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
partnerships
contextual
relevant
philosophy
ideology
renewal
decolonisation
city culture
loyalty race
pastors

Editor
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INTRODUCTION

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With great passion church leaders, theological educators, administrators, students and congregations debate whether theological education is providing the right kind of formative training for leaders of the Church. On the one hand there is an assumption that theological institutions in South Africa ought to be shaping and forming church leaders who can serve the almost insurmountable social needs of our country, be visionary with moral integrity, and be able to attend with competence to the many pastoral tasks at a local church level. On the other hand, theological institutions must determine how to take on the difficult task of forming leaders with fewer resources available within the changing landscape of higher education in South Africa. In the middle of these well-intended struggles there is once more the question of the vision and purpose of theological education. To what end should theological education be undertaken in South Africa to 'equip people for ministry'? What view of the present and the future needs to drive it to situate it historically and practically in the challenges facing the Church and its ministry? Precisely what are we forming pastors to be and do as we attempt to meet the needs of church and society in the changing South African context?

This book is an attempt to answer these questions by taking cognisance of the challenges that influence, impact and profoundly shape the possibility of training ministers in South Africa. This is a volume presenting eleven contested issues that attend to the concerns related to processes, structures, knowledge and practices within theological education. These controversial issues of accreditation, spirituality, diversity, gender, worldview, morality, church partnerships, technology, leadership and the curriculum are called into question in the education process. Contributors have offered keen insights about how to think differently and more complexly about these matters. It is an attempt to turn the soil of South African theological education, to highlight how we attempt to understand theological education within our contextual realities.

The complexity of the South African theological praxis calls for an approach to take on a diversity of perspectives of cultural, public and Christian life. As we know, South Africa is politically, economically and culturally a contested space in itself, filled with many contradictions and paradoxes. We also know that institutions of higher education continue not only to be intensely contested, but also continue to be sites of substantive, meta-theoretical, methodological and political/institutional contestations. Our context is filled with diversity on the level of race, class, gender, sexuality, denominational identity and language, to name a few. And, at the same time, any reference to all things African would have to be partial, provisional and contextualised. To essentialise theological education as 'theological education in Africa' would be a disservice. To propose a generic representation of training which covers all its instances in this part of the world would be to homogenise the experience. Instead this book is an affirmation of the multiple

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voices, locations, identities and positions within South African theological education, as a starting point for transformative theological education. To envision a transformative theological education requires one to seek fundamentally to reconstruct and re-imagine theological discourse, curriculum, pedagogy and institutional systems from a perspective of the geopolitical context. The importance of context is crucial as it influences the way we theologise and also provokes a seriousness with which we attend to cultural expressions of Christianity. Doing theology involves a multi-perspectival understanding that is shaped by different, interacting cultures and perspectives. The challenge within this book is for us to form our own meanings of sustainable theological education for our own time and place. As Maluleke (1996:17) suggests, we need to drink from our own wells. It is a way to assert our identity in this region, as location and positionality makes a difference.

This vision is not a description of the future, but rather an orientation in the present, a point of entry, a beginning, a departure but not always a final solution. The reason for the latter is that this orientation is mediated by our limits and the limitations of our theological institutions. These essays are a practice in truth-saying; to see ourselves as we are, with theological education institutions striving to be places of truth in church and society as part of its commitment to self-critical accountability. By engaging the impact of these contested issues within theological education, we develop a critical consciousness through attentive discernment and contextual evaluation. Through this sort of imaginative theological work, informed by educational research and practice, we can come to practical wisdom (Warford 2007:12). This wisdom can enable future ministers to confront the question of how to *be* in the world with the required competence, integrity and professional identity to meet the needs of church and society.

Ministerial training and formation

The Church in South Africa faces the task of reconstructing its congregational life, its educational institutions, and its witness in the world amidst an increasingly globalised society where people's desires are more often shaped by consumer culture than by the grace of God. It is a society where conviction is often shaped by state power rather than the cross, and where activities are often shaped by habits of division and violence rather than reconciliation (Jones 2002:190). To make sense of its changing role, the Church remains heavily dependent upon its ordained ministers for the vision and inspiration which are to motivate both its worship and mission. At the same time there is an acknowledgement that a new paradigm is needed for doing theology, and a new kind of Christian leadership is needed that is able to lead churches towards meaningful engagement in society. As the formational mandate becomes more a part of theological training (Foster et al. 2006), it is imperative to develop a more nuanced discussion regarding the relationship of ministerial formation to theological education. Thus, it is important to reflect on the character, activities and teaching of ministerial candidates so as to reconsider how to better 'form' pastoral leaders who can create, renovate, sustain and extend religious institutions.

The period of training is an important time to encourage a mature development of occupational and personal identity and to foster a coherent understanding of role and function in ministry. Ministerial formation is viewed as a multi-faceted activity involving critical thinking, the acquisition of knowledge, skills development, religious identity formation and the development of ministerial and spiritual maturity expected of church ministers (Overend 2007). This concept is embedded in the *habitus* model in which the Church, as a distinctive and historical community, fosters values through corporate worship and shared discipleship, forming a “disposition of the heart” (Ballard and Pritchard 1996:69). Theology as *habitus* is personal, self-engaging and constantly active. This formational notion of theological education is what Farley labels as *theologia* rather than ‘theology’ in order to underline that it is a kind of personal wisdom, a way of being human. However, *theologia* requires a disciplined reflection in order to achieve this purpose, and this comes through the modes of theological reflection, theological understanding and theological knowledge (Farley 1983:156–158). Here we see an ecclesiological understanding of formation concerning more than the object of study: It is a model of learning in which faith, study and tradition inform one another, and thereby foster the development of the person.

The goal is to help the student undergo a deep kind of formation – a personal appropriation of knowledge about God, the self and the world where learning is not just a personal matter but is done for the sake of public life, ecclesial life and Church leadership. This is a process which is viewed not simply as something that is done to students, but rather as a cooperative and intentional journey which engages the interests, time, skill and creative energies of the students and congregations. It furthermore enlists the enabling resources of theological educators who carry a mandate to provide the link between the education and ministry foundation. Ministerial formation must involve the training and equipping of pastoral leaders to *do* theology by involvement on a grassroots level. This implicates developing responsiveness to historical, biblical and pastoral dimensions within its context so as to be relevant.

Education for ministry is tied to exploration of vocation to ordination (Neuhaus 1992:3–4). This immediately distinguishes theological education from other professional education, since vocation to ordained ministry involves a call from God to the inner self as well as a call from the Church. Both must be present for authentic vocation. It requires that the ordinand explicitly and publically affirms that he or she is willing to let the Church play a large role in the shaping of the self. Ordained ministry has a unique character (Heitink 1993: 317–324) that focuses on the identity of the minister. This identity is not reduced to the external trappings and privileges of the office, but depends on the profound sense of conforming oneself as a servant of the Gospel.

At the same time, theological education no longer refers to university or seminary education alone, but to efforts on the part of the whole Church to learn from its rich traditions. There has been a reappraisal of the status and the role of laity in many Christian traditions. The

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realignment of Christian vocation as the task of the whole Church signalled a realignment of the nature of ministry (WCC 1982). Ministry is no longer solely equated with the activities of ordained ministry, but rather something exercised by the entire people of God, in church and around the world. There are now many different locations and agendas associated with theological education. Local ministry development and the education associated with it will increase in importance and quantity, and theological education must be a part of it. With this comes the challenge of envisioning and embracing the whole, of providing education which equips leaders for many different contexts. As can be seen within the goals of theological education, there are tensions between a sense of the whole, with a focus on inclusivity and hospitality and the ministry of *all* the baptised, and a push towards particularity and special identities shaped by ethos and context. Whatever 'we' do, it must include both the particular and the universal, the whole church.

With this brief introduction into ministerial training and before observations are made about the scope of this book, it is necessary to make a few general remarks relating to where theological education is currently situated within the South African context.

Changed landscape of theological education

Theological education and ministerial formation have globally been in a state of uncertainty for a number of years. This has been precipitated by the impact of globalisation on theological education, the process of rationalisation within educational and ecclesiastical institutions, the competing and sometimes adversarial interests of liberal, radical and conservative theological establishments, and the crisis in the vocation with regard to the ordained and lay ministry within the Church (Van der Water 2005:203). Whether in crisis or merely in painful transition, the fact remains that many church denominations in South Africa, Christian groupings and theological institutions have engaged in a radical review of their theological education and ministerial formation programmes.

In the changing South African scene, theological education has faced significant developments. Due to the restructuring of higher education over the past decade, which co-existed with demands for social and economic justice (Levy 2007), theological faculties at public universities across the country have been restructured as part of the Human and Social Sciences, as schools, departments or units of theology and religion (Dreyer 2012). Programme rationalisation, to increase efficiency and harmonise curricula, also led to fewer theological courses in some faculties. For Bible colleges and seminaries, the instability in theological education was impacted more strongly by the issue of accreditation and quality assurance. New institutions and mechanisms were put into place to deal with accreditation and authorisation, such as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) with its National Qualifications Framework. These private providers had to apply anew for accreditation, which had a domino effect for seminaries – some, which could not apply for accreditation for various reasons, were unable to attract students, forcing closures and merges. Furthermore, it became increasingly difficult for mainline

churches to keep residential training programmes running due to changing patterns of commitment and community which result in shrinking church membership and fewer ministerial candidates. On the other hand, the declining pool of candidates for ordained ministry has brought about an increase in programmes to equip laity for positions of leadership and service.

The nature of theological curricula and the quality of theological education varied greatly amongst different theological institutions. Therefore, accreditation was an important consideration – especially in the case of students who wanted to study further at different or at public theological institutions. Positively, accreditation forced theological institutions to be accountable to government, the Church and the general public, which, in turn, could result in greater effectiveness. However, this new accreditation process did not provide for any accrediting bodies other than itself. Theological institutions also had to resolve the tension between the status of institution as autonomous authority with statutory recognition and as serving local Christian communities and churches (Moodie 2008).

These higher education changes created instability from which churches and seminaries are only now recovering. Each institution's struggle with identity – the definition, purpose and mission, the creation and abandonment of programmes, and the search for fiscal stability – profoundly affected the practice of teaching and learning. While restructuring and closure have been some of the responses to the crisis, some Bible colleges have spawned a variety of emphases and new degree programmes, and found partnerships amongst universities. The positive effect of these movements is, hopefully, stronger ecumenical cooperation amongst the various churches that have collaborated. However, some have legitimate fears that the wheeling-and-dealing has led to a 'lowering of standards' in theological education (Maluleke 1998).

At the same time, we are aware that the very contours of historic Christianity are changing as a result of the phenomenal growth of Pentecostal and independent churches in the global South (Werner 2010). Indeed, Christianity itself is far more variegated and divided today than at any previous time in its history. In South Africa there has been a dramatic increase in demand for general higher education due to a younger and dynamic population, which is also reflected in a growing demand for theological education, especially amongst the African Independent Churches, Pentecostals and Charismatic networks. It would seem that the need for leaders far outstrips the ability of Bible colleges, seminaries and correspondence programmes to supply them. The mushrooming of new theological training institutions has, in turn, created tensions between public and private providers of theological education as they compete for students. The entrepreneurial marketing of theological education, valuing the students in terms of what they can consume or produce and the supermarket of theological offerings, brings the commodification and commercialisation of theological education into focus. The sudden growth in private theological education was partly because some traditions wanted to retain their specific identities and values which they perceived to be under threat (Levy 2007). At the same

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time, some church traditions have established their own ministerial training rather than looking to the traditional theological college or university. While it may be argued that most churches are not in a position to provide theological education at an appropriate post-secondary level, this developing pattern demonstrates that the needs of the Church have changed and may require different types of training. It is evident from these changes that there is a resurgence of denominationalism in theological education (Naidoo 2012) which is not a good sign for the integrity of Christian witness within the Protestant family.

Theological education in South Africa currently reflects the deep divides of the context within which it is situated – South Africa itself is a contested space and theological education is equally diverse and complex. Currently the spectrum of offerings includes accredited denominational/interdenominational Bible schools and seminaries, university faculties of theology serving particular denominations that are ecumenical, university departments of religious studies, unaccredited Bible schools, apprenticeships, short-term courses offered by well-meaning global partners, outright sale of certificates, moving courseware across borders, and a host of other strategies. Also, despite the widening digital-divide in South Africa there has been a surge of interest in new technologies that has caused an eager population to become further connected, though still to varying degrees. Many theological institutions have now moved into distance (correspondence) education, seen as a solution to the financial viability of institutions.

The approach to theological education within the various theological institutions is markedly different, ranging from confessional and critical correlation with social sciences, to contextual approaches. There are shifting expectations and denominational differences as to what the ordained ministry and church leadership should entail, which makes the task that more challenging. The curriculum in our context has mostly followed the ‘clerical paradigm’ and prepared students to enter traditional church leadership roles, while the growing need is for ministers to interpret the socio-economic, cultural, political and spiritual contexts of the majority with the aim of transforming these contexts. Most of the theological reflection remains captive to a Western model of theologising, reflecting the tension between African communal culture and the tendencies towards isolation, individualism, and the competitive characteristic of Western culture. The focus in the curriculum has been on the academisation of theological education with administrative and disciplinary silos, while integration is the actual requirement. University faculties have become so diversified that theological disciplines are no longer able to converse meaningfully with one another. Each discipline has its own methodology and, hence, its own language. And because of this it loses its capacity to reflect on a common goal for ministerial formation. The practical, pastoral or the clinical side of the curriculum tends to be equally remote from personal appropriation and internationalisation. The goals of the traditional intellectual approach, shaped by its Western views of rationality found in universities, often omit personal formational elements, despite evidence that students in these courses often enrol for formational reasons. The inner coherence and church-related responsibility of theological education cannot be exercised if the structural framework,

especially at public universities, does not allow a formational emphasis. Furthermore, the openness of the over-crowded curriculum itself aids the 'consumer mentality' of our culture, thus reinforcing the character and values of students and frustrating the faculty's attempt to become involved.

This overview highlights the many realities and challenges faced in training ministers, and requires a commitment from all critical and transformative theological educators to articulate the responsibility of Christian witness in relation to these shortcomings. There is no doubt whatsoever that the task and challenge of transforming ministerial formation in this context is an ongoing and dynamic one.

Scope of the book

In a country with a significant percentage of Christians (Statistics South Africa 2001), the focus of training ministers is strategically important as religion plays a critical role in supporting human rights, democracy and development (Piper 2009). In doing this, churches are trying to make sense of their new role in terms of culture, political profile and social influence as social and cultural systems that once held religious identity and traditions together, fragment. As church ministers become more and more involved in increasingly polarised and unpredictable church communities, there needs to be a deliberate strategy within professional training to equip ministers. However, to make this a reality involves the recognition of the many challenges in the educational process that impacts on the training of ministers. Since church denominations themselves have been challenged by internal pluralism and the erosion of the theological particularities, theological institutions have sometimes found it difficult to articulate a focused and coherent stance of their own. Hence there is little consensus about what pastoral identity should look like and questions of competence, excellence and standards are difficult to resolve. The aim of the book, then, is to provide a critical discussion of ministerial training and formation, being cognisant of the complexities that shape the education process in South Africa.

This volume is written from an ecumenical perspective, focusing on issues impacting both public and private theological education. Each contributor has offered a significant contested issue, varying from processes, structures, knowledge and practices, and has problematised this issue with detailed description, discussion and analysis (be it theological, denominational, historical, social, economic, political or structural) within South African theological education. Although contributors' areas of expertise are numerous, it is suffice to say they are sufficiently sensible and modest to recognise that there are no simple solutions to these complex problems, and that solutions can be thoughtful provoking, helpful and imperfect. While trying to maintain a common focus to the book, authors have expressed the kind of diverse interpretation that adds to the complexity in understanding the South African context. A concerted effort was made to invite contributions representing diversity, different theological traditions, younger academics, female academics and racial diversity to allow for the richness of perspective.

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This book has three parts:

Part One

This section is a spread of five essays that are critical to the way theological education is currently structured and shaped in South Africa. The first chapter begins with the perennial problem of the lack of integration within the curriculum with its specialisation and fragmentation. This has shaped the 'product' of theological education – leaders who possess advanced degrees, but correspondingly lack advanced spiritual wisdom, maturity, and ministry competence. The second chapter unpacks the problematic role of government accreditation requirements in setting adequate criteria for Christian ministry, and church traditions note that not all prices asked in the marketplace of academic recognition should be paid. This points to the deeper debate of how theological education fits into the secular underpinnings of higher education. The third chapter is a challenge to the cultural dominance of the West. It is a bold attempt in reconstructing theological education for our context, which aims to give indigenous African knowledge systems their rightful place. The fourth chapter highlights that the normative gender role expectation of our society is very strong, and rightly argues that a relevant theological education must be 'engendered'. The latter involves a transformation of both the structures of theological institutions as well as mainstreaming gender studies. The last chapter of this section looks at the neglected issue of managing diversity in theological education, and asks the deeper question of whether South Africans can un-think old categories of citizenship and refine themselves as a nation in order to move beyond racial categorisation (as an example) and their own political bondage.

Part Two

This section has three chapters which attend to issues in the ministerial formation process, namely spiritual and moral formation which is difficult to realise and highly contested, and the required partnership between the Church and training institution in shaping a formational mandate. The focus on the formation of future Christian leaders is duly set on the development of a deeply-rooted spirituality and the disposition of integrity, but not without its challenges. The first two chapters of this section explores contested issues in the educational process and highlight the important role of communal practices as key to forming future leaders. The last chapter explores the problematic tensions created between the theological institution and the church denomination in meeting each other's expectation in training ministers. It explores the potential turf wars or competing notions of education, ministry and mission, and how this relationship needs to be managed constructively.

Part Three

This section has three chapters; the focus is on innovation and emerging developments in training ministers. The first chapter considers the new type of entrepreneurial leader that is developing especially amongst the Pentecostal-Charismatic traditions. This chapter explores the implication of this type of leadership, highlighting the need to pay more attention theologically to the issue of leadership. The second chapter explores the emerging reality of technology in our context as it raises questions of formation, community, assessment and quality in the training process. Technology can bring people together and also isolate; hence the limits of its use must be carefully determined. Finally, since there will never be enough training institutions to assist in the task of leadership development, the last chapter deals with the problematic need to diversify theological training. This chapter speaks of a new initiative – a professional body for ministry training focused on lay leadership.

With the focus on contested issues, this book will surely stimulate further discussion, reflection and debate, and prompt readers to clarify their own thinking and practice as they confront the complexities of training ministers. It is hoped that this more complete description of the South African scene can inspire a transformative vision for the training process, encourage the ability to affirm difference, to learn from each other, and to dare to cross theological boundaries for the sake of common mission and ministry.

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