to be known by the teacher. John H. Leith, in his book entitled “The Crisis in the Church.” Though he wrote the book for Presbyterian seminaries, what he said is relevant to any theological school. He says, “The first task of the seminary is to teach the church’s faith.”<sup>7</sup> The capability of the teacher to know how the church he or she is serving expresses its faith. It is the back bone of the stability of his or her work. Church

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<sup>7</sup> John, H Leith, “Crisis in The Church,” John Knox Press 1997, P 40

members hear and respond to God's revelation in many ways. The teacher has to note that. Having interest in reading or studying the constitution and bye-laws of theological school and the church concerned will enable the teacher to avoid unnecessary conflicts. Even though traditions, constitutions and bye-laws are human made; no institution would like to see them mishandled. If the teacher does it, it is the easiest way to breaking relationships.

Again one may wonder why the teacher should know and obey them. John H. Leith once again says, "Seminaries originated out of the life of the church, out of the work of dedicated ministers and lay people, out of the community that shared a common life."<sup>8</sup> The teacher will have a peace of mind if that is done, for most doors for bad remarks will be closed.

#### ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS

One of the qualities or qualifications the teacher must have is the academic qualification. The teacher is not born with academic qualification, but must work for them. Academic qualifications are important for they shape the life of the teacher, benefiting the teacher and those who will be under his or her care. As the students meet the teacher for the first time, they would like to know as to whether the teacher qualifies to teach the subject concerned. The students do not select the teacher, but in the long run they will know for they have interest. Bad or good image of the teacher in the minds of the students will depend on their discovery. For the governing board of the theological school, academic qualifications come first. It is true that not all who have good academic qualifications can teach well, but for selection purposes, academic qualifications come first, hoping that the teacher will do well. D.G. Hart says, "The combined effect of the theological and social trends was to make ministerial education more academic. Fresh doctrinal approaches had to be evaluated, even if it was hoped that they would be rejected, and rising social aspirations created a demand for more scholarly preaching." He goes on to say, "Qualifications of an intellectual character needed the power both of acquiring and imparting the knowledge."<sup>9</sup> We can note that both the church and secular community need one with good academic qualifications, even though it is not certain that good work

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<sup>8</sup> OP. Cit Page 86

<sup>9</sup> G. D, Hart, Theological Education in Evangelical Tradition, Baker Books, 1996 Page 218

will be done. The failures will be known when one is working. But it is hoped that the teacher is one of the think-thanks of the theological school and the church. The directions of the theological school will depend on the teacher's opinion and research findings. The work of the teacher enriches the church if properly done and he or she is considered as the adviser of the church.

### THE TEACHER AS A COMMUNICATOR

Robert L. Youngblood says, "It is important to have a clear purpose in mind for a lecture. Then we must gather sufficient, relevant material, sift through them and put what we select into some kind of systematic order, with a particular perspective."<sup>10</sup> One of the outstanding roles of the teacher is that of communicating. The teacher has to pass on the information to the students. This exercise cannot be done at random. A careful planning is needed before hand, in order to capture the attentions of the students.

There are various ways of passing on the information or teaching because teachers are differently gifted. Again the level of education and maturity of the students should put in consideration. Lecturing is not the only method of teaching. The teacher should use other methods of teaching; such as: printing notes, books, research in the library and discussions in small groups. The list is long.

The teacher again should be able to allow the students to contribute in class. This is a health exercise for learning. I agree with Henri Nouwen; some of his views were brought in class for sharing. He says, "Students are not just the poor, needy, ignorant beggars who come to a man or woman of knowledge, but that they are indeed like guests who honour the house with their visit, will not leave it without having made their own contribution." Good communication keeps the students alert and go down to dosing when poorly done. It has to be noted again that "how the course taught is as important as what is taught." Sharon Heron goes on to say, "It is not the content of our teaching which is problematic but the process we employ as we work towards these ends."<sup>11</sup> Planning and communicating are both important. If one of them is not properly done, the process of

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<sup>10</sup> Robert, Youngblood, Reader in Theological Education, WEF Theological Commission Page 28

<sup>11</sup> Sharon, Heron J.S., "Relationship between Tutor and Student" M.TH. QUB 2004 Page 25

teaching is spoiled. A number of conclusions can be made from what I have so far discussed:

- a) Good teacher passes on a message to the students that you can also do it. Good teacher will always have his or her disciple.
- b) In doing God's work, good planning is needed..
- c) The reputation of theological school is good, and the school becomes the channel through which God's work is done..

Manfred Waldemar Kohl says, "As the seminary goes the church goes." He goes on to say, "Theological school determines the direction of the future of the church. The professors, lecturers, seminars, and texts books are the foundation on which the leadership of our churches and Christian organization is built."<sup>12</sup> All these can happen only if the teacher is able to communicate starting in class room and in other activities in theological school and in the community. What is in the mind must be put on plan and what is properly planned must be communicated or shared.

I conclude this part of my discussion by quoting Dr. Cheesman's lecture, He said, "The teacher's job as host is two-fold: First, he or she has to reveal, to let the students see, amid all their self-doubt, that they have a gift to give to the process of education. Secondly, it is to affirm, to encourage them, to share, reflect, develop, with excitement way and their vision."<sup>13</sup>

#### GIVING GOD ROOM IN THE SYSTEM

In the minds of the students, there can be a question: Is the teacher a Christian? The elements of Christian faith in a person are seen in the doing. The doing must be genuine, for outward display is only important when it reveals a genuine work first done in the heart by God. Then it is God who receives the glory for the great thing He has done. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the teacher to encourage the students to open their hearts for God. It is possible that some feel that they are lost. May be God is not in their system. J. Erl Thompson says, "I begin every class with prayer for two primary reasons: First, I want to invite the students to open their hearts to the

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<sup>12</sup> Waldemar, M. Kohl, *Educating for Tomorrow*, SAIAS Press, 2002 Page 29

<sup>13</sup> Graham, Cheesman, *Handout Lecture On Henri Nouwen's Teaching*, 2005 Page 4

searching, forgiving, and transforming presence of God so that they might be continually renewed and empowered. Secondly, I think we theological educators have a responsibility to assist students in naming the demons that torment their lives and undermine their emotional and spiritual competence. Accordingly, I seek to capture in prayer the hurts, disappointments, failures, grief, humiliations, and hopes of their lives and remind them of God's boundless love. I intend that the students will realize that their spiritual crises have a central place in both the informal and formal curricula of theological education."<sup>14</sup>

The teacher should not take things for granted that every thing is alright with the students. The students need assurance as they begin their journey in theological education. One of the stories from the Bible which is relevant to this discussion is that of Moses. Moses was confused and full of fear to do God's work. He became courageous after he had been given assurance by God. He would be with him. In Exodus 3:12 we read, "And God said to him: "I will be with you, and this you should have for a sign that I have sent you" Hesitation was no longer in the thinking of Moses; going to Egypt to free the Israelites was then his agenda. It is a blessing for the teacher to have a gift of giving courage to those who are weak and have no mood of moving ahead. Hesitation should be driven away from the thinking of the students. The students who had come to theological school could be in situation like that of Moses; they need assurance. With the help of God the teacher can do it. Thompson's passage quoted above has certain important points which should be discussed briefly: a) the students need to be renewed, b) the students need to be empowered, c) the students should be helped to fight against forces hindering their progress, the students need to be given hope.

a) The students are at a new place, started a new life. Theological school should be a place of renewal. Some students could have been discouraged and disappointed. An assurance has to be made that God is here and is involved in their life history. They are moving towards their destiny with God. It is the responsibility of the

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<sup>14</sup> J. Earl, Thompson Jnr, "Theological Education as Pastoral Care" in *Theological Education*, Oct. 1997 P35

- teacher as Thompson says, to lead the students in praying. Not only praying but in worshipping as well. They need to know that God desires them to experience spiritual revolution that not to involve national war or hatred. Instead, it is a reformation brought about using spiritual weapons of warfare (2Cor.3:3-5).
- b) The students can realise that they are now renewed, but need to be empowered. The disciples of Jesus waited to be empowered. Jesus asked them to wait for the Holy Spirit to do so, as it is recorded in the book of Luke 24:49, “And I send the promise of my Father upon you, but stay you in the city, till you be edued with the power from the High.” And that was fulfilled on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2:1-2).. The Holy Spirit is already here and the students should be assured that they will be empowered by the Holy Spirit.. It is true that some students left theological schools in the past renewed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Such events should be shared with the students that it can also happen to them. They must be told that it is important to remember that they belong to God and the Holy Spirit will empower them when time comes. What is important is to be patient for God Himself is penitent. It is a hard thing to do because the teacher is not the source of the power needed. Some of them would like to be empowered just at that time. But God does not work that way. He has his own time table. Again J. Earl Thompson says, “If our theological education is going to address the emotional and spiritual deficiencies of our students, we will have to establish and build an educational community that will nurture their emotional and spiritual competence.”<sup>15</sup>
- c) The students have different back grounds. Some of them are down hearted. They may have broken homes. In case of African situation, some may feel that they are being followed by their ancestral spirits who are protesting that he or she has made a wrong decision. Who will perform rituals in their honour? In such kind of situation the students will not be active in class. I remember in 1999, one of our students spent one week screaming whenever he was in class, asking his class mates to hold back the people who were coming to fight him. The people he was

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<sup>15</sup> J. Earl, Thompson, “The Theological Education as Pastoral Care, in Theological Education 33:2, 1997 P33

talking about could not be seen by any one expect himself. For him that was the work of his ancestral spirits who did not want him to be a pastor. It was the responsibility of the teachers to make sure that Christ had place in the life of that young man. It was hard work, but it had to be done. He got settled after six months. To send away a student in a situation such as this, would mean that Christ had no power. There are other social problems the students may have, complicated like the one above which also need the attention of the teacher and the teacher has to pray for them. If possible, the testimonies from other students who had similar problem should be given. The student affected may know that the problem can be solved through prayers. The role of the teacher in time of despair, down hearted with paralyzing spirit crisis is to give them courage for them to stand up and fight their way. Paul in 2 cor. 4:8-9 says, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed, we are perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” Christ is more powerful than the mysterious powers and can give comfort

- d) If there is something any one should not lose is hope. Any one without hope is a failure. Christ came so that we may have hope that we can succeed in what ever we do in his name. When we read John 3:16 we note that God has boundless love for us. Again in Psalm 33:20-22, it is said, “ We wait in hope for the Lord, he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you,” Giving God room in the system may be referred to as part of spiritual formation the teacher should be aware of. The main point here is to give the students courage to move on. For any one to keep on going hope is an asset. The ultimate goal of theological educators is to do God’s work. They are in business of establishing God’s kingdom on earth. That is why Jesus came, and in Matthew 28:20, a promise was made that Jesus is with us always. The presence of Christ in our system makes our work to be done smoothly. A relevant quotation from J. Earl Thompson may fit as I conclude this part of my discussion. It says, “In order to learn, people need a rich fertile soil of solidarity. Both people and their learning wither and die in climate of alienation. Are we theological educators creating a

community in which all of us, even when disagree with one another, will still acknowledge, appreciate, and affirm one another? What is at stake in all of our interactions is whether we are teaching our students and relating to our colleagues in ways that enhance their sense of worth and increase their competence.”<sup>16</sup>.

## THE TEACHER’S AWARENESS OF THE FIELD WORK

The teaching that takes place in the class room should be put in practice. The students under training must have the taste of what it means to be a pastor by going to do work in the church before graduation. This programme, of course, cannot be done by individual teacher alone; it has to be theological school’s programme.

However, in the mind of the teacher it should be clear that the training aspect of theological education is very important. There was a time Jesus sent his followers in the field as it is recorded in the book of Luke 10:1-3, “After this the Lord appointed ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them. “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.” The result of their work was pleasing. Joyfully they gave their report (Luke 10:17). It is good and important for the students to find themselves involved in the work of the church. It is, however, the duty and the responsibility of the teacher to inform the students that there is work to be done in the church. Jesus talks about “harvest which is plentiful.” It is in a parable form, meaning that there are many people to be served, waiting for the workers. An African situation is a point to be mentioned as an illustration. Many people are coming to church in some parts of Africa, and yet no adequate number of ministers to serve them is available. Sometimes a pastor is in charge of ten congregations. The students may find themselves in similar situation during their field work. Though it is not encouraged to over load the students with church work before graduation, but the students will gain experience before hand. John Bolt says, “Words yes, but words spoken by ambassadors and stewards authoritatively commissioned and empowered by one to

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<sup>16</sup> Earl, Thompson, “Theological Education as Pastoral Care, 33:2 Oct.1997 Page 33

<sup>17</sup> John, Bolt, Stewards of the Word, Calvin Theological Seminary, 1998 Page 133

whom has given all authority in heaven and on earth”<sup>17</sup> The teacher and the students are doing God’s work, who is the Lord of people being served.

Hesitation has no room in doing God’s work, because it is a command. Those who are involved in training aspect of theological education should be obedient servants. Sacrifice and patience are needed in doing God’s work. Joyful reports will be given when good work has been done. .

### THE TEACHER AS THE LEADER

The teacher is the leader who is leading students to achieving the aims and the objectives of theological school and the church. Showing no elements of leadership may not help at all. What ever position the teacher has at a theological school, decisions have to be made and instructions should be given, this helps to have smooth running of the institution. The question which we may have now is: What kind of leadership should the teacher have? The teacher is training pastors who will lead people in the church and society. It should not be a military kind of leadership where, when a commander shouts soldiers have to salute. But it is a Christian leadership. Antony Kalliath, in his book, “Christian Leadership”, says, “Jesus’ leadership style is a radical contrast to socially accepted forms of leadership. It is not meant to strengthen the power of the leader but to liberate the followers to give themselves for others. It is a leadership to promote leadership. Its ultimate aim is to create every one a leader that they become selfless catalysts of social transformation. The values of the kingdom must be the programme of his or her life. It must become the style of leadership in a contrast community.”<sup>18</sup> Dictatorship type of leadership should not have room in the teacher’s leadership. He or she has to teach what he or she practises. That is why it is different from secular leadership. It is also different because it is Christ like type of leadership. The leader is the servant of the people he or she leads (Matthew 20:26-27).

It means decisions made and instructions given should not be oppressive. Those being led should be given the respect they deserve. The teacher should aim at producing leaders

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<sup>18</sup> Antony, Kalliath, Christian Leadership, Dharmaram Publications 2001 Page 71

who are “selfless catalysts of social transformation,” as it is said in the quotation above. Their aim as leaders is that of helping to establish God’s kingdom. It is not self-centred leadership, but leadership that recognises the existence and contribution of others. Again Antony Kalliath says, “The human society must be transformed into God’s kingdom where humans can truly become humans by recognizing God’s sovereign leadership. In Jesus’, vision it is such kingdom where every one will have the authority that comes from within even if they are powerless.”<sup>19</sup> As human beings that kind of leadership may not be possible to have, but with the help of God it is possible. It is a God centred leadership where every one has a share. David H. Kelsey says, “Teachers and learners together contribute a community sharing the common goal of personally appropriating revealed wisdom. It is, then, a community ordered to some end, a community under orders. Some of the community, presumably the teachers, haven been engaged in this common quest longer than others, presumably the learners, but it is a shared quest.”<sup>20</sup>

#### THE SPIRIT OF TOGETHERNESS

I have said a lot about the roles that the teacher should play and qualifications the teacher should have. It is true that one single teacher cannot do and have all the qualities. What is needed is the sharing of duties and considering the talents each teacher has, with the idea of creating a team work. St. Paul talks about one body with many parts. Each part is differently gifted, but should use its gift towards a common goal. If one of them does not play its role, the function of the body is hindered ( 1cor. 12). Each teacher must have the ability to work with others in order to achieve the aims and the objectives of theological school and the church. The teacher must have the spirit of building the community of people who are willing to work with others.

Graham Houghton says, “To become a part of such a community of learners as teachers and students is to take part in fullest realization of one’s potential. No college teacher will achieve his own optimum power who is not strengthened, supported, and inspired by an

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<sup>19</sup> OP Cit Page 71

<sup>20</sup> David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin* Grand Rapids, 1993 Page 21

awareness of and perhaps a humble pride in his institution as whole”<sup>21</sup> What should be borne in mind is that the measure of success which can be achieved at any theological school will be depended on the measure of effective cooperation being experienced at the institution. That is one of the qualities the teacher should have. The teacher as an individual must build a good name which is emulated by others.

In conclusion, the teacher plays a very important role in theological education. In the book, “Educating for Tomorrow,” it is said, “The importance of the teacher as a role model either conscious or unconscious is too often underestimated. We teach, preach, and behave according to models we have observed, as do those who look to us examples. Effective, committed leadership is the key to success.”<sup>22</sup> The teacher should have ability to handle changes and settle disputes which may arise. He is people’s teacher.

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<sup>21</sup> Waldemar, M. Kohl, *Educating for Tomorrow*, SAIAS Press 2002 Page 206

<sup>22</sup> OP Cit Page 206

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