

THE FUTURE OF BAPTIST SEMINARIES IN AFRICA

By

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I. **Opening Remarks**

To God be the glory for this maiden meeting of African Baptist Theological Education Network (ABTEN). We thank the Lord for using the personnel of International Mission Board (IMB), Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) to convey this first assembly. I will like to especially commend Kevin Rodgers, the IMB Cluster leader for East Africa, who has the responsibility to arrange the historic occasion. The significance of this meeting is partly stated in the letter of invitation, “While we desperately needed more churches planted across Africa, we have realized that healthy churches need trained pastors and national missionaries.” (Rodgers, 2018:1). I believe that the establishment and efficient operation of this network will make Baptist witness/work more complete and fulfilling in Africa. This is a very good idea that is coming up very late. Fellow African Baptist theological educators, the implication is that we have no time to waste. We must not decisively and fast too.

I must also express a word of gratitude for being asked to do a presentation on “The Future of Seminaries in Africa.” I took the liberty to focus my presentation on Baptist Seminaries for obvious reasons. The assignment was given to me as the President of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, the oldest and biggest Baptist theological institution in Africa. Africa respect and value wisdom that come with age, a Yoruba proverb says, “Bi omode ba nge igi ninu igbo, agbalagba lo mo ibi ti yoo wo si,” “if a child is cutting down a tree in the forest, it is elder who knows where it will fall.” This means that elders are trusted and expected to understand trends so as to discern and prepare for future events. I ask for prayer support as I prayerfully make this presentation from my experience and from my heart.

It is not very helpful to neglect past lessons and present realities in an attempt to project into the future. I am happy to note that someone else has been commissioned to write on the History of Baptist Seminaries in Africa. I will build on that presentation and highlight the present realities in our Baptist theological education context, before I deal with issues and

proposals for the future. One important purpose of theological education is to support the life and work of the church. Baptist Seminaries in Africa must be concerned with the type of leadership training that will sustain a flourishing church in Africa. This is the concern that I will like to first address in the next two sections.

II. **Towards a Theology of Flourishing Church in Africa**

One biblical text that I consider to be very foundational to develop a biblical theology of the church is Matt. 16:13-19 and I will like to make some contextual comments on the passage.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked, "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ," the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

And I tell you that you are Peter," and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matt. 16:13-19, NIV)

Africa must accept Jesus as her Lord. I think that the first and the most important task of the church in Africa is to confess the lordship, supremacy of Jesus over and above all the gods and goddesses in Africa. The church is to worship Jesus and celebrate his power over all tyrants (sin, death, curse etc) troubling Africa. This confession is necessary because, due to globalization, Africa is now experiencing pluralism (of ideologies, philosophies and religions). The church in Africa must reject emerging philosophical relativism and theological universalism.

Contemporary African life is characterized by economic poverty, social injustice, political instability and religious ferment. The church in Africa has a spiritually challenging mandate to confront and overpower human and superhuman forces, agents and structures of sin, evil and wickedness responsible for hunger, diseases, corruption, dehumanization, misgovernment and godlessness in the continent. Some imperatives of the mission facing the African church include helping the society in human development, responsible citizenship, the practice of servant leadership and theological authenticity.

Any church talk in Africa without the dimension of Kingdom of God is myopic, superficial and inadequate. The church is the symbol of the present and future hope in Africa. I understand that the spiral in the typical church architecture is more than a lightning conductor. It points the immediate community of the church to heaven and God. I also observe that several chapel buildings of educational/theological institutions have the church spiral pointing the academic to God, the ultimate reality.

The eschatological role of the church in Africa includes helping to establish the Kingdom of God in the hearts and lives of the people. The Kingdom of God comes into a people and they are given hope for time and eternity when the sinner is redeemed, when the hungry is fed, when the sick is healed and when the demonized is delivered. Yet, beyond the activities meant for the fulfillment of the contemporary African society, the church is the symbol of the future, the end of history. The church must give hope to Africa.

III. Leadership Training to Sustain a Flourishing Church in Africa

One assumption (and indeed a conviction) of this presentation is that the nature and quality of preparation of church leaders (and other gospel workers) today will contribute significantly to the life, health and work of the church tomorrow. It is for this reason that a necessary component of successful evangelization and mission in a land is to establish a system and institution for training, developing and equipping indigenous leaders. I will like us to reflect on the type of theological educational process that can help to build and maintain flourishing church in our continent. I will focus on:

- Training Environment (model of institution),
- Training Programme (the curriculum),
- Training facilitator (the teachers),
- Training facilities (Library / ICT).

A. The Model of Theological Education/Institution

A study of the models/images of theological institution/education can be very interesting, instructive and challenging. Some of these are theological institutions as a quarry, potter's house, servant/brain of the church. It is exciting to think of theological education as a servant or brain of the church. One of the problems of these models is that they tend to limit focus of theological education on relationship with the church. A theological institution ought to be conscious also of its role to the world. In contemporary educational studies, theological institutions models have been variously classified as:

- (1) Classical; transforming the individual; Athens/Academy; theologia;
- (2) Confessional; knowing God; General/Seminary; doxology;
- (3) Vocational; strengthening the church; Berlin/University; scientia;
- (4) Missional; converting the world; Jerusalem/community; missiology.
- (5) Contextual; planting locally; Auburn/Parish; Koinonia;
- (6) Spiritual; engaging other worldviews; New/Delhi/Ashram; Agora.

Some elements of these models apply to African context but none is adequate or satisfactory in my opinion. John S. Mbiti is my witness. He reports that in the traditional African culture, training for priesthood “may comprise seclusion from the world, instruction in the laws, and sometimes “possession” by the divinity.” (1969:187) I wish then to propose a seventh model of theological/education in Africa thus: kingdom; empowering for spiritual warfare, Nigeria/Desert; Dunamis. I am aware of some possible legitimate objections to my model: the relevance of desert as a symbol of contemporary learning environment is possibly debatable and can be said to be retrogressive.

During the August 2017 Spiritual Retreat of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, I presented the theological institution as a desert/wilderness. I thought this would not be a novel or provocative idea considering the fact that the NBTS site is like a garden, full of mango trees which actually inspired the title of my introductory handbook of African Christian Theology, **Theology under the Mango Tree**. A study of some biblical narratives of the call and commission of people for ministry shows that God takes time to train and prepare them to lead His people: God trained Moses for forty years in the desert (Exodus 3:1); Apostle Paul spent sometime in Arabia (Syrian Desert) between his conversion and ministerial activities (Gal. 1:17). The Lord Jesus Christ prepared for public ministry, fasting for forty days and forty nights, in the desert (Matt. 4:1-11). The desert is a place of discipline, a place of reflection, a place of power encounter and a place of empowerment. I will like Baptist theological institutions in Africa to consider what it means for theological institutions to function like desert as a place for ministerial preparation.

B. The Curriculum of Theological Education

While scholars never agree on/about what constitute the curriculum of an educational programme, nonetheless they agree that curriculum is of critical necessity. Over the years I have tried to design, develop, implement and test curriculum to be balanced, to offer spiritual/academic/ministerial formation. A good curriculum also ought to be church-related, student-centered and societal-friendly. In the context of this presentation what should be the

components and characteristics of a training programme in a desert preparing leaders for worship, service and warfare, including fellowship, discipleship training and stewardship? In an insightful article published in 2007, William Dyrness reasons “that the fundamental challenge of theological education world-wide is the need to address the life and work (the practices) of the Church in its various cultural and political settings and not just simply its beliefs.” (2007:6).

The time has come for theological institutions in Africa to rework and enrich the curriculum inherited from the West, and to help strengthen leaders who would lead churches to function effectively in worship, warfare and service. The entire curriculum of theological education in Africa ought to be strong on kingdom motif: it should be rich in how to help students to discover the secrets, mysteries and keys of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 13:11, 16:19). Apostle Paul elaborated briefly on this mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ in Ephesians 3:2-13. In June 2017 and 2018, Peace House, Gboko, hosted Theological Educators Congress where the place of Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in theological education was emphasized. Theological institutions from forty evangelical churches/denominations in Nigeria attended the Congress.

C. The Facilitator of Theological Education

A theological institution is not only what the students are, it is also what the faculty is. A good faculty will provide a good learning environment conducive for information dissemination, as well as formation of heart, head and hands of students, such that will help to train and equip learners theologically and practically, to interpret and respond to the challenges of the society. Such facilitators should be spiritually/morally vibrant, academically competent and ministerially experienced. In addition, these qualities have to be combined with administrative capacity for an effective institutional head. Founding churches have to identify and saddle such persons with the task of institutional leadership.

But the identity of the theological educator in Africa is one that calls for reflection. Is a theological educator; a Lecturer? Educator? Teacher? Professor? Equipper? Discipler? They are often called lecturers like in secular academic institutions and so are recognized primarily as facilitators of knowledge. This image, which more often overemphasize their cognitive work over and against the affective and the behavioural domains, is a matter of concern by church leaders in Africa. Baptist Theological institutions in Africa must discover what it means

for a theological educator to be a teacher of the word of God and a discipler and equipper of learners.

D. **The Training Resources/Facilities for Theological Education**

Every educational/training institution needs academic and administrative resources to function effectively. These resources can be classified into four categories. The **first** category is resources for biblical studies (introduction, languages, hermeneutics, archaeology and theology). The Bible is the Chief resource for theological education and ministerial training among evangelicals. The Bible is the supreme source to study and acquire the power of God, to train and equip people to lead churches effectively in worship, warfare, service and other good works (2 Tim. 3:17). Thanks to God for the newly published **Africa Study Bible**. This is one of the most important additions to the body of growing literature for the promotion of biblical Christianity in Africa.

Secondly, there is no doubt that Africa will continue to benefit enormously from the western textbooks for references, historical reviews and other purposes. The work of organizations like Theological Book Network, Grand Rapids, Michigan is thus highly commendable. However, **thirdly**, the time has come for the African church leaders, educators and scholars to be assisted and equipped to develop materials that will be contextually relevant to Africa yet faithful to biblical revelation. The International Council for Higher Education West Africa Network got this kind of assistance some time ago to develop Integrated Text Book Series. I am also aware of the ongoing Africa Theological Advance, a project of Nagel Institute to encourage theological institutions in Africa to conduct researches that will lead to formulation and development of curriculum. It is a step in the right direction. The sponsors and organizers are appreciated.

Fourthly and finally, African theological educational system needs assistance for its services to be backed and enhanced with technology. Regular power supply, Internet access and website presence are not optional in the contemporary electronic and globalized world. Theological institutions must train and equip leaders to be effective in the use of technology to communicate/propagate the gospel and minister in the contemporary time.

IV. **Critical Issues about the Future of Baptist Seminaries in Africa**

In the past ten years I have been involved in documentation of historical development of three important Baptist organizations in Nigeria. Interestingly, it has been my task to contribute to the sections on the future of Baptist work for the three publications. I seek your

indulgence for me to give you a brief report of that exercise, it will help us to situate our concerns for the future of theological education in Africa.

Issues and proposals about the future of the Nigerian Baptist Convention published in 2014 for the centenary celebration are (2014:553-582):

- Dynamic and glorious worship,
- Spiritual vitality and renewal,
- Energetic and contemporary missions,
- Faithful stewardship,
- Functional organizational structure,
- Godly and purposeful leadership.

Three out of the thirty five conferences that made up the Nigerian Baptist Convention in 2010 are located in Lagos State. Matters related to the future of Baptist life and work in Lagos and environs as published in The Historical Development of Lagos State Baptist Conference (2010:210-219) are:

- The imperative of capacity building
- Development of Christ-like leadership
- The relevance of Kingdom motif,
- Cooperation for mission enterprise,
- Cultivating spirit of Christian fellowship and unity,
- Maintaining the Baptist heritage and identity.

Issues considered most critical about the future of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary as stated in The Amazing Legacy (2018; 267-269) its 120th anniversary publication are:

- Spirituality and discipleship,
- Maintaining the pride of place,
- Meeting global standards,
- Having global relevance/impact,
- Finance.

With the benefit of information from these three publications I will like to ask leaders of Baptist Seminaries to consider some elements of the following concerns for the future of ABTEN project.

(1) **Preservation of Baptist Identity:** The contemporary religious atmosphere of Africa is very chaotic. In today's globalized world, it is tempting and easy for the Baptist faith to be lost in the ecumenical relationships with other churches and denominations. The wind of Pentecostalism and charismaticism has deposited so much dust on biblical, doctrinal truths and ecclesiastical practices. As we renew our faith and spirituality we must not forget that the

Lord has blessed us with a heritage that is worth preserving and worth sharing. I call on us as theological education leaders to lead our institutions, teachers, students and alumni to value and cherish our simple but profoundly deep Baptist faith, vitality and heritage.

(2) **Commitment to Promotion of Evangelical Faith and Fellowship:** Baptists are a significant part of the protestant tradition and evangelical family. The critical theological affirmations of the evangelical tradition are: personal conversion and a vigorous moral life, the Bible as the true revelation of God to guide conviction and behavior, zeal to disseminate the Christian faith, and emphasis on crucifixion of Jesus and resurrection (Fakre, 1983:191). The great doctrines of the protestant reformation are: Christ alone, grace alone, scripture alone and faith alone. I will like African Baptist theological educators to participate actively in evangelical fellowships so that together we can stand against the growing liberalism, materialism, nominalism and post-modernism of our age.

African Baptists must rise above exclusive tendencies. We must join hands with bodies like Conference of African Theological Institutions (CATI), International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), International Council for Higher Education (ICHE), and International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (IAPCHE).

(3) **Faithfulness to Church Aspiration:** Every Christian educational institution exists to glorify God and theological schools are no exception. Seminaries are first of all and ultimately accountable to God through the body of Christ over and against the academic community. The task of spiritual formation must be consciously elevated above academic and ministerial formation. We must be very passionate to be faithful to God and beware of inordinate desire for recognition that comes through affiliation with and accreditation from secular universities, such that can compromise our call, blur our vision and derail the redeeming work of God in Africa. While we need to submit to accreditation and affiliation with evangelical agencies so as to enhance the quality of our educational services, we must intentionally and energetically focus on the training of the heart of our students. The letter kills, it is the Spirit that gives life (2 Cor. 3:6). Churches are neither impressed nor helped with half-baked ministers who are academic giants but spiritual and moral dwarfs.

(4) **Responding to African Wholistic Context:** The African worldview is wholistic. Our concept of reality is also comprehensive. We must reject the sacred-secular divide. The Christian education and life we have inherited and practiced has been largely other worldly. Our theological enterprise has been politically shy. The privatizing, individualistic tendencies

of our religious expressions has made us irrelevant to some non-churchly but legitimate aspirations of our people. Our theological education curriculum and ministerial training must produce African ministers and citizens who can contribute to the aspiration of Africa for social harmony, economic buoyancy, cultural restoration and political orientation.

(5) **Maintaining Missional Perspective:** While it is in order for some theological educators to specialize in evangelism and missions our entire theological educational curriculum must become more missional. Worship, fellowship, discipleship training and missions are the great tasks of the church. Theological educational system of Africa must be reinvented, re-approached and re-arranged to serve and enable the church to carry out the Great Commission. Every specialization, every training programme, every course of study has to emphasize missions – witnessing to win soul, lifestyle evangelism etc. Theological institutions must keep the fire of evangelism burning in Baptist hearts, lives, churches and organizations in Africa.

(6) **Enhancing Our Collaboration and Networking:** Partnership is the way God works, builds lives and advances societies. God invited the heavenly council to join him to make human beings (Genesis 1:26). The writer of Hebrews call us to perseverance with “Let us” exhortation repeatedly (Hebrews 10:22, 23, 25). No one builds alone (Nehemiah 2:18). Baptist theological institutions should not work alone. Please let us open up to learn from others. Let others also learn from us. We loose so much, too much when we bear our burdens alone. There is plenty of godly and practical wisdom in the Yoruba proverb: “Ka fi owo we owo ni owo fi mo,” it is through rubbing and washing together that hands become clean.

Each Seminary should participate in national and regional meetings. Institutional advancement is much more difficult to achieve when you keep away from attending conferences because of lack of finance. I have come to the realization that our most serious problem in Africa is not finance. It is poverty of commitment to the ideals of the Kingdom of God. I challenge every head of Baptist theological institution to take up this matter with prayer and fasting. We must break the cycle of poverty that tends to slow down the work of God in our hands.

(7) **Advancing the Kingdom of God in Africa**

The world is becoming more pragmatic. The people are becoming more difficult to win for God in Christ. Satan is becoming more desperate. Evil, wickedness and sin are on the ascendancy in many parts of the world. African Baptist theological educators must adopt a

spiritual militant warfare approach. Since the days of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, the Kingdom of God has been advancing through spiritual violence (Matt. 11:12). A desperate disease is desperately cured.

Africa is at a crossroads. We have publicly confessed Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. We have renounced the forces and agents of evil in our land. We have rejected the power and offer of witchcraft. We must seek for the secrets of the Kingdom, and place the keys of Kingdom in the hands of our students and graduates (Matt. 13:11; 16:19). I ask us to align ourselves with the prophecy and promise of the Master, "I will build my church, and the gates of hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18).

V. **An Agenda for the Future**

Where do we go from here? And how do we go there? I will like to ask the International Mission Board to be ready to partner with us collectively and individually as the Lord enables, provides and leads you and as we Africans take responsibility for continuing and further evangelization of our continent through dynamic theological education. Some of the questions that we will have to wrestle with in subsequent years as Baptist Seminaries in Africa face the future are:

1. **Institutional Mission:** How do we formulate and operationalize mission statements and strategic plans to continue the task of evangelization of Africa? What of the sustainability of Christian faith in our dear continent in view of emerging pluralism and Islamic aggression?
2. **Academic/Administrative Competencies:** The task before Seminaries now and in the future requires competent human resources. How do we train and retrain our staff for spiritual buoyancy, academic cutting edge, administrative and professional proficiency?
3. **Financial and Material Resources:** The level of material poverty of many African nations is a matter of concern. It would be naïve not to recognize the challenge in our attempt to offer effective quality ministerial training of international quality and with global best practices, in an environment of crippling poverty. How do we finance theological education in contemporary Africa? What revenue and fund raising strategies are recommendable in our context?
4. **Human Capital and Resources:** Human capital is the most important resource of any organization. African Baptist Seminaries need to be subjected to Organizational Capacity Assessment. How do we recruit, develop and retain God fearing but competent academic, senior administrative and other support staff? Many heads of our institutions are ministers

and theologians with little managerial training and experience. What training programmes can we provide for them?

5. **ICT/Other Facilities:** The industrialized world is fully developed with regular power supply. The educational processes are largely digitalized. How can we help African Baptist Seminaries to move towards computerization of admission process, administration, research, technology enabled teaching-learning and feedback? Many lecture rooms are equivalent to teaching under trees. The weak purchasing power does not give access to current books and journals obtainable through on-line marketing. What is the way out?

6. **Academic Programmes:** It is important for training programmes to integrate the mission of the institution. African Baptist theological educators have been encouraged to (re) design their curricular for greater contextual relevance. The truth is that not many have the personnel with expertise for curriculum design, development, implementation and review. How do we go about it?

7. **Student Services:** Theological education must not become elitist but affordable enough to train more ministers and all church members for Kingdom expansion. Baptist Seminaries in Africa cannot afford commercial rate like private universities, yet they are expected to deliver services of comparable quality. How do we make good quality bricks without straw? Where do we get scholarship to help indigent students?

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