Contested issues in **training ministers** in South Africa

morality
solutions
TECHNOLOGY
curriculum
ACCREDITATION ministerial **VISION**
AFRICAN LEADERSHIP VIABILITY
community *truth* *gender* *research*
DIVERSITY **SPIRITUALITY** formation *biblical*
identity
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relevant
philosophy
ideology
renewal
decolonisation
loyalty *culture*
race
pastors

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FOREWORD

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My Akan background and wisdom encourages me to undertake this contribution in two proverbs. Firstly, *se nnkɔr obi efua mu a, wodwen dɛ wo nko ara na eyɛ okuafɔ*, i.e. without venturing out into another person's farm, one may be tempted to conclude he/she is the only farmer, or even the champion of farmers. We need outsiders and their contributions to assess the rightness and fullness of our perspectives. Secondly, *adwen wotoa-toa*, i.e. wisdom is pieced together from different, diverse and even divergent perspectives and inputs. Against the background of the foregoing Akan wisdom, I have been uneasy about 'contestation' which is often held in terms of competition and struggle for victory. However, going back to the etymology, it helps holding together the mission and ecumenical vocations of theology. Both Akan proverbs, in their own way, pull us towards the ecumenical perspective which is a biblical imperative (Ps. 24:1; John 17:20-26; Eph. 1:10; Rev. 7:9ff; Rev. 21:1-7) and a catalyst of renewal (Pobee 1997). Ecumenical imperative is about making connections and building communities.

The submission of this contribution is that the twin words, namely contextuality and viability, are the ultimate test of the authenticity, integrity and relevance of any theological construct and endeavour. To put it another way, each contribution in this symposium may be assessed on how it corresponds to the heartbeat, the hopes and fears of Christians in South Africa, and their renewal. Contextuality and viability may be planks of 'contestation', but are fundamentally still about owning the products of theological and ministerial programmes by various constituencies.

Viability

Viability etymologically derives from the French word '*la vie*' (life) and the English 'able'. Hence, viability signals the ability to give life, renewal, change and transformation. Scripture itself is insistent that God's wisdom is spirit(ual) and, therefore, is revealed by the spirit (I Cor. 2:6-16). John 20:30-31 corroborates the Pauline statement to suggest that the dynamo of theology (education) is spirituality. And so, the Church Father, Evagrius Ponticus (345-397), monk from Egypt who influenced such giants of Christian history as Palladius, Bishop of the Ireland, John Cassian (c. 360-435), abbot of the monastery of St Victor near Marseilles, Dionysius the Areopagite, and Maximus the Confessor, asserted that "a theologian is one who truly prays and one who prays is a theologian" (Greenslade 1964:3). Prayer life is one aspect of tuning in to God, but spirituality is prayer and more. John Chrysostom (347-407), a celebrated expositor of scripture who was initially the Elder of the Church of Antioch and later Bishop/Metropolitan of Constantinople, spoke the length and breadth of spirituality when he introduced the idea of two altars – one in the sanctuary, the other in the marketplace (Bria 1996). In other words, theology's concern with spirituality is not only liturgical acts of worship but also to pass social,

economic and political issues through the prism and microscope of the God-word, with the ultimate good of redeeming everything to and for God. It is this that brings viability to the discipline of theology. Theology is not only to know the truth; it is to do the truth, too. My humble challenge is for us to critique our theological work by whether it equips us to know and do the truth, God's truth, which like Joseph's coat (Genesis 37) is as a coat of many colours.

The presentation thus far has attempted to suggest the crucial place of viability for what we do in theological education. It is that which makes Janet Trisk's use of 'engendering' as the subtitle of her contribution most appealing. Marilyn Naidoo's use of 'managing diversity' in her title, or Craig Dunsmuir and Michael McCoy's tying of ministerial formation into the Church's vocation and mission are useful resources for ventilating the viability of theological education. The chapter on Pentecostal-Charismatic traditions is very much on target as we pursue viability which facilitates change. Indeed, Part Two on ministerial formation focusing on spirituality and morality is perhaps the most rewarding part of this publication.

Contextuality: Blessing our memories

The theme of viability, as traced through spirituality as the dynamo of vibrant theology like the rest of theological education and ministerial formation in Africa, came with models minted in the North, especially the Latin West. As such, spirituality as a discipline has been mediated and shaped by scripture and some classics from the North/West: The Greek epic poet, Homer (c. 800 BCE-c. 701 BCE), the Greek philosopher Plato (427-347 BC), the Greek philosopher Aristotle (284-322 BC), the Roman poet Virgil (70-19 BC), the Church Father Augustine of Hippo Regius, Roman North Africa (AD 354-430), the Italian philosopher-theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), the English poets John Milton (1608-1674) and William Shakespeare (1564-1616), and the Spanish author Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1567-1618). With the exposure of students to these landmarks of formational and spiritual development, the student's life "becomes a practice of ecumenism of time – and their journey through life is enriched by having (them) as partners along the way" (Weigel 2013:14).

This classical input, however, may not be completely precise because of Christian faith's core message of the Incarnation (John 1:14, Gal. 4:3). It is that incarnational thrust that we highlight with the word contextuality. The contribution by Phillip Higgs on "The African Renaissance and the decolonisation of theological education" is a refreshing exploration of this theme. In the South African context, however, for precisely the reason of the painful experience of the ideology of apartheid, theology and education must be most attentive of issues of the social, economic and political life which will necessitate the reorientation of theology to look beyond dogma towards the fundamental meaning of religion as concerned with the human (Bonhoeffer 1967:118). However, in engaging issues of human dignity and rights, we must be careful not to turn theology into a programme or

crusade; rather it may never lose its *raison d'être* as good news and gospel (cf. Higgs' chapter in this publication). Theology may not start from the problem of the community and a predetermined framework to articulate the Christian message – that leads to legalism rather than gospel.

There is a context of multiple plurality and pluralism in South Africa – ethnic, race, gender, religion and denominations. Those identities involved in the pluralism should lead us to engage, firstly, the different people, and then to explore the philosophy of truth that will not short-change the being of other humans. The vision of contextualisation has for some time now, especially since the nationalist era, been bubbling on the African theological scene. The desire for contextuality passes under such descriptions as accommodation (Rahner and Vorgrimler 1965:12), adaptation (Hermandes 1958), inculturation (Waliggo et al. 1988) and African theology (Ela 1988, Pobee 1979). The endeavour to culture the word of God in the South African context has gone under the designation of black theology (Mosala 1989, Mofokeng 1983), liberation (Frostin 1988) and reconstruction (Villa-Vicencio 1992).

All the foregoing attempts are rooted in the realisation and conviction regarding the crucial importance of environment, physical, external and interior for viable theology. By the former is meant modern surroundings and features. By interior environment is meant mental and spiritual climate (Niblett 1955:234), which is perhaps more influential than exterior environment. The contribution by Conradie lays out how the University of the Western Cape is grappling with the environment/context in the South African context so as to sustain the missiological orientation of theological education.

Language, the vehicle of culture and people's identity, has long been recognised to be critical for engaging people. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that missionaries take the credit for reducing African vernacular to writing (Pobee 2011:20–29). On the other hand, much of theological work in South Africa is done in English or Afrikaans to which the biblical languages are added. Ela (1988:44) is right in his critique that “in Africa, the confrontation between the message and the African universe must bring forth meaning with the power to transform the lives of African Christians.” Today the faith of the Church in Africa is in danger of death because the Church tends to forget the cultural dimensions as marked by the Greco heritage. If the faith of Africa is not to die (cf viability), it must become a vision of the world that they can feel is theirs; European cultural dimensions must be stripped away. There is an urgent need to reject present models of expression if we are to breathe new life into the spoken word. Our Church must express a Passover of language, or the meaning of the Christian message will not be understood. In place of the cultural presuppositions of Western Christianity, namely *logos* and *ratio*, we must substitute African symbolism. Starting with the ecclesial furrow where language of faith germinates, we must restore the gospel's power to speak to Africans through the primordial symbol of their existence.

As I have my ears to the ground, I have a sense that religion of one kind or another is of significance for people in South Africa. I have a sense that churches would profess theology in their blood and life stream. However, do they own theology and theological education in truth on the ground? To own it will go with honouring in reality the principles of viability and contextuality of the institutions.

This symposium is a rich and careful articulation of issues in theological and ministerial formation. Bringing together in one volume relevant bibliography makes it that more invaluable.

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