

A Historical and Contextual Case for Modular and Transnational Education: The Baptist Theological School in Serbia

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ABSTRACT: Modular and transnational educational delivery are two types of structures for theological schools that often are found together, especially in theological schools outside of the West. Many examples of positive and negative aspects of each of these have been presented in literature and research. Some of these examples have come from the experience of educators at non-Western schools, while others have approached the subject from a contextual and theoretical basis. This article seeks to show the need and usefulness of modular transnational education by analyzing the history and context of a theological school. To this end, the example of the Baptist Theological School in Serbia will be considered with the goal of evidencing the natural suitability and benefits of modular lay education as well as transnational instructors.

KEYWORDS: history, Baptist Theological School, Serbia, modular, transnational, Oncken

Introduction

In 1834, Johann Oncken was baptized into the Baptist faith at midnight on an island in the Elbe River near Hamburg (Saxon 2015, 7). He would go on to become one of European Protestantism's most fruitful reformers, sending missionaries and establishing churches throughout Eastern Europe (Detzler 1993, 227; Randall 2000, 316-331). This was not without hardship and persecution, even from his own country. Hamburg, like most of Germany, was under the dominance of the Lutheran Church, the established church at that time (Saxon 2015, 9). Therefore, Baptists did not find ready acceptance. Illustrations of the zeitgeist of the area are anecdotal stories, passed down into near legend. It is said that Oncken was arrested multiple times in Hamburg for evangelism, with the Burgermeister warning him, "As long as I can lift my little finger, I will put you down from preaching this gospel." Oncken replied, "As long as I can see God's mighty hand above your little finger, I will preach this gospel" (Wood 1970, 273). It is opined that the local chief of police had determined to extinguish the Baptists, "root and branch" (Rushbrooke 1915, 9). Stories in the history of the church are many, but persecutions and imprisonments throughout Oncken's life and ministry were a reality, in spite of the fact that the persecutors theoretically held to the same gospel message as Oncken. Yet Oncken's motivation in persevering lies in his oft-recited belief that every Baptist is a missionary (Todorović 2011, 267). He became known as the father of European Baptists because of his commitment to planting churches across Europe. His efforts spread much further, though, impacting church planting in Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden, Poland, Turkey, Austria, Australia, W. Africa, France, Hungary, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, the Baltic States, China, and Serbia (Rushbrooke 1915, 2). While his passion was missions, it was expressed in various ways. The first hint of the need for modular education in Serbia was seen in Oncken's drive to increase theological education through Sunday Schools and establishing theological college in Hamburg. If every Baptist is a missionary, and therefore a theologian, then the testimonies of Baptists would necessarily have to be

supplemented by trained service (Rushbrooke 1915, 28). Oncken had personal reasons to want Christian workers trained. Hamburg was a very religious city, but foundational Christian doctrines had been abandoned including belief in the deity of Christ (Saxon 2015, 4). What began as a simple six-month theological instruction to small groups of men continued for years until a permanent four-year college was established on October 1, 1881 (Rushbrooke 1915, 30). Yet his theological ethos was predicated on the need to train lay workers from different cultures with a model consistent with their abilities.

In November of 1875, Heinrich Meyer, one of Oncken's appointed missionaries and colporteurs, was sent by him to Novi Sad, Serbia to a group of ex-Nazarenes who were holding regular meetings (Donat 1958, 435). At this meeting, several people were baptized as adult believers, thereby marking the beginning of the Baptists in Serbia. The theological school in Hamburg served as a source of constant supply for ministry and education for Eastern Europe, and specifically for Serbia (Armitage 1887, 829-830). In 1892, the Novi Sad group became an independent congregation. They invited Julius Peter, a Prussian native, to be their pastor. Peter had himself finished the Hamburg school which Oncken started and brought his educational perspective to influence the Baptists of Serbia (Wardin 1995, 267). Like his mentor, he immediately started mission work in Serbia in the villages of Šajkaš, Bečej, Feketić, Crvenka, Torža, Sekić, Belo Blat, and Gregurevci, putting Hamburg's theological education to practical application for the kingdom of Christ, focusing on regular lay ministers (Bjelajac 2010, 95). The Novi Sad church became the center of missional and educational work for the province of Vojvodina in Serbia and beyond (Hopper 1977, 30). Lay workers would continue to be the backbone of the Christian endeavor along with the need for practical, accessible theological education.

This story is interesting for those who desire to understand Baptist history in Serbia. However, its importance lies in the fact that it sets the stage for the future of theological education, springing from Oncken's Hamburg school and influencing not only the initial work, but subsequent pastors and mission work. The Lord would build an organized educational movement in Serbia on the foundation Oncken and his men laid down. Not long before Pastor Julius Peter's death, the Baptist World Alliance met in 1920 in London and determined to offer missionary support to the Baptist movements in Yugoslavia and other newly established works with the partnership of the Southern Baptists in America (Bjelajac 2002, 188-189). In the same decade, American Everett Gill was sent by the Alliance to Romania, and two American-based Europeans to Yugoslavia, Czech Vinko Vacek and Serbian Nikola Dulić (Bjelajac 2002, 188-189). While Vacek would help organize the Baptists of Serbia into a formal union, it was Dulić who would be instrumental as the successor to Peter to carry on the work of theological education in Serbia.

When Dulić came to Yugoslavia in 1923, he organized a two-week course for Sunday School teachers, much like Johann Oncken did in Hamburg (Bjelajac 2002, 189). This two-week course soon became four-week courses with both men and women as well as different nationalities present. One attendee of the lectures expressed the attitude of every participant there,

“Brothers”, he said, “let us conclude today so that we do not deny it tomorrow. Let there be no Serbs, no Croats, no Germans, no Hungarians among us from now on. Neither male nor female. Let's be Christ's!” (Bjelajac 2003, 164)

These seminars would spread out over the next few years to villages in Serbia like Bački Petrovac, Crvenka, Belgrade, Severin, and Mačkovac (Lehotski 2010, 264). This was a continuation of the vision of Oncken that education is necessary and should be

designed with lay workers in mind. Additionally, theological education taught by and delivered to mixed ethnic groups would be a common theme running through the future of theological education in Serbia. The combined need to teach lay Christian workers of various nationalities would prove to be the logical rationale for modular transnational education.

The Baptist Theological School

In keeping with the cross-cultural aspect that theological education had in Yugoslavia from the start, American missionary John Allen Moore was appointed in 1938 as a representative to Yugoslavia by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board (Wardin 1995, 268). At that time, there were few trained Baptist preachers in Serbia for several reasons. Reading of books besides the Bible was considered by some to be sinful, especially by those from a Nazarene background. Additionally, a trained preacher was considered unspiritual and worldly and thus disqualified for ministry (Klem 1952, 88-89). Despite the previous declarations coming out of Dulić's courses, unity in mission work and the provision of theological education was still difficult to organize in areas where the work was young and different nationalities, languages, and convictions co-existed (Klem 1952, 88-89). Vinko Vacek had managed to unite five language groups into a formal denominational alliance in the early 1920s, establishing the contextual model for a cross-cultural partnership among Baptists in Serbia (Lehotski 2004, 17). While Vacek furthered the cause of unifying nationalities under one Baptist umbrella, it was Moore who led the establishment of a theological institution. He founded the Baptist Theological School (BTS) in Belgrade and gave birth to the current school existing in Novi Sad now. Moore formalized and organized the work that Vacek and Dulić had pioneered in the previous decade. A seminary, however, was considered at the time a revolutionary work, and as such, one that was attended with some trepidation and persecution just as the original Baptist work had been (Moore 1941, 176). The world and political scene were chaotic with the onset of World War II, and some feared that an educated populace would cause trouble with government officials (Torbet 1963, 189). Regardless, Moore's vision was shared by all the leaders at the seminary and stated most vocally by him in a letter published at the opening of the school (Bjelajac 2010, 266). Reflection on it illustrates the faithfulness of men and women who, faced with the most dangerous of situations, still press on because they believe in the work God has called them to. Moore stated,

“We must not postpone action indefinitely just because the entire road has not been inspected. We do not know what awaits us in the future. It is quite possible that within a few weeks or months, we will be scattered on several fronts. We do not know the future. We only know that we are bound by the duty and love to the Lord to be faithful in the present and to work while the day lasts, as the night will come. We hope to have one long day of doing the works of Him who sent us, but whatever day or night, nothing is required of a servant but to be found faithful.” (Bjelajac 2010, 265)

In this original Baptist school, subjects were designed to address both the theological and practical and demonstrated a contextual desire on the part of the school to meet the realistic needs of the men and women who attended. According to an unpublished personal letter written by J.A. Moore, which this author possesses, eleven subjects were offered, including New Testament, Church Organization, Bible Geography, Missions, and Evangelism, which were also taught alongside Business, History, and Hygiene. The teachers were transnational even at this time, coming from American, German, Serbian, Czech and Slovak backgrounds, male and female (Moore 1940, 317). Students were aged between 19 and 60 years old. Seven nationalities were represented

among students: Serbian, Croatian, Czech, Slovak, German, Slovenian, and Russian. They were not ordained ministers but were lay preachers who were in fact mostly farmers (Moore 1940, 317). There could not have been a more cross-cultural, colloquial educational program. The second world war would see the closing of the school only six months after it started, along with the shattering of the Baptist Union in Yugoslavia. Both would eventually be reestablished in due time. However, it is important to emphasize that not only was a theological school started, but that it was marked by two foci, that is, working with a variety of nationalities and reaching lay leaders. These two factors would continue to mark the nature of BTS and would determine the modular transnational direction of the school.

The goal of reopening the seminary to help the average Christian laborer was realized on March 1, 1954, when BTS reopened in Zagreb, Croatia, with its president Franjo Klem. Klem was a key figure in the renewal of theological education work among the Baptists in Yugoslavia, of which Croatia was a part at that time (Lehotski 2010, 267). He, along with others, had a desire that the school provides more education to people than just the basic courses that had been the norm up until then. Klem carried on the vision of the founders of BTS and revealed in his inauguration that there is a great need for the theological preparation of workers, basing this on the fact that only three men in positions of leadership among the Baptists had any theological education (Lehotski 2010, 268). Indeed, Klem's contribution was transnational, that is, the continuance of permanent theological education that served the ethnically diverse Balkan population. After Klem, Josip Horak, a lawyer and economist, brought a more administrative direction to the vision of the school. He was experienced and competent, and in his directorship of BTS, which lasted until 1957, he was instrumental in keeping theological education organized in post-war Yugoslavia (Lehotski 2010, 269). This concentration will continue progressively in the direction of meeting the educational needs and life situations of lay workers, up to the present situation of being a modular school.

Unfortunately, the desire for a permanent solution to the lack of theological education and a direction toward more serious study was not attended with the financial means to accomplish it. It was still a post war time, and Yugoslavia could not rely on financial help from other parts of the Baptist world. This would lead the school to relocate briefly to Daruvar, Croatia, and soon thereafter to Novi Sad, Serbia, returning to the founding place of the first Baptists in Serbia. The first building was on Mičurinova Ulica 1, and then it would move into a new building on Koruška 24. That street is now Kolo srpskih sestara (Lehotski 2010, 268). In moving to Novi Sad, the school would embrace once again its roots, physically, spiritually, and philosophically.

A young scholar named Adolf Lehotski, who attended a course for preachers in 1923 at the same school started by Johann Oncken in Hamburg, followed his predecessors in seeking to improve biblical preaching among lay pastors in Northern Serbia (Lehotski 2010, 272-273). Lehotski believed that these lay preachers could not take time to attend school in Hamburg or anywhere else if it required full-time dedication. Therefore, BTS was designed to have courses short in duration. Lehotski would lead BTS in this manner for 14 years until he was replaced by Stjepan Orčić, a graduate of the school itself. Orčić's vision would maintain the view that theological education be brought within reach of ordinary Christians unable to accommodate the commitments required by most residential schools. Orčić declared,

“The idea of the new school is to be much closer to the people. We abandon the concept of a school for preachers, and we accept the idea of becoming a school for biblical and theological training. A school should be closer to the real needs of churches and community.” (Lehotski 2010, 272-273).

This sustained the idea that theology was for everyone and that if the kingdom of Christ in Serbia was staffed by lay leaders, they too needed to be thoroughly equipped in teaching the word of God [2 Timothy 3:16-17]. The passion for accommodating theological education for the common person with jobs, families, and responsibilities continued to hold the focus of BTS' line of leaders. Johann Oncken had this in mind when he stressed the value and importance of Sunday Schools for all ages in the churches he planted. Orčić shared his understanding that everyone needs theological education and that there must be educated teachers to accommodate the demand. This was a continued emphasis on a trained laity, but now more intentional and developed.

BTS was directed by additional men who sought a connection with the community of Christians. James Williams was the first missionary to get permission from authorities for a permanent VISA to live in Yugoslavia (Bjelajac 2010, 274). He creatively revised regular curriculum by creating the Extensive Theological Organization (ETO), which had the mission of providing theological education to pastors and Christian workers who did not have the ability to attend a residential school (Lehotski 2010, 274). In his efforts, a formal work was established dedicated to the laity. In 1987, a professor at the school named Želimir Srnec became director. He renamed the school "Logos" and divided the program of the school into two parts. The first part would be a one-year program designed as a preparatory school for lay workers, which could be followed by an additional three years of pastoral studies. In this way, the basic needs of lay workers were addressed, in addition to the more advanced needs desired by full-time pastors (Lehotski 2010, 275). Srnec' vision for theological education echoed Franjo Klem from earlier years of the school and sought to "do everything to continue the vision of the founders of theological education, as there was an extraordinarily great need for educated Christian workers." At the same time, Srnec' desire was to train "well-educated successors for the future" (Lehotski 2010, 275). The first titular dean of BTS was Dimitrije Popadić, elected in 1999. Popadić established a charter for the school to be a Faculty of Theology and designed a program consisting of six degrees that could be attained (Lehotski 2010, 275). He sought to meet the needs of a wide group of students with varying backgrounds and ability for study. His vision for BTS was for it to be a "faculty of theology for the academic, spiritual and practical" (Lehotski 2010, 275). Popadić continued directing BTS, at that time under the name Protestant Theological Faculty, until 2007.

Finally, in 2010, the school was given to the directorship of Ondrej Franka, also acting President of the Union. (The information from this point onward regarding BTS is from the direct knowledge of the author, who worked as an associate with Ondrej Franka at the Baptist Theological School from 2013 to present). Having been educated in the West, Franka believed in the need not just for theological education for everyone, but that which is as thorough and comprehensive as possible. He desired that the teaching at BTS be respected and recognized on an international level, as the people of Serbia deserved the best education, yet that it also be available to the general populace. As the school had been paused for several years, Franka determined to hold monthly courses for laypeople in order to accomplish two goals, that is, to keep momentum of the school going and to train pastors, preachers, and Christian workers without removing them from their ministries or jobs. In this way, he continued the tradition which came before him. BTS would operate this way until 2015.

The purpose of presenting the history of the leaders of BTS is to demonstrate that the missional vision in Serbia, since the founding of Baptist churches there as well as the inception of the school, was theological education made accessible to all nationalities as well as to those who could not attend residential school. This capitalizes on the benefits

of the community of Christians in the interchange of theological instruction from mixed cultural backgrounds (Wall 1982, 39-52). BTS has always been a multicultural school for the general population of Christians in Serbia and the Balkans. This is a remarkable character trait for a school to carry for 80 years. In Eastern Europe, in general, lay people are not historically involved in church affairs or ministry and do not hold office due to the background of the highly hierarchical Orthodox Church (Ilić 2008, 468). This often leads to a distancing effect people feel with regard to church. BTS has strived to break this paradigm by educating as many people as possible who desire to know God more. To have the ability to serve in the church as laity also brings the laborer a felt need to be educated. It is not an easy task as the majority religion is Serbian Orthodoxy which has different doctrines and theology than Evangelicals (Volf 1996, 27).

The multicultural nature that BTS has always held to is reflective of the land. Situated between the countries of Romania, Hungary, and Croatia, it hosts many groups of ethnicities. Having transnational teachers makes sense in this context. It is also reflective of Evangelicalism itself. Evangelicals are (or should be) against any nationalism in Christianity because they consider all genuine Christians to be their spiritual brothers and sisters, and hold to the idea of a new nation of people, a heavenly and holy one [1 Peter 2:9] (Milovanović 2016, 10). To this end, Ondrej Franka recruited an American, Dwayne Baldwin, to come to Serbia and help to renew the ministry of theological education with the contextual principles that marked BTS from its genesis. In applying new pedagogy to its historical impetus, the school was formally designed and structured as a transnational, modular bachelor's program in September 2015.

Modular Education as a Contextual Structure

BTS has long been under the governance of the Union of Baptist Churches in Serbia. In considering how the structure of the redesigned school would best suit the needs of the average Christian, many forms were considered. Originally, the Union had the desire for the school to be a full-time, residential school in order to match a common model seen globally. This would necessitate the use of multiple resources such as accommodations, school/kitchen/housekeeping staff, and resident faculty, none of which BTS had or could financially develop. Residential theological schools in the Balkans have found it difficult to recruit students who were willing and able to attend school full-time, requiring them to be dependent on parents or family for support, with the prospect of no financial compensation in Christian ministry once they graduate. Yugoslavia, under the leadership of Marshal Josip Tito, operated with a unique communist government. Churches, and hence theological schools, were allowed to operate if they kept a very low profile and conducted themselves quietly within the walls of the organization. While not repressed per se, BTS was not a government-recognized facility and has only recently been able to be registered in Serbia. Given this history and the cultural stigma associated with Evangelical groups, it is exceedingly difficult for students and graduates of BTS to maintain a decent standard of living based solely on ministry. Even in an existing modular setting, the financial aspect is difficult, as employment remains one of the most frequent reasons for student drop out at BTS.

It was determined that the needs of the community were best served by the school being structured in a modular format. Modular courses typically cover either single subjects or a group of content which comprise a coordinating unit (Sadiq 2014, 105). To match the needs for contact hours with the limitations of potential students, the format was to be one-week modules, four times a year, with two courses per module. Teachers would be brought in who fulfilled the qualifications needed to maintain integrity of the school. Staff would be self-supported, which would initially lessen the need for so many resources from BTS. This format has remained the structure of the school since that time.

The overall program is four years in duration for the earning of a bachelor's degree. The initial cohort in 2015 started with 20 students, and new enrollment averages about ten students per year. Many similar schools in Eastern Europe have fewer, sometimes not surpassing ten students in the entirety of the school. To date, BTS has graduated 27 students with a Bachelor of Arts degree and hosted students from Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Montenegro, the United States, Indonesia, and Canada. The school desires to represent even more countries as it grows. There are certainly challenges that exist within a modular structure of education. A decrease in student focus and a tendency to be highly task-oriented have been observed when physical interaction with teachers is lessened. Further, less interaction time with other students can lessen the learning experience as well (Agarin 2021, 326-327).

However, the modular structure has served BTS well and is now recognized by the staff of the school as the best form of theological education possible for the Evangelical needs in Serbia. This is reflective of many parts of Europe where non-residential schools that operate in either a modular or online format are gaining in popularity due to the need for students to have employment and ministry outside of school (Penner 2010, 541). As the body of Christ is served in the community, removing men and women for several years to study in the "rarefied air" of a theological residential school isolates them and creates barriers between the educational institute and the church (Claydon 2005, 11). In modular schools, students must work hard to balance school, life, and ministry, which in itself helps develop and strengthen biblical character attributes. In short, education in modules allows students to continue their ministry and not move physically into the oftentimes expensive environment of a residential school. They also can immediately apply what they have learned to their contexts between modules, and bring timely questions raised in their contexts back to the school setting. Another advantage to modular theological education is a financial one. Monetary capital for hiring staff is almost nonexistent in Serbia as in other Eastern European countries. Modules enable the theological school to recruit transnational teachers who are able to come in for a short-term module to teach, most times on raised support or personal financing. Most of these teachers are from the West. This practice has become very common in Eastern Europe and is one of the most utilized forms of theological education outside the West (Sadiq 2014, 105).

Practically speaking, BTS has six criteria for an instructor to be considered as a professor. They must be:

1. Academically qualified (minimum of a Masters' level degree);
2. Capable to teach theology (pastor or prior teaching experience);
3. Willing and able to teach (time, energy and willingness to prepare notebooks and syllabi);
4. Doctrinally sound (general agreement with BTS Statement of Faith);
5. Morally sound in life and ministry;
6. Financially independent (requiring little to no honoraria and willing to fund themselves in travel and accommodations)

These qualifiers can be quite limiting and difficult to find in totality in the local setting, especially where past opportunities for theological education have not contributed to credentials or experience, and where teachers need or even demand payment. Additionally, some aspects of this list, such as qualified teachers, are likely more available for general or secular education in Serbia, but not in theological education. The issues of cost, credentials, and ability remain a prohibitive factor in the goal of many purely national teaching facilities. This does not mean it is nonexistent, but that the pool of candidates must naturally be expanded to include foreign educators.

Modular Education and Character

Research has borne out what BTS has seen experientially. Not only in Europe but also globally there is a growing prevalence of modular or distance education. Baptist schools alone are estimated to train over 50% of their ministers in non-residential courses (Andronovienè 2010, 691). In addition to biblical and theological knowledge, there is the subject of character education, long thought to be limited to schools in which student/teacher interaction is prolonged. In literature highlighting the issue of virtue education in theological schools, the question is asked about whether short term programs can truly impact a student's character. Answers to the positive are becoming increasingly more common (Cook 2009, 31). For the purposes of character education, there are benefits of modularly structured schools that can actually encourage virtue building. Even pastors in Eastern Europe have expressed the opinion that part-time theological education, such as is found in modular education, provide the most optimal conditions for character as they maintain students' relationships with the local churches (Dyatlik 2009, 104). In this way, the local worshipping community engages with the student, helping shape character by providing a laboratory in which to test what is being learned in school (Andronovienè 2010, 691). This approach has been determined to be significant in formation of character as it ensures that character is being developed in a way that actually serves the community, and not simply as an abstract subject (Andronovienè 2010, 691).

Modular types of programs often serve to advance 2 Peter virtues, such as brotherly kindness and love by fostering relationships between local churches and seminaries (Dyatlik 2009, 99). Character education is a driving force at BTS. Part of the actions necessary to achieve character development is being active in the garishness of "real" life and ministry, and implementing knowledge and skill in actual life circumstances. Modular courses, therefore, help BTS to achieve its goal in developing virtue in students. Most students also work or take care of families. This necessity is not likely to change, as ministry roles in Serbia and the Balkans usually do not provide the income needed for proper family sustenance. This may be what distinguishes BTS as a school that encourages the development of men and women with godly character as opposed to the production of men and women who merely have much knowledge (Kelsey 1992, 92). Studies have shown that students in modular programs actually experience better overall formational development than those in residential settings (Nichols 2015, 121). Likely causes for this are the fact that modular students are more mature and have jobs and families with the responsibilities that attend to those duties. At the very least, modular and distance students are certainly not disadvantaged with regard to spiritual formation compared to residential students (Nichols 2015, 132). Students who are residential for four years may miss out on opportunities for virtue that only happen in the challenges of local life, and hence they not only suffer in cultivating character, but also can become a stranger in their own communities.

Throughout the history of BTS, all of the school's leaders contributed with their own vision for the school. In God's sovereignty, these visions were not independent but part of a golden thread throughout the years, tied one to another in a common goal. The desire at its core was to always have an institution that would be designed to train everyday people who would impact everyday people. A theologically elite class of people has always been anathema to the intention of BTS, yet the necessity for thoroughly equipped Christian workers has remained the motivating purpose behind the school. This has contributed to the role of modular education.

Transnational Ethos as an Operating Principle

In addition to a focus on lay Christian workers, the history of the Evangelical work in Serbia has always been centered around the idea of the global community of faith working together. Heard in the cross-cultural voice of the quote at the beginning of this article, “Let’s be Christ’s!”, there has always been an effort to join forces with other races and nations for the cause of Christ in Serbia. BTS was started, and continues, as a result of Serbians, Slovaks, Czechs, Germans, Americans, and others. Transnational education in Serbia has always worked best because global members of Christ’s body, though diverse in theological background, can work in a co-belligerent manner against ignorance of God’s word.

Technically, transnational or cross-cultural theological education can be seen as a practice in which learning in the host culture is conducted by teachers from a different culture and institute (Council 2001, 2). However, the word is used by BTS to refer to its practice of intentionally using foreign educators to supplement national teachers. This form of education has gained popularity in recent years, especially in schools located in non-Western contexts, as it enables educators to teach at multitudes of locations where resources may be scarce. It allows the educator to utilize his skills, and gives the host schools a wealth of potential adjunct professors, increasing the overall quality and breadth of education at the school. The practice has also been considered very helpful by those receiving it because it is a biblical demonstration of the community of faith participating in the edification of other believers. In this way, it can be considered a benevolent act of sharing amongst global believers.

In Eastern Europe, transnational schools exist partly due to nationalist religions, primarily Orthodoxy. Evangelical schools such as BTS offer something to the student of theology that national religions often fail to offer, that is, a theological perspective outside of the national religion. For the Evangelical, it is a hope of salvation in Christ’s work alone and a life lived in surrender to His word alone. Unfortunately, for Evangelical schools, the majority of credentialed Evangelical instructors and resources are still located in the West. The problem of lack of resources, teachers and faculty, literature, and funding are all limitations that are difficult to alter, making reliance on transnational teachers increasingly frequent.

Aside from the dependence on cross-cultural teachers and resources, research has borne out that mixing cultures when it comes to education is actually beneficial for the student for a more ecumenical reason. The student sees theology from more than their own context and enables them to see themselves not only as a native in their country, but as Christian pilgrims whose spiritual nationality transcends borders (McGill 2014, 227). When John Allen Moore came with the FMB to open a Bible school in Belgrade in 1939, he did not know the culture or the history of Serbia (Lehotski 2010, 264). Yet, his initiative did not produce a failed work, or an aberrant Western Christianity in the Balkans. It instead started a work that was continued by many nationals after him. Investigation has shown that transnational interaction contributes critically to a student’s education (Astin 2011, 145). It could be that transnational schools in the final analysis are also structurally better than national schools in the area of critical character development. Biblical character results from knowing oneself before God, and this involves self-assessment as well as community assessment. Therefore, having a blend of a Western teacher’s individualism with Serbian collectivism can be synergistic.

Reflection for Other Theological Schools

The approach to education outlined in this case study can be used with some benefit in other theological schools. A reflection on a school’s cultural and historical tradition may yield

critical pathways for the future of the institute that are possibly unconsidered. The vision and purpose of the school must be examined to determine what benefit is available from a case study such as this. The purpose of this case study is not necessary to advocate for change in schools, whether they are modular, transnational, or neither. However, evaluating how a school can improve to better match the dynamics of the students as well as the context is always a best practice. Recommendations for consideration are largely dependent on the status of the school, that is, whether it is a newly structured school, an existing modular institute, or a residential program.

For some global schools seeking to design a structure, a modular format may be a best solution. Additionally, there are many ways for a school to function modularly. Modular education can operate in unit fashion, focusing on a single course for a short period of time, often two to three weeks. Other modules can be done in repeating bursts of short duration, such as only on weekends for a month. BTS has a separate program that is held on only one Saturday a month on a particular topic. Students who cannot attend the more demanding program at BTS find this useful for theological education, though there is no degree offered for it. In fact, if a degree is not part of the consideration, modular programs can be tailored to fit almost any situation. An existing residential program can benefit in a similar way by adding a modular component to its educational offering, specifically for those students who cannot participate in a full-time program. Institutions already functioning in a modular fashion can expand their modular approach, not only for unreached student demographics but also in order to focus on specific educational goals such as a program for counseling or worship arts. All modular schools can be encouraged to reconsider how character development can take an elevated place in the function and ethos of the school. Contrary to a mentality that character instruction is only possible in residential schools, students may benefit from virtue education in modular courses in ways that surpass that of other structures.

The other aspect of BTS, that of being transnational is more typically found in schools existing in non-Western contexts. For these schools, the relationship between teacher and student is a primary concern for contextualization and character instruction. Faculty can be encouraged to do simple things that contribute to contextualization, even in brief time frames, such as asking students how a presented lecture can be applied in the local contexts and allowing for discussion. Seeking ways to foster relationships is important, such as intentional lunches or dinners with teachers in students' homes. Some global schools seek to become fully national as an ideal goal, with no influence or teaching from the West. This may be necessary because Westernism is a barrier to students' education. However, a fully national school may not be the consummate endpoint for all schools. Transnational schools are often attractive to the local population as they can be seen as a more international education. In fact, schools that are taught in English, with or without translation, can be a draw to surrounding countries. From a biblical perspective, theological education is a community activity. If one community has an abundance of resources, it can legitimately be seen as a Christian duty to share those resources with other needy communities, in this case, transnational schools (The Scriptures detail the practice and responsibility of one church giving for the financial support of other churches [2 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8]). While this is an ecclesial reference, it can be argued that the principle of the Christian community sharing resources with each other should be an intentional focus of Christian ministries as well, including theological education. There is, of course, the danger of becoming overly dependent on sending countries. This threat should be a consistent source of conversation and reflection. However, the benefit of transnational schools is not entirely on the side of the receiving school. Incoming teachers can profit spiritually from interacting with other communities of Christians.

Above all, the school is the expert and knows best how the history and context need to be met in the geography in which it operates. It is difficult for a transnational school to maintain autonomy when so many resources are required from the West, but this must be a priority. The school must be uncompromising in its vision, policies, and functions, with the resolution that it will do so even at the risk of the school closing if necessary. If this risk is acceptable, it frees the school to operate as independently as possible.

Concluding Remarks

Theological education in Serbia, since its beginning, has had characteristics with proclivities to modular and transnational education. These have been manifested in two ways, a desire to reach the laity and the need to work along multicultural lines present in Serbia. The Holy Spirit has galvanized a vision for these goals in the people He placed in theological education in Serbia throughout the last 100 years, supplying what was needed for the Serbian context. For Serbia, continuing in the path acknowledged first by Oncken as well as each subsequent leader of BTS has necessitated modular, transnational education. More than that, having the most natural and fitting impact on the community for the gospel demands modular, transnational education. It has been demonstrated in reviewing the history and context of BTS that it would actually be contextually wrong for the school to be structured in any other way. This case study can serve as an illustration for all theological schools considering how best to match the needs of their students.

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