An Interpretative Analysis of Matthew 28:18-20 as a Basis for Theological Education

Babatunde Ogunlana (PhD) iD

Baptist Theological Seminary, Kaduna, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Theological education is a vital outgrowth of the Great Commission, designed to serve the church's mission in the world. It plays a crucial role in equipping leaders and believers. However, debates persist regarding the most effective purpose, curriculum, methods and model for theological education that prioritizes mission. The complexity of the field is reflected in the varied purposes and models of theological education proposed by scholars, underscoring its multifaceted nature. Purposes and models of theological education have been a topic of debate. This study provided an interpretative examination of Matthew 28:18-20, exploring its implications for the purpose, curriculum, models, and teaching methods in theological education. The study specifically targeted theological education within the Nigerian context. This study employed a non-empirical method, combining exegetical and descriptive approaches to investigate theological education. The article argued that the Great Commission serves as a framework for theological education, highlighting the crucial role of mission, evangelism, and disciple-making in shaping its purpose and practice. Some of the findings are that theological education's purpose is to shape students into Christ-like disciples, equipping them to fulfill the Great Commission; the curriculum should focus on the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), equipping students for discipleship, disciple-making, and teaching others; theological educators should adopt a missional model that prioritizes understanding God's active presence in the world; theological educators should adopt a missional approach, mirroring Jesus' teaching method, as evident in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19). Conclusively, the Great Commission offers a robust foundation for theological education, empowering leaders and believers to fulfill the church's mission through mission, evangelism, and disciple-making. This research has demonstrated clearly that a closer examination of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) can provide a robust foundation for theological education

Keywords: *Theological Education, Matthew 28:18-20, Curriculum, Great Commission*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Theological education is an essential outgrowth of the Great Commission, established to serve the church's existence and mission in the world. Its primary objective is to nurture leaders who will guide the church in fulfilling its divine mandate. This leadership formation encompasses four critical dimensions: spiritual growth, moral integrity, ministerial preparedness, and intellectual rigor.

Theological education in Nigeria faces significant challenges related to its purpose, curriculum, methods, and models, which threaten its effectiveness and warrant further investigation. The definition, purpose, and model of theological education have been subject to diverse interpretations and perspectives, reflecting the complexity and multifaceted nature of the field. Different scholars have offered distinct definitions of theological education, highlighting its various dimensions and emphases. The purpose of theological education has also been a topic of debate. The models of theological education have also been subject to diverse interpretations.

Therefore, this article aims to conduct an interpretative analysis of Matthew 28:18-20, exploring its implications for theological education, specifically in relation to its purpose, curriculum design, educational models, and teaching approaches. The relevance of the study lies in its potential to inform and guide theological institutions in Nigeria in redefining their purpose and curriculum, as well as theological educators in adopting a suitable model and teaching approach for effective theological education. The key objective of the article is to analyze Matthew 28:18-20 and uncover its implications for theological education, in relation to its purpose, curriculum design, model and teaching method. The article establishes that the Great Commission provides a rich foundation for theological education, emphasizing the importance of mission, evangelism, and disciple-making. The missional model, rooted in Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20, is hereby recommended as an effective approach for theological educators in Nigeria to adopt.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a non-empirical method, combining exegetical and descriptive approaches to investigate theological education. A comprehensive literature review synthesizes scholarly perspectives on the subject, establishing a foundational framework. An in-depth analysis of classical and vocational models reveals their limitations, particularly their neglect of participating in God's mission. This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) serves as a rich foundation for theological education, emphasizing evangelism, discipleship, and mission.

An exegetical analysis of this passage, considering its historical, literary, and linguistic contexts, uncovers its original meaning. A descriptive approach is then used to relate the meaning of Matthew 28:18-20 to theological education, exploring how it can inform a missional model that prioritizes evangelism, discipleship, and mission. By following this methodology, this study will delve into the significance of the Great Commission and its relevance to theological education. Through this methodology, the research will contribute to the development of a missional model of theological education that emphasizes participation in God's mission, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of theological education.

3.0 SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVES ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

This literature review aims to synthesize the views of scholars on the meaning, purpose, and models of theological education. By examining existing research, we will establish a foundational understanding of the subject, providing a framework for this article. This review will uncover key insights, trends, and debates in the field, enabling a deeper comprehension of theological education's complexities. In this literature, scholarly perspectives on the scholarly perspectives on the definition and significance of theological education will be analyzed. Various models of theological education and their underlying

philosophies will be explored. This literature review will provide a comprehensive overview of theological education's current state, informing the development of a robust framework for understanding the subject.

3.1 Theological Education: Definitions and Perspectives

Theological education is a multifaceted concept that has been defined and approached in various ways by scholars. At its core, it is established to serve the church and society, guided by the principles of God's reign. According to Nancy R. Heisey and Daniel S. Schipani, theological education is a critical dimension of the church's teaching ministry, responsible for passing on traditions that faithfully witness to God's reign, guiding believers in diverse cultural settings to make wise judgments about normative Christian beliefs and practices, and articulating the church's message in ways that nurture Christian life and faith. It is aimed to form and transform the faith, equip individuals for ministry and service, strengthen and renew the church.[1]

Abraham Folahan notes that theological education is in crisis in many parts of the world, particularly in the Third World, where Western paradigms dominate. However, there is a growing movement to rethink and restructure theological education in contextually relevant ways.[2] Other scholars emphasize different aspects of theological education. Simon Kolawole and Moses O. Oladeji stress that theological education is God-centered, meeting total human needs, with the Bible as its primary source.[3] Ponnle Gideon Adetunji and Philips Akinbobola emphasize that theological education prepares individuals for religious

vocations, providing knowledge, skills, and character development.[4] Elijah O. Otokola posits that theological education trains individuals to know and serve God, typically in preparation for special service or leadership.[5]

From these definitions, it can be rightly asserted that theological education is a complex and multifaceted field that encompasses various perspectives and approaches. At its core, it aims to form and transform individuals and communities, equipping them for ministry and service. While challenges and crises exist, there is a growing recognition of the need for contextual and relevant theological education that prioritizes God's reign and the Bible.

3.2 The Purpose of Theological Education: Diverse Perspectives

Scholars have offered various insights into the purpose of theological education. According to Abraham Folahan, some notable perspectives include those that follow. LeRoy Ford describes the purpose of theological education as integrating personal formation and functional formation, laying a foundation for fulfilling its mission. Personal formation focuses on the development of an individual's character, spirituality, and relationship with God. This aspect of formation is essential for cultivating a strong foundation for ministry. Functional formation, on the other hand, emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for effective ministry. This includes theological knowledge, biblical understanding, and practical ministry skills.[6]

According to Miroslav Volf, theological education centers on God, focusing on leadership formation that combines spiritual,

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[1] Nancy R. Heisey and Daniel S. Schipani eds., *Theological Education on Five Continents: Anabaptist Perspective* (Strasbourg: Mennonite World Conference, 1997), 5-7.
[2] Abraham Folahan, 'What is the Purpose of Theological Education,' *CTE* 1, (2011): 1-2.
[3] Simon A. Kolawole and Moses O. Oladeji, "Strategic Planning and Theological Education: Priorities and Action Plans for Development," in *Theological Education and Ministerial Training in the Nigerian Baptist Convention* (Lagos: Baptist College of Theology, 2012), 78.

[4] Ponnle Gideon Adetunji and Philips Akinbobola, "Staff Development and Theological Education," *Theological Education and Ministerial Training in the Nigerian Baptist Convention* (Lagos: Baptist College of Theology, 2012), 134-135.
[5] Elijah O. Otokola, "The Importance of Theological Education to the Changing World," *Continental J. Education Research* 10 no. 2 (2017): 94.
[6] LeRoy Ford, *A Curriculum Design Manual for Theological Education : A Learning Outcome Focus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 343, quoted in Abraham Folahan, "What is the Purpose of Theological Education," *CTE* 1, (2011): 1-2.

practical, and academic objectives. Spiritual formation is essential for leaders, enabling them to cultivate a deepening relationship with God. Practical formation equips leaders with the skills and competencies necessary for effective ministry. Academic formation provides leaders with a robust understanding of theological concepts, biblical studies, and historical contexts. [7]

Gnana Robinson asserts that the primary purpose of theological education is to prepare individuals for doing God's will and ministry. This purpose underscores the importance of equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and spiritual maturity necessary to effectively serve and fulfill their calling. [8] According to a group of North Eastern Asian theologians, the primary purpose of theological education is to prepare men and women for participating in Christ's ministry. This purpose highlights the importance of equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and spiritual maturity necessary to effectively serve and fulfill their role in advancing God's kingdom. [9] Tony Sargent establishes that spiritual formation is the overriding goal of theological education. This emphasis on spiritual formation recognizes that effective ministry and communication of the historic faith depend on a deepening relationship with God and a strong spiritual foundation. [10] Afterward, Folahan submits that the purpose of theological education is the work of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing formation – an activity that permeates the entire process. He highlights the importance of love for God and neighbor, distinguishing theological education from general education. [11]

Furthermore, John Enyinnaya discusses various views on the purpose of theological education. From a Catholic perspective, formation is a multifaceted process that encompasses human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions. This comprehensive approach recognizes that effective ministry and service require a well-rounded individual with a strong foundation in various aspects. From Ott's view, theological education should be relevant to the church's aspirations. This perspective emphasizes the importance of aligning theological education with the needs and goals of the church, ensuring that it remains a vital and effective tool for equipping leaders and advancing God's kingdom. [12]

Then, Enyinnaya suggests that theological education should focus on making an ideal church and making an ideal pastor. According to Enyinnaya, an ideal church is characterized by evangelism, robust preaching, ministry to the needy, team spirit, inspiring worship, and prayer. An ideal pastor, is characterized by prayer, sense of call, knowledge of the Word, care for members, preaching, and leadership. [13]

The purpose of theological education is complex and multifaceted, encompassing various dimensions that work together to equip individuals for effective ministry and leadership. At its core, theological education seeks to foster spiritual formation, leadership development, and preparation for ministry. Spiritual formation is central to theological education, enabling individuals to become Christlike in their character, values, and actions. This dimension of formation is essential for cultivating a deepening relationship with God and empowering individuals to live out their faith. Theological education also aims to equip individuals for effective service and leadership

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[7] Miroslav Volf, "Dancing for God: Challenges facing Theological Education Today," in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3(2005): 200-205, quoted in Folahan, "What is the Purpose of Theological Education," 1-2.

[8] Gnana. Robinson, *Theological Education in India: The Journey Continues* (Chennai: The Christian Literature Society, 2000), 32, quoted in Folahan, 1-2.

[9] James .F. Hopewell, "Theological Education," in *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Missions* (London: Lutterworth, 1971), 591, quoted in Folahan, 1-2.

[10] Tony Sargent, "The Value of Theological Education for Ministry and Service" – an address given to the Baptist Union Assembly, Scotland, Oct. 24, 2001 (unpublished), quoted in Folahan, 1-2.

[11] Folahan, "What is the Purpose of Theological Education," 2-17.

[12] John O. Enyinnaya, "Theological Education Fit for Purpose: The Contours of Relevance in the Training of Ministers for Today's Church," *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 21, (2016): 27-37.

[13] Enyinnaya, 'Theological Education Fit for Purpose, 27-37.

in ministry. This includes providing training in areas such as biblical studies, theology, pastoral care, and community engagement.

Furthermore, theological education should be contextually relevant and effective, addressing the specific needs and challenges of the church and its community. This requires a deep understanding of the cultural, social, and spiritual context in which ministry takes place. Ultimately, theological education should prioritize spiritual formation, evangelism, and mission, aiming to produce ideal pastors and churches that reflect Christ's teachings. By focusing on these key areas, theological education can fulfill its purpose and produce effective, Spirit-led leaders who make a meaningful impact in the world.

3.3 Models for Theological Education: A Review of Scholarly Views

Robert Banks presents an in-depth analysis of various scholars' perspectives on theological education models. Three prominent models are outlined below.

3.3.1 Athens/Classical Model

Edward Farley proposes this model, centering on theological wisdom as a form of divine wisdom accessible to all. The goal is to cultivate a person's spirit, character, and mind, deepening their faith and preparing them for ministry. Farley emphasizes that a theological education structure should include biblical studies, church history, and systematics. This provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding God's Word and the Christian tradition. A theological education should focus on personal formation, encompassing moral, intellectual, and spiritual growth. This holistic approach enables individuals to develop into well-rounded leaders. Finally, it should focus on teacher expertise with an emphasis on expert

knowledge of basic texts and practices. This ensures that students receive high-quality instruction and guidance. However, Farley's model has been criticized for its tendency toward abstraction. The approach can be too abstract and methodological, insufficiently related to the practical issues facing the church. This can make it challenging for students to apply their knowledge in real-world contexts.[14]

3.3.2 Berlin/Vocational Model

John B. Cobb, Jr. and Joseph C. Hough, Jr. advocate for this model, prioritizing practical theology and vocational orientation. The model stems from an attempt to justify the place of theological education in the University curriculum on the analogy of training for other professions, such as law and medicine. They emphasize that a theological education should include the key features of practical theology, vocational identity and contextualized apology. Practical theology focuses on critical reflection of church practice. The model proposes that church leaders should be problem-solvers, pioneers, and implementers as well as teachers. Vocational identity includes the blending of biblical studies and church history with vocational formation. Theology and ethics should be less dominated by methodology. Also, topics like world religion, social sciences, the arts, and mass media should be introduced to the curriculum. Contextualized apology emphasizes connection between academic and practical work. Its curriculum should give a preference to a contextualized apology. The goal of theological education should be to prepare church leaders who are aware of the multiple and global contexts in which they serve.[15]

3.3.3 Synthetic Model

David Kelsey proposes a synthesis of classical and vocational models, integrating historical

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14 Robert Banks, *Envisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 19-35, also see Edward Farley, *The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) and Edward Farley, *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 19-21.

15 Banks, *Envisioning Theological Education*, 34-40. Also see Joseph C. Hough, Jr., "Reform in Theological Education as a Political Task," *Theological Education* 17 no. 2, 1984 and Joseph C. Hough, Jr., and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 34-39.

theology (which should include biblical and historical studies), philosophical theology (which is purely theoretical) and practical theology (a concrete embodiment in congregations and seminaries). The three should be interconnected.

Systematic theology should be the comprehensive and constructive integration of biblical studies, historical studies, and philosophical studies. In this model, the goal of theological education is to develop a higher synthesis of key elements in both the classical and vocational models. Theology is to be related to the whole of life.[16]

While these models offer valuable insights, they often overlook the importance of participating in God's mission. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) provides a rich foundation for theological education, emphasizing evangelism, discipleship, and mission. By examining the Great Commission, theological education can be reoriented to reflect Christ's mandate to the church, and will prioritize mission and evangelism. By embracing the Great Commission as a basis for theological education, students can be equipped to participate in God's mission, fulfilling the church's purpose in the world.

4.0 BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

The Bible provides numerous examples of educational practices and principles that can inform theological education. These examples will be discussed in this section.

4.1 Old Testament Examples of Education

The Old Testament provides numerous examples of education and mentorship, highlighting the importance of passing on knowledge, values, and traditions to future generations. These knowledge, values and traditions are passed by God, the family, and community leaders.

The Old Testament also depicts God as the ultimate teacher, who instructs and guides His people (Psa. 94:10). This theme underscores the importance of divine wisdom and guidance in education. Parents played a crucial role in teaching children about God's ways. Deuteronomy 4:9 and 6:7 emphasize the importance of parental instruction, while Proverbs 6:20-23 highlights the significance of maternal influence. Mothers were instrumental in imparting early education, as seen in Proverbs 1:7 and 1 Samuel 1:9-11. Parents usually shared stories and answered children's questions, helping to pass on their faith and traditions. Exodus 12:26-27 and Deuteronomy 5:20ff demonstrate the importance of storytelling in education.

In addition to the role of parents, local elders, national leaders, priests, and prophets played significant roles in teaching and mentoring younger generations. Respected elders shared their wisdom (Judg. 5:10-11, Prov. 17:6), while national leaders like Moses and Joshua exemplified leadership development. Priests trained young priests in cultic matters (Judg. 17:10, 1 Sam, 2:21), and prophetic schools and mentorship were instrumental in shaping the spiritual leaders of Israel (1 Sam. 1:11, 1 Kin. 19:19-21). Therefore, the Old Testament examples of education highlight the importance of intergenerational transmission of knowledge, values, and faith. These examples provide valuable insights into the role of God, family, and community leaders in shaping the next generation of Israelites.

4.2 New Testament Examples of Education

The New Testament provides significant examples of education and mentorship, offering valuable insights into the importance of spiritual formation, community, and practical application.

Jesus' approach to discipleship is a prime example of effective education. He called and mentored disciples, investing in their spiritual, moral, and ministerial development (Matt. 8:19, 21). As a teacher, Jesus emphasized the importance of spiritual growth, moral character,

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[16] Banks, *Envisioning Theological Education,* 46-54. See also, David Kelsey, *Understand God Truly: What's* *Theological About a Theological School?* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 46-54.

and ministry preparation. [17] The apostolic ministry, particularly Paul's collegial approach, demonstrates the value of community-based learning and ministry development. [18] By forming circles for learning and ministry, Paul fostered a sense of shared purpose and mutual support among his colleagues.

These biblical examples provide a rich foundation for theological education, highlighting the importance of mentorship, community and practical application. Through mentorship, students are guided in their spiritual and ministerial development, which is essential for their growth and preparation for ministry. The examples emphasize a sense of community and shared learning, which in turn, helps students develop meaningful relationships and a deeper understanding of their faith. Through practical application, theoretical knowledge is integrated with practical ministry experience, which in turn, enables students to apply their learning in real-world contexts.

5.0 INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 28:18-20

Apart from the biblical texts highlighted above, another biblical text that serves as a great foundation for theological education is Matthew 28:19-20. Matthew 28:19-20, known as the Great Commission, serves as a foundational text for theological education. Jesus' command to "make disciples of all nations" and "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you" underscores the importance of discipleship, teaching and mission. This passage provides a robust framework for theological education. The interpretation of the text will be provided in this section.

5.1 Background of the Gospel of Matthew

The Gospel according to Matthew is at the head of the New Testament. Scholars have considered it an important book of the New

Testament. Michael Green affirms that Matthew is the most important single document in the New Testament, for in it we have the fullest and most systematic account of the birth, life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[19] Robert M. Mounce says that Matthew is the Gospel that over the years has shaped the life and thought of the church, the most important book ever written. [20] Arthur. W. Argyle comments that the Gospel is the most influential book and it was the one most highly regarded by the early church fathers. They quoted it or alluded to it more frequently than to any other.[21] The Gospel presents the events of Jesus Christ fully, clearly, and orderly than other Gospels. The Gospel contains many important themes, one of which is the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

The Gospel according to Matthew has traditionally been assigned to Matthew the apostle. The Gospel is believed to have been written to the believing Jews dwelling in Jerusalem and its environs. It was written between AD 70 and AD 80 at a time when there was a dichotomy between Christianity and Judaism, and many Jewish Christians were contemplating whether to follow Christianity or Judaism. According to Argyle, the Gospel was written to show Jesus to be the Messiah of the Jews in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The author repeatedly stresses this fulfillment by quoting Old Testament passages. Furthermore, Argyle says that the Gospel was written to guide the life of the church, in three respects; worship, discipline and ethical conduct, and missionary activity.[22] Prominence is given in Matthew to the missionary activity of the church to the extent that Jesus Christ in the concluding verses bides His disciples to continue His missionary activity to all the nations of the world. This concluding verses, that is, Matthew 28:18-20 which is tagged the

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[17] Banks, *Envisioning Theological Education,* 99-110.

[18] Banks, *Envisioning Theological Education,* 113-117.

[19] Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, ed. John Stott (The Bible Speaks Today, Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 19.

[20] Robert M. Mounce, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 1.

[21] Arthur. W. Argyle, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, ed. P.R. Ackroyd, A.R.C. Leaney and J.W. Parker (The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 1.

[22] Argyle, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 3-6.

Great Commission, is the focus of this interpretative analysis.

5.2 The Great Commission

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 is the final words of the risen Lord directed to His disciples, whom He had trained for some years. It was Christ's mandate for them. It is the climax of the Gospel of Matthew. According to Daniel Wenham and Steve Walton, it is one of the most important mission statements of the church.[23] The basis for the mandate is the authority of Christ. According to Green, it is the response to meeting the risen Christ. It springs from worship (Matt. 28:9, 17). It is no individualistic enterprise. It is a matter of great sheer obedience. It includes the baptism and careful discipling of new converts. It is always directed outwards, to the unreached. The authority and presence of Jesus Christ are specifically attached to it.[24]

The Great Commission is made up of the methods of Christian missions: Going, Baptizing, Teaching, and Church planting. It comprises Christ's promises to His disciples. It is also Christ's mandate for the church. It has been used as a theological catalyst for a church's outreach ministry.[25] The Great Commission is found in all the four Gospels. However, only Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:5 record the commission in an imperatival statement. Meanwhile, Matthew 28:19 attracts the greatest amount of attention among Christian writers.[26]

5.3 An Interpretative Analysis of Matthew 28:18-20
Verse 18
In verse 18, Jesus proclaimed His authoritative position to His disciples. He proclaimed that all authority belongs to Him. The Greek word for 'authority' is *exousia*, and it means 'absolute power and jurisdiction'.[27] Finkbeiner notes that the term *exousia* is a more comprehensive term than 'power' (*dynamis*), referring to position as well as function.[28] All authorities denote complete and universal authority.[29] It is the authority given by the Father, and it is meant to be delegated to the disciples so that they would be able to fulfill the Great Commission. Thus, this authority precedes the Great Commission, because the process of making disciples of all nations is a divine assignment that the disciples cannot fulfill by their own power.[30] The basis for Christ's commission to His disciples is premised on His authority.

Verses 19-20a
Verses 19-20a present Christ's commission to the disciples. Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples of all people by the means of going to these peoples, baptizing those who accepted Jesus as their Lord, and teaching them about Christ. The commission is expressed by an imperative accompanied by three participles. The verb *mathēteuō* in imperative form is used to express 'make disciple'. It means to make a learner or a follower of Jesus.[31] The verb entails preaching and response.[32] This implies that the disciples are given the task of preaching the Gospel to all people, which possesses the power to bring the hearer to salvation. Another thing implied is that the disciples are saddled with the task of continuing the work of Jesus among all peoples of the world. Jesus worked and labored to make them disciples. They are also expected to make other people disciples like themselves.

The verb *mathēteuō* is accompanied by the three participles *poreuomai, baptizō*, and *didaskō*. Finkbeiner notes that *poreuomai* has the imperative force and preparatory nuance,

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[23] Daniel Wenham and Steve Walton, *Exploring the New Testament: A Guide to the Gospel and Acts* (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 209.

[24] Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 322-323.

[25] Douglas Finkbeiner, "An Examination of 'Make Disciples of All Nations' in Matthew 28:18-20," *Calvary Baptist Theological Journal*, Spring, (1991): 13.

[26] Finkbeiner, "An Examination of 'Make Disciples of All Nations' in Matthew 28:18-20," 13.

[27] Mounce, *Matthew*, 267.

[28] Finkbeiner, "An Examination of 'Make Disciples of All Nations' in Matthew 28:18-20," 23.

[29] John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1886), 592.

[30] Mookgo S. Kgatle, "Globalisation of Missions: An Exegesis on the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)," *In die Skriflig Verbi* 11, (2018): 3.

[31] Mounce, *Matthew*, 268.

[32] Finkbeiner, "An Examination of 'Make Disciples of All Nations' in Matthew 28:18-20," 26.

and can be translated as 'go make disciple'.[33] Thus, both *mathēteuō* and *poreuomai* are imperative in meaning. This implies that the disciples must not remain in one place, they are mandated to go and seek the people they are to make Jesus' disciples. The other two participles *baptizō* and *didaskō* are a way of discipling. They are responses of the disciples to the recipient of the gospel. The disciples are to baptize and teach them. The disciples are to baptize the new converts. They are to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Argyle says that to baptize into the name is to baptize into the possession, protection, and blessing of the Godhead, and to establish a living union between the believer and the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. [34] Broadus interprets 'to baptize' as a mere ceremonial and initial act of obedience to Christ, which should be followed by lifelong obedience to His entire commandment.[35]

The disciples are also to teach them to obey everything Jesus has commanded them. Finkbeiner suggests that this second participial phrase emphasizes the process of discipleship, which is the instilling of the teachings of Christ in the life of the new converts. A discipler concentrates on teaching which transforms life. [36] They are to continue Jesus' teaching ministry. The content of the teaching is "all that I have commanded you." The Great Commission's mandate is to go and make disciples of all peoples by initiating the new converts into the body of Christ and teaching them to become like Christ so that they would likewise continue the task of making disciples of other peoples.

Verse 20b
Verse 20b emphasizes Jesus' promise of His presence. Jesus promised to be with the disciples always to the very end of the age as they carry out the Great Commission. Finkbeiner comments that this promise of Christ's presence

is emphatic, extensive, and enduring. It is emphatic because of the words 'surely' (idou) and 'I' (ego). It is extensive since he will be with his followers all day. It will endure until the consummation of this age. [37] The Great Commission ends with the promise of Jesus' presence. Thus, the disciples are assured that as they are obedient to the Great Commission, Jesus will continue to be with them. This promise is also for the contemporary disciple.

6.0 THE GREAT COMMISSION AS A PREMISE FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION
This section explores the profound connection between the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) and theological education, highlighting how the former can inform and shape the latter. The Great Commission can serve as a robust foundation for theological education, providing a clear purpose, a missional focus and a Christ-centered approach. It can also shape curriculum design and provide a good model for theological education.

6.1 Matthew 28:18-20 and Theological Education
6.1.1 The Authority of Christ in Theological Education
The existence and operation of theological institutions are rooted in the authority of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19-20). The term "authority" in the secular sense can mean "who's is in charge?", "exerting control on people or situation" or "the place where one can find out the correct answer to key questions". [38] According to Nicholas T. Wright, when we talk about the Christ's authority, we mean that Christ is in charge, controlling situations in theological institutions. It means the authority invested in Christ by God, His Father. In Christ Himself, all authority lies. [39] . As such, Christ's authority should remain the foundation for all theological endeavors. Theological education should rest on

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[33] Finkbeiner, "An Examination of 'Make Disciples of All Nations' in Matthew 28:18-20," 24-25.
[34] Argyle, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 222.
[35] Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, 594.
[36] Finkbeiner, "An Examination of 'Make Disciples of All Nations' in Matthew 28:18-20," 29-30.

[37] Finkbeiner, "An Examination of 'Make Disciples of All Nations' in Matthew 28:18-20," 31.
[38] Nicholas T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative," *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 2, 4.
[39] Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative,", 4.

Christ's authority. It should operate under the authority of Christ, recognizing His sovereignty over all aspects of education and ministry. Theological education should acknowledge Christ's Lordship. Jesus' teaching should serve as a guide. By operating under Christ's authority, theological education can foster authentic spirituality, cultivating a deepening relationship with God. It can prepare effective leaders by equipping students for ministry and service under the authority of Christ.

6.1.2 Christ's Commission

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus commissions His followers to "make disciples of all nations" and "teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." This commission serves as a guiding vision for theological institutions, shaping their purpose and mission. The goal is to equip students to become mission-minded disciples who can effectively spread the Gospel. The school setting is portrayed in the commission. Teachers are saddled with the responsibility of making learners or students of Jesus.[40] The students should be equipped to make disciples of all peoples. Christ's commission also implies a comprehensive approach to theological education, encompassing intellectual formation, spiritual formation and ministry formation.[41] Through intellectual formation, students are equipped with knowledge to effectively communicate the Gospel. Theological knowledge gained by students equipped them to participate in Christ's Mission. According to Olufemi, it makes them to adapt, continue to learn, and keep space with rapid development all round.[42] Through spiritual formation, spiritual growth, character development, and dependence on the Holy Spirit are fostered. Enyinnaya says that the minister will continue their journey towards

Christlikeness through spiritual formation. The minister learns to be the person that God will use and do things in ways expected of Christ's disciples thus becoming an example for the people of God.[43] Through ministry formation, students are prepared for practical ministry, including preaching and evangelism.

Furthermore, the commission entails preaching. Preaching is the act of communicating Christ's message.[44] The students should be equipped with the knowledge that will enable them to preach the Gospel to all people effectively. During their stay in the seminary, they should be made to practice preaching inside and outside the wall of the seminary. The preaching must be done in the power of the Holy Spirit.

6.1.3 Implementation of the Great Commission in Theological Education

Implementing the Great Commission in theological education involves going, baptizing and teaching. Matthew 28:19-20 outlines Jesus' commission to His disciples, emphasizing these three components. Going implies engaging in mission and evangelism beyond the walls of the seminary. This implies that theological education needs to align itself with the demands of the church's Great Commission.[45] Baptizing implies initiating new converts into the body of Christ, symbolizing their new life. This may result into church planting. Church planting is the process of making disciples, a gathering together for the purpose of worshiping the Lord in fellowship and nurturing new converts, until they become committed and commissioned to the task of evangelism.[46] Teaching implies continuing Christ's teaching ministry, equipping disciples to obey His commands. Teaching takes place in theological institutions. It is usually

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[40] Mounce, *Matthew*, 268.
[41] Bank, *Envisioning Theological Education,* 16-18.
[42] Jacob Ishola Olufemi, "Academic Formation in Theological Education and Its Implication for Competent Ministry," *Edumania-An International Multidisciplinary Journal* 01, no. 2 (2023): 67.
[43] Enyinnaya, "Theological Education Fit for Purpose: The Contours of Relevance in the Training of Ministers for Today's Church," 36.

[44] David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011), 54.
[45] Enyinnaya, "Theological Education Fit for Purpose: The Contours of Relevance in the Training of Ministers for Today's Church," 36.
[46] Emmanuel Oluwaseun Abejide, *The Art of Church Planting* (Osogbo: Gamsons Commercial Press, 1998), 1.

based on curriculum designed for each institution.

Therefore, the curriculum should be structured to foster practical experience where students should participate in missions and evangelism outside the seminary. It should emphasize church planting. For this reason, Bernard Ott argues for the integration of the mission of the church with the curriculum. [47] Kirk suggests that theological education curriculum should be revised with greater attention to the mission of the church.[48] Students should be equipped to plant churches, initiating new believers into the body of Christ. It should focus on biblical studies, church history, theology, and practical theology. It should be structured to prepare students for the teaching ministry. Students should be equipped to teach others, continuing Christ's ministry. This teaching should be grounded in Scripture, emphasizing obedience to Christ's commands. By structuring theological education around the Great Commission, institutions can effectively prepare students for ministry fulfilling Christ's mandate.

6.1.4 The Presence of the Lord Jesus
In Matthew 28:20, Jesus concludes the Great Commission with a profound promise: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

This assurance can be applied to theological institutions. The promise is for all theological institutions that obey the Great Commission, prioritizing making disciples, baptizing, and teaching and equipping students for ministry and service. The promise of Jesus' presence provides comfort and guidance. This implies that theological institutions can trust in Jesus' guidance and presence. They rely on Jesus' presence and power. The promise of

Jesus' presence is a powerful encouragement for theological institutions, reminding them of His guidance, empowerment, and companionship as they fulfill the Great Commission. Therefore, the presence of God should be a matter of concern for every theological institution because they are in the world as Christ's representatives.[49]

6.2 Description of Theological Education
Theological education is established for the sake of the church. It is an education for the disciples, who have been saved and called by Christ. It is designed to continue Jesus' teaching ministry. Therefore, it is concerned with the training of these disciples so that they will become the messengers of Christ. According to Nancy R. Heisey and Daniel S. Schipani, it is structured to meet the need of the church and society. It is a special dimension of the church's larger teaching ministry. It is concerned with the formation and transformation of the faith community – "strengthening and renewing" and with the enablement and equipment for ministry in particular. It can be understood primarily, as education for apostleship, that is, the training of men and women to be faithful and competent servants of Jesus Christ.[50]

Theological education is concerned with the formation of leaders for the church of Christ. This formation combines spiritual and practical with academic objectives in one holistic integrated educational approach.[51] According to Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission's mandate is to go and make disciples of all peoples by initiating the new converts into the body of Christ and teaching them to become like Christ so that they would likewise continue the task of making disciples of other peoples. Theological students are formed to become leaders, who would lead the church to

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[47] Bernard Ott, *Beyond Fragmentation: Integrating Mission and Theological Education. A Critical Assessment of Some Recent Developments in Evangelical theological Education* (Oxford: Regnum, 2001), 47.
[48] Andrew J. Kirk, "Re-envisioning the Theological Curriculum as if the Missio-Dei Mattered," *Common Ground Journal* 3, no. 1, (2005):24.
[49] Mark Allan Powell, "Matthew as Pastor: The Presence of God", *Word & World* 18, no. 14 (1998): 348.

[50] Heisey and Schipani eds., *Theological Education on Five Continents: Anabaptist Perspective*, 5-7.
[51] The International Council of Accrediting Agencies for Evangelical Theological Education, "Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education," in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 19, no. 3 (1995): 308, 312..

participate in *Missio Dei*, the Mission of God. These leaders are equipped to continue the Mission of Christ. Their basic task is to make disciples of all peoples as they have been made.

6.3 Models of Theological Education

There has been debate on what should be the best model for theological education. Two of these models have been previously discussed. In the same manner, the synthesis of the two models has been discussed. Meanwhile, each of the models has its weakness. The classical model is too abstract and methodological and insufficiently related to issues facing the church. The vocational model is concerned with the issues facing the church and has nothing to do with the issues outside the church. Robert Banks has proposed another model called the missional model or Jerusalem model. This model is presently winning the debate. It focuses on what God is doing in the world. It is designed to focus on all formations in theological education focusing on the Great Commission.

According to Banks, the missional model is a more integrally and distinctively Christian approach to theological education. [52] It is mission-oriented. Its model is what Jesus did with His disciples by inviting them to follow Him, helping them to listen and to understand His work, training them to be obedient, and gifting them with the transforming power of His Spirit. [53] The missional model emphasizes theological mission.[54] It places greater emphasis on action than other models. It is a field-based approach that involves "learning-in-ministry rather than learning-for-ministry".[55]

Banks comments that in the missional model, theological education is a dimension of mission and has a vital missiological context. It is an aspect of the teaching ministry of the church involving specialized testimony to the kingdom. Theological education is an education undertaken with a view to what God is doing in the world. It focuses on forming character, ability, and thought, informing the mind, praxis,

and contemplation, and transforming values, people, and communities. In the missional model, the goal of theological education is to prepare lay leaders to help in the educational ministry of the church, to help prepare the minister of the word and sacraments, to equip the whole people of God, to develop leaders for missions and to help the church articulate its faith.[56]

In the missional model, theological education is a significant expression of mission, identifies Jesus' relationship with his disciples, and the basic model it should follow. It recognizes the missiological background of the major divisions of the curriculum and affirms the informational, formational, and transformational character of all aspects of ministry training. In the missional model, theological education is wholly or partly field-based, and it involves some measure of doing what is being studied. This may take the form of action-reflection or reflection-action. [57] In the missional model, theological education should concentrate on developing habits of critical self-reflection on spiritual formation, faith, leadership quality, and practice that will indirectly influence the important areas of life and ministry.

6.4 The Curriculum of Theological Education

A critical examination of the missional model reveals that Matthew 28:18-20 provides a robust foundation for designing a theological education curriculum.

This passage emphasizes Christ-centered, God-focused and Spirit-filled curriculum. These three elements indicate a missional curriculum. This implies that a missional curriculum should prioritize Christ's teachings, commands, and mission. It should emphasize the Trinity - God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It should foster a dependence on the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment.

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[52] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 75.

[53] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education,* 132.

[54] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 144.

[55] Enyinnaya, 'Theological Education fits for Purpose,' 29.

[56] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 131, 132, 142.

[57] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 142.

Furthermore, the curriculum should emphasize the task of the church, equipping students to fulfill the church's mission and purpose. It should focus on discipleship, preparing students to make disciples and teach others. It should prioritize practical application, providing opportunities for students to engage in mission and ministry. It should explore the role of the Father, understanding God's plan and purpose for humanity. It should emphasize the person and work of Jesus Christ, studying Christ's teachings, life, death, and resurrection. It should highlight the ministry of the Holy Spirit, fostering a dependence on the Spirit's guidance, empowerment, and fruitfulness.

Additionally, the curriculum should be designed to blend theoretical knowledge with practical application, fostering a holistic learning experience. As Banks suggested, this can be achieved through experiential learning.[58] Field internship should be properly organized for students to enable them to participate in on-site ministry and reflection, applying theoretical knowledge in practical contexts. It will enable students to reflect on their experiences, integrating theoretical insights with practical lessons. It will also enable students be effective participant observers and observant participants, enabling them to engage in ministry settings, observing and participating in practical ways.

This is seen in Jesus' approach with His disciples. This approach involved hands-on learning, where they applied teachings in real-world settings. Similarly, the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) emphasizes the practical ministry of going, baptizing, and teaching. Theological education should mirror this approach, incorporating practical experiences that enable students to apply theoretical knowledge in ministry settings.

7.0 CURRENT CHALLENGES FACING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATORS IN NIGERIA

The insights shared in this section are informed by the researcher's extensive experience as a theological educator spanning over two decades, with a particular focus on the Nigerian context, drawing from personal experience and observation of theological education in the region. Today, theological educators in Nigeria encounter a multitude of challenges that impact the effectiveness of theological education. These challenges are multifaceted, encompassing various aspects such as purpose, curriculum, method, and model of theological education.

One of the most significant challenges facing theological educators in Nigeria is defining the purpose of theological education. The purpose of theological education is a topic of ongoing debate, with diverse perspectives on what it should achieve. This lack of consensus leads to confusion and inconsistency in educational goals, ultimately affecting the quality of theological education. Most often, theological education in Nigeria faces the challenge of balancing formation in its purpose. The three key aspects of formation – spiritual formation, intellectual formation, and ministry formation – are essential for producing well-rounded leaders. However, theological educators struggle to strike a balance between these aspects, often prioritizing one over the others.

Theological educators are faced with significant challenges related to curriculum development and implementation. One of the primary concerns is the use of outdated curriculum, often inherited from Western theological educators. This curriculum, although well-intentioned, may no longer be relevant to contemporary needs and challenges. The curriculum is not tailored to the specific needs and challenges of the Nigerian context, leading to a mismatch between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This can result in graduates who are not adequately prepared to address the complex issues facing their communities. Furthermore, the curriculum often prioritizes theoretical knowledge over practical application. This can lead to a lack of preparedness for ministry, as graduates may not have the necessary skills and experience to

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[58] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education,* 133, 143.

effectively serve their communities. The emphasis on theoretical knowledge can also lead to a disconnect between the classroom and the real-world context of ministry.

Theological education has long been a subject of debate among theological educators, with one of the most pressing concerns being the ideal model for theological education. At the heart of this debate lies a fundamental question: what is the most effective way to equip students for ministry and leadership? Different scholars have proposed varying approaches, with some prioritizing theoretical knowledge, others emphasizing practical ministry, and many advocating for a blend of both. Moreover, the landscape of theological education is continually evolving, with new models emerging to meet the changing needs of students and the church.

Theological educators in Nigeria have a rich history of emphasizing teaching methods that prioritize the transmission of theoretical knowledge through lectures and rote memory. While these approaches have their place in shaping the theological understanding of students, they often fall short in equipping learners with the practical skills and critical thinking required for successful ministry in the twenty-first century.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS OF MATTHEW 28:18-20 FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATORS

A theological educator is entrusted with the vital responsibility of teaching and mentoring students in a theological institution. As experts in theological education, they play a pivotal role in shaping the next generation of ministers and leaders. Their work has a profound and lasting impact on the church and society. By embracing the principles outlined in Matthew 28:18-20, theological educators can effectively fulfill their responsibilities and equip students for ministry and service. Theological educators play a pivotal role in fulfilling the Great Commission in theological education, as outlined in Matthew 28:18-20. To achieve this, they must adapt key principles from this biblical

mandate to overcome the challenges highlighted in the above section.

Concerning purpose, theological educators are tasked with developing comprehensive theological education programs for both laypersons and clergy leaders.[59] These programs should strike a balance between three essential aspects: personal formation, which fosters spiritual growth and moral integrity; intellectual formation, which cultivate critical thinking, biblical knowledge, and theological understanding and vocational formation; which prepares students for effective ministry and service. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) can help in striking such a balance. The purpose of theological education is therefore to mold students into Christ-like disciples, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively make disciples of all nations, as entrusted by Christ.

Concerning curriculum, theological educators should design curricula that seamlessly integrate theoretical knowledge with practical application. This holistic approach to learning enables students to apply biblical principles to real-world contexts, develop essential ministry skills and cultivate a deep understanding of theological concepts. The curriculum should center on the Great Commission, equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and practices necessary for effective discipleship, disciple-making, and teaching others (Matt. 28:18-20). It should be designed to blend theoretical knowledge with practical application, fostering a holistic learning experience.

Concerning model, theological educators should adopt a missional model that prioritizes understanding God's active presence in the world. This approach offers a promising framework for theological education, striving for a balance between theoretical foundations and practical application. They should emphasize the importance of sharing the gospel and making disciples of all nations, as outlined in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20).

Concerning teaching method, theological educators should adopt a missional approach,

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[59] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 17.

mirroring Jesus' teaching method, as evident in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19), where He instructs disciples to "teach them all," emphasizing a focus on disciple-making and spreading the gospel. A missional approach blends theory and practice. It equips students with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills, enabling them to effectively serve and minister in their communities. It is a field-based learning. It involves "learning-in-ministry" rather than "learning-for-ministry." [60] It encourages students to apply what they are learning in real-world contexts, under the guidance of experienced mentors.

9.0 CONCLUSION

This article has conducted an interpretative analysis of Matthew 28:18-20, exploring its implications for theological education. The analysis of Matthew 28:18-20 has demonstrated that theological education should prioritize evangelism, missions, and holistic formation, equipping students to fulfill the Great Commission. It has demonstrated that theological education's curriculum should be missional, blending theoretical knowledge with practical application. By grounding theological education in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), theological institutions will emphasize practical ministry and foster holistic formation. By this, students would be equipped to fulfill Jesus' mandate and prepared to impact their communities. In conclusion, the Great Commission provides a rich foundation for theological education, emphasizing the importance of mission, evangelism, and disciple-making. By embracing this mandate, theological education can effectively equip leaders and believers to fulfill the church's mission in the world.

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[60] Enyinnaya, 'Theological Education fits for Purpose,' 29.

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About the Author

Rev. Dr. Babatunde A. Ogunlana serves as a Lecturer and Deputy President (Academics) at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Kaduna, Nigeria. Holding a Ph.D. in Old Testament and Bible Translation, his research expertise spans Old Testament Linguistics, Biblical Inspiration, Contextual Exegesis, Existentialism, and Bible

Translation methodologies. As an ordained Nigerian Baptist Convention pastor, Dr. Ogunlana combines academic rigor with spiritual leadership.