

CONTEXTUALIZING TRAINING FOR PENTECOSTAL LEADERS IN AFRICA: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

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*What people tend to learn most is what the culture of an institution cultivates rather than what teachers teach. If this is true, then as the historian Glenn Miller points out, 'to redefine theological education is first to reconceive the institutions that teach theology.'*²

Training in Retrospect

This paper intends to explore more than curriculum, content, or academic prowess. It attempts to introduce the need for Christian leadership training in Africa, the challenges inherent in the quest of such training, and the “culture” of learning necessary to maximize its potential. After all, accreditation is more than creating standards and assessing quality. It is, as stated in the above paragraph, concerned about the “culture of the institution,” or ethos of a training program.

Church Growth

What does one say about the church in Africa without repeating the obvious? The explosive growth of the church desperately requires that trained leaders be found. While on the one hand the exponential church growth in Africa is reason for celebration, on the other it has produced monumental challenges. The church has grown beyond its capacity to produce trained leaders quickly enough to lead the mushrooming congregations. Stephen Talitwala puts it this way: “New believers do not have enough teachers. The church does not have enough trained pastors to staff the churches. Many new Christians remain babies in Christ.”³ Furthermore, he writes, “High growth rate of church membership, accompanied by scarcity of trained Christian leaders, will lead to secularism, syncretism, and fragmentation of the church. Training centres

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² Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 211.

³ Stephen Talitwala, “Theological Education in the Modern African Context,” *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 6, no. 1 (1987): 12–16; See also Daryl Lucas, “Leadership Training in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Christian Education Journal* X, no. 3 (Spring 1990): 91–107.

must identify areas of desperate need where the investment of good resources will yield maximum results.”⁴ Such growth presents challenges unique to its own context.

David Barrett documents the growth of the church in Africa. At the turn of the century, approximately 9 percent of the population of Africa belonged to a church. In a recent research project conducted by the Pew Foundation, it was discovered that 48 percent of Africa’s population claim to be Christian, while 41 percent claim to be Muslim. During the mid-part of the 1980s, Africa’s Christian population overtook that of North America. Today North America has 10.2 percent of the world’s Christians, as compared with Africa’s 20 percent. This growth raises real questions. One has to wonder what institutional or contextual factors have led to such growth in Africa on the one hand, and such stagnation in America on the other. Many explanations are offered, but the implication is this: western missionaries must be leery of transplanting methods of instruction that have proven ineffective in their homeland. As one African student in Canada asked, “How is it that the only forms of theological education that have been given to us in Africa come from the part of the world where the church is in decline?”⁵ Hopefully, missionaries can weed out the deficiencies or innocuous programs that have proven ineffective at home, and tune in to the African context, contextualizing both message and methods.

Mission Influence

The American church has its own challenges. Weaknesses often lie within the training structures themselves. Dearborn has pointed such deficiencies. He states, “I am coming to the conclusion that there is no other professional organization in the world which allows its primary professional training institutions to produce graduates who are generally as functionally incompetent as the Church permits her seminaries.”⁶ Furthermore, he asks, “Can you imagine a medical school retaining its certification if its graduates’ first exposure to surgery was as the surgeons?” Whether he is overstating his case is an open question. However, we do know that missionaries have not always been good at contextualizing their approach.

The western gospel has come too much in western forms, some of which are baggage. Stevens and Stelck put it this way: “Theological education is one more arena for global imperialism. So we get globalization without contextualization. We ignore non-rational or supra-rational ways of learning in indigenous cultures (Klem 1982), and cut all pieces of cloth to the same Western pattern.”⁷ Michael Griffiths recognizes the dire impact of the West on the African church. While some western influence has been imposed from without, today it is often sought from the African church itself. Students strive to go to the West to study. In this regard, Michael Griffiths asks a very cutting question in the title of his paper: “*Need the Two-thirds World Travel*

⁴Talitwala, *ibid.*

⁵R. Paul Stevens and Brian Stelck, “Equipping Equippers Cross-Culturally: An Experiment in the Appropriate Globalization of Theological Education,” *Missiology: An International Review* XXI, no. 1 (January 1993): 33.

⁶Tim Dearborn, “Preparing New Leaders for the Church of the Future: Transforming Theological Education through Multi-Institutional Partnerships,” *Transformation* 12, no. 4 (October 1995): 7–12.

⁷Stevens and Stelck, 31–40.

West for Theological Circumcision?” He suggests, “The desert experience theological students frequently experience in the West, the boiled-down academic syllabus that fails to feed the spirit, the obsession with minutiae, and the fact that the alleged neutrality of much biblical criticism, is a decision against responding to the Word of God.”⁸ Griffiths furthermore notes, “Many dedicated scholars in the western tradition are asking themselves whether the emperor knows he has no clothes on!” Speaking about the system of education inherited from the West, one principal of an African seminary addressing the London Evangelical Colleges in 1987 said, “We continue to train an aristocracy for the leadership of the church, *which will guarantee the future inertia of the people of God.*”⁹

This is harsh criticism indeed, yet it raises issues that require sincere reflection. Not only have students studied in the West and imported their western theologies to Africa, but missionaries have often unwittingly exported their own cultures without distinguishing between gospel and culture. Wendland notes,

The educational programs of many theological schools and seminaries in this region are still closely modeled after curricula that have been developed and practiced in the West. Accordingly, there is a heavy emphasis on academic subjects, such as systematic theology, confessional symbolics (creeds), ecclesiastical traditions (e.g. organizations and administration), and church history, ancient and modern. . . How do they compare with subjects such as Bible background. . . African traditional religion, and current national Christianity (including a study of the so-called independent movements).¹⁰

Renewal in Theological Education

The International Council of Accrediting Agencies issued a manifesto in 1984 highlighting the global needs of training programs.¹¹ The manifesto was the final product after a three to four years’ dialogue around issues of renewal in theological education. There was a general feeling that the models of education being employed for Christian leadership were inadequate and needing major revision.¹² The twelve recommendations offered by the ICAA could also give us ideas for future consideration. The report recommends the following:

1. Contextualization of course content and instructional methods
2. Churchward orientation (dialogue)—determining programs “by a close attentiveness to the needs and expectations of the Christian community we serve”

⁸Michael Griffiths, “Need the Two-thirds World Travel West for Theological Circumcision?” Unpublished paper delivered at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, 1990, quoted in Stevens and Stelck.

⁹Ibid., 35.

¹⁰Ernst R. Wendland, “The ‘Interference Factor’ in Christian Cross-Cultural Communication: With Special Reference to South-Central Africa,” *Missiology: An International Review* XXIII, no. 3 (July 1995): 270–271.

¹¹International Council of Accrediting Agencies, “Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 8, no. 1 (1984): 136–144.

¹²Robert Ferris, *Renewal in Theological Education: Strategies for Change* (Wheaton, IL: Wheaton College/Billy Graham Center, 1990).

3. Strategic flexibility in leadership roles, academic levels served, and educational modes; in short, being market-driven
4. Theological grounding for theological education philosophy (contextualization is not enough)
5. Continuous evaluation of educational programs on the basis of highly specific objectives
6. Community life, not just academic, in formal schools
7. Integrated programs, including experiential and spiritual components in curricula
8. Servant molding and other biblical concepts of leadership that go against the competition ethic
9. Instructional variety—going beyond the lecture method.
10. A Christian mind—thinking Christianly about all aspects of life.
11. Equipping for self-directed learning.
12. Cooperation between/among programs and institutions.

While on the one hand we want to reflect on the quality of the training already being undertaken, we also need to look toward the future. Some of the fine activities in leadership training over the years can be done better; hence the pursuit of excellence, the talk of developing standards for leadership training, and a striving to meet meaningful criteria for theological education. While theological institutions can meet part of the challenge of Christian leadership training for the church and society, avenues must be explored to train as many Christian leaders as possible—thus the urgency to meet the supply of a rapidly growing church. *Standardization* and *maximization* can be visualized as two wings of the mandate, words describing both the posture and scope of the challenge.

Challenges to Theological Education

Formative challenges confront the church in Africa. These are not in isolation from the global context, especially since many institutions have been started by expatriate missionaries and are still strongly influenced by them. Lessons can be learned from educational counterparts and theological institutions in the West. We can glean from their achievements and also learn from their mistakes. There isn't absolute clarity, however, in the models imported from the West. Banks suggests, "Especially in the West, theological education presents a confusing picture. . . . As students become older, less mobile, and more part-time, extension centers and distance learning have become more important."¹³

One of the discoveries of seminaries in North America is that they have trained a generation of leaders who have not functioned as leaders in the broader culture. Greenman notes, "Secular leaders observe clergy as disengaged from their local communities, unable or uninterested in participating in public life outside the congregation, suggesting that their focus was 'taking care of their own.' Lay people observe clergy as unable to connect their seminary studies with their ministerial work, and less than successful in helping people 'see what difference religious values and commitments can make, in the lives of each church member and in our life together as a society.'"¹⁴ This inward preoccupation was substantiated by Edward

¹³Banks, 4.

¹⁴Jeffrey P. Greenman, "Mission as the Integrating Centre of Theological Education" (paper presented to the faculty at Tyndale Seminary, Toronto, Canada, May 1999).

Farley, who identified the role of the seminary as training for a “professional paradigm,” and ministry came to be identified as activities that the ordained minister performed in an institutional setting.¹⁵ As Greenman notes, this type of training assumes a particular view of the church and a particular function for the minister. One writer, Loren Mead, refers to this as a Christendom model of the church,¹⁶ a model where ministerial training is usually seen in terms of taking care of existing congregations.¹⁷ Concerning the church and its mission, then, Greenman notes, “The prime focus of parish ministry becomes meeting the religious expectations, psychological needs, and social demands of the people who are found within church walls Sunday by Sunday.”¹⁸ I find Greenman’s description enlightening and sobering. If he is right, major correctives need to be taken in leadership training methods in North America. In developing a new program at Tyndale Seminary, Greenman appeals for a “missional paradigm as [a] guiding philosophy.” Putting it in ecclesiastical terms, seminaries have concentrated only on training priests. Should there not be room for equipping for prophetic roles in society?

As we pursue curricula, and devise standards for excellence, these issues are of critical importance. Pedagogical tensions must be maintained in holding together:

1. Interests of church and school
2. Personal development and corporate responsibility
3. Spiritual formation and vocational skills
4. Private spirituality and social justice
5. Doctrinal purity and contextual theology
6. Priestly preparation and prophetic endorsement
7. The community of faith and the fraternity of the “called”
8. The preparation of character and the apologetic mind
9. A knowledge of God and a knowledge of the world
10. A missional church and a missional scholarship

As Pentecostals, however, we would be aberrant if we did not recognize the place and centrality of the role of the Spirit in spiritual formation. To this we must give more than lip service. Banks articulates this reality most poignantly. He writes:

There is a tendency in this literature to portray God as a passive agent in the whole process of theological education. . . . This paucity of discussion of the Spirit is a major theological weakness in the debate. Throughout the Bible the Spirit is heavily involved in communicating with the people of God and enlightening them about God’s character and work. Failure to give the Spirit a

¹⁵Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983).

¹⁶Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier* (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1991).

¹⁷See also Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986).

¹⁸Greenman, 5.

central pedagogical role in theological education demonstrates how much these writers, to some extent even those I have exempted from this criticism, still lack a fully adequate theological framework.¹⁹

ACTEA Study

One of the sources of information concerning such training in Africa has been *ACTEA Tools and Studies*, produced in 1989.²⁰ Paul Bowers, former director of ACTEA, analyzed over 742 schools involved in leadership training in Africa. These included catechist and evangelist training centres, Bible schools and institutes, Bible colleges, theological colleges, seminaries, and university departments of religion. Most programs were residential and only a couple of well-established correspondence or extension programs were included. Some startling facts were uncovered.

The data revealed that 79 percent were begun after 1950, 63 percent since 1960, and 40 percent since 1970. While it was discovered that 104 schools had been started in the 1970s, only 36 were started from 1980–1984, a notable downturn in the inception of new schools. Bowers suggests that the growth curve seems to have peaked in the 1970s, and the 1980s brought more modest growth. The schools that reported were in 41 countries, but more than half of the schools were in only four: Nigeria (130), South Africa (111), Zaire (85), and Kenya (66). The correlation of schools to percentages of population is shown here in table 1.

Table 1. Christian population and theological schools by country

Country	% Christian Population	% Theological Schools
Nigeria	17.5%	17.5%
South Africa	11.2%	15%
Zaire	13%	11.5%
Kenya	05.7%	08.9%
Totals	47.4%	52.8%

The shocker was the relatively small size of the schools and the student-teacher ratios. The average enrollment was 44.7 students, with only 22.2 percent of the schools having an enrollment of 60 or more. Post-secondary schools had an average of 64.8 students, versus an average of 36.3 students at the secondary level. The average number of both full-time and part-time teachers was 7.3 (full-time being 4.8). The teacher/student ratio for theological schools in Africa turned out to be 1 to 6.1, or 1 to 9.3 for full-time faculty. Bowers purports, “This in turn may imply that inefficient utilization of facilities and staff, and hence also of finances, is a

¹⁹Banks, 63.

²⁰See Paul Bowers, “New Light on Theological Education in Africa,” *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 1990, an update of an article by that title published in *East Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* in 1987. Bowers notes, “ACTEA is a network and support service for evangelical theological education in Africa now linking more than 190 theological schools and programmes on the continent. ACTEA is a ministry of the Theological Commission of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM).”

significant overall pattern in theological education on the continent. One presumes that denominational sensitivities are a major factor in this situation. . . .²¹ The other significant factor relative to faculty concerned its Africanization. Evangelicals were distinctly behind the general pattern. Africans at ACTEA schools constituted 48.4 percent of all staff, compared with 60.1 percent for all schools.²²

Bowers delineates one other significant statistic. There were 298 schools that were identifiably evangelical in their sponsorship. Seventy-one percent of the evangelical schools were found in six countries: Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Zambia, Ghana, and Zaire. Extrapolating the average size of each school, he estimated a total of 12,763 theological students in Africa. Based on Barrett's estimate of some 36,711,000 evangelicals in Africa in 1980, this amounted to 1 evangelical theological student for every 2,876 evangelical African Christians.²³

Contextualized Approach

Christian leadership and church leadership requirements have some commonalities. These must be identified and articulated for effective cross-cultural training. Leadership also has contextual realities. What is the nature of leadership in Africa? Kohls points out that there are some traits in the African leadership model, e.g. the role of the chief, and more lately, that of politician, that have influenced the ideas of leadership within the church.²⁴ How should current political models of leadership, traditional tribal models of leadership, and cultural contextual models be incorporated into models of Christian leadership?

These influences need to be recognized and adapted in the context of Christian ministry. Conversely, missionaries have to be careful in using western training models not conducive to the African context. They must be careful in their methodological approach to training, recognizing that the nature of such will determine the type of graduate. Butler describes such a problem in Zaire, stating: "The programs used, especially the resident BI [Bible Institute] model, reflected western ideas of education as opposed to traditional African ideas of education. Clearly these programs were applied with little concession to the African culture."²⁵

Elliston reaffirmed this perspective. He states, ". . . if one wants a certain type of result (i.e. meeting a certain cognitive, attitudinal, or skill-based goal), the overall educational process

²¹Ibid., 19.

²²Such research needs to be done for Pentecostal schools in Africa.

²³While this research is dated, the author recognizes that it can be used as a benchmark and encourages scholars to use current research to find what would be applicable to Pentecostal theological education on the continent.

²⁴Paul Kohls, "A Look at Church Leadership in Africa," *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 17, no. 2 (1998): 107–126.

²⁵Ronald C. Butler, *A Program for Recruiting and Training Leadership for the Christian Churches in Zaire* (Portland, OR: Theological Research Exchange Network, 1994), 65. Butler suggests that the kind of approach to training also affects the nature of theological support. He notes, "Because of the nature of the programs provided and the high profile of the missionaries, the members and leaders of the churches always considered these programs to be missionary programs. Therefore, according to their thinking, the programs should be funded by the missionaries."

must be considered and designed with that end in view.” Furthermore, “the general results of a given educational structure can be predicted.”²⁶

A program designed or developed with the end in mind is referred to as an outcome-based model or “competencies”-based model of instruction. The model identifies the required skills and outcomes desired in the training, and builds the training around such realities.

Contextual theology. Richard Gehman writes about the need, the history, and methodologies of contextualization in Africa. He rightly points out that it was not until the early 1970s that evangelicals felt they could use the term with any legitimacy. Of course the term only came into missiological use at that time.

Contextualization is required for a relevant theology. Dr. E. W. Fasholé-Luke put it this way: “the nature of the quest for African Christian theologies is to translate the one Faith of Jesus Christ to suit the tongue, style, genius, character, and culture of African peoples.”²⁷ Among the tasks he sees to be tackled is the interpretation of the Bible in the African context, and the development of a contemporary Christology coming out of the African world view. Furthermore he states, “Conversion to Christianity must be coupled with cultural continuity.”²⁸

Apologetically, John Mbiti, noted African theologian and scholar, states, “The church in Africa is a Church without a theology and Church without theological concern.”²⁹ Mbiti, however, had other concerns about the theology imported from the West. On one occasion he reminisced, “We feel deeply affronted and wonder whether it is more meaningful theologically to have academic fellowship with heretics long dead than with the living brethren of the Church today in the so-called ‘third world.’”³⁰ Even though he was speaking forty years ago, one hopes that the situation has changed. Western nations will look more and more toward the two-thirds world for their contribution to developing Kingdom theology.³¹

Contextualization has to do with customs, leadership, political, and worship styles. But it includes more. It is concerned with training and educational methods but also theological methodologies.

Van Arkel reminds us, “God’s self-disclosure is never acultural.”³² God always reveals himself understandably to people in their own cultures. As people seek to understand God’s self-

²⁶Edgar J. Elliston, “Designing Leadership Education,” *Missiology: An International Review* XVI, no. 2 (April 1988): 206.

²⁷E. W. Fasholé-Luke, “The Quest for African Christian Theologies,” in *Mission Trends No. 3*, eds. Gerald Anderson and Thomas Stransky (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 135–151.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Quoted in Fasholé-Luke.

³⁰Colin Chapman, “Mission and Theological Education. ‘An Admirable Idea . . . But Exceedingly Difficult to Work Out’” (paper presented at the inaugural conference of the British and Irish Association for Mission Studies at New College, 1990).

³¹In 1998 it was the African (Anglican) bishops at the Lambeth conference in Great Britain who stood up against the west on the issue of homosexuality and ordination of gays. It is even embarrassing today to quote western theologians in their demeaning of African Christianity on this issue.

³²Jan T. de Jongh van Arkel, “Teaching Pastoral Care and Counseling in an African Context: A Problem of Contextual Relevancy,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 49, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 189–199.

disclosure they contextualize their theology. Dyrness reminds us that, after all, everyone theologizes, albeit with vary degrees of intellectual sophistication.

In the midst of this self-theologizing, voices are being raised for a strong evangelical approach. While the more liberal wing of the church has captured the essence of contextualization, voices like those of Kato, Gehman, Adeyemo, Osei-Mensah, Fasholé-Luke, and Talitwala argue for an evangelical contextualized theology. This process, however, is not concerned only with developing a product, e.g. a written document having African origins. It is concerned with the approach to *doing theology*, and more particularly, *doing training* in Africa.

Contextual methods. One of the most often-quoted research projects concerning the pedagogical approach in Africa was conducted by Earle and Dorothy Bowen.³³ The Bowens suggest that missionary educators have done little in contextualizing their teaching methods, particularly in theological education. Furthermore, the western missionaries' approach to education is significantly different than the Africans.' Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes the distinction this way: ". . . the Westerner is largely analytical, whereas the African tends to be synthetical. . . . the Westerner breaks things up and the other tends to see things as wholes. This is why Westerners can be such good scientists, but they are not so good at putting things back together."³⁴

Accepting Tutu's premise and field-testing their research on 205 students in 4 theological colleges, the Bowens conclude that Africans tend to be more "field-dependent," meaning that they approach situations globally, and have a visual rather than auditory orientation. There are all kinds of ramifications that spin out of this research. The Bowens list 16 implications for training in Africa. They conclude that teachers in Africa can do more to contextualize their methods to provide maximum learning opportunities for their students.

Wendland supports this research. He says, "A didactic style that may be suitable (or at least expected) in the United States does not work well in Africa, where students seem to learn and perform better when taught more inductively (from specific instances to the general principle), concretely (or relationally in terms of problem-oriented, real-life experiences), communally and participatively (according to the traditional oral-aural approach)."³⁵ These factors need to be considered when training programs are designed.

The outcomes that one desires should also impact the training process. Jonathan Lewis has done significant work in designing training for the two-thirds world. He notes, "Non-westerners tend to be less analytical and more holistic in their world views and as such, may respond to a praxis approach to learning such as apprenticeships, internships, or community-based experience."³⁶ Furthermore he notes, "A teaching style is a reflection of the individual's value system regarding human nature and the kinds of goals and environment that enhance

³³Earle and Dorothy Bowen, "Contextualizing Teaching Methods in Africa," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (July 1989): 270–275.

³⁴Ibid., 270.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Jonathan Lewis, "Contextualizing Needs Assessment for Third-World Missionary Training," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 8, no. 4 (October 1992): 121–122.

human learning.”³⁷ Lewis suggests that an experience-oriented model is much more applicable outside the West. It is in this area that the West has also departed from sound pedagogical instruction. Less stress needs to be put on the classroom, particularly in its lecture-oriented approach. These findings reinforce the need to give greater credence to extension-oriented models and nonformal methods of education.

Relevant Theological Education

In much of the majority world during the 1970s, there was significant discussion about renewal and excellence in theological education. Bruce Nicholls is well known in helping in the formation of Asia Theological Association (ATA) during that decade, and also gave input in the development of the Accrediting Council of Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA). Wilson Chow noted Nicholls’ contribution, appealing for a global accrediting body for theological schools that would “effectively prepare students for Christian ministries or church vocations.”³⁸ There was a call for new insights in the integration of the academic, spiritual, and practical in theological training, and for new and relevant curricula. Now, three decades later, the question needs to be asked: “How far has leadership training progressed in adapting to the new global and contextual realities specifically as it relates to training in seminaries and theological institutions?”

Chow makes this distinctive abundantly clear when he states, “Seminaries should be different from schools of religious studies patterned after the university model, or even from professional training schools. There must be a functional integration between learning by precepts and learning by experience, between being and doing.”⁴⁰

This paper has focused on theological and methodological contextualization for the African context as well as on renewal in theological education. In a recent book, Linda Cannell suggests, “Most of the leaders in the majority world, and increasing numbers in the West, will be developed in nonformal ventures established by concerned national leaders. . . . In the non-Western world, one might hope that there will be a shift from valuing the prestige of degrees and academic attainment toward creatively assessing one’s culture to determine what modes of educational development are needed in that context.”⁴¹ The challenges in leadership development remain huge. There is no doubt that there must be more collaboration between mission and national churches for effective leadership training to be developed for this burgeoning church.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Wilson Chow, “An Integrated Approach to Theological Education,” in *Evangelical Theological Education Today: In International Perspective*, ed. Paul Bowers (Nairobi, Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1982):49–60.

⁴⁰Chow, 51. Chow bases his appeal for an integrated approach to education on the assumption that the following five characteristics are what denominational leaders are looking for in their ministers: 1) service without regard for acclaim; 2) personal integrity; 3) Christian example; 4) pastoral skills; and 5) leadership.

⁴¹Linda Cannell, *Theological Education Matters: Leadership Education for the Church* (Newburgh, IN: EDCOT Press, 2006), 325.

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