

FORMAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN VANUATU: HOPES, CHALLENGES, AND SOLUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Ni-Vanuatu speak of Christianity as “daylight”, in contrast to the animistic ways of their ancestors, who lived in “too dark”. Daylight is a time when the church brought political stability, knowledge, and participation in the wider world, whereas “too dark” was a period of isolation, ignorance, and cannibalism. While traditional ecclesiastical metaphors, such as “the body of Christ” or “the herald of good news”, are meaningful to ni-Vanuatu, they often describe the church by using these other images of daylight, development, or the bearer of superior *save* (knowledge, power, ability). For Melanesians, the church has been crucial as an agent of cultural transformation, bringing education, hospitals, economic development, and empowerment.

Since the church has been engaged in so many “this-worldly” pursuits in Melanesia, stakeholders may be unclear about the purpose of theological education. Is it a means towards community development, and empowering leaders? Is it about instilling denominational doctrine?

Is it about transmitting the content of the Bible, and getting people saved?

There are numerous TE (theological education) institutions throughout Melanesia, and just as numerous (sometimes-contradictory) ideas about what TE should accomplish. Some see it as a means for asserting agency, or achieving political independence. Writing about the Presbyterian Training Institute in Vanuatu, Ian Smith argued that “education should lead to self-awareness, which, in turn, will lead to liberation” (1991, p. 57). Smith showed that this goal was realised in Vanuatu precisely because the Presbyterian and Anglican churches led the way to political independence. Their ministers were the cream of the educational crop, having benefited from their churches’ rigorous training institutions. Pacific Islanders, being suspicious of secular government leaders, have argued that the church should raise up leaders of integrity from within their own ranks to bring about justice, improve the standard of living, and yet shield people from succumbing to capitalism (Siwatabau, 2002, pp. 16, 20). Others have suggested that TE must help people in the Pacific deal with globalisation, without becoming spiritually impoverished (SPATS, 2000). Evangelicals in Melanesia, embracing a more Christocentric worldview, envision TE as a means for inviting students to make Christ Lord of their lives, to know the word of God, to develop a regular prayer life, to be part of a regular church fellowship, and to witness and serve others (Daimoi, 1989).

These divergent views of TE have been emerging in Melanesia for decades; however, little has been written about the history, hopes, challenges, and strategies for TE in Vanuatu. Theses have been written, describing how the ni-Vanuatu church has engaged in “ordinary” education in the country (Campbell, 1974; John, 1973; Smith, 1991), but no study has focused specifically on formal theological education. This paper shows how stakeholders at institutions in Vanuatu define the goal of formal theological education. It also describes the challenges, which stakeholders face in achieving

those goals, and reports on solutions they are enacting to mitigate those obstacles.

To perform this research, I interviewed 18 faculty members and students (both current and matriculated) at three theological schools: one trains laymen in a rural village; another trains pastors in the capital city; and the third works at a well-established mainline college in a rural setting. Below, I give a brief overview of the history of Christian missions and theological education in Vanuatu. I then report on my methodology in the study, and present the research questions that guided the interviews. Next, I analyse the participants' responses about their goals and challenges for TE. Lastly, I show how these institutions are trying to mitigate those problems, in order to become more effective in the 21st century.

HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN VANUATU

The establishment of Christianity in Vanuatu followed a pattern similar to the rest of Melanesia: The gospel, which was heralded by expatriate missionaries in the middle of the 19th century, became well-established at the turn of the 20th century, went into serious remission, because of nativistic movements and cargo cults around World War II, and then enjoyed a resurgence as the church became enculturated, often resulting in syncretistic movements (Nehrbass, 2010, pp. 147-182; cf. Whiteman, 1983, pp. 274ff).

Today, more than 94 percent of ni-Vanuatu identify with the Christian church (Mandrick, and Johnstone, 2011), while maintaining beliefs about their *kastom* (traditional) cosmology, and engaging in animistic rituals, such as shamanism, *kleva* (divination or clairvoyance), and imitative magic (e.g., to produce rain or good crops). The church is respected by most, and Christians have enjoyed a great deal of religious freedom, but it has been difficult for church leaders to bring people out of animism into a truly contextualised faith.

In addition to the well-established mainline churches, in the past three decades, scores of Christian denominations, such as the Neil Thomas Ministry (NTM), Foursquare church, Assemblies of God (AOG), Apostolic, and Christian Outreach Centre (COC), have taken root, as well as cults, such as the Latter-day Saints (LDS) and Jehovah's Witnesses (JW).¹ Additionally, Baha'i and Islam are also establishing a presence. While the era has passed where the church was the only avenue for people to receive an education in Melanesia, it is more pressing, now than ever, for islanders to receive quality theological education, which is biblically grounded, so that they can sift through competing worldviews.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN VANUATU

About 90 percent of Vanuatu's population are engaged in subsistence farming, making formal education out of their reach. However, urbanites, who seek jobs in tourism, the business sector, or the government, typically receive tertiary training. There are a handful of tertiary educational options within the country for them to do so: the University of the South Pacific (USP), various teacher-training colleges, and the Institute de Technologie (INTV). The brightest students desire, or are recruited, to complete their education at more-prestigious institutions overseas. Since many use their tertiary education as a stepping stone for further education overseas, accreditation becomes essential to ensure cross-crediting (Crocombe, and Crocombe, 1994, p. 96). Tertiary education in Vanuatu presumes that the brightest students will complete their studies elsewhere.

In the first half of the 20th century, the Presbyterian church's educational system was viewed as cutting edge, since it produced the nation's most qualified graduates. In recent decades, however, church leaders have noticed that their formal educational institutions have lost that footing, and are not keeping up with the times. Malcolm Campbell

¹ The Seventh-day Adventist church (SDA) came much earlier – as early as 1930, in some of the islands in Vanuatu.

(1974), a long-time administrator at the ministerial training institution for the Presbyterian church, argued that the regress was the result of the institution spreading itself too thin. It was trying to offer too many educational tracks, rather than focusing on what it did best: training teachers and pastors. Whatever the reason for the shift, government schools are now seen as prestigious, while Christian institutions are considered second-rate by faculty and students. One principal lamented, “There’s a gap between what USP produces, and us. The government gets highly-educated people, and we get the leftovers from the secondary schools. We want a university . . . we need to catch up.” As I show below, stakeholders are planning to do just that.

FORMAL THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS IN VANUATU

There are two large Protestant formal TE institutions in Vanuatu: Joy Bible Institute (JBI) in Port Vila, and Talua Ministry Training Centre (Talua) on Espiritu Santo. The Anglican church has recently opened a training centre in Vanua Lava, where the AOG church has a rural Bible institute. The Presbyterian church also has some rural training centres on Malekula, Tanna, Epi, and North Efate. The French Protestant church has a rural training centre on Espiritu Santo. For a short time, the Foursquare church maintained a Bible college on Tanna. Many of the other Protestant denominations also run periodic TE courses on the outer islands, as they secure funding and personnel to do so. In this study, I have limited my research to JBI, Talua, and SIPBC, but I believe the results are representative of stakeholders in other institutions.

When the Assemblies of God began planting churches in Vanuatu, pastors were sent to the South Pacific Bible College in Suva, Fiji, for their theological education. As the denominational leadership saw a need for an institution within the country, they opened Joy Bible Institute in 1979. The school is located in the nation’s capital, but most students live on campus, and do not need to work, since they receive scholarships to offset the tuition costs. The school has the infrastructure for expanding significantly, however, the enrolment

remains at around 20, and there are only two full-time teachers, plus some administrators. Students study for three years to receive a theology diploma.

Talua was only established in 1986, but its roots go back to 1895, when the Presbyterian church set up the Teachers' Training Institute (TTI). The name implies the school was only for training teachers, but "there was very little 'teacher training' in the modern sense. The academic programme was centred around Bible and Christian theology" (Campbell, 1974, p. 127). "The purpose was to produce faith and religious commitment" (p. 109). In 1960, TTI's name was changed to Tangoa Training Institute, to accommodate the fact that TTI was now training ministers (Smith, 1991, p. 78). Aulua Theological Training Centre on Malekula Island merged with TTI in 1986, and the school moved to mainland Espiritu Santo to form Talua Ministry Training Centre. Today, it offers a three-year diploma in theology, and a B.Min.

In the 1990s, the Presbyterian church of Vanuatu (PCV) encouraged presbyteries to become proactive in the theological education of their lay people on the outer islands. The Southern Islands presbytery explored possible site locations throughout the five islands in Tafea province, and sought out a potential principal for a Bible College. They eventually decided to establish the school in a remote village called Enafa, on Tanna. The school offers a two-year, lay-leader training course, a one-year missionary course. Short seminars are also held regularly for laypeople.

The future of these three institutions looks bright: the enrolments are stable, the faculty have positive attitudes about the schools. They face challenges in reaching their goals, but they are strategising about how to overcome those hurdles, as I show below.

METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY

My research methodology for this study was based on the qualitative techniques for developing a grounded theory (GT), described by Charmaz (2005), and Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1998). I participated in theological education at the three institutions in the study, performed interviews, selected the data, which seemed most salient, and, finally, put the data into general categories, which summarise the goals, challenges, and solutions that stakeholders described.

I guided my interviews with four open-ended questions:

1. What is/was your goal in studying/teaching at a theological school?
2. Does the school meet those goals?
3. What are the challenges to meeting those goals?
4. What is the school doing to mitigate those challenges?

While the responses were multi-faceted, there was a great deal of homogeneity in how stakeholders perceive their TE institutions.² I have summarised their responses in this essay.

THE GOAL

As church leaders throughout Melanesia are developing their particular theologies of TE, I wanted to discover how faculty and students at Vanuatu's TE institutions define the goal of TE for themselves. It turns out that faculty and students agree that their primary goal is transformation. As I show, below, they want their schools to teach the Bible so the next generation of disciples can know Christ, live godly lives, and make Christ known.

² The responses were so homogenous, in fact, that, after six or seven interviews, I reached "theoretical saturation". That is, I was not hearing anything particularly new from the responses.

WHAT THE FACULTY WANT

When I interviewed faculty about their goals for TE, the most common response was that their institutions should be turning people into disciples of Christ. Faculty members almost unanimously emphasise discipleship over scholarship or book learning. They want their students to model the Christian life. Some indicators of an exemplary Christian life included: practising the spiritual disciplines of fasting and prayer, and refraining from alcohol, smoking, and kava. This emphasis on discipleship indicates that the primary task of TE is seen not as transmitting doctrine, but, rather, spiritual formation. The academic dean at one school said the goal was to “send out students with proper knowledge of the word of God, so they can expound the Bible in its proper context, and live a life worthy of the calling”.

A second, but related, goal is to send out a ministerial workforce that will change the world, preach, and combat heresy. An expatriate, working at one institution, said that formal TE is necessary to achieve this, since exegesis and apologetics require high-level critical thinking skills, which lay people in Vanuatu do not acquire without tertiary education.

Thirdly, since TE institutions are funded and governed by denominational bodies, the faculty sees it as a priority to work within the framework of the denominational requirements, and to pay attention to the standards of their accrediting body.

On a fourth point, faculty are divided. Some desire their institutions to be sufficient enough that students would not need to go out of the country for additional training. They want to bring their institutions up to international university status, so that they may be competitive options, compared to other institutions in the Pacific (participants specifically mentioned schools in PNG, the Philippines, and Fiji). On the other hand, some faculty believe their best bet is simply to prepare students to complete their higher education overseas. Many students agree with this plan, since Melanesians, who have studied in another

country achieve a status, which cannot be achieved by staying within Vanuatu. Whether or not faculty expect their TE institution to become the final step in people's education, most want their institution to keep up with the times, and be taken seriously in the global community.

Lastly, it is notable that faculty at the three institutions, where I interviewed, are endeavouring to make their schools more interdenominational, not only to increase the student intake (and thereby ensure the viability of the school in the future), but also to be more relevant to a larger audience. This interest in ecumenism seems to be based on the fact that faculty are not as focused on their institution, or denomination, in and of itself, rather, they see their institution as a means of achieving their ultimate goal of making disciples.

WHAT THE STUDENTS WANT

As could be expected, students were a bit more myopic than the faculty, in their responses to my research questions. They focused more on how the school could meet their personal goals, rather than what the school's goals should be for equipping the nation. For instance, when I asked Julie³ what the purpose of TE was, she said it helped her in her youth-ministry work. This is highly practical and valuable, but is significantly less comprehensive than the response of faculty members, who saw the goal as raising up a generation of disciples, who could preach Christ, live exemplary lives, and combat heresy.

While faculty fear that students only come to TE institutions for a "piece of paper" – to get a certificate, and, hopefully, a better job – none of the participating students said the diploma or degree was their goal. They wanted to be trained to do God's work. As one student said, "Theological education should help those of us who have a calling to preach and teach, to help, to preach in a way that's relevant, to help people know Christ and honour Him." Most students in TE will be

³ Names of participants have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

preaching and ministering. They want practical training. Some, in fact, had a strong calling to ministry, and see TE as necessary preparation. Pastor Sonia had a Macedonian call to the ministry. She dreamt that a man asked her to come lead his church, and handed her the Bible with John 15:16, “You did not choose Me, I chose you.” Interestingly, she said that, a year after this calling, she was converted, and began pastoral studies.

Sonia’s call was rather personal. On the other hand, since Vanuatu is a group-oriented culture, many students end up in TE at the behest of the village elders, regardless of personal desires, or a sense of calling. There are many anecdotes about young men, who were sent to TE institutions by their village for personal reform. One man I interviewed was sent away to a training institution so his wife would have a break from his physical abuse. Fortunately, he was converted at the institution, and experienced personal reform, as the village elders had intended.

Most students said that TE should give them the tools to accurately handle the word of truth. This may seem obvious, or even trite, but it is also impressive, because it means the nation’s future elders and pastors are placing a premium on the Bible, and it indicates that they place “this-worldly” goals, such as development or empowerment, beneath the Christocentric goals. The emphasis on God’s word and practical mission, as the primary purpose of education, is in line with Talua’s goals for Vanuatu more than 100 years ago. “The emphasis on the whole program was biblical” (Campbell, 1974, p. 109). Campbell argued that the sentiment that “academic excellence in secular studies was never a goal” has persisted at Talua from the beginning, for better, or for worse (ibid).

Related to the goal of knowing God’s word better, students’ second-most articulated desire is that TE will help them combat false teaching and cults. They recognise that this will involve, not only knowledge of

the Bible, but of apologetics, critical thinking skills, and exposure to what the new religious movements are teaching.

Finally, students (especially urban ones) feel that TE is necessary to lend credibility to their position in the church. Pastor Carlos said that those with only diplomas are preaching below the education level of the congregation. “Congregants can go get college training, or earn university degrees, so the pastors need to keep up with the times. . . . It’s the educated who will influence society.” Formal TE in Vanuatu is, in part, anyway, about achieving the status necessary for making a difference.

WHAT THEY ARE DOING RIGHT

When I asked stakeholders what actions they have been successfully taking to achieve these goals, most of them responded that they were teaching the Bible effectively, offering ample opportunities for practical implementation of the skills they’ve learned, charging reasonable fees, and becoming more interdenominational. I expand on each of these below.

Teaching the Bible

The curriculum at each of the three institutions I researched is heavy on biblical content, exegesis, and doctrine. The libraries at the two well-established schools are impressively up to date (and equally impressively well utilised). Students must write term papers, and take exams on the content of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is central to TE in Vanuatu, and the schools are giving it prominence in their curriculum.

A Mentoring Relationship in a Practical Setting

Graduates responded that the most-effective and enjoyable part of their theological education was the practical component. The schools are not only teaching content, but are also sending students into the field for up to a year (or longer) towards the end of their studies, as apprentice ministers. The fact that many graduates continue on in ministry after

matriculation is a testimony to the effectiveness of the mentoring and practical component.

Charging Reasonable Fees and Offering Scholarships

While no institution would turn down offers for funding, faculty and students rarely see finances as a hindrance to their school achieving its goals. Fewer than half of the participants in this study even mentioned funding at all. Of those who did speak about funding, here is a summary of their impressions:

- The well-established denominational institutions rely heavily on scholarships, secured overseas, to offset tuition costs. Expatriate faculty receive their salaries from overseas donors. While these institutions are well established, they are certainly not self-reliant.
- Rural institutions are more self-reliant, since they have almost no running costs, no permanent buildings, and very low salaries. Unfortunately, this benefit of self-sufficiency comes at a cost. The extremely low budget means the quality of staff and curriculum is limited.

Partnering With Other Denominations

Stakeholders were pleased to report that their interdenominational attitude is helping them achieve their goal of raising up disciples. Specifically, faculty said that, encouraging people from other denominations to attend to the school, increases the pool of applicants, which means the school can be more selective in the admission process. Also, this sort of interdenominational cooperation means that graduates may potentially minister at any number of denominations.

CHALLENGES

Being situated in one of the world's poorest countries, one might expect stakeholders to list funding as one of their major obstacles to achieving their goals of TE in Vanuatu. However, as I mentioned above, funding

was barely on the radar for many participants in this study. Instead, the challenges were related to the intake of students, education level of the faculty, and feasibility of attaining accreditation standards.

Intake of Students

Faculty mentioned three concerns about the quality of incoming students. Firstly, many lack a sense of calling. Secondly, students use TE as a stepping stone to a better career, or a last resort. Lastly, but probably most significant, since the nation's best students are recruited (or sent) to USP, or even overseas, incoming students at the TE institutions do not have the English, or critical thinking skills, necessary for performing higher-level exegesis, theology, and apologetics.

Faculty members' primary concern about the intake is the number of students who lack a calling to the ministry. One teacher lamented, "Many students won't use their education for the Lord – they are just taking up space here." Understandably, if faculty invest their lives in training ministers of the gospel, they want their students to be engaged in that work as well. The sense of a calling should also help students persevere through the three or four years of training. One student explained, "If you don't have a sense of call, you'll struggle to complete the program."

The lack of calling is part of a larger problem that one principal sees in some incoming students. "We aren't getting the young people we should be getting. . . . If schools were discipling their people before they ended up in Bible College, that would help them be prepared. We want to take disciples, who want to become pastors, but, instead, the school has to go back and explain the fundamentals of the faith to them."

Faculty are also concerned that students are using TE as a stepping stone, just as they would use any other formal educational opportunity in the country. An academic dean told me, "Some students come here when all other doors are shut to them." One student said, "Many want

to come, get a certificate, and then go work in a restaurant, hotel, or in the government.” A teacher told me, “Theological education is seen as a last resort, when they can’t get into any other school.”

The degree to which this accusation is imagined or real is unclear, since TE institutions do not keep a record of how many graduates actually go on to serve in the ministry.⁴ Interestingly, faculty at TTI noticed this trend back at the turn of the 20th century. Students were required to take a solemn oath that they would not use TTI as a stepping stone, but would become Presbyterian teachers themselves. Unfortunately, the oath “did not stop all those who were trained from taking up subsequent employment in other fields” (Campbell, 1974, p. 119).

Another challenge, related to the intake of students, is education level. Faculty said that many don’t have the English, or other study skills, necessary to perform well in the school. Vanuatu’s linguistic situation is unique, because it was a colony, simultaneously under both France and England. Half the population was educated in French, while the other half was educated in English. It is notable that all of the Protestant TE institutions are conducted in English. Protestant Francophones must go to nearby New Caledonia for formal TE training in a *lingua franca* they understand.

Since the goal is to disciple, rather than to have students achieve a bachelor’s degree, it is acceptable to admit students with only a grade 8 education. There is no need to reject applicants, based on education level. As I mentioned, above, faculty would much rather turn away students, who show no interest in living a life for Christ, than students who have a lower education level. However, it is problematic to admit students from such varying education levels. The classroom will inevitably have students, who can barely read, sitting alongside students, who are at university level.

⁴ It is also difficult to determine exactly what “serving in the ministry” entails.

Education of Staff

The training institutes cannot become competitive at the international level unless the faculty have master's degrees or doctorates. Participants said that, when they attended training in PNG, Fiji, or the Philippines, their faculty came with a lifetime of ministry, and had advanced degrees. Many faculty at Vanuatu's institutions are young, and only have a B.Min.

Faculty want their institutions to be competitive, so they can be taken seriously in the global community. One principal told me,

We need to train men and women, so they can go to the USA and Australia – where our partners are – and be heard. . . . We want to send our ministers to teach in other universities in other countries. We need to replace our staff with doctorates – with university people. . . . We have always been a receiving church, we want to be a sending church – part of God's mission worldwide.

The education level of the staff is a significant challenge to achieving this goal.

Accreditation

Accreditation is bittersweet. It raises the standards, and lends credibility to the institution, but the standards can be irrelevant, or unrealistic, in a nation that is less developed than the nation where the accrediting body is established. One faculty member said, "They [the accrediting body] don't know our real needs. They haven't been here – they haven't seen how things are here!"

SOLUTIONS

Stakeholders are aware of the above-mentioned challenges, and have been strategising about how to mitigate those obstacles. To summarise the main challenges, faculty wants their institutions to compete at an international level, so that their graduates will be taken seriously, and

may have a maximum impact for Christ, not only within the country, but throughout the world. However, a portion of the incoming students either lack a sense of calling to the ministry, do not intend to use their training as professional Christian ministers, or simply lack the educational background necessary for attaining the level of education that faculty and accrediting boards want to deliver.

To mitigate these problems, stakeholders at all three institutions believe that, if they can increase awareness of their school, they might draw from a larger pool of potential students. And, if they can limit their enrolment to only the most-serious disciples, those with a calling, or those with at least a high-school education, their student intake would be substantially enhanced.

Awareness

Stakeholders at the TE institutions in this study would like to tell communities and churches, “Send us your best!” If the school can show that their institution is superb, and that the graduates will be engaged in valuable work, perhaps parents of high-quality students would be persuaded that TE is worth pursuing. Stakeholders also want communities to be aware that they desire students, who are already Christians, and have a calling to the ministry.

It is unclear what criteria communities in Vanuatu use to determine who will attend theological training, but the decision is clearly group-based, not individual. Anecdotes suggest that churches choose young men and women for a number of unrelated reasons, such as:

- The candidate demonstrated success in other projects or activities;
- Other members of the candidate’s family have gone into the ministry;
- The candidate has a bad reputation, and needs guidance or personal reform; or

- The candidate has a good reputation, and leaders believe he will return to help the village.

These criteria are broad, and even contradictory. Outer-island awareness campaigns are meant to redefine, for the communities, who should be given the opportunity to study at formal TE institutions. If communities can be informed about what kind of students the institutions want, perhaps they'll send their best.

Stricter Admission Standards

As with any educational institution, stakeholders at TE institutions desire to get enough applicants to their schools so that they could reject those who lack a calling to the ministry, or who may not lead exemplary lives. Talua has this privilege. They received 70 applicants in 2007, and accepted only 15. On the other hand, JBI had 15 applicants, and accepted 10 for 2011. SIPBC took in its five applicants in 2011.

Some faculty suggested that it would be helpful for the admissions committee to receive confidential letters of recommendation from pastors or community leaders. This would ensure that chiefs or pastors could confidentially notify the committee beforehand, in the event that a community chose a certain individual to attend TE, who lacked personal character.

Shift Paradigms About Who is Being Trained

Another way to solve the student intake problem is to broaden the scope of educational opportunities offered at these institutions. If a substantial portion of the student body wants to attend the school for additional education, but does not want to engage in full-time ministry, perhaps the school should diversify its educational tracks. If they offer training for other careers, such as teaching, technology, or health care, they can take in students, who do not plan on going into the ministry. Perhaps, the faculty can recognise that they are training Christians to do other valuable jobs. This would require a perspective that goes

beyond the denominational needs, since the institution would no longer exist specifically to train ministers for the church, but to meet a broader need in the country.

Other stakeholders are opposed to this strategy. They feel they should focus on what they do best: theological education. However, it is clear that, if Vanuatu's institutions are going to focus specifically on TE, they need to be more stringent about whom they admit to the school.

Regardless of whether formal TE institutions decide to broaden or tighten their scope in the future, I can summarise what this research has revealed about student intake:

- Schools must recognise the reality that not all students will become Christian workers;
- Schools must recognise that many students will develop a sense of call during the course of their study; and,
- Some graduates may not go into full-time ministry, but will still go on to live Christian lives, and be lay evangelists.

One student, Joe, told me that he will use his B.Min. to go back to his island and work in Bible translation, or in community development. He said he is under pressure from staff, pastors, and denominational leaders to change course, and become a pastor. But he prays to God to stay the course of his own calling. He added, "That doesn't mean I won't preach, or won't work in church. I'll still do that." Indeed, Joe is a success story for the school, not at all a failure.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that stakeholders at TE institutions in Vanuatu define their goal as teaching the Bible, and modelling the Christian life, so that students will be transformed from disciples of Christ into effective ministers of the gospel. To reach that goal, they are teaching the Bible, mentoring their students, charging reasonable

fees, and working with other denominations. The main obstacles to attaining their goals include the students' lack of calling, low education level, and faculty members' lack of higher degrees. In order to mitigate those obstacles, the schools are redefining who should be trained in TE, endeavouring to implement stricter admission standards, and are even broadening their definition of who may study at their institution.

What the research did *not* turn up is equally remarkable. I was surprised that no interview data suggested TE should reflect local pedagogical methods. Bazzynu (2001) suggested that Melanesian TE should be holistic, free, community-based, informal (based on the apprentice relationship, rather than coursework), should implement rites of passage, and should involve stages of learning throughout one's life. It is also important to note that none of the TE institutions in this study is exploring online technology. Numerous young people in Vanuatu want to receive online theological education, but must pursue an overseas institution to do so. These lacunae, in the interview data, confirm, as participants in this study indicated, that TE institutions in Vanuatu are a bit behind the times.

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