Reaching The Zenith As A Christian Scholar: The Imperative Of Faculty Development

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ABSTRACT
The paper, “Reaching the Zenith as a Christian Scholar: the Imperative of Faculty Development,” underscores the imperative nature of faculty development for advancing in one’s career as a Christian scholar. The paper dovetails on the writer’s exposure at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, September – December 2015 to isolate advantages of the faculty development exposure. These are: i) Broadening of One’s Horizon ii) The Inspiration of Senior Academics iii) Exposure to Facilities and Resources iv) Advantage of Complimentary Opportunities v) Pursuit of a New Passion and vi) Challenge of a Broader Vision. The paper also makes suggestions to improve the programme and these are: i) Orientation for Participants ii) Preliminary Preparations iii) Making the Faculty Development Programme a Sabbatical and iv) Expanding the Scope of the Programme.

Keywords: Zenith, Christian scholar, Imperative, Faculty development, Academics, Exposure and Vision.

I. INTRODUCTION
It is a glorious privilege to be a Christian scholar. In addition to being an instrument in God’s hand, thus His ambassador, the Christian scholar has a great opportunity to contribute to the formation of men and women who will in turn impact their generation and even future generations. When seen from the perspective of theological education, the Christian scholar has the additional opportunity of influencing those who will be future leaders of churches and Christian organizations and institutions thereby further enlarging the circles of influence. Like any other professional, the Christian scholar should aspire to reach the zenith. The thesis of this article is that faculty development is imperative in actualizing this aspiration. The paper, “Reaching the Zenith As A Christian Scholar: The Imperative of Faculty Development,” reflects on the writer’s exposure at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS), Fort Worth, Texas, September – December 2015 as one of the beneficiaries of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS), Ogbomoso faculty development program. At that time he was the Rector, Baptist College of Theology, Oyo, one of the theological institutions of the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The paper discusses the purpose and value of faculty development, and highlights six advantages of the writer’s exposure at SWBTS, Fort Worth. Thereafter, the paper makes some suggestions to enhance the program and to make it more impacting.

II. REACHING THE ZENITH AS A CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR: THE IMPERATIVE OF FACULTY DEVELOPMENT
Before identifying six of the advantages I experienced during my exposure in America, I shall discuss the purpose and value of staff development program and the development of human potential, to which training is integrally linked. J.A. Ilori affirmed that “the purpose of Christian education is human development” (Ilori, 2013: 34). He further asserted: “The social purpose of Christian education includes more than individual development. It includes social development and this, in turn, implies the highest possible development of each individual (Ilori, 2013: 34 – 35). The relationship of staff development to
the purpose of Christian education is that staff development helps to achieve the purpose of Christian education, which the Christian educator should exemplify. Writing in the context of theological education, Adetunji and Akinbobola underscored that the purpose of staff development is for “them to make progress with their own lives and also to bring progress to their establishment or institution” adding that staff development involves training and equipping of staff appropriately (Adetunji & Akinbobola, 2012: 134). They further noted that “academic and professional development involves encouraging the staff to add value through program of continuing education in order to remain relevant, mature and develop personal cum professional identity with integrity on the job” (Adetunji & Akinbobola, 2012: 135).

Furthermore, they emphasized the necessity of staff development thus:

> Professional development of the staff is a major issue for some reasons. As a theological educator and staff, his contributions help in the renewal of church ministries, enhance the unity of the church, give prominence to church leadership development, provide theological competence for church ministries, reinforce and strengthen denomination’s identity of current and future denominational leaders and workers. He is no doubt a man of enormous potentials, and if given the opportunity of development, the efforts will be of great benefits to the church, the denomination, the society and the world at large (Adetunji & Akinbobola, 2012: 137).

From the above, we can see the progressive benefits of staff development from the individual, to the institution, the denomination and the world.

Writing with reference to training of teachers and church workers, Tidwell observed: “A church which fails to train its teachers and leaders cannot expect to do well the teaching and learning tasks for its members” (Tidwell, 1982: 265). He also identified pre-service and in-service training as the two basic types of training (Tidwell, 1982:266).

Similarly Michael S. Lawson emphasized the need for, and highly rated, in-service training thus: “An on-going training program needs a multifaceted strategy,” citing annual in-service training as one of six procedures that have been extremely effective over time (Lawson, 1992:141). In the same vein, citing Caset Treat, Opateyibo and Ayandele noted on the importance of training: “Caset Treat emphasized the significance of teaching and training church workers. Teaching, according to him, is the giving of knowledge or information; while training is preparing the church for the next phase of growth” (Opateyinbo and Ayandele, citing Treat, 2002:138).

The above section, with the references to the training of church workers, has shown graphically that training is of great significance for the continued growth of staff and institutions and that it should be done perennially. Thus it forms a good background in advancing the imperativeness of faculty development program. As a further means of authenticating the imperativeness of faculty development program for reaching the zenith as a Christian scholar, I shall reflect on six of the advantages I experienced during the faculty development program at SWBTS, Fort Worth.

**A. Broadening of Horizon**

The faculty development program at SWBTS, Fort Worth broadened my horizon extensively. Among other dimensions, I was exposed to new culture, skills and methods, and I advanced on the ICT beyond where I was before I traveled. Indeed. The impact of the exposure on me is so profound that I have testified to many people that my life will never be the same again.

Even before I travelled, the process of preparation, most especially going for the Visa interview, initiated the transformation I experienced, which is most descriptive of my exposure. The transformation is in line with Ilori’s submission on the advantage of travel thus:

> Through travels we come into direct contact with people of foreign nations as well as with people of various sections of our own country. Thus through travel we often overcome prejudice and bias and develop a cosmopolitan and broadminded philosophy of life. Whereas formal education tends to be abstract and theoretical, traveling provides a sense of immediacy and directness (Ilori, 2013: 86 – 87).
Later in this article, I shall reflect on the new passion and broader vision I have now consequent upon the exposure. In the final analysis, the new passion and the broader vision are integral to the broadening of horizon of the faculty development program.

B. Inspiration of Senior Academics

Like any reputable academic institution, I was exposed to senior academics at SWBTS, Fort Worth and the exposure gave me great inspiration. While at the institution, I sat in classes of, and interacted with, lecturers who are older and more experienced than me. Thereby, I was enriched and further strengthened in my resolve to press on until I reach the zenith of my career as a Christian scholar. One aspect of the inspiration relates to publications. I was challenged and inspired by those who have dozens of publications. Another aspect relates to extensive institutional, denominational and organizational involvements and travels. Most especially in the above respects are the Seminary President, Dr. Paige Patterson, Dr. Paul Stutz, Dr. Keith Eitel, Dr. Michael Morris, Dr. David Allen, Dr. Terry Wilder, Dr. Brent Ray and Dr. John Derouen.

C. Exposure to Facilities and Resources

Probably more than any other advantage, exposure to facilities and resources is the greatest benefit of the faculty development program to me. I was amazed at some of the facilities, especially buildings, most especially the chapel, one of the “seven wonders of SWBTS” as I called it. Similarly, I was overwhelmed with resources, most especially books and journals which I received and/or bought within the short period of three months.

In this regard, I want to reflect on an experience I had. In the library, I had access to work of great philosophers. Also, at the Christian Lifeway Bookstores at SWBTS and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS), Louisville, Kentucky, I bought scores of books. Among them are philosophy books including primary works of some of the great philosophers. After one particular purchase I imagined that I had been teaching philosophy for decades and yet I did not have primary works of the great philosophers.

One special dimension of the resources was arts. My appreciation of arts was enhanced by my exposure. Ilori’s comment on the role of arts and humanities to education is very insightful thus:

_Education is incomplete without the enjoyment of the arts and humanities. Knowledge of the great works of arts of the past may illuminate one’s appreciation of the present. Appreciation implies more than recognition of the great workers of arts. It means a transvaluation of our attitudes whereby art becomes a way of life and conditions our basic values and goals_ (Ilori, 2013. 87).

Of the abundant works of arts at SWBTS, the one that struck the greatest responsive chord in my heart is the King David Suite created by Edna Hibel. On a double score, even the writing on Hibel provides a great inspiration of its own. Here are excerpts:

_Edna Hibel, creator of the David Suite, is world renowned as one of the leading figures in contemporary art. A painter and lithographer of international stature, Hibel has earned a unique combination of critical acclaim and popular acceptance for the beauty, humanity and insight of her artworks in a wide range of media and techniques. Perhaps the greatest tribute paid to Edna Hibel has been the establishment of the Hibel Museum of Art, Palm Beach, Florida, the only museum in the United States dedicated to the works of a living woman artist (Citation on Edna Hibel, written on December 12, 2015)._}

D. Advantage of Complimentary Opportunities

My going to SWBTS afforded me opportunities to know some other places, and to visit and preach in churches, for which I am very grateful. During my stay, I visited SBTS, Louisville, Kentucky, fulfilling a long-desired dream of my life. Similarly, I attended the inauguration of Prof. Benjamin O. Akande as the 21st President of Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri, a service of great academic and historical significance to me.
As to churches, I visited eleven (11) churches during the three months of my stay and I preached in 5 of them. The latter are: (1) Living Faith Baptist Church, Irving (2) New Life Baptist Church, Dallas, (3) First African Baptist Church, Fort Worth (4) GraceWay Christian Church, Ground Rock (Austin) and (5) African Evangelical Baptist Church, Grand Prairie, all in Texas. I place on record my profound appreciation to the churches I was privileged to preach which concretized an international dimension of my ministry.

In addition, I attended Dallas Baptist Association meeting held at Park Baptist Church, Dallas, a wonderful exposure for me in terms of the resources at the promotional stands, and the timing and presentations at the meeting. When I was at Austin, I also visited the office of the Austin Baptist Association where I was also inundated with resources. In all the above mentioned places, I met several officers and personalities some of whom I have been in contact with.

E. Pursuit of a New Passion

The impact of the exposure on me is so profound that consequently, I have a new passion – to assist some other ministers to go to America and to change/enhance some of the facilities in our theological institutions and in the Convention. Implicitly, the new passion is congruent with Jesus’ words when He said, “To whom much is given, much is also expected” (Luke 12:48).

It is significant to record that the passion has started. One of the areas of the gap between America and Africa is in the area of resources. Many books were bought for the Baptist College of Theology, Oyo and this fulfils a Philosophical rationale of the passion, to reduce the gap between America and Africa. (I shall be reimbursed by the College but some of the books I shall give free to the College). Similarly, some of the books would be given to individuals. I also started purchased new chairs to replace the ones in the Rector’s office.

In another dimension, I gave money, clothes, biros and so on to dozens of people since my arrival. In a sense this is empowerment and bringing the advantages of my exposure to bear on a contextual need. In his book, Contextual Approach to Christian Education in Africa, Emmanuel A. Laso observed: that poverty “is one of the serious problems confronting the Church in Africa today. 300 million African people live on less than $ 1 US per day (Laso, 2013: 95). I recall an unforgettable experience in this regard. On December 19, 2015 I was at our home town, Ipee, for my sister’s daughter’s wedding. I gave a retired graduate teacher $40. To my greatest amazement she said she had not seen the currency before. It was unbelievable to me as I asked her whether she meant what she said.

The new passion concurs with Esther O Ayandokun’s exposition on goal and motivation. According to Ayandokun, “Goal directness is the key attribute of motivated behavior. The person in his/her pursuit persists until the goal is reached” (Ayandokun, 2013:88). She also noted that “motivation answers why people do certain things.” Positing that there are two types of motivation–intrinsic, which is self – directed motivation and extrinsic, external – directed motivation, she affirmed: “When the two meet, they produce wonderful effect on persons towards achieving set goals” (Ayandokun, 2013:92). I assert that the aim of the new passion is to transform those who would benefit from the plan with the resultant goal of impacting the affected ministers positively, enlarging their ministerial coasts, with great cumulative effects on the Nigerian Baptist Convention. As to the facilities, the goal is to create a more conducive and dignified environment in our institutions and the Convention.

F. Challenge of a Broader Vision

In a similar vein with the new passion, my exposure also gave me a broader vision. Consequent upon my exposure, I became convinced of the need to operate further afield. In other words, after over two decades of operating in Nigeria and West Africa, I now have a global vision. I desire to use America as a platform in so far as America is one of the countries one can use for such a global vision. I shall attend conferences in America for cross fertilization of ideas and to be in tune with global theological /academic trends. Then, as God opens the doors, I look forward to opportunities to visit other countries to teach on short term basis, contributing to the growth of churches in those countries while I am there.

The broader vision articulated above tangents with Myles Munroe’s comments on the awesome potential of the individual. He opined thus:
You possess awesome potential within waiting to be activated and released. The release of your potential demands that you refuse to be satisfied with your latest accomplishment. Only then will you tap into the vast bill of credit with which you were born...Releasing your potential requires a willingness to move beyond the familiar to the realm of possibilities (Munroe, 1992:12)

I am gratified that the faculty development program has intensified my desire to further release my potentials thus achieving my purpose in life and fulfilling my destiny in the world in a greater measure.

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR ENHANCING THE FACULTY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The faculty development program has many advantages and is imperative to reaching the zenith as a Christian educator. I hereby offer the following suggestions for its enhancement.

A. Orientation for Participants

Faculty members who would participate in the program should be given orientation covering culture shock adjustment mechanisms, expectations, opportunities and challenges, interactions, clothing, spending, purchases, and so on. Meeting(s) should be arranged between recent participants to interact with intending faculty members of the program.

B. Preliminary Preparations

Necessary preliminary preparations that can be done in Nigeria should be made. For instance, I wrote to the Dean, Fish School of Missions and Evangelism, Dr. Eitel, about the seminars Dr. P.S. Akinbobola and I could participate in and requesting that we be allowed to present one or two papers. Whereas Dr. Eitel replied indicating his readiness to send the list of all PhD seminars for the semester to me, the Seminary President wrote that I should wait until the outcome of the Visa interview copying Dr. Eitel and Rev. Dr. S. Ademola Ishola. Eventually, it took about two days to select seminars I would participate in when I got to SWBTS, which I could have done before I left Nigeria consequent upon an email Dr. Eitel would have sent.

Similarly, the respective maintenance / financial assistance of the supporting parties should be made available at least two weeks to the time of departure to aid participants’ preparation. Generally, preparations for the trip should commence at least six months to the date of departure from Nigeria.

C. Making the Faculty Development Program a Sabbatical

NBTS, Ogbomoso should explore the possibility of making the program sabbatical - like. Even if participating faculty members do not teach, they can be asked to develop a colloquium paper which can be presented to postgraduate students, or an academic paper which can be presented at a faculty forum. In either case, the topics would have been assigned before affected faculty members leave Nigeria.

D. Expanding the Scope of the Program

In view of the many and great advantages of the faculty development program, more faculty members from NBC theological institutions should be enlisted for the program, especially those who have spent six years and above. Similarly, the Seminary and the Convention should discuss with one or two other institutions. Indeed, the possibility of institutions in England and Europe for the program should be explored. Now is the time for NBC theological educators to be involved in global theological initiatives. With respect to the huge financial implications of the radical suggestion above, several options should be explored. One option is for the Convention to pay for only the return tickets and the affected faculty members’ institutions to pay for the maintenance, with whatever amount the faculty members can raise on their own.

IV. CONCLUSION

I place on record my profound appreciation to the Baptist College of Theology, Oyo, the NBTS, Ogbomoso and the Nigerian Baptist Convention for facilitating my participation in the program. Similarly, I thank SWBTS, Fort Worth, Texas and all who contributed to the success of the exposure in Nigeria and America. The article has articulated the imperative of faculty development program in enabling Christian scholars to reach the zenith of their careers. While noting that the faculty development
of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso is a very advantageous program, the paper has further advocated for enhancing and expanding the scope of the program. It is hoped that the ideas in the paper will motivate Christian scholars to aspire to reach the zenith in their careers, encourage the NBTS, Ogbomoso to improve on its faculty development programme and inspire other tertiary institutions to be more committed to faculty development.

REFERENCES
Citation on Ednra Hibel, Nylon Student Center, Southwestern Baptist Theological Summary, Fort Worth, Texas, written on December 12,2015.