

Beyond the Centre: A Focus on the Broader Issues in Theological Education

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Introduction

Every organization has something that makes up its core existence. The core of a school is teaching and learning. The core of a bank is managing money. The core of a farm is producing food. What is the core of a theological institution? It includes three basic things:

- Instruction in Bible and theology
- Training in Ministry
- Spiritual Formation

It has been the goal of this conference to focus on the first two issues—how can we be more precise and accurate in the teaching of Biblical theology and how we can more effectively prepare our Church leaders to be successful pastors, preachers, teachers, evangelists, counselors, administrators, mentors, and communicators of vision.

Regardless of how advanced an athlete becomes, his coach continues to focus on the basics. An athlete never gets to the point that he or she can ignore the basics and only focus on the more advanced things. In a similar way, in theological education, we must continue to focus on the basics. Theological and ministry training are at the heart and centre of our seminaries. Although our seminaries and Bible colleges and missionary training institutions do many things, instruction in Bible and theology and training for various ministries in the church must always be the primary focus.

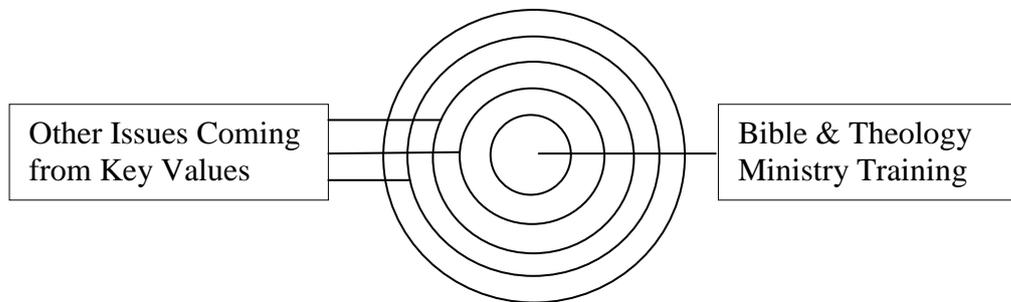
However, theological education and ministry training are not the only issues that are important in our theological institutions. There are many other things that theological educators do and therefore must be concerned about. These may be considered more peripheral issues but they have a direct bearing on the fundamental issues.

It probably could be argued that the core responsibility of any government is to protect its citizens. However, a government might be very successful in protecting its citizens but still be considered a failure if it did not fulfill certain other responsibilities. Governments must provide infrastructure; they must provide opportunities for development; they must provide justice for their citizens. Of course, if a government had to make a choice between protecting its citizens from armed robbers or building better roads, it would rightly choose to protect its citizens. However, to the extent that that government neglects the needs of infrastructure and ignores the needs of its citizens for food and justice and opportunities, to that extent that government has failed in its responsibility even though those issues are not the highest priority of a nation.

In a similar way, there are other issues or challenges besides theological education and ministry training that our theological institutions must be concerned about. These are

reflected by the principles or values related to what we do. In fact, many of these issues are directly related to the core responsibility of the institutions. However, they are things that often go beyond the theological matters that we often focus on during conferences like this.

Therefore, in this presentation I would like to focus on some of those issues that radiate out from that centre of our core responsibilities. These are primarily values that relate to our overall mission of providing theological education and ministry training but are perhaps not the heart and center of our focus. However, these challenges have practical issues associated with them and it is primarily those practical values that I want to address.



What are those issues and values that radiate from the core duties of theological institutions?

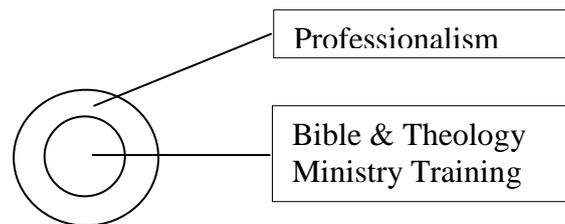
The Challenge of Professionalism

Here is a fairly typical scenario in Africa or perhaps I should say a perceived scenario. An intelligent and successful businessman or academic is “born again.” Because he has excellent leadership and communication abilities, after two years, he starts his own church. He has some moderate success and in two more years, he starts his first branch. After planting ten or fifteen branches, he starts his own Bible college to train more workers for the kingdom. He declares himself to be the bishop over his churches and obviously becomes the president of his Bible college. Only eight years after becoming a true believer and with no professional theological training, he becomes state chairman of PFN or CAN.

This is a scenario that annoys many of us who have gone to school for many years trying to learn how to interpret the Word of God accurately and how to provide professional ministries in our churches. Although most of us recognize that God can call anyone to become engaged in ministry and does occasionally use people who have not had formal professional theological training, it seems a bit amateurish and even arrogant for these “untrained upstarts” to think that they know enough about the Bible to teach others, much less enough about ministry to create their own Bible colleges.

This is certainly a legitimate concern. We would all agree that Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit when he said our converts should not be ordained into ministry too hastily (1 Timothy 5:22). However, there is another side to this coin. Many of us have worked hard to be able to “*rightly divide the word of truth.*” We know how to do exegesis; we read Greek; we know the theological vocabulary; we can prepare meaningful sermons; and we can spot theological error. However, we have had no formal training in education or administration. Our teaching techniques are boring and uninspiring. We know little about administration. In fact our teaching and administrative techniques are ever bit as amateurish and incompetent as the theological skills of those “untrained preachers” who start their own churches and seminaries. Thus, a part of the focus we must have in theological education is a concentration

on professionalism in the non-theological parts of our ministry. Professionalism, therefore, is the first ring outside of the core issues of theological education and ministry training.



Professionalism in Teaching Methodology

Just as it is important to know the truth that will set us free (John 8:32), it is just as important to communicate that truth that sets us free. Unfortunately, we often focus so much on the content that we neglect the methodology. This is not only true in theological education, it is true in education as a whole. Before a teacher can be employed by the ministry of education to teach primary or secondary school students, the teacher must have evidence of professional training. Amazingly, a person can be employed to teach the teachers in the university with no professional training. I would guess that less than 25 percent of the lecturers at the University of Jos have any kind of professional teacher training.

However, the fact that this is practiced widely does not excuse us from our responsibility to become the best and most professionally trained teachers that we can be. In fact, our public universities are waking up to this weakness. Some universities are now requiring at least a post-graduate diploma in education before it will employ a person as a lecturer. In addition, the University of Jos is now considering developing a specialty in tertiary-level educational training. The following are three specific areas related to methodology that we as theological educators need to focus.

Professional Understanding of Learning

Do you realize that not everyone learns the same way? Some of us learn best from lectures; others learn best from interacting with others; others learn best from hands-on activities. Robert Thompson was a missionary lecturer in Nigeria for several years. He wrote a little book entitled *The Art and Practice of Teaching* while he was here. It has one chapter that talks about the four ways people learn that is worth the price of the book.¹ I would encourage all of you to get this book and learn more about the ways your students learn.

Professional Understanding of Teaching

Most of us use the lecture method in our teaching because that is the one we are most familiar with and, in some ways, this is the most efficient way to communicate large amounts of material. However, lecturing is not the most effective form of teaching. There are other methods that will help to drive the lesson home even more effectively than lecturing. There are two observations about methodology that specifically need stress.

¹ Robert Thompson, *The Art and Practice of Teaching*, Africa Christian Textbooks, Bukuru, 2000. pp. 21-35. These four types of learners are: 1) the dynamic activist; 2) the imaginative reflector; 3) the analytical theorist; 4) the common sense pragmatist. Thompson suggests that the professional lecturer will provide something for each kind of learner in every presentation. He calls this the "learning circle."

First, every teacher should vary the methods that he or she uses in the classroom. Prof. J. A. Ilori says that in every class period, a good teacher should use at least three different methods.² This is not the place to outline all of the possible methods one can use in the classroom. There are good books that can help you develop multiple teaching methods. However, professional in education means that you must use multiple methods in every class.

Second, every lecturer should use methods that he or she is comfortable using. David could not wear Saul's armor. Few people can teach exactly like their favorite teachers. You must find out the methods that you are most comfortable with and learn how to use them very well. In preparing your class presentations, keep these principles in mind:

- Preparation
- Variation
- Participation

Professional Understanding of Modern Tools

Computers. Our modern world has developed many new tools for teaching and learning. That means that as the modern world comes to our communities, we are going to have to learn to use those modern tools. Computers are changing the way we teach and learn. Many if not most lecturers in theological institutions now either own or have access to computers. Computers enable you to prepare better and organize your presentations. They also enable you to store and retrieve information much better than before.

Email. Most western institutions now use email to communicate with their students. Lecturers and students communicate with each other by email. Most assignments are now submitted by email. This is coming to Africa. I am now supervising many of my MA and PhD students by having them submit their documents to me by attachment through email. This is also coming to our seminaries. We must not resist it. We must anticipate it and prepare for it and control it or it will eventually control us.

Internet. The Internet is a vast resource of materials which our students are gaining more and more access to. The Internet has already started to revolutionize teaching and learning in Africa. Therefore, our students must be guided in their usage of this amazing tool but The one thing that has kept us back from matching western theological education in the past has been resources. The Internet is now changing that. We now or in the near future will have access to the same information that institutions in the western world have.

eGranery. An American Fulbright scholar name Cliff Missen, who served at the University of Jos, has developed a tool that is assisting many universities and other institutions in Africa. It is called eGranery. It is a massive hard disk with millions of articles that can be attached to the institution's library computer system. It is basically available for African institutions for the cost of the hard drive and a training workshop.³

² See J. A. Ilori, *Principles and Methods of Teaching Christian Religious Education in n Post-Primary Institutions: An African Perspective*. Africa Christian Textbooks, Bukuru, 2005. As the title suggests, this book is primarily designed for teaching secondary school students but, in my opinion, 95 percent of it applies to teaching at the tertiary level as well. Prof. Ilori has a very significant chapter on methods in this book, in pp. 149-212. Also see Thompson on "Teaching the Adult," pp. 46-56.

³ <http://www.widernet.org/digitallibrary/>

PowerPoint. Classrooms will never get beyond the use of the blackboard or some variation of it. However, PowerPoint has become a powerful supplement to it. It gives us the opportunity to do so many more things in the classroom. We can prepare our texts in advance and not be restricting to writing on the blackboard. We can show slides and pictures and charts and even videos to our students. Using PowerPoint requires much more time in preparation. However, it yields many positive results. Obviously, there are obstacles that many of us have to overcome here in Africa to be able to consistently use PowerPoint. The primary one of course is stable electricity. However, we must not use the lack of electricity as an excuse to fail to learn how to use this helpful tool.

Professionalism in Research and Writing

I wish to remind you that teaching is only one of the responsibilities of the professional academic. Research is another important part of our responsibilities. As I am sure you are aware, in the universities, academics either “publish or perish.” In the early days of my academic career, I resented this practice. I reasoned that some teachers are very good in the classroom but are not very good at doing research or writing. And those lecturers who happened to be good in the classroom but not very good at writing got little recognition. On the other hand, a person may be very good at researching and writing and very poor in the classroom, and that person would be rapidly promoted.

I am still not sure that we have gotten the balance the way it should be. It is certainly true that not everyone will be a recognized published scholar. Good classroom teachers are as important as researchers and writers. However, I am now more sympathetic toward the necessity for all academics to attempt to publish peer reviewed articles. The attempt to publish books and articles has many advantages.

- It encourages you to continue learning.
- It demonstrates that you are a true professional.
- It exposes you to the current literature in your field of research.
- It provides you with an opportunity to share what you are learning with others.
- It makes you accountable to others in your particular academic discipline.
- It continues to refine and improve your ability to communicate.
- It gives you a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

We in theological education often excuse ourselves that we are so loaded down with teaching and administrative duties that we do not have time to do the necessary research that will produce publishable materials. I am sure that is true to some extent. However, to the extent we do not write and publish, to that extent we will limit our growth in our academic disciplines. I challenge you as individual lecturers to take up the call to publish.

- Keep track of academic issues that you would like to study some day.
- Make sure you are reading theological journal articles and relevant books.
- Make it a goal to publish something in your area of interest at least once per year.
- Do not be embarrassed to give your documents to others for evaluation and editing.

Administrators, I challenge you to use your position to encourage staff to publish. You will do them a favor. You will do their students a favor. You will do your institution a favor. You will do the kingdom of God a favor. Publishing is a mark of professionalism

Professionalism in Administration

Everything we have said about professionalism with lecturers can be said about administrators. Teaching and administration are two totally different skills. Whether it is good or not, educational institutions tend to reward good teachers by making them administrators. A person who is a brilliant teacher may be a poor administrator. Many if not most of our lecturers in our Bible colleges and seminaries eventually get asked to fulfill various kinds of administrative responsibilities. When your time for administration comes, I challenge you to approach it in the most professional manner.

I will not take time in this paper to talk about the qualities of a professional administrator. However, I would like to underscore two brief points.

Be more conscientious of time.

If 20 people wait 30 minutes for a meeting to start, that is 10 human hours that have been wasted. I have said over the years, “If you steal my computer, I will get another one; even if you steal my vehicle, by the grace of God, I will get another one. But if you steal my time, no one will ever be able to repay any of my time to me.” J. K. Opadiran, acting director of Studies at the Nigerian Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) came to our university two weeks and gave a lecture on strategic planning. He spontaneously quoted someone who made this statement: “Until Africans develop a better appreciation for time and numbers, there can be no evaluation and without evaluation, there can be little progress.”

Provide more formal and professional administrative training.

Just as certainly as we are annoyed by businessmen becoming “theologians” without professional training, our constituents often becomes annoyed at theologians who become “administrators” without professional training. I believe that this is a legitimate concern. How can our theological institutions overcome this problem?

- Administrators need to read books and articles on administration.
- Administrators need to attend workshops and seminars on administration.
- Administrators may need to enroll in professional courses on administration.
- Administrators need to bring in people into the administration who have professional training in administration and they need to listen to them.

Remember, there is no shame in recognizing that you are not an expert in everything and seeking to become more professional in your area of responsibility.

Professionalism in On-Going Learning

One of the wonderful things about education is that it is one of the most enjoyable things you can do. Proverbs 25:2 says, “*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.*” Even a king cannot do anything greater than search out and discover truth. And one of the good things about education is that it is a life-long process. We do not have to stop learning when we complete our formal education. And one of the good things about being an academic is that we continue to learn during our entire careers. Or at least we should continue to learn. Of all the people in the world, we who are academics

should be the ones who continue to learn and grow. There are two applications I want to make to this point.

Theological educators must continue to learn.

If we are to serve our modern generation, we must continue to grow and learn along with our students.

- We do this through reading books and journals.
- We do this through attending conferences and workshops.
- We do this through serious discussions with our friends and colleagues.
- We do this through regularly updating our notes and other teaching materials.

I challenge our theological academics to make sure that you are continuing to learn and grow academically. I challenge the administrators of our theological institutions to make sure your staff are growing academically and that you budget for it accordingly.

Theological institutions must provide in-service training for people in the field.

One of the growing convictions I have is that the theological institution has not completed its task when it graduates its students. I believe that our theological institutions must create projects and programmes that will stimulate and challenge its alumni and other Christian leaders. I recognize that most of our theological institutions are already doing more than they can do. However, we must develop a vision that having a professional cadre of Christian leaders means that there must be on-going professional training and interaction. What are the best organizations to provide that kind of training? I am convinced that they are our seminaries and Bible colleges. The leaders of our theological institutions must think seriously about the best ways that we can address the needs of our constituents in the field.

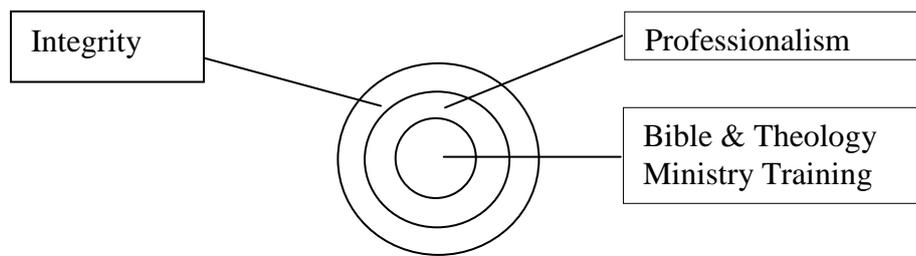
Paul gave two powerful statements only six verses apart in Colossians 3.

- 3:17: *“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*
- 3:23: *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”*

These verses demand professionalism of us. Every lecture we prepare, every examination we mark, every project we supervise, every article we write, every meeting we chair must be done with Jesus’ name on it and with all of our hearts. Let us be professionals. Let us be people of excellence. Let us be one of those *“workman who does not need to be ashamed”* (2 Timothy 2:15) in the fulfillment of our responsibilities.

The Challenge of Integrity

Equally as important as the challenge of professionalism and perhaps a part of it is the challenge of integrity. Jesus said, *“you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”* We who are teachers of the truth must also be models of the truth. I will not attempt to define integrity at this point. Everyone in this conference knows exactly what integrity is. I will simply focus a bit on integrity as it relates to theological education.



Integrity in Financial Policies

Our African theological institutions have at times been a reflection of the society at large—where administrators view the resources of the institution as their own to use as they see fit. To avoid the problems of the society at large, we must develop professional means of budgeting, accounting and auditing.

- We must resist the temptation to use money simply because it is there.
- We must understand that it is unethical to use money that has been given for one purpose for another purpose.
- We must be transparent in our financial policies and practices.

These things are certainly known and understood so I will not say more about this.

Integrity in Admission Policies

Every institution represented here has policies and guidelines for admission. These are usually worked out in advance—in the non-emotional atmosphere of planning sessions rather than the highly charged atmosphere of implementation. Seminary administrators must be consistent and disciplined in following the recognized admission policies. Obviously, administrators at times have the right to waive certain requirements and that right should not be taken from them. However, when these admission policies are waved along ethnic and tribal lines or there is any hint that these have been done in some kind of improper way, this becomes unethical. Remember that you will lose your reputation as being a person of integrity very quickly if you become inconsistent in admission policies.

Integrity in Promotion Policies

There is no sin in having various levels of employees and rewarding those who excel. Paul said, “Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor” (Romans 13:7). Paul was primarily writing to encourage the Roman Christians to have proper attitudes toward their government officials. However, the application of giving proper respect to those to whom it is due goes beyond that.

Because of this, most institutions, including theological institutions, have policies about advancement and promotion of its staff. I challenge all administrators to make sure that there are objective written criteria to be followed when considering promotions. Obviously the administrator knows more about the staff than the various staff members know but the promotion process should be as transparent and straightforward as possible. This will encourage people to strive hard for those promotions and will reduce the jealous and gossip and friction in the staff.

Integrity in Relationships

Many people have spoiled their reputations through improper relationships with the opposite sex. Sometimes we attempt to excuse our sinful behaviour by comparing ourselves with the imperfect characters in the Bible. I recently heard of a major Christian leader who was confronted about his sexual sins. He was told that this was inconsistent with the example of Jesus. This man responded, “I cannot be a leader like Jesus but I can be a leader like David so I am trying to be a leader like David.” Because David had moral failures in his life, this Christian leader felt that he could be excused for moral failures in his life. When we have improper relationships with students or colleagues or others, we are undermining our spiritual authority and making ourselves vulnerable to discipline and judgment.

Integrity in Title Usages

We love titles in Africa. We love the recognition that comes from them. Because of that, sometimes we are tempted to take shortcuts and acquire titles we really do not deserve.

- If you are not ordained, do not call yourself “Reverend.”
- If you have not earned a doctorate, do not identify yourself as “Doctor.”
- If you are not earned academic degrees, do not place those letters behind your name.

It is unethical, dishonest and a compromise of your testimony to use academic titles that have specific connotations and imply certain accomplishments when you have not achieved those accomplishments.

Integrity in Documentation

Every institution has a specific method of documentation. We in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Jos use the MLA method. I would encourage every theological institution to make sure it has selected a standard way of documentation and then make sure that all students and staff use that method. It would be most convenient to adopt the method of the institution with whom you are affiliated.

Even more important, make sure that you and your students properly document your sources. To do otherwise is plagiarism which is an academic crime. With the growing availability of the Internet, one of the biggest problems we are now facing at the University of Jos is plagiarism. Some plagiarism occurs because students do not understand research and documentation and think that copying the work of others is academic research. However, most people who practice plagiarism understand that they are doing wrong. I will resist the temptation of narrating here the sad experiences of plagiarism that I have experienced at the University of Jos, even from senior church leaders who are PhD students in Biblical studies. However, plagiarism will get students expelled from the University of Jos and it will get lecturers dismissed. Therefore, I urge academic staff to take proper documentation seriously.

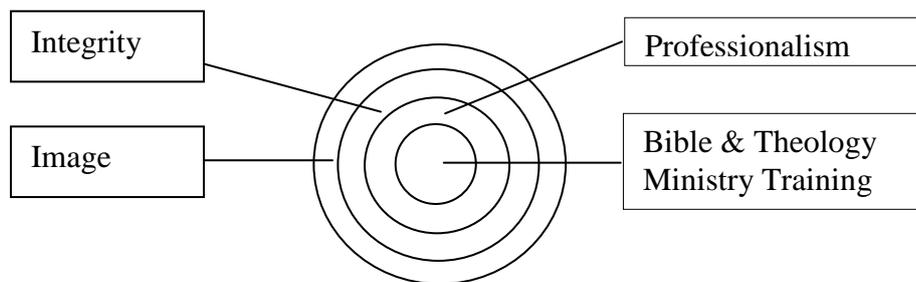
- Make sure you understand exactly what plagiarism is.
- Teach what plagiarism is to your students and then continually remind them.
- Read projects carefully to discover cases of plagiarism.
- Make a lot of noise about plagiarism so that your students and colleagues will understand the seriousness of it.

The Challenge of Image

God knows who we are. We think we know who we are. However, to other people, we are what they think we are. It has often been said that in many ways perception is more important than reality. All of us have helped to create a specific image and that is the way people think of us.

It is my conviction that Christian leaders must work harder and be more deliberate in cultivating an image of integrity and respect. Proverbs 22:1 says, *“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”* Immediately after Pentecost, Luke states that the Christian believers enjoyed *“the favor of all the people”* (Acts 2:47). It should be our goal to be like Titus who was *“praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel”* (2 Corinthians 8:18) and Demetrius who was *“well spoken of by everyone”* (3 John 12). A positive image in the community or within your circle of influence enhances your ability to accomplish your goals. It also provides a positive example to those who are learning to do what you are doing.

How do we create a positive public image in our seminaries and other theological institutions? One of the key ways we do this is through ceremonies. As a general rule, we do a good job with our ceremonies. We understand the protocol and the academic liturgies and we know where to get and how to use the appropriate academic regalia. Our academic celebrations are usually very positive events that help to generate goodwill and a positive image. However, are there other ways that we can improve our public image? I am convinced that there are a number of ways we can do so. And the focus on improving our image creates a third circle of values or challenges surrounding our core responsibilities.



Campus Beautification

God is a God of beauty and order. Simply look around you. God has made our world with beautiful colors and shapes. It is filled with variation and contrast. Although God has made the world to be very beautiful, we human beings have often made it to be very ugly.

There are several words in the Bible that are related to “beauty” such as “glory” and “radiance.” In comparing the husband-wife relationship to Jesus’ relationship to the church, Paul said: *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless”* (Ephesians 5:25-27). God wants the church and the various parts of it, including those involved in theological education to be *“radiant . . . without stain or wrinkle or blemish.”* Obviously the first application of this verse is to moral and spiritual beauty and purity. However, the metaphor itself presumes beauty and cleanliness and wholesomeness.

One of the first responsibilities that God gave to the human race was to take care of the environment (Genesis 1:26, 28). How well have our seminaries and Bible colleges done that? I do not believe that we should needlessly waste money on exotic things and become extravagant and gaudy. However, there are many things that we can do to beautify our campuses and insure that they are a positive testimony to Christ:

- Make sure that the campus is immaculately clean.
- Plant more flowers and shrubs and trees.
- Provide proper places to discard waste.
- Keep the offices dusted properly.
- Encourage a maintenance culture on your campus.
- Create a sense of wholesome pride in caring for the campus.

My challenge is that the campuses of our theological institutions should be the most beautiful places in our communities and that visitors feel refreshed and challenged when they visit our campuses.

Professional Dress

The clothes that we wear reflect something about us. They can tell whether we are clean people, neat people, extravagant people, proud people, sloppy people, casual people, serious people and many other things. I would encourage our seminaries to pay more attention to the clothes that our staff and students wear. We should not do this from a spirit of legalism or elitism but from a spirit of professionalism.

When ancient scribes copied the sacred scriptures, they did so in full rabbinical regalia. They were not casual about the Holy Scriptures. Those of us who teach the word of God and prepare others to teach the word of God should not be casual about it either.

It is my observation that Africans have traditionally been more formal in their dressing than people from the western world and particularly Americans. Unfortunately, the western influence seems to be having some influence on us.

The way we dress says something about the way we view ourselves. In addition, the way we dress helps to create the image that others have of us. When I go to the University senate, nearly everyone there is dressed formally. If academics in our secular institutions believe that it is necessary to dress well, how much more should we who represent God and His word, dress appropriate for our positions?

Affiliation and Accreditation Issues

One of the issues that affects the image of any institution is the idea of accreditation or affiliation. Although there are other significant reasons for a theological institutions to consider affiliation or accreditation, one of the most important is that affiliation helps to give credibility to an institution. It tells the public that there is some professional body that is looking over the shoulder of the institution to demand certain standards of performance and professionalism. Affiliation or accreditation is an ongoing public affirmation of the school.

The continent-wide evangelical body that accredits organizations in Africa is the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA). This body is built on the

American style accreditation philosophy.⁴ This is only evangelical continent-wide theological body that helps to guarantee standards of excellence in a theological institution.

A second approach to authenticating the genuineness of the education is through affiliation with a university. In some countries, such as Nigeria, historically, it has only been the university that could grant degrees. Therefore, any body that wanted to grant a degree was required to affiliate with a university. The affiliation process functions much like the accreditation process. It involves a needs assessment and a process of addressing those needs before affiliation can be granted. Some institutions, such as Jos ECWA Theological Institution (ECWA) have chosen both accreditation and affiliation.

There are many advantages to accreditation and affiliation.

- They help to guarantee a relatively uniform standard of education.
- They provide opportunities for the institutions to be accountable to others.
- They give students and opportunity to go to institutions that recognize the affiliation or accreditation.
- They enable students to be hired by government institutions and other employers who only recognize accredited degrees.

Perhaps the most important advantage of affiliation with a public university is the public relations value that the organization gets from it. In most of our societies, the university is viewed as the grandfather of all education. Therefore, having a link to that institution always is an advantage. It is true that sometimes the affiliated institution is actually doing a better job in theological education than the affiliating institution. However, from the community's point of view, it is the university, despite all of its shortcomings, that has the prestige and, by association, grants some of that prestige to those bodies affiliated with it.

Perception is an important part of influence which is an important part of success. Our theological institutions must make every effort to be viewed as professional agencies.

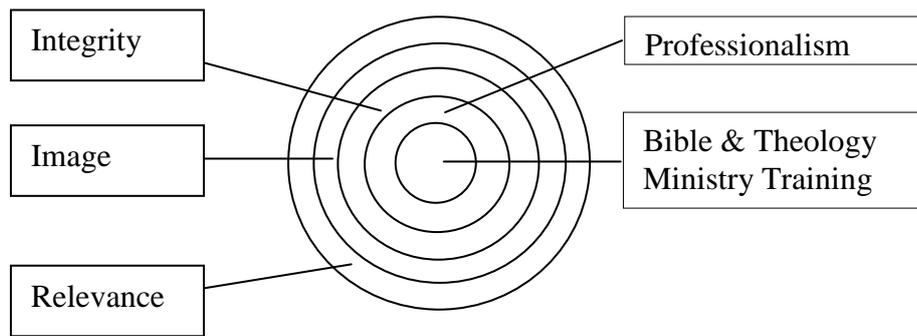
The Challenge of Relevance

Theological training must be more than just the accumulation of information and the sharpening of the reasoning powers. It must be designed to address the real needs of the people whom the student will some day serve. Although learning has value in itself, the learning that takes places in our seminaries and Bible colleges has a specific focus and a specific objective. The objective is to prepare Christian leaders who will serve the body of Christ at local, community, national and international levels. Therefore, it is the idea of relevance that is the fourth ring that emanates out from the center of theological education.

⁴ There are several ways that one can relate to ACTEA. These include:

- **Correspondent Status.** This means that the institution is loosely connected to ACTEA and has the right to receive mails, attend conferences and enjoy other general benefits.
- **Candidate Status.** This means the institution has actually started the accreditation process and is doing the required self-study that is a prerequisite to accreditation.
- **Accreditation Status.** This means that the institution has met the minimum requirements of ACTEA and is a full member with all of the rights and privileges associated with the agency.

In addition, there are three kinds of accreditation including secondary school, post-secondary school and post-graduate school levels. ACTEA also affiliates TEE programmes. See <http://www.theoledafrica.org/ACTEA/Default.asp>



It is commonly said that our armies are always preparing to fight yesterday's wars. I suspect that is sometimes true with education as well. We teachers often teach the issues that we were taught and things that we experienced in our earlier lives. That is usually a good starting place but we cannot limit ourselves to those things. We must be prepared to be the salt and light of today's world and we must prepare our students for tomorrow's world.

What are some of the issues that we need to prepare our students for?

- **HIV/AIDS.** During the last 30 years, our world and particularly Africa has been devastated by the major health crisis spawned by AIDS. Though AIDS is a disease, it has implications that go far beyond the medical community. And because the minister of the gospel must deal with the whole society, he or she must understand and be prepared to deal with this phenomenon.
- **Corruption.** Because corruption is such an endemic part of society, we must understand it from a theological and a cultural point of view. Our future pastors must know how to help people who have been infected and affected by this social disease. They must design and implement programmes that will inoculate children of their churches against corruption. They must know how to hold their members accountable and be a prophetic voice to the community on such matters.⁵
- **Governance.** The missionaries who planted the church in Africa did not encourage their converts to participate in the political process. Therefore, politics and governance have been taken over largely by people who do not have a Christian worldview. Our church leaders must have a healthy understanding of politics and governance so they can properly advise and support those Christians in their congregations about their responsibilities to participate in the political process.⁶
- **Violence.** The African church has suffered enormous violence from its beginning to the present. How should Christians and Christian leaders respond to violence? If we do not teach and train our young pastors in the best ways to respond to violence, they

⁵ In 1997, the Congress on Christian Ethics in Nigeria (COCEN) produced a document called "The Nigeria Covenant." This is a 10-paragraph document that states what Christians believe about ethics and integrity, especially in public life. Later, a related body known as Covenant Keepers published a *Nigerian Covenant Study Guide* that created 22 Bible study lessons based on the Nigeria Covenant. Several seminaries have used this document in various ways to prepare their staff and students for how to respond to various social and ethical problems in the society.

⁶ In 2007, the Nigeria chapter of the Africa Forum on Religion and Governance (AFREG) produced a four-paragraph document entitled "Nigeria Christian Creed on Governance." This document outlines the Christian's belief about what God expects of those who govern and those who are governed. It has become an official document of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). AFREG has also created four Bible studies based upon the four paragraphs of the creed and these are contained in a document entitled *Nigeria Christian Creed on Governance Study Guide*. These documents are available through the national CAN office in Abuja.

will react in the way their communities have taught them to react. And those reactions will probably not be godly responses. Martin Luther King Jr. led the non-violent civil rights movement in the United States. A major part of his ministry was teaching those who participated in how to respond to police brutality and mob reactions. Because they were well trained, they responded accordingly. Our church members need similar training but they will not be trained unless their pastors train them. And their pastors will not know how to train their members unless someone trains the pastors.

- **Pornography.** Unfortunately, more and more pornography and sexually explicit materials and videos are coming into Africa. The Internet is especially feeding this phenomenon. Our future pastors and church leaders must be well prepared to personally overcome the temptation toward these things. In addition, our pastors must know how to help their members avoid it and help people who have become addicted to it to be delivered.
- **Secularism.** Most African nations are emerging democracies. One of the issues that democracies must deal with is the issue of religion in politics and particularly the role of the minority religions. I am convinced that the secularism as practiced in the US and most other western nations is not ideal for Africa. I, therefore, encourage our Christian leaders to work out a common consensus on the concept of secularism and pluralism and make sure that we teach these things to our young pastors so that they will be prepared for these issues when they come up in their ministries and also so that our Christian leaders will speak with one voice on these things.
- **Environment.** One of the first and clearest instructions that God gave to humanity was to care for the earth (Genesis 1:26, 28). Unfortunately, Christian leaders have often failed to realize our responsibility in this matter. We must train our young pastors to be sensitive about environmental issues and teach their people to care for the earth that God has given to us. We must oppose pollution and wasting natural resources and abusing the physical environment with the same enthusiasm and commitment we oppose the moral pollution that destroys our souls.

There are many other social issues that the church is and will face including poverty, prostitution, abortion, child slavery, unhealthy living conditions, improper employment practices, prisoner rehabilitation, justice for widows, and many other social concerns.

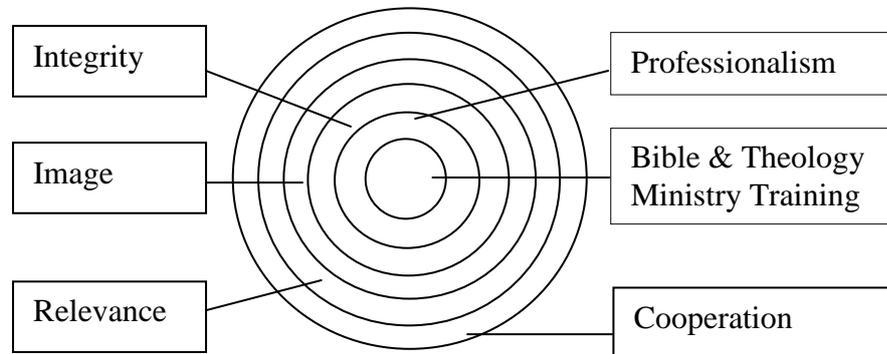
I believe that there are two responses to this issue. First, we as individuals must make sure that we keep ourselves relevant. We should read newspapers and news magazines. We should attend community meetings where social issues are discussed. We should visit our elected officials. We should discuss relevant social issues with our friends and colleagues.

Second, I believe that each of our seminaries and other Christian leadership training institutions must develop at least one course on “Ministering to Contemporary Issues.” It is likely that such a course would need to be team taught. And it is also likely that this would be the kind of course in which many resource persons would be brought in from the outside to teach our future pastors about these issues and the best way to respond to them.

It is only as we address the relevant needs of our contemporary society that we will gain the respect of the society. We must remember that salvation is not just forgiveness of sins and preparation for heaven. It is the complete restoration of a world to become what God originally designed it to be. We as ministers of the gospel and theological educators are called to fulfill that responsibility.

The Challenge of Cooperation

One of Jesus' most important messages was a stress on the unity of the body of Christ. Of course, there is also diversity. There was diversity among the twelve disciples. There has been diversity all throughout church history. However, Jesus anticipated that diversity and on his last night on this earth prayed to the Father that all of his followers "*may be one*" (John 17:11, 21, 22). Therefore the last of the ever-widening circles that we will discuss in this presentation is the challenge of cooperation.



In the early days of missionary work in Africa, there were summits in which missionary organizations met together but the extent of their cooperation was to divide up various portions of Africa and agree to focus on those individual areas. We are now far beyond the stage of one mission or one church being restricted to one geographical area. However, we are not beyond the need for cooperation.

What are some of the areas of cooperation?

Sharing Staff

Two of the key principles of the New Testament are to "*love your neighbor as yourself*" (Matthew 19:19) and "*honor one another above yourselves*" (Romans 12:10). We have stressed these principles as they relate to us as individuals but do they also have an application to our institutions as well? If one seminary has a specialist in a very narrow field, such as patristic studies, should not the institution that employs that person be generous in allowing that person to assist other institutions?

- If one seminary has someone good in electronic record keeping, let him or her teach others.
- If one seminary has someone good at internet research, let him or her develop workshops for sister organizations.
- If one seminary has someone good at understanding plagiarism, let other institutions benefit from that person.

One of the phenomenon that has been developing in the last ten or fifteen years is the growing examples of the modular style of theological education. Institutions created in recent years, such as Evangel Seminary in Jos and West Africa Theological Seminary in Lagos have created their whole programmes around this method of teaching. Even older seminaries like the Nigeria Baptist Seminary, Ogbomoso, have moved to using the modular form of instruction, at least in the post-graduate faculty.

Why is the modular form of education so popular? Perhaps the most important reason is that this form of education gives the institution an opportunity to bring in highly qualified staff for a week or two. These staff can teach a full course and make a major contribution to that institution that would not be possible if that lecturer had to be there for a full semester. Therefore, the institution is greatly enriched by borrowing staff. And, the staff who go there to lecture for a week or two are also enriched because they are able to interact with different kinds of students in a different environment. With this kind of exposure, their own students and their institutions also benefit.

However, the only way that this modular form of education can exist is if institutions are unselfish in allowing their staff to serve other institutions. Therefore, I appeal to academic staff to accept those invitations whenever they can to assist other institutions. I also appeal to administrators to be gracious and flexible in allowing your staff to be a blessing to other institutions. These practices seem consistent with Jesus' prayer for our unity.

Sharing Resources

It is more difficult to share resources. However, seminaries in the same general area should have inter-load library relationships and should orient their staffs accordingly. I will note here that sometimes the senior staff understand these things but the junior staff jealously guard the resources of their institutions and are not happy when visitors show up. Other things such as academic regalia, electronic equipment, and, on occasion, transportation vehicles should be shared whenever they are needed. In fact, theological institutions in the same neighborhood would be wise to jointly purchase and share certain items which are only used once or twice a year.

The seminaries in Jos are a good example of this kind of cooperation. The Theological College of Northern Nigeria has set a good example in joint publishing by allowing non-staff to publish in their journal, *The TCNN Research Bulletin*. JETS has invited the local seminaries to participate in its recent conference with Paul Bowers. Evangel Theological Seminary has allowed its facilities to be used by others. Even this conference is a positive example of joint cooperation—several organizations working together.

In addition to loving one another as our selves, God expects the strong to assist the weak. In Romans 14, Paul outlines the way that Christians who disagree with each other on various issues must respond to each other. He concludes his argument by saying, "*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up*" (Romans 15:1-2). First, I believe that the application of this verse extends to organizations as well as individuals. Second, the way "weak" and "strong" are used in this context would suggest that all of us are weak and strong on different issues. Thus, regardless of who we think the weak and the strong may be, the passage demands a respect and tolerance and even support of those who are different than we are. In light of this principle, I believe that older institutions should help the newer ones. Institutions with strong academics should support those with weak academics. Institutions who are highly respected should be willing to mingle with and support and give encouragement and recognition to the less respected ones.

I will add here one final word that may stir the theological waters a bit. Whether one likes it or not, Pentecostalism has made a very powerful impact on Christianity in Africa in the last 30 years. I think it can be argued that Pentecostalism has driven much of the church

growth and has also encouraged a more authentic African style of worship in Nigeria during that period. One of the weaknesses of Pentecostals, known both outside and inside the movement is the lack of strong theological education. However, many Pentecostal organizations are now trying to catch up. They are starting and trying to improve their Bible colleges and seminaries. They want help and are reaching out to the older evangelical institutions for assistance and guidance. My challenge to those older non-Pentecostal institutions is that you must not ignore their cries for help.

- Give admission to the Pentecostal academic staff when they apply to your institutions.
- Welcome Pentecostal administrators who come to you for advice.
- Invite Pentecostal institutions to participate in your programmes and celebrations.

Even though some may not agree with Pentecostal theology and practice, it is better to have well-educated Pentecostals who are friends than self-taught Pentecostals who are isolated from the rest of the body of Christ and are giving a warped and twisted form of theological education. And by lending a helping hand to your Pentecostal brothers in theological education, your institution might actually learn one or two things also.

Conclusion

No one questions that the central focus of theological education is building theology from the Bible, training for Christian ministry and encouraging spiritual formation. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate, there are many factors that influence these goals. It is our responsibility to focus on the centre without ignoring the broader issues. It is our privilege to provide balanced, practical and meaningful training for our future Christian leaders. It is our conviction that our efforts will not be in vain and that our students will see a greater development of God's kingdom on this earth than we have seen.

I will conclude this presentation and this conference with a paraphrase of 2 Timothy 2:2; *“And the things you have heard these resources persons say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to your reliable students who will also be qualified to teach the body of Christ all throughout Africa.”*