



**“Measuring Impact of Theological Education  
in a Traditional Mission Field  
A Twenty Year Study from Kenya**

**ABSTRACT**

This study examines what God has done in and through Class 510 of Kenya Baptist Theological College over the twenty years since graduation, with particular attention to their efforts among the unreached peoples of East Africa, and serves as a significant aid to measuring long-term impact of theological education on traditional mission fields.

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## **“Measuring Impact of Theological Education in a Traditional Mission Field: A Twenty Year Study from Kenya”**

Abstract:

The value of theological education on traditional mission fields swings back-and-forth over time like a pendulum. Historically, theological education taught by missionaries was a priority, supported through large investments on the part of supporting denominations and churches, despite the high cost involved of establishing and supporting these endeavors. Questions linger surrounding the real value of theological education, and how might one measure that value objectively. This paper details a twenty year perspective on the impact of missionary theological education in a traditional mission setting. The longevity study centers on the members of Class 510, a cohort that started and completed together the Diploma of Theology degree at Kenya Baptist Theological College in November of 1999. This study examines what God has done in and through them over the twenty years since graduation, with particular attention to their efforts among the unreached peoples of East Africa, and serves as a significant aid to measuring long-term impact of theological education on traditional mission fields.

## INTRODUCTION

“Missions has been a part of Africa’s story since just after Jesus ascended into heaven. By the middle of the first century, churches had been established in northern Africa by early converts to Christianity. Two thousand years later, Christian presence has left indelible marks on the continent—some positive, some less so.”<sup>i</sup> According to Melanie Clinton of the International Mission Board, theological education is one of those less than positive marks.

“The desire to train African church leaders led to the establishment of seminaries and Bible schools. Unfortunately, African pastors often were not empowered to be self-theologizing—that is, to examine Scripture and develop contextualized answers to the African church’s questions. While seminaries offered insight into complex topics like assurance of salvation, Africans are often more concerned with day-to-day concerns, like ‘How can I be cured of this illness?’ Now African believers are increasingly turning to the ‘health, wealth, and prosperity’ teachings of televangelists and modern-day ‘prophets’ who are tuned in to the everyday wants and needs of African people.”<sup>ii</sup>

The perceived value of theological education on traditional mission fields swings back-and-forth over time like a pendulum. Historically, theological education taught by missionaries was a priority, supported through large investments on the part of supporting denominations and churches, despite the high cost involved of establishing and supporting these endeavors. Questions linger surrounding the real value of theological education on traditional mission fields, and how might one measure that value objectively. This paper details a twenty year perspective on the impact of missionary theological education in one such traditional mission setting. The longevity study centers on the members of Class 510, a cohort that started and completed together the Diploma of Theology degree at Kenya Baptist Theological College in November of 1999. This study examines what God has done in and through them over the twenty years since graduation, with particular attention to their efforts among the unreached peoples of East Africa, and serves as a significant aid to measuring long-term impact of theological education on traditional mission fields.

## CONTEXT

The lingering value of theological education in traditional mission settings may be the subject of debate, but its essential place in mission is evidenced by the early introduction of seminaries and pastoral training in many mission settings. This was true with the establishment of the Baptist Mission of East Africa. During the Nigeria Baptist Mission Meeting in August of 1956, a special service of dedication was held in the chapel across the road from the mission compound. Six missionaries<sup>1</sup> leaving Nigeria and going to open Baptist work in East Africa were “set apart for the work and commended to the leadership and mercy of God.”<sup>iii</sup> The first official meeting of the Baptist Mission of East Africa took place on August 23, 1956 in the home of Davis and Mary Saunders. Fast forward less than two years, and on February 20, 1958, the first ten converts were baptized resulting from Southern Baptist mission work in East Africa. “The nine men and one woman were baptized in a running stream at Mbeya.”<sup>iv</sup> The same day, the cornerstone was laid for a hospital. That same month, a report was given to the Executive Committee concerning a five-year program of expansion in which definite plans were made to establish a seminary. A 100 acre tract of land was purchased nine miles north of Arusha on the main Nairobi road, with Mt. Meru towering 15,000 feet at the back of the campus, and 100 miles of the Rift Valley sprawling in front.<sup>v</sup> The actual building was completed in 1961; the International Baptist Theological Seminary of East Africa (IBTSEA) was a reality. The first class of fifteen students began on January 29, 1962.<sup>vi</sup>

Twelve years later, in May of 1974, theological education began in earnest in Kenya by Baptist missionaries with a “Theological Education by Extension pilot project for Central Kenya. The initial step was to begin the training of selected pastors to lead training groups in their area.”<sup>vii</sup> At the Annual Mission Meeting in 1975, the Baptist Mission of East Africa voted to divide into two separate missions (Kenya missionaries comprised one mission and Tanzania missionaries the other), and one of the first actions of the new Baptist Mission of Kenya was to take steps to establish a seminary in Kenya.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. and Mrs. W. O. Harper, Mr. and Mrs. D. L. Saunders, and Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Walker.

'A seminary of our own' was a dream for a number of years of both missionaries and nationals in Kenya. While the Arusha Baptist seminary had always done a fine job of educating the ministers of Kenyan Baptist churches, the hope of having a Baptist school within Kenya continued."<sup>viii</sup>

In 1976, the Baptist Convention of Kenya requested that an extension of International Baptist Theological Seminary of East Africa which was based in Arusha be established in Kenya. In 1981, IBTSEA responded to the request and the Kenyan Branch was established in Limuru, Kenya. The Seminary in Kenya would be a branch of the Baptist Seminary in Arusha, Tanzania, but rather than a residential program, the Kenya school would combine extension studies with residential studies, enabling students to earn a Certificate in Theology. "Each student would have a tutor to assist him in his study at home. Regular classes of all the students would meet at a center at Brackenhurst Baptist Conference Centre for ten days of lectures, testing, and other studies. Home studies would be extensive with the student meeting with his tutor three hours every other week."<sup>ix</sup> Soon, Seminary branches opened in Malindi, Kisumu, and Namanga. In 1988, the Board of Governors of IBTSEA separated the Kenyan Branch from the Arusha campus allowing both schools to operate separately. The first Board of Governors was constituted to govern the Limuru Campus, which was then renamed Kenya Baptist Theological College. On July 6, 1988, Kenya Baptist Theological College was registered with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. "Over the years, KBTC has coordinated Baptist Bible Schools through harmonizing their curriculum and offering needed assistance for quality, sound theological education. KBTC has partnered with other institutions such as Nairobi University, Wayland Baptist University, South Africa School of Theology and currently with Mount Meru University (formally IBTSEA). The student body has been a representation of countries such as Tanzania, Congo, Ethiopia, Burundi, China, Brazil and South Sudan."<sup>x</sup>

## CLASS 510 CASE STUDY<sup>2</sup>

My colleagues and I of The Unfinished Task Network were recently privileged to conduct a very special reunion of pastors from across Kenya. This was no random gathering of African pastors. Instead, these still identify themselves as members of

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<sup>2</sup> Survey and interviews with members of KBTC Class 510, September 26-28, 2019

Class 510, a cohort that started and completed together the Diploma of Theology degree at Kenya Baptist Theological College back in November of 1999. The final course that I taught them in 1998 was an elective entitled “The Unfinished Task,” in which I challenged the students of Class 510 to move from being beneficiaries of mission to serving as agents of mission. While serving as missionaries with the Baptist Mission of Kenya, David Neely, a fellow instructor at KBTC, and I dreamed of and prayed for students to catch a vision for indigenous church planting among the least reached people groups of East Africa. We considered biblically and strategically what would be required of our students to enter into missionary endeavor themselves, rather than depending on Western missionaries as had been the case for well over one hundred years in Kenya. The challenge was met at first with incredulity—was it even acceptable to the Baptist mission to speak in these terms? I recall clearly when I challenged the students of Class 510 to move from being recipients of mission to becoming agents of mission. There was dead silence. The students looked at one another and then to me. Finally, one of the bolder students asked, “Mwalimu (teacher), is it permissible for you to say this to us? Will you get in trouble with the Mission for telling us this?” I assured them that I was not concerned about any possible repercussions of my challenge. One by one, the students recognized the aberrant gap, and embraced the calling themselves to go and send rather than continue waiting and receiving. As the course came to a close, the twenty three students of Class 510 presented me with a wooden carving of the nation of Kenya to which they attached a small notepad containing the name of each student and the unreached people group they were committing to engage with the Gospel.

Fast forward twenty years. Under what I understood to be the prompting of God’s Spirit, I was compelled to gather these students again from all across Kenya and ask them to share their story—what God has done in and through them over these many years since we last discussed and agonized over the unreached peoples of East Africa, and the gut wrenching absence of indigenous missionaries among them. I reached out to my former missionary colleague and another close friend, and we began working to bring Class 510 back together. Members of the class accepted our invitation, and sixteen of the original twenty three came together in Tigoni, Kenya, most of whom had enjoyed

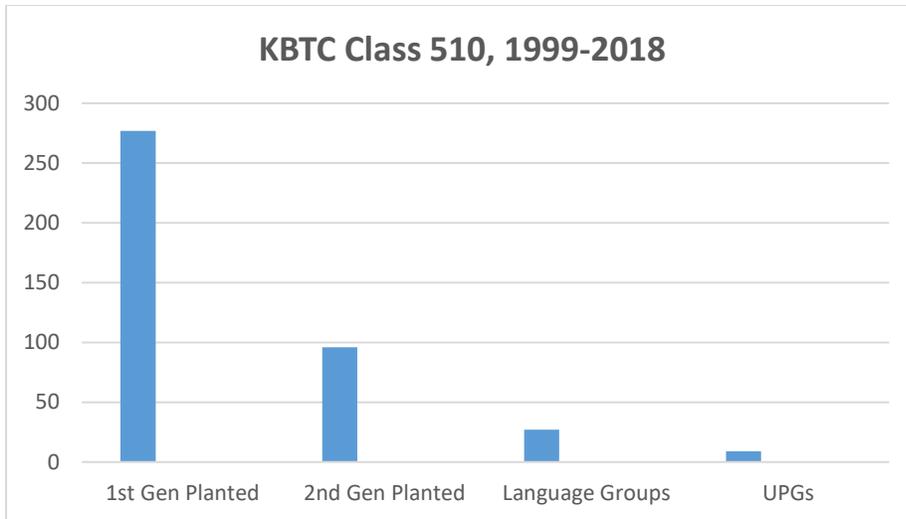
very little communication among themselves during the previous twenty years. Five members of the original group had gone on to be with the Lord, so the sixteen members of Class 510 that gathered represented 89% of the students still living. Each member of Class 510 shared their story of what God had done in and through them over the past twenty years, emphasizing the impact that their theological education in general, and “The Unfinished Task” course in particular has had on their ministries. At the close of our Class 510 reunion, we challenged and recommissioned them to go out with a renewed vision for indigenous church planting among the least reached peoples of East Africa.

## FINDINGS

What we learned as Class 510 shared their story was nothing short of awe inspiring. Over the span of twenty years (1999-2018), these twenty-three servants of Christ had engaged 27 language groups with the Gospel—6 of which are considered unreached or unevangelized people groups.<sup>3</sup> They had planted 277 churches that in turn had planted another 96 churches, for a total of 373 church plants over twenty years. They accomplished all this without the aid of Western missionaries and funding, and in the face of enormous challenges, intense loneliness, and heart-rending suffering. They acknowledged their short comings, and admitted the discouragement they had endured along the way. Despite setbacks and occasional losses that would have turned back most Christian leaders, they remain faithful to finishing the task of reaching the least reached around them.

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<sup>3</sup> Orma, Wanga Muslims, Coastal Swahili, Turkana, Sudanese, Oromo-Borana,



- For a list of Language Groups engaged, please see Appendix A.
- For a list of Location of Churches Planted by Student, please consult Appendix B.

## OBSERVATIONS

### 1. Identity

Through testimonies given during the Class 510 Reunion in September of 2019 as well through the course of extended dialogue, students, without exception, evidenced their identity as being a member of Class 510. Their connection to Kenya Baptist Theological College as alumni was rarely mentioned. This is likely due to the fact that students at KBTC twenty years ago entered and proceeded as classes, much like what is commonly referred to today as cohort groups. Members of a particular class began their seminary studies together, took the same courses together, lived, ate, worshipped and fellowshiped together during the campus portions of their studies, and graduated with their diploma or certificate in theology together. Class 510 members have maintained contact with one another to one degree or another, but since the 510 Reunion in September of 2019, one regional gathering has been planned and conducted in Nairobi, and a second regional gathering has been planned for Western Kenya in 2020. These are not alumni meetings organized by the Seminary; rather, these are planned by the class members themselves for the purpose of fellowship and joint planning of how to begin doing ministry together.

The conclusion that naturally follows this observation is that the effectiveness of theological education in mission settings may well be in relation to the depth of relationships developed among class members during their course of study.

## 2. Isolation

Students expressed having endured an intense sense of isolation from the Seminary over the past twenty years of ministry. Apart from occasional fund raising appeals, and infrequent contact with Baptist missionaries due to a strategic shift by the mission away from work in traditional mission areas, alumni did not receive any communication from Kenya Baptist Theological College. This resulted in negative isolation that was not self-induced. Members of Class 510 said that they felt they had been ignored, and that they were, therefore, unimportant.

We may surmise that mission seminaries miss out on a vital opportunity to conserve and perpetuate the impact of theological education by not planning and conducting a strong alumni program or strategic approach to continuing education. Planned appropriately, an alumni program could serve as a secondary level of support in tandem with the cohort identity. This, in turn, would hold strong potential for engaging alumni in support and propagation of the theological institution and its programs of study.

## 3. Indigeneity

Members of Class 510 have been productive in ministry over the past twenty years, as measured by the number of churches planted and daughter churches resulting from those church plants. What makes this all the more missiologically significant is that these efforts have been accomplished entirely apart from any outside assistance from mission agency or the Seminary itself. Students gave testimony to enduring extreme hardships at times in undertaking church planting endeavors without external support, but the bottom line is that they were successful, for the most part, in these efforts. While the majority of church planting efforts by members of Class 510 were not among unreached peoples, students fulfilled the mandate of “The Unfinished Task” by moving from being recipients of mission to becoming agents of mission.

#### 4. Insufficient

Peter and I sat together near the dining hall table, encompassed on either side by other former students of mine. The fellowship during the evening meal was an extension of the special reunion that had started only two hours earlier. Peter Olanapa is an exceptional and insightful Maasai who graduated from Kenya Baptist Theological College as a member of Class 510 with a Diploma in Theology and went on to earn advanced theological degrees. He is a leader among his village elders. As we laughed while enjoying reminiscing over a traditional meal, conversation shifted to my purpose for returning after all these years. Peter asked probing questions related to the subject at hand, which was what must be done to finish the task of reaching the unreached peoples of East Africa. He pressed the issue and stated that from his perspective, the churches that have been planted in Maasai land are seen by many in the villages as irrelevant. Peter explained that many villagers see the church as a Sunday place of worship and preaching, but when they have a need during the week they turn to either the government or NGOs<sup>4</sup> to meet their needs. For all practical purposes, the church is irrelevant to the average villager, particularly during a time of great need or crisis. Peter asked the question that my colleagues and I had journeyed so far to address: What would happen if the churches we plant among the least reached could be seen as centers of community development?

Peter's question brought into focus one area in which the theological education he received was insufficient. Students were ill equipped to address community needs as a vital component of church planting and Christian ministry.

#### CONCLUSION

The theological education of Class 510 has proven to be effective over twenty years following graduation, at least in the area of church planting and evangelism. This has been assessed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Perhaps the most promising aspect of this is that as a result of the twenty year gathering and discussion resulting from student testimonies and survey results, members of Class 510 are beginning to ask

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<sup>4</sup> Non-government organization.

what would happen if, in addition to focusing on evangelism and church planting, the church is seen as the center of community development? What changes when the church becomes the primary source of help for a village or community in symphony with government and non-government resources? What if addressing need is not merely a gateway to evangelism, but the embodiment of what the church is meant to be? One undeniable result of a paradigm shift toward holistic mission is that the church is seen as relevant to all of Village life, and that changes everything. Relevance follows identification. These Kenya seminary graduates are articulating and fleshing out that the goal is not to plant churches that are culturally relevant; the goal is to live out the holistic mission of Christ to enjoy an all-consuming love for God, and to express corresponding self-sacrificing love for our neighbors in every village and city. Holistic mission produces a relevant church.

Only time and eternity will reveal the full extent of the sacrifice of this relatively small number of former students, but based on historical and empirical evidence, there is every reason to believe that theirs will be an exponential impact for the gospel and glory of Christ among the nations.

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<sup>i</sup> Clinton 2018, 1

<sup>ii</sup> Clinton 2018, 4

<sup>iii</sup> Stewart 1976, 22

<sup>iv</sup> Stewart 1976, 29

<sup>v</sup> Stewart 1976, 38

<sup>vi</sup> Stewart 1976, 39

<sup>vii</sup> Stewart 1976, 144

<sup>viii</sup> Scales 1998, 45

<sup>ix</sup> Scales 1998, 45-46

<sup>x</sup> [www.kbtc.ac.ke](http://www.kbtc.ac.ke).

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## APPENDIX A

### Language Groups Engaged:

- Luhya, Wanga (Muslims)
- Orma
- Meru
- Luo
- Kamba
- Coastal Swahili
- Kikuyu
- Maasai
- Turkana
- Samburu
- Saboot
- Lubukusu
- Luhya
- Kalenjin
- Budama, Uganda
- Hutu, Rwanda
- Tutsi, Rwanda
- Sudanese
- Amhara, Ethiopian
- Teso
- Somali
- Oromo, Borana
- Miji Kenda
- Sebei
- English
- Pokot
- Rendille

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## APPENDIX B

### Locations of Churches Planted by student

#### Obadiah Alubusia

- Kakamega Town, Western Kenya
- Idalcho, Western Kenya
- Mumias Area, Western Kenya

#### Fred Auma

- Homa Bay County, Eastern Kenya
- Machakos, Central Kenya
- Migori County, Western Kenya
- Nairobi City

#### David Gitau Ndungu

- Teso South, Western Kenya
- Busia County, Western Kenya
- Ethiopia

#### Hesbon Isinga

- Kakamega, Western Kenya
- Vihiga, Western Kenya
- Sabaot, Western Kenya

#### Peter Kamau

- Isiolo
- Nyeri, Central Kenya
- Laikipia, Central Kenya
- South Sudan (refugee camps)

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Allan James Gichuki

- Thimu, Central Kenya
- Maganjo, Central Kenya
- Kamukunji, Central Kenya
- Mukurweini, Central Kenya
- Gikondi, Central Kenya

John Komu

- Limuru Region, Central Kenya
- Kiambu County, Central Kenya
- Nyeri County, Central Kenya
- Mutomo, Central Kenya
- Ngeri Ngiro, Central Kenya
- Karai, Central Kenya

John Mwanzia Mutisya

- Machakos Town, Eastern Kenya

Robert Nabiranda Walukitu

- Mwanza, Tanzania
- Masinga, Eastern Kenya
- Mbeya, Tanzania
- Bungoma, Western Kenya
- Busia, Western Kenya
- Kakamega, Western Kenya

Mark Ndinyo Khamala

- Kimilili, Western Kenya
- Kitale, Western Kenya
- Kakuma (refugee camp), Northwest Kenya
- Uganda, Eastern Part

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Thomas Nyukundi

- Kisii South Mogirango, Western Kenya
- South Kisii, Western Kenya
- Kitutu Chache, Western Kenya
- Kuo Land, Western Kenya
- Kuria, Kenya & Tanzania

Solomon Nyamai

- Muthesya, Eastern Kenya
- Ikatini, Eastern Kenya

Joseph Okulo

- Kipangas, Rift Valley
- Narok Town, Rift Valley

Peter Olanapa

- Kajiado County, South Rift
- South Rift Region
- Tanzania

Ben Wanzama

- Nairobi

Regina Kabata Njuguna

Sammy Mark Owino

- Nairobi

Simon Mwangi Ndegwa

- Kakamega, Western Kenya