Handbook of Theological Education in Africa
REGNUM STUDIES IN GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY
(Previously GLOBAL THEOLOGICAL VOICES series)

Series Preface

The latter part of the twentieth century witnessed a global level of change in Christian dynamics. One significant development was the rise of the churches in the global south, not only in their number but also in their engagement with their socio-cultural contexts. Regnum Studies in Global Christianity explores the issues that the global church struggles with, focusing particularly on churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

The series publishes studies that will help the global church learn not only from past and present, but also from provocative and prophetic voices for the future. The editors and the publisher particularly pray that the series as a public space will encourage the southern churches to make an important contribution to the shaping of a healthy future for global Christianity. The editors invite theological seminars and universities from around the world to submit relevant scholarly dissertations for possible publication in the series. It is hoped that the series will provide a forum for South-to-South as well as South-to-North dialogues.

Series Editors

Ruth Padilla DeBorst
President, Latin American Theological Fraternity, Santiago, Chile

Hwa Yung
Bishop, The Methodist Church in Malaysia, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia

Wonsuk Ma
Executive Director, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford, UK

Damon So
Research Tutor, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Oxford, UK

Miroslav Volf
Director, Yale Center for Faith and Culture, New Haven, MA, USA
Handbook of Theological Education in Africa

Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner (Editors)
Priscille Djomhoue and James Amanze (Associate Editors)
Editorial Assistants: Kennedy Owino, Chammah Kaunda, Stephen Phiri

Forewords by John Mbiti, Andre Karamaga, Russel Botman,
Olav Fykse Tveit, Mercy Oduyoye and Denise Ackermann
1. Introduction

The long-term sustainability of Christian churches depends greatly on the effectiveness of pastoral (and lay-leader) training. The problem faced by theological education in tropical Africa and the whole of the African continent is apparent as soon as one notes that most pastoral training has been conducted by missionaries— the majority of whom know little or nothing about the inner dynamics of the African cultural and religious heritage. This situation persists because of the high cost of residential pastoral formation and the lack of contextualization of the training curriculum. To cut costs, African bishops and churches invite foreign missionary instructors to conduct training in their pastoral institutes. As long as the syllabi of African theological colleges and seminaries are imported from elsewhere, pastoral training will continue to be out of tune with the cultural and religious dynamics of African societies among whom the trainees are expected to work after graduation.

Urgent transformation of the curriculum for theological education in Africa is a necessity, not an option. Curriculum development is a professional undertaking, which must begin from the context of the learners— from what they already know— then proceed towards helping them discern those texts and experiences that can provide relevant knowledge, skills, and expertise appropriate for each particular context. Jesus was exemplary in his pedagogical skills. He would illustrate all his teachings with parables, metaphors and idioms derived from the cultural experience of his audiences. At the beginning of this third millennium, a contextually relevant curriculum for theological education in Africa ought to effectively deal with at least two issues:

- How to prepare African pastors, priests, lay leaders, teachers and other personnel without alienating from their culture?
- How to prepare them to cope with the present split between Christian identity and practice as characterized in much of African Christianity today?

2. Cultural Identity

Inevitably every Christian mission agency from outside Africa has introduced into this continent the cultural and religious values from the home country of that agency. This cultural invasion of Africa with North Atlantic culture is particularly evident among the African elite as a result of schooling and indoctrination. The curricula in schools, colleges, seminaries, and universities have been overloaded with cultural values from Europe and North America at the expense of the African cultural and religious heritage. Christian instruction and the use of foreign languages as the medium of instruction have reinforced this alienation of African students from their culture. How can one envision a relevant effective and academically sound programme of theological education without falling into this trap of cultural alienation? This is possible, provided that the policy makers are committed to both the Gospel and cultural affirmation. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15 and Galatians 2-3) is instructive on this point.

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1 An earlier, shorter version of this essay was published as an article in the Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity (New York: CUP, 2010).

There is nothing specifically African in the doctrines recited by African branches of various denominations—such as the Anglican, Baptist, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Moravian, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Quaker, Reformed and Roman Catholic denominations. Yet in practice African Christians in these denominations remain rooted in their respective African cultural traditions. For them Christianity remains largely a Sunday affair, with little or no direct impact on the political, economic, ethical, and aesthetic norms of wider society. This inconsistency between doctrinal identity and actual daily life and conduct among African Christians brings to question the significance of the rapid numerical increase in church membership in Africa, which has no direct impact in human relations among the people in a continent burdened with civil strife, administrative inefficiency and economic failure. Apparently many Africans turn to the church for refuge, hoping that through the Church they might perhaps survive the collapse of social institutions (which fail to serve them) and the post-colonial political crises in predominantly “Christian” countries.

This lack of social engagement of many African Christians reflects the fact that, in most instances, the form of Christianity that has been introduced to the continent of Africa is a religion aimed at securing eternal life for the believers after their death. What believers do now is “insurance” for the life to come, leading to a neglect of social responsibility with regard to the current political and economic affairs. Most priests, pastors, and lay-leaders fail to provide any relevant guidance for the Christians under their care, especially during social and political crises. Prayer is important. But social analysis and relevant action is even more urgent. In practice, churches are often the focal points for fomenting social strife. Denominational rivalry often disguises ethnic tensions and vice versa. African churches, especially those that are extensions of foreign denominations, remain largely detached from the daily social concerns of the nations to which their members belong. The training and continuing education of priests, pastors, and lay-leaders tends to perpetuate this shortcoming instead of overcoming it.

4. Private Christian Universities and Christianity in Public Universities

The dissonance between theological education training and contextual relevance leads to a pastoral workforce inadequate for the delivery of relevant contextual service to the congregations in both rural and urban areas in Africa. An African theological education curriculum that effectively addresses these issues ought to be an African ecumenical undertaking (transcending the denominational rivalry and competition inherited from the mission agencies). To be contextually relevant and effective, tertiary Christian theological education will have to re-think the inherited relationships with North Atlantic Christianity, taking into serious consideration the challenges that the latter is facing in the twenty-first century as a consequence of policies formulated and implemented in the twentieth.

Whereas Tropical Africa has numerous churches without enough adequately trained theologians, churches in the North Atlantic countries have an excess of trained theologians without enough Christians to serve. How can these North Atlantic theologians support the training of African theologians within African cultural contexts, instead of the expensive model of sending Africans to train abroad out of context and out of home? What would be the ingredients of such a model of theological education? There is no easy answer to this question because cultural presuppositions and power relations (including between rich North Atlantic churches and pauperized Tropical African churches) tend to overshadow any chances of unanimity in matters of doctrine, institutional structure, pastoral care, and conceptual clarity. The dominant model of patronage and tutelage is more destructive than constructive, more retrogressive than progressive.

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2 Many Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in the North nowadays are facing a dramatic lack of ministers as well.
Africanization of Christian theological education is necessary and overdue. One model for dealing with this challenge has been the establishment of "Christian" universities. Since the 1970s several such universities have been established in various African countries, mainly as denominational and sectarian institutions. The justification for these institutions has been that public government-funded universities are secular in curriculum and management. Some of these "Christian" universities have insisted on avoiding or bypassing the accreditation requirements that are mandatory for tertiary education. Some have tried to set up their own parallel accreditation regimes. This approach is counter-productive, because the graduates of these institutions find it difficult to fit within the public job market.

In Kenya, this problem was overcome through the establishment of the Commission for Higher Education as the accrediting authority for all private universities. Every private institution offering degrees is required to apply for accreditation. The process from application to accreditation is rigorous and tedious, but it has paid high dividends for the institutions that complied. Several private universities have qualified for Charter and are contributing significantly to the national pool of human resources. In addition to "Christian" courses, each such university is required to offer courses that are relevant for general education and professional competence. The institutions are also required to ensure that the majority of teaching and administrative employees are national and properly trained. A staff development scheme is mandatory, and the Library must be adequately equipped. Internet connectivity is also required, with broadband speeds and capacity high enough to upload and download high volumes of data for large numbers of users.

Some institutions have resisted these requirements, which are taken for granted in Europe and North America. The institutions that have complied appreciate the importance of keeping abreast with technology. Some of them are preferred for the courses they offer and the ethos they uphold. It would be worthwhile for churches in the North Atlantic to seriously consider this approach to education in general, and theological education in particular.

5. Education and Theology

The expression 'Theological Education' presupposes a conceptual link between two processes—Education and Theological Expression. It is worthwhile to clarify the link between them. There is a tendency to consider 'Theological Education' as a process, distinct and separate from 'Education'. Professionally and conceptually, however, 'Theological Education' is a specialised form of 'Education'. National policies of 'Education' in a particular country will greatly influence 'Theological Education' and other aspects of specialised training. This point is illustrated below, with particular reference to Kenya and Tanzania—two neighbouring East African countries which chose very different national education policies on attainment of national sovereignty in the early 1960s. It is impossible to establish effective theological training in a social setting which lacks solid educational foundations.

a) Education and Schooling: Education is the process of socialisation through which individuals and groups are guided to become responsible members of society. There is no human society without its own process of education. When a nation is conquered by an invading power, the first social institution to be destroyed is education, which is then replaced by a new process of indoctrination by the invading power. Unfortunately, since the colonial conquest, 'education' in Africa has been equated with 'schooling', with disastrous consequences. In Africa, schools, colleges and universities became, and have remained, institutions of cultural and religious alienation, in which children and adult learners acquire new values, cultures and attitudes, often at variance with those of the families and communities in which they have

3 http://www.che.or.ke.
been brought up. The policy of boarding schools and residential colleges reinforced this process of cultural alienation. During more than four decades of my teaching at all levels of the school and university curriculum in Kenya I have repeatedly heard from pupils and students that what they learned in school and college had little or no relevance to their daily lives at home and work. My endeavour has been to make my teaching and research relevant and applicable in my own cultural context. I did not acquire the skills for this endeavour during my training, so I have had to learn as I struggled along with my pupils and students. It has been a great challenge, and great fun. Education should be a process of cultural affirmation, not cultural alienation.⁵

This unfortunate context was not accidental. In the colonial period it was necessary—so the masters believed—for Africans to be alienated from their culture, religion and history. On attainment of national sovereignty, African leaders had to choose either, to overhaul the national schooling system and risk losing the patronage of the former colonial masters, or, to maintain continuity with the colonial past, and sustain the schools and colleges as instruments of cultural and religious alienation. Some countries, like Tanzania, chose 'nationalisation' of schools and colleges, while others, like Kenya, chose to sustain and maintain the colonial infrastructure.

Each option had heavy costs and consequences. In Tanzania a whole generation went through school without learning the English language. While national cohesion was achieved that generation lost touch with the rest of the world. Theological colleges developed the capacity to train clergy in Kiswahili so that the language of liturgy became the language of training. This legacy of Julius Nyerere still prevails today in Tanzania even though there is now an emphasis on the teaching of English in addition to Kiswahili, the national language. In Kenya English became the medium of instruction in schools, colleges and universities as a matter of national policy. International consciousness was promoted and foreign languages were taught in schools, colleges and universities. A whole Kenyan generation became globally and individualistically oriented, but national cohesion was jeopardised. Kenya is reaping the bitter fruits of that policy today. Theological training in Kenya is still conducted in English, which, for most Kenyans, is not the language of communication at home and in church. It becomes difficult, under these circumstances, to design a curriculum directly relevant and applicable to the needs and challenges of the ordinary citizens. Schooling then becomes a process of creating a small elite, which is in touch with the global information networks, while the majority remain alienated from both themselves and the world. From country to country schooling in Africa hovers between these two extremes.

b) Theological Training and Articulation: Theological articulation has to be cultivated. While the average person has the ability to make theological inferences through intuition, the conceptual refinement of those inferences requires training in both language and religious discernment. During my studies in High School, my godfather brought my attention to the vows he had made on my behalf when I was baptised as an infant. He declared to me that, as he had completed his obligations as my sponsor, I was now an adult and could make my own decisions. Respecting his elderly counsel, which as an African I took seriously, I enrolled for Confirmation classes and went through the Anglican Catechism (in the English Book of Common Prayer) in preparation for my Confirmation Test. I took my classes seriously and this became an early opportunity for me to sharpen my doctrinal awareness about Anglicanism. I am happy that I passed and was confirmed in 1964. We may infer from this personal experience that theological training should be viewed as a lifetime process, beginning in infancy and continuing throughout one's life.

The clergy and lay leaders are expected to know more than ordinary believers. It is embarrassing for them to rely only on intuition and inspiration on matters doctrinal and theological. Unfortunately, in practice many pastors and lay leaders in Protestant churches today have little or no theological and


Handbook of Theological Education in Africa
ministerial training. This is particularly the case in some dioceses in the Anglican Church of Kenya, where it is no longer possible to distinguish Anglican churches from other Protestant denominations, except in name. Liturgically and socially, Anglicanism seems to have lost its identity, leaning more towards charismatic and Pentecostal worship. This loss of liturgical identity can be attributed partly to the neglect of rigorous theological training for clergy and lay leaders. In contrast, the Catholic Church, Pentecostals and Baptists take training much more seriously. If African church leaders cannot provide theological and doctrinal leadership in the respective congregations and parishes where they serve, how can African Christianity be sustained?

6. Current Models of Theological Training and Ministerial Formation

In Africa theological training is almost always linked to ordination. It is unusual for a person to enrol for theological training unless he/she intends to join the clerical hierarchy. Thus the enrolment in theological institutions is almost entirely tied to the number of clergy needed in specific denominations at specific localities. Although the Church in Africa is reported to be growing rapidly in terms of numerical strength, the rate of numerical growth cannot sustain viable enrolment in Africa's theological institutions. There are about 800 theological colleges in Africa today, with an average enrolment of 45 students. From a managerial perspective, this scenario is not viable in the long term.

To meet the annual recurrent expenditure from modest fees, a tertiary institution requires a minimum enrolment of 500. Within the Anglican Communion, it is common to find in the same ecclesiastical province, several diocesan Bible schools and pastoral institutes, none of which are viable. Whatever the justification for such duplication, it cannot be considered responsible stewardship of the meagre resources available in a shrinking economy. Diocesan contributions from the congregations cannot sustain such expenditures. Nor can donations from abroad. I have had the privilege of interacting with many students and teachers in many of these institutions. Both the teachers and the students are generally poor owing to the fact that their institutions hardly ever raise enough revenue to meet their annual expenditure, including the staff remuneration and accommodation for students.

Theological Education by Extension (TEE) has been proposed as an alternative to residential ministerial formation. However, TEE presupposes the existence of a respectable, stable and viable institution from where theological training is 'extended' to the non-residential part-time trainees. In practice TEE programmes have tended to operate autonomously, often with little or no supervision and quality control. Again I have been privileged to interact with both teachers and students in such programmes and there is general dissatisfaction with the conduct, content and quality of the training offered through TEE.

7. The Idea of a “Christian” University

The word “University” has at least four meanings, each of which emphasizes an aspect of the activities and identities associated with universities. Ideally, a university should be strong in all these four aspects:

1. A tertiary institution where students learn knowledge and skills for award of degrees, diplomas and certificates on successful completion of their courses. Such an in institution may have “physical” or “virtual” identity.

2. A set of buildings in which knowledge and expertise is imparted from multi-disciplinary academic and professional perspectives at the highest level of competence.

3. A community of scholars dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and expertise at the highest possible levels and from the broadest possible perspectives.

4. An internationally recognized forum for sharing knowledge, experience and expertise among top scholars and experts from diverse professional and academic specializations.

Part I: History in Theological Education in Africa
When the word “University” is qualified with the adjective “Christian” it is important to clarify what the phrase “Christian University” is intended to mean. A post-secondary institution does not become a “university” when its owners change its name. It must strive to attain all the attributes of excellence at the tertiary level. It must also become competitive, with the potential to attract leading scholars and students in the academic and professional disciplines in which it specializes. Internationally it must acquire a profile to attract top students and professors. The phrase “Christian University” may mean at one or more of the following four notions:

1. **Ownership**: A tertiary institution which is owned by a church or church-related agency.
2. **Ethos**: A tertiary institution which, in its Ethos, Vision and Mission, is committed to the pursuit of ideals proclaimed by the Christian faith, irrespective of the religious affiliation of its owners.
3. **Personnel**: A Tertiary institution managed by, and serving Christians, irrespective of the religious identity of its owners.
4. **Curriculum**: A tertiary institution whose curriculum is doctrinally consistent with the Christian faith, irrespective of the religious identity of its benefactors.
5. **Profile**: A tertiary institution whose public profile and visibility is identified with Christians, irrespective of the curriculum content.

In Africa, the phrase “Christian University” has often been used to mean an institution for training priests and other religious personnel. A seminary is not a university, even if it trains priests at the highest level of competence. To become a university an institution must open up to train personnel in diverse disciplines and professions. The following are some of the motivations behind the establishment of “Christian” Universities:

1. **Secularization**: With increasing secularization of public universities some churches have decided to establish universities taking religion seriously.
2. **Sectarianism**: Some denominations want to establish tertiary institutions in which their brand of religiosity is normative for all students.
3. **Entrepreneurship**: Some churches and Christian individuals take advantage of government policy where enterprises are invited to invest in various sectors of the economy.
4. **Ideology**: Some investors want to strategically indoctrinate the students through a particular curriculum orientation, with the hope of influencing leadership during the next generation.
5. **Participation**: Some churches want to participate in tertiary education alongside the government, without loss of identity.

In view of the low enrolment in public tertiary institutions, there is a proliferation of “religious” universities. Unfortunately, shame, embarrassment and ridicule befalls the religions or denominations identified with tertiary institutions that are poorly managed. For this reason, it is prudent for any religious body to plan carefully and in the long term before embarking on the challenging task of establishing a “religious” university.

### 8. Options for Viable Theological Education in the Twenty-First Century

In view of the observations made above, there are several viable options. Each of them has its advantages and shortcomings. The solution is to be found in multi-faceted approaches.

a) **Utilization of Public Tertiary Institutions**: Provide ordination courses for graduates from public universities. This option would considerably reduce the recurrent cost of theological training and ministerial formation. The main cost would then be carried by the public sector. The implication is that dioceses will have to keep track of their brilliant members during their undergraduate training, and involve

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them in lay activities in anticipation of ministerial formation on completion of the course. Another implication is that the remuneration of graduate clergy should, at least, be commensurate with the public salary scales. There are many advantages in this option. Most of the older Protestant churches in Africa have well trained lay people in many professions. This option makes it possible for the Church to make use of this expertise in a formal and structured way, without the necessity to invest heavily to train its own specialists. This is the way of the future.

b) Consolidation and Amalgamation of Existing Institutions: Rationalisation of theological education will require, to the extent possible, the eradication of duplication and competition, and the enhancement of mutual support and complementation. For this option to work, bishops and donors will have to be willing to take a rational, rather than political approach to theological education and ministerial formation. The option may require consolidation and amalgamation across provinces, even across continents. It is irresponsible to continue to do separately, what can be achieved much more efficiently and effectively, through joint and united initiatives.

c) Ecumenical Co-operation in Theological Education: During the 1950s and 1960s there were established in Africa and the Caribbean, what came to be called 'United Theological Colleges'. These were institutions brought into being by donors at the end of the colonial era. African leaders were not involved in the negotiations. In view of the missionary competition and rivalry that characterised the colonial period across denominations, these united theological colleges did not function as well as their promoters had anticipated. The denominational aloofness remained and was sometimes accelerated after departure of the missionaries to Europe and North America. Owing to dissatisfaction with these united theological colleges, partner churches established their own training institutes in competition with the ecumenical ones. In future, it will be necessary to review the present condition and future prospects of the united theological colleges, in the context of increasing denominational self-centredness. There is an important role for ecumenical theological training in the future, but its specific mandate and curriculum will have to be defined clearly.

d) Theological Training through Para-Church Institutions: Theological education can also be enhanced through institutions owned by Trusts independent from Dioceses and provinces, but maintaining the ethos of the Church. In this connection the initiative of the (Anglican) Church Army in Eastern Africa is illustrative. Carlile College, owned by Church Army in Eastern Africa, was established for training clergy and para-clerical personnel sent directly by dioceses in nine countries in eastern Africa. This initiative holds great promise, because it makes it possible for the institution to meet the national and international standards in tertiary education, while at the same time serving the need of the Church in human resources development. Such an institution can team up with others in different professions, and also to link up internationally.

9. Modes of Delivering Theological Education in the Future

Theological Education and Training has conventionally been conducted through the lecture method. This mode of delivery ties students physically to their lecturers. Communication Technology has advanced greatly since the 1960s. Today it is possible to deliver efficiently and effectively full examinable courses without direct physical contact between lecturers and their students. The University of South Africa (UNISA), based in Pretoria, has an enrolment of 200,000 students scattered all over the world with 456 examination centres and 65 graduations per year. It has a library of twelve million volumes. This is just one example of the possibilities for the future. Taking these insights into consideration, it will be important for the Anglican Church to consider new and more efficient ways of delivering high quality theological

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Part 1: History in Theological Education in Africa
education and training. The following are some of the options to consider in addition to the conventional lecture method:

a) Delivery through Electronic Mail: It is now possible for a lecturer to teach students all over the world through electronic mail. Each student is linked directly to the lecturer, while there is a possibility of the students themselves interacting electronically. This can be very efficient, because both the students and the lecturer will only communicate whatever is most essential. This mode of delivery presupposes accessibility to computers, telephone connectivity and availability of Internet services. It is essential for Africa to be enabled to join the international superhighway. The church ought to make its contribution while the bilateral and multilateral agencies make their respective contributions.

b) Delivery through Audio Visual Media: Audio and Video Cassettes are another medium of instruction. Though expensive at the beginning, it becomes cheaper over time, depending on the number of users. The more the users, the less the unit cost. It is an effective mode of delivery, because students can access and use the media any time at their own convenience. Preparation requires expertise, but once the experience has been gained, it becomes a great asset.

c) Teaching Guides: Lecturers in residential institutions can reach more students if they are encouraged to write teaching guides for use by their regular students. There has to be a system of inducement and remuneration for this mode of delivery to take off. The Open University in the UK has become one of the most successful establishments to deliver tertiary education to people who, under normal circumstances, could not go to university.

d) Delivery through travelling seminars and Field Workshops: This is a mode of delivery has high returns. Within short periods, spaced once, twice, thrice or quarterly every year, students can prepare to go through a programme together, in their own country or abroad, increasing cross-cultural learning, and at the same time benefit the learners according to their career goals and professional interests.

e) Interdisciplinary, Multi-Campus and Multi-Media Delivery: This option is a combination of all the above. It has great promise for the future. Both public and private universities in Kenya have adopted this model, reducing the overall cost of travel and accommodation for students while increasing enrolment.

10. Theological Publishing in Tertiary Institutions

Most nations of Africa are celebrating their golden Jubilee (fifty years) of sovereignty in this decade. Yet, five decades after independence, most textbooks for tertiary are still imported. Theology is not an exception. Contextual relevance and applicability are cardinal principles in tertiary education, and over-reliance on imported learning and teaching materials inevitably yields subservient mentality. If theological knowledge continues to flow one way, from the North Atlantic to Africa, how can we affirm the unity and mutuality of the Christianity as a universal faith? It is important to support theological publishing in Africa, focusing on works by African theologians for consumption primarily by African readers. Only in this way can the maturity of the African Church be ensured and manifested across cultures and generations. A few initiatives have taken a lead, though with many challenges.8

11. Associations of Colleges and Universities

The formation and promotion of associations of Colleges and Universities can greatly enhance standards and confidence. Comparability will gradually become normative if the Associations become forums for encouraging excellence in academic, professional, recreational and aesthetic activities. The Association of

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8 In this connection, I would like to refer to the African Christianity series issued by Acton Publishers, Nairobi, www.acton.co.ke. There is also Paulines Africa Publishers in Nairobi www.paulinesafrica.org, and Cluster Publishers in South Africa www.clusterpublications.co.za; and also Editions CLE in Yaounde, Cameroon, www.editionsacle.com

Handbook of Theological Education in Africa
Theological Institutions in East Africa (ATIEA) used to provide such a forum, but with declining financial resources it has declined in its fervour, influence and effectiveness.

12. Concluding Remark

In this paper I have sketched what I consider to be priorities for theological education in Tropical Africa. The Paper is not exhaustive. It only points towards new ways and means by which we might begin to conduct theological education, moving away from conventional modes of thinking and delivery. I shall be happy to discuss any aspects of the suggestions made herein.