

Ethnic Studies: An Urgent Need in Theological Education in Africa

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Abstract

By virtue of its subject matter, theological education ought to infuse life with morals and values, thus moulding a just, moral and peaceful society such as is envisaged in God's telos for His world. And in line with its aims, theological education provides knowledge and skills to people to enable them to serve the church, together with the wider society where the church lives. A theological curriculum appropriate to its context ensures success in both these aspects of theological education. To their credit Africa's theological institutions seem to have curricula which are relevant to Africa's context. Success in sustaining the relevance of these curricula lies in continually revising the curriculum so that it does not become dated. One such urgent revision is in the offering of ethnic studies which is necessitated by the ethnic crisis in Africa. For this reason, ethnic studies in the curriculum of theological education in Africa are imperative. In the essay four ways are proposed in which ethnic studies could be included in the curriculum of theological education in Africa.

Introduction

A few years ago, renowned theological educator, the late Professor Kwame Bediako, in a passing comment noted the following: "During the past thirty to forty years, the mushrooming of churches in independent Africa has led also to the proliferation of Bible schools . . ."¹ We may not have actual statistics of the current number of theological institutions in Africa but it is a fairly safe conclusion that the hundreds of Theological Institutions in Africa² (including university Religious Studies Departments and Faculties

¹ Bediako, K. (2001) The African Renaissance and Theological Reconstruction: the Challenge of the Twenty-first Century. *Journal of African Christian Thought* 4.2, p.29.

² See, Bowers' paper which although written 18 years ago clearly points to this since there has been no visible drop in the increase of theological institutions in Africa, nor the closing down of African universities' Religious Studies departments or Faculties of Theology. Bowers, P. (1990) New Light on Theological Education in Africa. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 14, pp.57–63.

of Theology) represent an appetite in Africa to have her clergy and church workers theologically educated or trained. This is a noble desire that ought to be fulfilled since the provision of theological education (TE from here on unless noted otherwise) is vital in view of its subject matter and goals.

Importance of theological education

The subject matter of TE

Theology, and thus the subject matter of TE, is about God and his created order. For that reason TE is intrinsically characterized by the intersection of issues about God – his words and actions, agency, nature, character etc. and his world – human beings, nature and environment, societies/communities etc. In consequence, TE is distinguished by the fact that although it has professional, civic and intellectual purposes, it is, on the basis of its transcendent subject, essentially moral and value-laden. And so, in concrete terms, TE invariably offers inquiry, instruction, knowledge and practice which, in relation to humans' perceptions and experiences of the transcendent, draw from both the moral and value-orientated domains. As such it can influence most other human endeavours, whether scientific, artistic, social or political, for good or ill. What is more, seen in this perspective, the contribution of TE is distinct and necessary in any pursuit of a just, moral and peaceful society, vital elements in the viability of any society and, for Christians, germane to God's *telos* (purpose) for his world – a new heaven and earth.

Such an understanding of the subject matter of TE is not to say that other kinds of education and academic disciplines have no moral and value elements, nor any sense of the transcendent among those involved with them as tutors or students. But insofar as they are involved with morals and valuing, they have a theological element. This is the reason why it is argued that issues of theology exist in all abstract academic disciplines. So that, "Just as problems in the physical theory in relativity can be discussed philosophically . . . so, too, problems in ecology and psychoanalysis can be discussed theologically."³ Put simply, where moral and value issues in different fields and disciplines emerge, an avenue is provided for the deeper study of religious and ethical issues which are a subject area of theology even though in this case those issues fall within those other fields and disciplines. Moreover, theology relates to other cognate disciplines such as sociology, development, conflict resolution, psychology, counselling, history, etc. To the degree that theology relates to these disciplines, theological issues are dealt with within these disciplines but from the vantage point of matters specific to those disciplines' subject areas.

³ Toulmin, S. (1990) Theology in the Context of the University. *Theological Education* 26.2, p.61.

Seen this way, TE is significant because it contributes to our society vital elements we could variously describe as “morals” or a “moral vision”, “values” or a “value system”, “spirituality” and the like, all of which are integral to a just, moral and peaceful society. For this reason theological institutions in Africa have a very special role of moulding African society into a just, moral and peaceful society in keeping with God’s *telos* for his world.

Aims of TE

The second importance of TE lies in its aims. Formal higher education ideally strives to provide knowledge and a variety of skills which are necessary for public service and other vocations. For this reason, higher education is viewed as existing to benefit a nation’s economy (of course with its corollary benefits of giving individuals access to income and professional status).⁴ So strong is this perception of the goal of higher education that in many places universities have been blamed for failing to offer the right, or quality, education (that is to relate theory to practice in the field) when the services for which its graduates are employed are inadequately delivered.

TE is not divorced from the dynamics and impulses of general higher education that we have just alluded to above. Such a thesis is clear where TE is offered through faculties of theology and departments of religious studies in African universities. Elsewhere, TE usually subscribes to the purposes of higher education in endeavouring to offer certificate, diploma, or degree level education in the field of theology. In fact, in a number of instances, theological institutions are offering TE in partnership with universities, or are seeking accreditation through institutions which impose on them purposes and standards that would be expected of higher education in universities.⁵ TE, therefore, has been understood in a variety of ways and with different shades of emphases, to exist for the purposes of providing knowledge and skills for services in the church and in the wider society where the church lives. The following few examples of the observations and reflections by those involved in TE will suffice to underline this *raison d’être* of TE.

⁴ See Grubb and Lazerson’s article for more on this. Even though their article is written from an American context, the issues and facts they look at resonate with higher education across the continents. Grubb, W. & Lazerson, M. (2005) Vocationalism in Higher Education: The Triumph of the Educational Gospel. *Journal of Higher Education* 76.1, pp.1–25; see also, Matos, N. (2000) The Nature of Learning, Teaching and Research in Higher Education in Africa. In: P. Higgs, N. C. G. Vakalisa et al. (eds) *African Voices in Education*, pp.12–38. Rustica Press, Western Cape.

⁵ Such as the Commission of Higher Education in Kenya. The commission was established in 1985 through an Act of Parliament to regulate growth and ensure quality in higher education in Kenya. To date this commission has granted a number of theological institutions in Kenya the licence to offer degrees in TE having certified that they meet the standards expected of university education. For more on the commission, see their website, <http://che.or.ke>.

Tinyinko Maluleke in the context of TE in South Africa writes: “(South) Africa should be producing theologians, priests and religious workers who are able to participate and/or facilitate in the addressing of Africa’s peculiar problems.”⁶ Klaus Fiedler and Kenneth Ross are of the view that TE in Malawi should be equipping its beneficiaries “to think out the meaning of the gospel in their particular social and ecclesial situation”.⁷ Kwame Bediako feels that TE should end up “equipping God’s people for mission and for the transformation of African society”.⁸ Plueddemann forthrightly puts it thus: “The aim of TE is to develop leaders to build and strengthen the church.”⁹ As a last example, Anderson argues, “Theological institutions are called upon with exponential force to produce ministers capable of addressing the complexities of modern life. Frequent questions emerge: ‘How shall we best teach our students to minister to the world?’”¹⁰

It is important to be aware that in the context of Africa, the importance of the goals of TE just mentioned, are magnified. This is on account of the fact that in Africa Christianity (together with Islam and other forms of indigenous religions) is a major presence or factor in life. Consequently, it is incumbent on theological educators to understand that the provision of TE which directs and channels Christianity in constructive ways for public and social good is an important agenda within TE’s prescribed goal which relates to the church’s habitat, the wider society. Maluleke puts it thus: If official statistics are to be trusted, Africa is a very religious continent with Christianity – however nominal it might be – occupying a place of pride in this. This means that TE in Africa has public consequences beyond the narrow confines of seminaries and church congregations. In many countries therefore, African theological and religious education is public education – quite apart from whether governments recognize this or not.¹¹

To sum up, we are saying that the subject matter of theology and its goals brings the importance of TE into sharp relief. This importance has to do on the one hand with the

⁶ Maluleke, T. (1998) The Africanization of Theological Education: Does Theological Education Equip You to Help Your Sister? *Journal of Constructive Theology* 4.2, p.15.

⁷ Fiedler, K. & Ross, K. (1996) Postgraduate Theological Degrees at the University of Malawi: Vision and Reality. *Ministerial Formation* 72, p.15.

⁸ Bediako, K. (2001) The African Renaissance and Theological Reconstruction: p.29; see also Bediako, K. (2000) Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension. *African Affairs* 99, pp.303–323.

⁹ Plueddemann, J.E. (1989) The Challenge of Excellence in Theological Education. In: R.L. Youngblood (ed.) *Excellence and Renewal: Goals for Accreditation of Theological Institutions*, p.11. Paternoster, Carlisle.

¹⁰ Anderson, R.C. (2003) Infusing the Graduate Theological Curriculum with Education about Disability: Addressing the Human Experience of Disability in Theological Context, p.141. *Theological Education* 39.

¹¹ Maluleke, T. (1998) The Africanization of Theological Education: Does Theological Education Equip You to Help Your Sister? p.15; see also K. Bediako’s article, (2000) Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, on the role of Christianity in Africa in the new millennium.

infusing of life with morals and values, thus moulding a just, moral and peaceful society such as is envisaged in God's *telos* for his world, and on the other, providing knowledge and skills to people to enable them to serve the church, together with the wider society where the church lives.

The state of TE in Africa

Inappropriate curriculum?

For TE in Africa to engage adequately with the subject matter of theology and at the same time meet the goals of TE, it must have a curriculum which is appropriate to the African context. In this regard, TE in Africa has been cited as not appropriate for the African context.¹² Undoubtedly TE cannot engage adequately with its subject matter if that subject matter is not related to the context of those engaging with it, nor derived from issues stemming out of their context. Secondly, TE cannot provide requisite knowledge and skills to its students for service in the church and world if the skills and knowledge offered are out of touch with their realities. The result of such a mismatch between the curriculum of TE and the context of its students is that the students end up ignorant of the issues they need to work with and engage with theologically in their churches and wider society. They also are not knowledgeable enough to handle adequately (and in the interest of God's *telos*) the various issues that affect their churches and their society. Finally, they are not competent to contribute to the solving of issues that affect their churches and society. But it is not quite the case that TE in Africa is riddled with inappropriate curricula.

A survey of the curriculum of twelve theological institutions¹³ in different regions of Africa seems to indicate, in varying degrees, that theological institutions in Africa have made efforts to have in their bachelor's degree a curriculum that is informed by the African context. The curriculum of these institutions includes the traditional academic disciplines - such as systematic theology, biblical studies, and church history - that would be found in theological/religious studies anywhere. In this regard one would be tempted

¹² By, for example, De Gruchy (1994), Maluleke (1998), Bediako (2001) and Gundani (2002). Of course, evaluations of TE as inappropriate to their context are not unique to TE in Africa (see Farley [1983], Cobb and Hoff [1985, and Ott [2001]) nor even, as alluded to above, unique to TE.

¹³ These are: Bangui Evangelical School of Theology of Central Africa Republic, The Theological College of Northern Nigeria, West African Advanced School of Theology in Togo, Shalom University of Bunia in DRC, Uganda Christian University, Nairobi University of Kenya, NETS in Namibia, Sovereign Grace Theological Seminary of the University of Africa in Malawi, Africa University in Zimbabwe, University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, University of Kwazulu Natal Peietermaritzburg in South Africa and Evangelical College of Southern Africa in South Africa. My survey is not meant to be comprehensive but, rather, to serve as a window to look into the curriculum of TE in Africa.

to conclude that such curricula are not geared to the African context. While we cannot rule this out, it is not necessarily the case since one can incorporate African concerns within the traditional disciplines. In the area of biblical studies, for example, one can conduct interpretations that are deliberately contextual. In systematic theology, as another example, African categories can be exploited in Christological studies. But the traditional disciplines are not all there as in the curricula of these African theological institutions. There are courses that are clearly designed to address the African context.

Concerning Africa's religious context the Theological College of Northern Nigeria (in conjunction with the University of Jos), for example, has courses which aspire to address the religious context in Africa, such as African Church History, Nigerian Church History, Theology of the Holy Spirit for an African Context, African Traditional Religion in Nigeria, Ethics in the West African Context, etc. In Kenya, the University of Nairobi's Department of Religious Studies has; African religion, Belief Systems in Kenya, New Religious Movements, History of Christianity in East Africa, etc. In Southern Africa, the Evangelical Seminary of Southern Africa has courses such as The Church in Africa, African Initiated Churches and Zulu Language and Culture, which address the religious context of Africa. Indeed, any random look at the curriculum of theological institutions in Africa confirms that common to most of them are courses in various disciplines and fields which are informed by the religious context of Africa.

As another example of an appropriate curriculum in TE in Africa, my survey also shows that Africa's theological institutions are grappling with Africa's political context, particularly with regard to conflict resolution and management. For example, African University of Zimbabwe has a course on Biblical Foundations for Leadership and on Conflict Transformation and Peace Building; the University of KwaZulu Natal has a course on Religion and Conflict, as well as on Christianity, Justice and Peace; while both the Evangelical Seminary of Southern Africa and the Theological College of Western Nigeria have a course on Conflict Resolution. As a last example, I surmise that the various courses offered in the field of ethics by African theological institutions may have in their application components that touch on the political issues facing Africa.

So there is every indication that, in principle, theological institutions in Africa are striving, in the TE they offer, to address Africa's context. Theological institutions which offer degrees and higher studies that do not address themselves in their curriculum to the African context would be the exception. But such a conclusion does not mean that there is no room for revising and improving the curriculum of TE in Africa. In the interest of continued appropriateness, curriculum revision is a necessity in view of the constant movement and ever-evolving contexts. Indeed we have a critical issue in the African

context which theological institutions in Africa must address in their curriculum and to this we turn now.

Ethnic Studies: a critical need in the curricula of TE in Africa

The select number of theological institutions in Africa at which I looked fail, without exception, in addressing one critical context in Africa, viz., ethnicity. An aspect of Africa's context is that it is characterized by ethnic identities and with them ethnic psyches, conflicts, loyalties, jealousy and hatred. Ethnicity in Africa has some vital and positive elements such as "ethnic morality" – that "... complex web of social obligations that define people's rights and responsibilities, and that protect people when they are most vulnerable and alone ...", "which subordinates ... one's behaviour to certain moral imperatives when dealing with other group members."¹⁴ But what makes ethnicity in Africa stand out is that it is largely an ubiquitous, potent negative force shaping most aspects of life in Africa.¹⁵ Africans feel closer to members of their own ethnic community regardless of whether they are family or friends than to others. Many persons in Africa cannot define themselves without reference to their ethnic group. Their ethnic group is what gives them an identity, a sense of belonging, and even in some sense, "life". Therefore, it is unthinkable to an African to exist without one's ethnic group. "I am because we are"¹⁶ is an African sentiment.

In consequence, most Africans have an overriding commitment, loyalty and emotional attachment to their ethnic community.¹⁷ This commitment manifests itself in various guises such as in solidarity with one's ethnic community, in jealousy and hatred of other ethnic groups and so on and predominates negatively in the religious, economic, political

¹⁴ Berman, B., Eyoh, D. & Kymlicka, W. (2004) *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, p.4 Ohio University Press, Athens; for more on "moral ethnicity" and on the positive potential of ethnicity see Lonsdale, J. (1994) Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism. In: P. Kaarshalm & J. Hultin (eds) *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*. Institute for Development Studies, University of Roskilde, Roskilde; Hameso, S.Y. (2001) *Ethnicity in Africa: Towards a Positive Approach*, pp.91–106. University Press, Lincoln.

¹⁵ It is precisely ethnicity in this negative sense which concerns my paper. I am concerned with ethnicity's negative influence in Africa to which, I am contending, TE must address itself. If the influence of ethnicity in Africa was largely positive, then its subject would be more of an academic exercise in TE. Unfortunately for Africa, as Lemarchand once put it: "Ethnicity is evidently more than an intellectual construction. Its devastating effects on the fabric of newly independent states, and of older polities, are all too obvious." Lemarchand, R. (1986) Ethnic Violence in Tropical Africa. In: J. F. Stack Jr, (ed) *Ethnicity in the Contemporary World*, p.184. Greenwood Press, Westport.

¹⁶ This was made popular by the renowned African theologian, Mbiti, S. (1969) *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp.108–9. Heinemann, Nairobi.

¹⁷ V.C. Uchendu calls this "'ethnic patriotism' – an important value which conflicts with a wider national loyalty." Uchendu, V.C. (1995) The Dilemma of Ethnicity and Polity Primacy in Black Africa. In: L. Romanucci-Ross and G. Devos (eds) *Ethnic Identity: Creation, Conflict and Accommodation*, p.129. Sage Publications, London.

and social context of Africa that we mentioned above. For example, in the religious arena of Africa, ethnicity continually makes nonsense of the proclamation of the gospel of the brotherhood of all believers which transcends ethnic boundaries, when Christians find it difficult to accept each other as one in Christ just because they are from different ethnic groups.¹⁸ In the economic context of Africa, corruption and the plunder of national resources and the poverty which springs from these vices can be traced to ethnicity. In politics, virtually all wars and conflict in Africa can be more or less traced to the forces of ethnicity. Ironically it is in times of scarcity and competition for resources, and in wars and conflicts, that ethnic forces seem to be at the height of their strength. Invariably ethnicity has bred instability and violence in Africa and is altogether a threat to the survival of African statehood¹⁹ as envisaged in the various national constitutions of African countries – a fact that may not be well appreciated.²⁰

What is more, studies on the current state of ethnic problems in Africa²¹ show that the problems are worse now than ever before. “Everywhere [in Africa] the politics of identity and ethnicity appear resurgent.”²² Forrest, from the standpoint of politics, summarizes the reasons thus:

In the early years following postcolonial independence, government co-option, the predominance of an international system that supported existing states, and the pursuit of a dual autonomy-plus-state-access strategy all contributed to keeping subnationalist [ethnic] mobilization at non-threatening levels. Later, autonomy-seeking movements gained momentum for a number of reasons. These include state leaders’ loss of external backers due to the end of the Cold War, the failure of most African states to generate a strong sense of nationhood, the dramatic weakening of the state infrastructures, and the improvements in rebels’ organizational capacity and their ability to synchronize their behaviour with the norms of local societies. In some cases, this local synchronization may involve a retraditionalization of political power, which is occurring in various rural locales.

¹⁸ It is an open secret that churches themselves are caught up in these negative ethnic forces. For more, see, Cyril (2007), Maigadi (2006), and Onyalla (2005). See References for further information.

¹⁹ As Ayittey puts it: “In country after country, the state has been captured or monopolized by one tiny group – an ethnic group . . . and the instruments of state power and government machinery have been used to advance the economic interests of the ruling group. . . . This politics of exclusion does not endure. It eventually leads to destructive competition, instability, civil strife, institutional breakdown and ultimately to the implosion of the state.” Ayittey, G. (1999) *Africa in Chaos: A Comparative History*, p.343. Macmillan, London. See also the various articles in Braathen (2000).

²⁰ The sentiments of Okuro that “despite its resilient reality, ethnicity and ‘tribalism’ have not received adequate scholarly commentary in academic discourses in Africa,” point to this. Okuro, S.A. (2003) Review of *Ethnicity in Africa: Towards a Positive Approach* by Hameso Y. Seyoum. *Africa Studies Quarterly* 7.1, pp.88–89. It is no wonder that there is relatively scant material on ethnicity in journals on discourse on Africa such as *African Studies Review*, *African Studies Quarterly*, *African Affairs*, and *African Cultural Studies*.

²¹ See for example Berman, Eyoh, & Kymlicka, W. (2004) *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, pp.1–12 and Brown, M.E. (1993) *Ethnic Conflict and Internal Security*, pp.1–23. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

²² Berman, Eyoh and Kymlika (2004) *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, p.2.

The subtext of a coalition-orientated political culture is an underlying influence in a growing number of movements.²³

In view of the above, it is a fair conclusion that ethnicity is a crucial dimension around which Africa's religious, socio-economic and political problems revolve and is currently a crisis in Africa which threatens the very survival of Africa. It is a life and death issue that is totally against God's *telos* for his world which TE cannot ignore. For this reason, I view the ethnic crisis as more deadly than HIV/AIDS, yet TE in Africa has responded to HIV/AIDS and is silent on ethnicity. A response to ethnicity by theological institutions in Africa, therefore, is both imperative and urgent. TE in Africa would betray utterly its subject matter and goals, discussed earlier, if it does not respond with urgency to the crisis of ethnicity in Africa, and to the incapacity of the church in Africa to manage ethnicity positively. But how could ethnicity be part of the curricula offered in TE in Africa? I suggest four ways in which this could be done in what follows.

Ethnic Studies in the curriculum of TE in Africa

Ethnic Studies offered as a discipline in TE in Africa

One way in which ethnic studies could be part of the curriculum of TE is by way of having it offered as a *distinct discipline* alongside the other traditional ones. Having ethnic studies as a discipline will have the advantage of both isolating and concentrating on particular issues on ethnicity, and intensively studying specified variables or problems. Indeed, there are a number of issues that need to be looked at to appreciate ethnicity in Africa. These issues would touch on the meaning and understandings of ethnicity, the history of ethnic groups and ethnic relations in Africa, their underlying assumptions and philosophies, reasons for their enduring strength, the roles played by ethnic communities in the formation and identity of individuals and societies etc. The acquisition of knowledge on, and the understanding of, ethnicity in Africa will surely be transformative at some level, changing the student's perspectives and even prejudicial attitude.

However, I submit that knowledge and understanding of the subject will not be all there is to such a discipline. Ethnic studies will have to be an applied and engaged discipline since ethnic studies are not neutral but take a stand against the life-threatening forces of ethnicity. For this reason reflection and instruction on managing ethnicity would be integral to such a discipline, as would the inculcating of the virtues of tolerance and love. In addition, other issues that will have to be isolated and looked at have to do with

²³ Forrest, J.B. (2004) *Subnationalism in Africa: Ethnicity, Alliances, and Politics*, pp.53–54. Lynne Rienner Publishers, London.

advocacy, the application of knowledge and understanding in contending with the negative forces of ethnicity in Africa in the student's nearest appropriate constituency. In this regard the Bible in TE would assume a place of pre-eminence as a source of guidance in managing ethnicity, in acting to combat it, and in inculcating the virtues without which ethnic forces cannot be neutralized. This pre-eminence of the Bible is vital because for Christian communities the Bible is in some sense "the word of God" which, therefore, has an absolute and universal character and is of permanent value in helping to deal with the concrete realities of life, including ethnicity. The biblical vision of God's *telos*, for example, must be brought to bear on, and to be linked with, ethnic realities in order to produce recommendations which are helpful, possible and fall within the churches' competence. Case studies too may be particularly helpful in bringing out real ethnic issues which could form a basis for reflection and desired actions.²⁴

However, in order for ethnic studies to be offered in TE in Africa as a discipline, theological institutions which intend to offer it as such must, at the very least, meet the following disciplinary requirements:²⁵

- (1) Define the goals (of course within the over-arching goals and purposes of TE) of ethnic studies.
- (2) Articulate the commitments that are implied by the defined goals.
- (3) Enumerate the methodology and procedure which should organize and direct ethnic studies.
- (4) Spell out the parameters of the body of knowledge (the field of the discipline) to be looked at in ethnic studies.
- (5) Specify skills applicable to ethnic studies
- (6) Have (or develop) specialists and practitioners in ethnic studies who essentially are scholars who have invested themselves in ethnic studies.

Meeting the above requirement is not an easy task particularly in the case of the third, fourth and sixth requirement. It is perhaps for this reason that virtually all traditional academic disciplines were not the result of carefully planned efforts with the ultimate aim of having them as disciplines but rather evolved through time into disciplines. Even relatively recent disciplines wherever they are found, such "missiology" or mission

²⁴ See, Wendland, E.R. (1998) The Case for a "Case-Study" Approach to Theological Education in Africa. *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 17.1, pp.41–57, on the merits of the 'case-study' approach in TE in Africa. Some case studies are already available (see for example Hameso [2001], Klug [2001 and Lemarchand [1986]) but there are many more waiting to be researched.

²⁵ These specific requirements are a synthesis of my general knowledge on the dynamics of disciplines in higher education, and of what I have read on some discussions on other forms of emerging studies such as "environmental studies" (see Caldwell [1984]), and curriculum studies (see Oliva [1988, 14–17]).

studies,²⁶ cultural studies,²⁷ or African studies,²⁸ evolved into disciplines. Therefore, although offering ethnic studies as a discipline in TE in Africa is, for the reasons mentioned, desirable, we may have to wait for the studies to evolve into a discipline. But in view of the ethnic crisis in Africa, TE in Africa does not have the luxury of time. We have to look then to other ways in which ethnic studies can be offered as part of the curriculum of TE in Africa. Indeed, these other ways have been the starting point from which recent disciplines have evolved into disciplines.

Ethnic Studies offered as an interdisciplinary subject in TE in Africa

The second way in which ethnic studies can be offered in the curriculum of TE in Africa is through positioning it as an *interdisciplinary* field of study. In this way ethnic studies could, against the background of its concerns, subject and goals, draw from relevant content of various fields of study. Such fields of study could include, for example, biblical and theological/philosophical studies (because biblical, theological and philosophical perspectives on ethnicity are necessary to understanding ethnicity, in guiding advocacy against its negative forces, and in managing it), religious studies (since ethnic dynamics are often inseparable from religion), historical studies (for ethnic matters have a history which is important in analyzing and understanding ethnicity), peace and reconciliation (since such studies are particularly useful in advocacy towards a peaceful and integrated society), conflict resolution (because of the ethnic factor in these issues), sociological and anthropological studies (on account of ethnicity being a sociological phenomenon), politics and governance, etc.

Consequently, much as ethnic studies does have, and, if taken up, will generate over time its own unique content and applicable skills, it will share common subject matter with other fields of study relevant to it. This sharing could be done in at least two ways. Firstly, ethnic studies could have its separate and distinct courses, which we may call block courses. To these block courses would be added courses taken from other fields but which are relevant to ethnic studies. Such an approach is at times referred to as a multidisciplinary²⁹ approach to studies. The disadvantage of a multidisciplinary approach to offering ethnic studies in the curriculum of TE is the intrinsic potential of having an

²⁶ See Verkuyl, J. (1982) *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, pp.11–17. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

²⁷ For more, see Exum, J.C. and Moore, S.D. (1998) Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies. In: J. C. Exum & S. D. Moore, (eds) *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 266*, pp.19–45. Sheffield University Press, Sheffield.

²⁸ See Staniland, M. (1983) Who Needs African Studies. *African Studies Review*, 26.3/4, pp.77–97.

²⁹ I got this from Peterson in his argument for having environmental studies in the curriculum of higher education. Peterson, K.L. (2003) The Educational Imperative of Creation Care. *Christian Scholar's Review*, 32.4, p.437.

eclectic curriculum. This could happen when the discipline-based courses that are added to the block ethnic studies courses are not well integrated together and with ethnic studies.

Secondly, ethnic studies could aim to transcend the aforementioned potential danger in offering ethnic studies as an interdisciplinary field of study by offering ethnic studies in such a way that it invariably links and interweaves with the courses which it draws from other disciplines. The direct way of doing this is simply by placing ethnic studies alongside those courses so that indeed, ethnic issues feed into and out of that subject. For example, a theological institution could offer courses such as *The Gospels and Ethnicity*, or *Ephesians and Ethnic Reconciliation*, and in so doing link biblical studies with ethnicity. As another example, a theological institution could offer courses such as *Religion and Ethnicity*, or *The Idolatry of Ethnicity* and in so doing link ethnic studies with religious studies. Other courses that theological institution could offer are, *Nationhood and the Emergence of Ethnicity in Africa*, or *The History of Ethnic Conflict in Africa* and in so doing link ethnic studies with historical studies, or even offer, *Ethnicity and Conflict in Africa*, and in so doing link ethnic studies with peace and reconciliation studies etc. This approach in contradistinction from the multidisciplinary approach above is at times referred to as an interdisciplinary approach to studies and seems to be the one preferred in introducing HIV/AIDS studies in the curriculum of TE in Africa.³⁰

Ethnic Studies offered across the curriculum in TE in Africa

Another way in which ethnic studies can be offered in TE in Africa is through integrating or infusing ethnic studies across the already existing theological curriculum in a way that does not require new, separate courses in ethnic studies. The subject of ethnicity would then be interwoven into all courses which are taught in a theological institution. For example, a lecturer of New Testament might address the meaning and application of the oneness of God's people advocated in Ephesians for African societies, particularly the church which is riddled with ethnic tensions and barriers. In a theological studies course, the oneness of the human race could be pondered and its meaning for ethnic relations considered in a course such as *A New Humanity in Christ*. In a pastoral studies course on the local church one might wish to consider how ethnicity affects church congregations and to reflect on ways that such situations could be managed or overcome. In an ethics class the immorality of ethnicity could be considered and a rigorous ethical response mounted, alongside inculcating the virtue of tolerance and love, etc.

³⁰ See, Dube, M.W. (2003) *An HIV and AIDS Curriculum for Theological Institutions in Africa*. In: M.W. Dube, (ed.) *HIV/AIDS and the Curriculum: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes*, pp.152–172. WCC Publications, Geneva.

Infusion of ethnic studies in the curriculum of TE in Africa may necessitate investing in faculty in order for them to have the requisite knowledge in ethnic issues which would enable them to link ethnic issues with the courses they teach. Although investing in faculty for ethnic studies may be a hindrance, the advantage of such a way of offering ethnic studies in TE in Africa is that no new courses are added to the curriculum which is often tight and space in it competed for. This way of offering ethnic studies also brings about a critical dialogue between ethnic issues and various subjects in the curriculum which is potentially helpful in bringing about actions and stands against ethnicity in Africa informed with knowledge, understanding and skills from different fields.

Ethnic Studies offered as general or core courses in TE in Africa

Last but not least, given the significance but largely negative nature of ethnicity in shaping Africa and the educational imperative thereby, courses in ethnic studies could be offered as part of the core or general courses which must be taken before graduation. This will mean that all students undertaking a theological education will have the benefit of acquisition of knowledge and understanding of ethnic issues, together with the advocacy that such knowledge and understanding call for. It is possible for such courses to be offered in a way that is specific to traditional or established theological disciplines. Here, for example, a theological institution could offer a core course in ethnic studies specific to those undertaking a biblical studies degree, or offer an ethnic course specific to those studying for a missions degree etc. Such a way of offering an emerging discipline was done some years back by Concordia Theological Seminary in the USA. In this instance the emerging field of study was “missions”, and it was offered in all the traditional theological disciplines by “mission professors” who were “embedded in each of the traditional theological disciplines”.³¹

Conclusion

As I pointed out earlier, ethnicity is largely a negative force shaping most aspects of life in Africa, and a threat to the survival of African statehood as envisaged in the various national constitutions of African countries – a fact that may not be well appreciated. The point cannot be overstated that ethnicity is a crisis in Africa, for it threatens the very survival of Africa. It is a life and death issue which is totally against God’s *telos* for his world. TE in Africa, therefore, would be failing Africa if it does not help students acquire, from the perspective of theology, knowledge and understanding of the forces of ethnicity, and skills through which they can counter these forces and contribute to a

³¹ Schumacher, W.W. (2007) Mission Across the Curriculum: Historical Theology. *Missiology*, 35.4, p.432.

moral, peaceful and just society in the course of their work in the church and the world. Indeed, ethnic studies is an urgent need in TE in Africa.

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