

Making Connections: Integrative Theological Education in Africa, M. Naidoo

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A simple search on Google reveals that the Western world rests on an assumption that Western universities predated the origin and development of higher education globally. Yet, there were universities in Africa before the University of Bologna—recognised as the world’s oldest university—was established in 1088. The first theological faculty was established at Alexandria before the end of the second century CE. So, in terms of theological education, Africa does not need the West to inform us regarding how we go about formation for ministry, though from the beginning of the colonial period, Western forms have been imposed on the African context on another assumption that the “West is best.” This is the context within which integrative theological education seeks to challenge and replace outdated models; which is never a finished product but always a work in progress that aligns itself with the philosophy of life-long learning.

The book is in four parts. The first considers conceptual issues related to integration along with the appropriateness of “Africanisation” and the theological education realities of the context. The second part deals with the changes that require to take place in the actual content of theological education, and part three engages with issues related to ministerial formation, moral education, gender awareness, and public theological issues. It also focuses on the hidden curriculum. The fourth section investigates two recent reports on the need for and the value of integrative learning on the African continent.

One of the restraining features in the move toward integrated theological education in Africa is the global drive towards the ranking of institutions because it will take time, resources and great energy to establish a new African and integrative *modus operandi*. First, Africa cannot compete with historic European and American institutions, because they set the terms of the ranking process. Second, academic institutions in the West possess massive historic resources. Third, in order to become truly African, it has to be



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acknowledged that we operate with vastly different epistemologies. Fourth, prior to the imposition of Western Enlightenment informed thought forms, the African context already presented a holistic approach to life, of which education was an integral component. Related to this is the antipathy towards individualistic forms of expression (as distinguished by “isolation, individualism and competition”, p.3) compared with the African commitment to a holistic, communal approach marked by an inclusive “spiritual power” (Mugambi). It is possible to develop integrated theological education programmes. From the late 1970s, the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa introduced an integrated third year to its diploma programme, which was found to be helpful to those who were preparing to minister in a context still dominated by apartheid.

The book, which is the result of continent-wide empirical research, auto-ethnography and critical literature studies carried out by African scholars, stresses the need for theological education to emerge from the local context and to be communally led, for it is here that the needs are felt in their most acute form. Hence, transformation is essential in the design of curricula for the laity as the entire people of God, which includes the ordained.

It may be that African institutions of higher education will have to make a sacrifice in order to re-establish their integrity as “African” without being pressed into a mould that defines “African” as only one form of representation. The move towards integrative theological learning can assist in this process, as long as we do not expect all these forms to have the same form and structure—since no two contexts are identical.

Although it is clear that such a move (which is recommended for our theological education institutions) will involve a great deal of time, energy and enthusiasm, this collection of essays demonstrates that the effort expended will be well worth it in terms of the conscientised ministers that are produced. We must always remember that the nature of the ministry we are called to is integrated. We never sit down to study scripture without there being pastoral, theological, historical, missiological or ethical implications. It is far better that our candidates for ministry learn an integrated methodology rather than being plunged into the multi-faceted demands of ministering to God’s people with a disintegrated theology.