African Theological Advance

Announcement
The Nagel Institute, with generous support from The Templeton Religion Trust, invites project proposals for the “African Theological Advance” initiative. Its aim is to support African Christian scholars, in theology and other disciplines, to engage in fresh research, thinking and teaching about Christianity’s engagement with contemporary African society. This initiative will make 16 grants between $35,000 and $50,000 USD for two-year research and curricular development projects. These grants, to be awarded in two rounds of eight grants, are for postgraduate African theological seminaries or university-based postgraduate theology programs. The awards will be for research and curricular development projects that address gospel and culture issues in Africa by drawing on interdisciplinary methods and insights to address one of four topical areas:

- African spirituality and values
- Science and religion—particularly health and healing
- Religious innovation and competition
- Forgiveness, peacemaking and reconciliation

Winning projects will feature both fresh research into contemporary African realities and the incorporation of this new knowledge into Christian thought and curricular renewal.

Applications for round one are due October 2, 2017, and applications for round two are due on May 1, 2018.

Project Focus
The focus of this project is to encourage African scholars to gain a fresh understanding of how Christianity engages contemporary African realities in these four topical areas. The project also focuses on African theological institutions and programs. It aims to help them employ and develop their capacities as conveners of research and scholarship and to embed the fresh insights they gain from research within their programs of teaching and community service. Interdisciplinary teams would conduct research and develop Christian thought that would be infused throughout these institutions’ theological and ministerial education.

This project also aims to recognize and enlist the multiple sources of talent and insight for accomplishing such tasks. Theological schools and programs are invited to propose projects that draw on the deep insights into Gospel and culture that African scholars across the continent are developing. They are also encouraged to enlist the unique talents and perspectives of African-diaspora scholars now serving on other continents. They are also welcome to draw on the Interest in African Christian thought and mission among non-Africans as well. Grant funding thus would be used to convene research teams that draw on local, regional and international talent. These teams would focus first on new research projects and then on developing teaching modules, courses, publications, media pieces and continuing education events that would disseminate the new discoveries and embed them into the ongoing program of education.
Project Topical Areas and Key Questions

African Christian scholars and church leaders, in conversation with Templeton officers, have identified four topical areas of high interest and relevance. Successful proposals will address questions within one or more of these four areas:

1. **African values and African spirituality.** Interest in African values percolates across the African church academy. On a continent hamstrung by corruption and conflicts, how might African values be understood as part of the solution rather than a source of the problem? Might theologians and other scholars probe the nature of values that are grounded in African tradition but also enhance human flourishing in a rapidly urbanizing and globalizing Africa? One cannot separate African values from African spirituality, which suffuses human experience, animates the natural world, and richly populates all planes of existence. How have these traditional spiritual traits survived in the contemporary scene and modulated within Christianity? How has this spirituality accommodated itself to urbanization and technological and economic change? Are cardinal African values and virtues substantially different from those of other cultures or from those that have been identified as nearly universal values? If African values are different, what difference do they make? Do they in fact contribute to flourishing? How do the changing circumstances of African life affect traditional African values and spiritual proclivities? When these traditional values and spiritual traits have been adopted into an introduced religion, such as Christianity or Islam, has the result been positive or negative? What can the church gain by way of missional teaching and pastoral guidance from a deeper knowledge of African values and spirituality and their interaction with contemporary life? For this kind of research to flourish, theologians need renewed cross-fertilization with African social scientists, religious studies experts and philosophers.

2. **The interaction of faith and science: particularly in health and healing.** At the intersection of science and faith, some of the most urgent questions that African Christians ask are about health and healing. Contemporary African Christians hear what appear to be competing claims from traditional healers, Christian faith healers, and medical professionals. How are they to reconcile these claims in a way that honors both the Great Physician and these varying bodies of knowledge about healing? How do the natural and the supernatural realms interact in health and healing? African theological leaders need to step up their research, reflection and teaching on these issues. Over the past 15 years, dozens of theological schools in Africa have adopted courses on HIV/AIDS. These were welcome and necessary, but other health crises erupt, and the issues of health and healing in the context of faith and science are far broader and deeper than a focus on one malady can handle. Therefore, we encourage researchers to investigate the relationships between spirituality and health. Do certain spiritual beliefs and practices promote or detract from health? How do African Christians and other African religious believers view medicine and various medical practices? How do their beliefs affect their mental or physical health, or their willingness to seek medical or other healing interventions? How do they reconcile competing claims of healing? How do the religious beliefs of medical practitioners affect the way they practice medicine? What is the role of pastoral counseling and prayer in healing? African theological schools could benefit immensely from new research and curricular development in this field.

3. **Religious innovation and competition.** Religions constitute some of the most dynamic forces in Africa today, and researchers are trying to catch up with their numerical growth, proliferating forms
and cultural influence. Christianity in Africa is amazingly innovative, diverse and competitive. Christian theologians often view religious innovation and competition with dismay because of the potential for heresy, fragmentation and strife. Even so, diversity and competition are often vehicles, if not drivers, of creative change. The proliferation of evangelical and Pentecostal movements in Latin America, for example, has resulted in renewal and reform in that region’s Roman Catholic churches. A similar renewal has occurred in Ghana’s older Protestant churches as the charismatic and Pentecostal movements have competed with them. Is religious competition a destructive force? Does it enable innovation and foster creativity? What happens to secularity in the context of religious innovation and competition? What is the relationship between religious innovation and commercial entrepreneurship? How do new religious forms and patterns relate to broader social and institutional changes in contemporary Africa? How do local religious initiatives relate to global trends and movements, as in the worldwide rise of Pentecostalism? What is the “balance of trade” in Africa in importing and exporting religious trends and movements? Might these new religious developments, which reflect African agency, resilience and creativity, suggest a more positive approach to the study of contemporary Africa? A remarkable new chapter is being written in the history of Christianity in Africa and the continent’s theological educators need to give the rising generation of pastors and theologians, in Africa and beyond, a better understanding of what it all means and how to teach and minister in this context.

4. Forgiveness, peacemaking and reconciliation. As a major site for civil violence in recent decades, Africa has much at stake and much to offer for those who want to learn more about the barriers and pathways to forgiveness, peacemaking, and reconciliation. Political scientists, anthropologists and psychologists are studying these issues in Africa, but what might theologians learn from them—and teach them—about the complex interactions of justice and mercy, restitution of wrongs, and reconciliation, forgiveness and accountability? Across the continent, Christian people and agencies are often leading in post-trauma counseling, community based reconciliation initiatives, and peace education. What are the interventions or conditions that enhance reconciliation, rebuilding and new flourishing? Are there lessons that can be applied more broadly, in other places and circumstances? How might the insights that peacemaking agents are gaining be examined more systematically, consolidated, and incorporated into theological and university education?

Project Leaders

Project Chair
Tite Tiénou, professor and former vice president, Trinity International University, USA; also the founding dean of Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de l’Alliance Chrétienne, in Côte d'Ivoire.

Advisory and Selection Committee
Benhardt Quarshie, rector, Akrofi-Christaller Institute, Ghana
Jehu Hanciles, professor, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, USA
Lamin Sanneh, professor, Yale Divinity School, USA
Esther Mombo, professor and former deputy v.c. academic, St. Paul’s University, Kenya
Afe Adogame, professor, Princeton Theological Seminary, USA
John Azumah, professor, Columbia Theological Seminary, USA
Bungishabaku Katho, professor and former president, Shalom University, Dem. Rep. of Congo

Project Advisers
Afe Adogame, professor, Princeton Theological Seminary, USA
Jehu Hanciles, professor, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, USA
Francis Nyamnjoh, professor, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Damaris Parsitau, professor, Egerton University, Kenya
Mwenda Ntarangwi, vice president, Theological Book Network, USA

Project Administrators
Joel Carpenter, Nellie Kooistra, and Donna Romanowski of the Nagel Institute, Calvin College, USA

Project Expectations
1. Each project will focus on a topic that falls within at least one of the four approved topical areas:
   a. African spirituality and values
   b. Science and religion—particularly health and healing
   c. Religious innovation and competition
   d. Forgiveness, peacemaking and reconciliation
2. Project teams will recruit and involve scholars from outside their home institution to bring in fresh insights: from across Africa, from other regions of the world, from other disciplines (especially the social sciences), and particularly from the “African diaspora.” Project team leaders (PL), however, must be staff members of the sponsoring theological programs
3. Grants will range from $35,000 to $50,000 over a two-year grant period.
4. Grants will assume some institutional cost-sharing, particularly for conducting local events, hosting visiting scholars, and offering course releases to project team members.
5. Grant funds may be used to support the work of researchers, present and publish papers—including in international venues, organize conferences and workshops, and develop new courses that draw on project findings.
6. Project team leaders (PL) must attend a mid-course seminar and present the team’s findings at a summative conference.
7. The dean or president of the home institution sponsoring each grantee team must attend the final summative conference to report on how the institution is incorporating and promoting the findings of its team.
8. Grant funds or support from home institutions will be used to cover the costs of participating in project-mandated events, notably the mid-course seminar and the summative conference.
9. All proposals will include a communication from a senior officer of the proposing institution that shows how the project engages institutional priorities and is part of a plan to enhance scholarship and renew the curriculum.
10. Each project team will present one research paper suitable for publication in a refereed and internationally indexed journal.
Instructions for Proposals

First Round:
Proposals are due October 2, 2017. They must be submitted via e-mail attachment as a single document to: nagel@calvin.edu
Notification: Applicants will learn of their project’s selection status by December 1, 2017.
Start Date: Grant periods begin on January 1, 2018, contingent on the return of a signed grant contract.

Second Round:
Proposals are due May 1, 2018. They must be submitted via e-mail attachment as a single document to: nagel@calvin.edu
Notification: Applicants will learn of their project’s selection status by June 1, 2018.
Start Date: Grant periods begin on July 1, 2018, contingent on the return of a signed grant contract.

Applicants will prepare a dossier that includes:
1. Cover letter of no more than 1 page with title, amount requested, project team leader (PL), and team members (if applicable)
2. Brief abstract of the proposed work not to exceed 150 words
3. Narrative Proposal: use attached proposal template
4. Detailed budget: use attached budget template
5. Provide a project bibliography that lists existing scholarly literature on your topic and other key works on its context and relevant theories
6. Written endorsement of the project by the head of the host theological program. This endorsement must include a statement indicating that the line of research you are proposing is of strategic value to the school or program and promises to lead to improvements in the institution’s curriculum and scholarship
7. Written endorsement by the institutional official who will have signing authority for the grant contract and spending reports, e.g. the head of finance
8. Abbreviated curriculum vitae or academic resume (2-3 pp) for the project team leader (PL) and each team member

Submission
Proposals must be submitted via e-mail attachment as a single document to: nagel@calvin.edu
1. The words “African Theological Advance” should appear in the subject line
2. The required documents should be compiled in a single PDF file in the order listed above
3. To create single PDF file, follow instructions:
   • All required documents should be saved as individual PDF files
   • To combine individual PDFs into single PDF file, you may use free online tool (merge PDF)
4. An acknowledgment email will be sent within five business days of receiving your full proposal
5. All questions about the application process should be sent to: nagel@calvin.edu
**Budget Guidelines:** included in budget template

**Selection Process and Criteria**
Once proposals are submitted, they will be reviewed briefly by the project director and administrators for eligibility of the proposer, completeness of portfolio and basic germaneness to the RFP’s stated themes and questions. All proposals that pass these basic requirements will then be sent for extensive review by the project’s advisory and selection committee.

**Criteria**
1. Germaneness of the project to the RFP’s stated themes and questions
2. Significance and strategic value of the proposed work including both theoretical and practical benefits
3. Investigator’s or team’s talent and preparedness
4. Appropriateness and promise of the project’s approach and methods
5. Strength and feasibility of the project plan
6. Potential for interdisciplinary insight and contributions
7. Complementarity among the various projects to be funded
8. Likelihood of publication, both in project collections and beyond
9. Strength of plans to use project findings in developing curriculum
10. Plans for further dissemination, such as pastors’ workshops, curricular materials and additional conference panels
11. Strategic value of project for host institution’s development
12. Promise of project’s leading to further investigation

**Eligibility**
1. Project team leaders (PL) must be employed by the theological program that is hosting the proposal.
2. Expatriates and African scholars from other departments or universities are welcome on teams as co-investigators or consultants.
3. Scholars doing research to complete advanced degrees are welcome to participate on teams, but they are not eligible to lead teams.
4. Projects that are primarily historical in emphasis, or that focus primarily on texts, are not likely to be funded.
5. We encourage proposals that gain insights from empirical research as well as theological reflection.

**Basic requirements:**
Once selected, teams will commit to:
1. Undertake the proposed research on the selected theme/topic
2. Provide regular reports on progress of project as stated in the contract
3. Communicate regularly (e.g. via email) with an assigned project adviser and the research director
4. Participate in the initial project development workshop and final culminating conference
5. Produce at least one high-quality scholarly article for publication