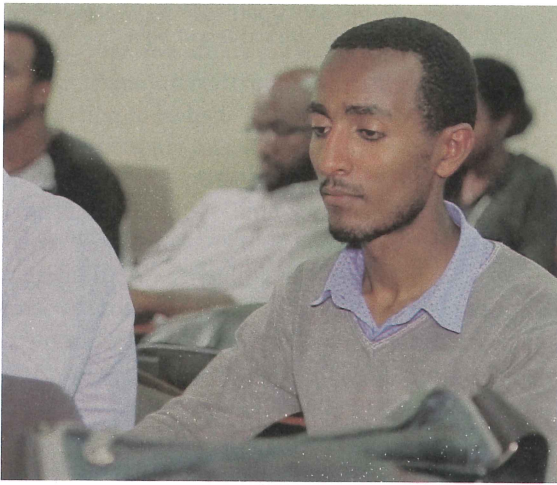


THE CHALLENGES OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA

SEMEON MULATU | EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE OF ADDIS ABABA



Ethiopia has a population of over 100 million, and the number of evangelical Christians exploded from very few believers in the 1930s to 20 million in 2017. The church went through periods of persecution in its history, but that did not prevent the church from growing. In fact, it expanded and became stronger.

During the past twenty-five years, the church in Ethiopia has been enjoying a relative freedom. Many believers are being added, and new churches are being planted at a faster rate all over the country. People are responding to the gospel because life-challenges from many directions are driving them to the Lord. They are realizing that he is the only true hope they have.

Christianity's rapid expansion and relative freedom are great blessings, but they also come with

challenges. The church's unprecedented growth has far outstripped its ability to provide trained leadership for its congregations. Most churches are led by ministers who have very little or no formal theological training. That makes it difficult for pastors to provide sound teaching to their flock. As a result, believers are vulnerable to many false teachings that are spreading like wildfire. Through television, these teachings are reaching many believers who are not equipped to distinguish truth from error.

Now more than ever, the church needs well-trained pastors and ministers who faithfully preach the word of God and help believers become mature disciples of Christ. Meeting the growing need for training is a daunting task for theological institutions, which face big challenges to make theological education accessible, affordable, and applicable.

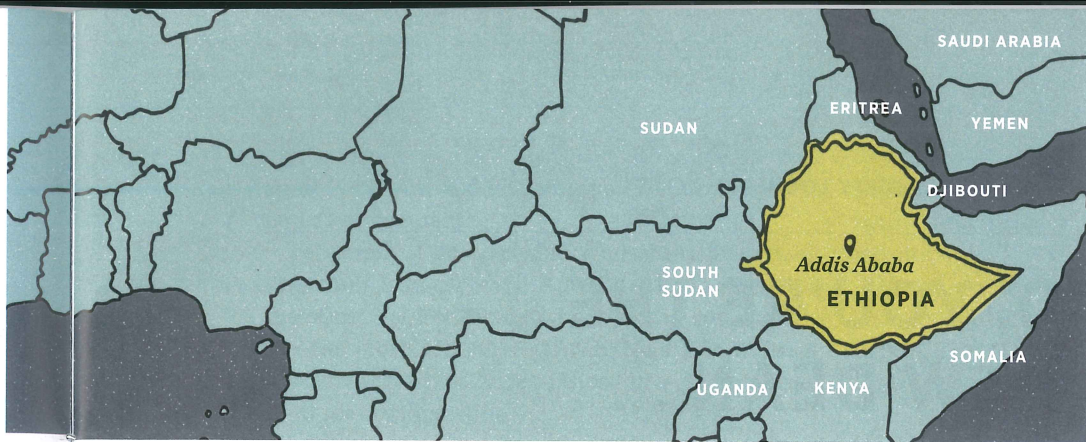
ACCESSIBLE There are very few Bible colleges and seminaries in Ethiopia, and most of them are in bigger cities. Although many Christians have an interest in studying theology and becoming better equipped for ministry, people in rural areas find it

unaffordable to move to the cities. Providing online education is not feasible due to poor Internet connections and limited access to computers. Some theological schools have opened extension campuses around the country. However, multiplying these extension sites is

challenging because of the lack of qualified faculty members and financial resources.

Another challenge that affects accessibility for many people is the language barrier. All college-level

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education in Ethiopia is offered in English, so many Bible colleges and seminaries are forced to turn away potential students who lack English proficiency. In addition, the textbooks and library resources used in these institutions are written primarily in English. There are very few books that are written in the local language (Amharic) that can serve as textbooks at a college or seminary level.

AFFORDABLE Since most students come from financially challenged areas, they struggle to pay even the subsidized tuition rates. In addition, the higher cost of living in the cities makes it unaffordable for many potential students. Schools struggle to become financially sustainable with the subsidized tuition they collect from students, and they struggle to pay reasonable salaries to their faculty and staff. Attracting and maintaining qualified professors is a challenge. Those who teach at these colleges and seminaries usually serve sacrificially. With such low compensation, it is difficult to attract faculty members who have received formal training in Western nations and have remained there.

APPLICABLE The other challenge that theological schools face is making the training applicable to the specific ministry contexts students come from. There is a lack of contextually relevant books that can be used as textbooks and reference materials. Most of the materials used are written by Western authors, and they mostly address Western issues. There is a huge need for quality textbooks that are written specifically for an Ethiopian (or African) context.

The challenges facing theological education in Ethiopia exist in many parts of the world. As churches continue to grow in the coming years, it is all the more important to provide sound training for Christians that is accessible, affordable, and applicable. Teaching theology in these contexts is a huge opportunity that can make a difference in the lives of millions of believers. The challenges are daunting, but we believe the God of the harvest will enable us to train more servants for the church in Ethiopia and beyond. **D**

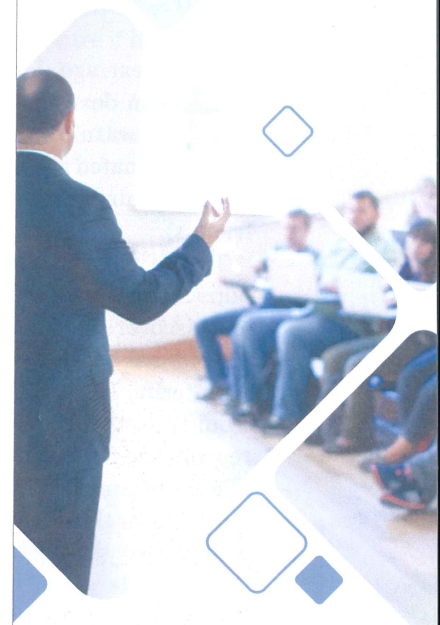


SEMEON MULATU'S areas of interest are Christian higher educational leadership and homiletics.



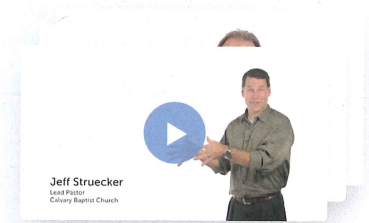
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