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Review

Ott, Bernhard, *Understanding and Developing Theological Education*, Langham Global Library, Carlisle: 2016, ISBN 9781907713880, 475pp.

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In *Understanding and Developing Theological Education*, Bernhard Ott, a theologian, former rector, president of a theological seminary, and former academic dean reflects on his vast experience and lessons learnt about leadership and curriculum development in the field of theological education. The contents of the book are intended to be a valuable resource not only for leaders at any level in theological schools and training institutions, but also for students and seminarians who need direction in terms of their intended studies. Ott offers a global perspective, incorporating, among other things, studies from North America and England, and international networks in Switzerland, Germany, and India.

The book contains eight chapters. After an introduction chapter, chapters 2-4 elaborate on foundational and skill competencies while chapters 5-8 elaborate on practicalities, including include models and strategies. The first foundational competency (chapter 2) is the struggle for reform and renewal in theological education, historical influences, and the changes that have shaped current theological education. Ott begins at the Second World War, then reflects on the efforts of the World Council of Churches and the Association for Theological Schools, the missionary work of International Council for Evangelical Theological Education and universities and theological schools in Switzerland and German-speaking Europe, and provides deep insights into the history of educational reform.

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In the third chapter, Ott discusses the foundation of educational theory in-depth. He explains the various forms and models that exist and are spread across institutions, seminaries, and training facilities. He discusses catechistic, monastic, scholastic, and seminary models. He highlights and speaks favourably about the seminary model, which aims to bring renewal or transformation to the church. These models also include institutions called Theological Education by Extension. Ott elaborates on the various traditions that forms the bases for the current models, and states that institutions should consider the past, the present, and their effectiveness in the current context.

Ott elaborates on the theological foundation for theological education in chapter 4. Cites theologians such as Richard Niebuhr, David Kelsey, and Edward Farley, Ott insists that theological education must be grounded in theology. The aforementioned gleaned their stance from the examples of Jesus and Paul. Ott maintains that it is important for hermeneutical assumptions to be shaped by the Bible and be underpinned by the impact of systematic theology. He argues that the church as the primary place for theological education. A connectedness, therefore, exists based on the responsibility between church and educational institutions. This relationship cannot be underestimated. Ott reiterates that theological education exists to serve the church and not the other way round.

In chapter 5, Ott argues for the importance of integrating theory and practice. Ott cites Gerald Ebeling who claimed that there is a disruption in the subject matter related to theology, an estrangement in spirituality and intellectual works, and tension between theory and practice. Integration allows for a thorough assessment of “Theory, Praxis and *Poiesis*” (202-203), which relate to the various competencies of reason, virtue, and ability.

Curriculum development is examined in chapter 6. Ott states that curriculums are at risk if they are maintained over the years without consideration of current demands (church and mission), and the concerns of students and instructors, which include inadequacies in the curriculum such as behavioural competency, training in missions, and pastoral theology.

In chapter seven, Ott stresses the need for quality control. Delivering what is promised versus acquiring competencies and skills as per accreditation

standards is of great importance. The use of various, appropriate tools, as well as constant reviews, are vital for educational institutions. The question of who is responsible in terms of support, what are the goals, and how the process should unfold aid execution and development of curriculum design. Partnerships with volunteers and agencies increase effectiveness and the practical opportunities and exposure that enable an integrated curriculum.

Ott focuses on various leadership models in chapter 8, but particularly highlights the work of Peter Thomas Senn who introduced head (strategy/orientation), hands (structures/coordination), and heart (culture/motivation) model. This model also clarifies the administrative leadership model versus an entrepreneurial leadership role. Ott argues that the role of a leader at a theological school requires more than just following a job description. Effective leaders must execute a combination of leadership tasks, theories, and organisational models to address the demands and variables of the theological arena.

Although Ott does not present an African perspective on theological education, his experience in the field of theological education, views on a wide range of leadership models, and involvement in curriculum development and international platforms including the World Council of Churches demonstrate valuable lessons for leaders at any institution. Ott's emphasis on the Bible, church context, partnerships with other agencies, and the demand to prepare students and seminarians for the challenges of the world are applicable to international and African leaders. Yet many of the institutions, models, and scholars quoted by Ott relate to Switzerland specifically. The opportunity to hear forth African context is missed.

Ott recommends his book to leaders and students. But the book's lengthy historical discussions and overwhelming number of scholarly perspectives, may make it cumbersome for busy leaders with significant time constraints. Ott tends to discuss basic concepts at length, which may prove unnecessary for experienced leaders. Concepts such as the Word of God, praxis, and curriculum do not warrant the extensive definitions and explanations that Ott provides. Concise summaries, especially at the end of each chapter, would be helpful. Ott also recommends his book for students, but the heft of the value may render it inaccessible to students who want to see relevant information

immediately. Ott's book may not be as suitable for that target group as he hopes.

I do, however, strongly recommend the book to new leaders in the field of theological education field. New leaders at African institutes will benefit from deeper understanding of the history and international development of theological education. The book may also inspire an African scholar to write about a similar volume about theological education from an African perspective, specifically for the African context.