

**COMPETING VALUES AND TRANSFORMATIVE
LEARNING: HOW CAN THE COMPETING VALUES
OF ACADEMIC RIGOR AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION
BE HELD TOGETHER WITHIN THEOLOGICAL
EDUCATION? PROPOSING TRANSFORMATIVE
LEARNING AS AN EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK TO
SAVE THE MARRIAGE**

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Introduction

This article explores a conundrum relevant to Pentecostal theological education. The issue can be stated as a question, "How can core values that underlie Pentecostal tradition be addressed alongside the values of higher education?" Or, to put the question another way, "How can the competing values of academic rigor and spiritual formation be integrated in theological education?"

The article introduces Transformative Learning as a relevant educational lens for viewing theological education arguing that a transformative learning approach fosters both knowledge creation and spiritual formation.

Asking questions – seeking dialogue

This article seeks to raise questions that are relevant to those who are engaged in Christian Higher Education and specifically, for those whose passion is theological education. Asking questions is essential to any research and the basis of reflective practice. In the world of higher education, multiple pressures and endless deadlines precipitate a constant flurry of action, but action without reflection leads to a kind of activism¹ that becomes doing for doing's sake. We must stop and ask questions! Questioning what we do and why we do it is a core process of good practice but asking questions is not the end point. Reflection without action is verbalism², just empty words. The basis

of good practice in higher education is reflective practice or 'praxis', that has rare combination of action with reflection.

It is hoped that by asking questions this article will provoke us to think critically about our priorities and practices as theological educators. There are no ready or easy answers but asking questions may spur us to dialogue with others to seek new understanding and find answers.

Guiding values – setting priorities

The direction of travel for any higher education institution is, to a greater or lesser extent, guided by its underlying values. Though not easily observed guiding values act as a steering rudder navigating an institution through the socio-economic and political waters that make up its context.

What are organisational values? They are something at the heart of an organisation, the "enduring, passionate and distinctive core beliefs".³ In his review of organisational culture Mike Wall concludes that "values relate to the inner core of an organisation" and "are variously described as 'emotional' or 'spiritual'".⁴ Values are linked to behaviour and another definition of values is the "broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others".⁵ It is the values of the institution that set the priorities.

Value-statements can be found written on webpages, brochures and promotional material. These value statements are often the institution's 'espoused values' rather than the actual operational values that guide decisions. Espoused values are often the ideals and aspirations of an institution – often expressed in higher education institutions by words like "quality" or "excellence". In practice these words do little to guide or steer. Espoused values can end up as not much more than empty platitudes unless they are critically reviewed, restated and engaged with.

The decisions and practices of an institution can be observed. For example, who is hired, what is taught, what attention is paid to the hidden (implicit) curriculum, what is rewarded and what stories are told. It is these ways of doing things that allow the underlying values to be intuited. Thus, an institution's guiding values are often found in the implicit way of doing things rather than in the explicit value statements in promotional material.

Since guiding values play such a vital guiding role it is important for institutions to regularly critically re-examine and re-state their guiding values. If underlying values are not critically examined and made explicit there is danger of mission drift as organisations move on prevailing currents and end up far from their intended mission. In higher education generally, the prevailing currents are likely to be economic and socio-political. In theological education provision these same currents influence direction but there are also local currents, such as the numbers needing training (in parts of Africa high, in parts of Europe low). The pragmatics of size and demand, economics and politics can push institutions to delivering curriculum and developing scholars in ways that clash with their core values.

The value of values is that they support, promote and enable the mission of the institution. Values are too important to leave uncritically assumed or to be buried under a plethora of competing demands.

Competing Values in Theological Education

In Christian Higher Education and Theological Education there are tensions that arise from competing values. Higher Education has two main concerns. Firstly, teaching that will prepare students to be responsible citizens and secondly, research that enables the development of knowledge for the common good. The teaching and research roles of Higher Education are not discordant with Christian values and there are Biblical principles that support the work of preparing minds well, of diligent enquiry and responsible citizenship. The tension arises when we consider what is meant by 'Christian Higher Education'. The prefix 'Christian' needs defining. Where 'Christian' refers to learning that is Christo-and Cruci-centred, the focus is on making disciples of Jesus Christ. Certainly disciples of Jesus Christ should be shining examples of responsible citizens contributing to the development of knowledge for the good of all, but the tension arises in preserving the teaching and research roles of Higher Education while at the same time intentionally nurturing sound Christian spirituality. It is a tension of competing values, of seeking to preserve academic rigor and also nurture spiritual formation. This is a marriage that needs work! Kay and Davies' article in this edition of the journal provides a helpful history to Pentecostal Universities

and how these dual and competing values continue to influence many practical aspects such as design of curriculum and teaching approaches.

The tension between fostering knowledge and faith is felt keenly in theological education especially where the aim is preparation for pastoral ministry. Anim and Onyinah (2013)⁶ writing from a Pentecostal perspective state

“ [that the] tension of studying theology and being able to maintain sound spirituality at the same time continues to be a major struggle in the minds of many Pentecostals and Charismatics.” (2013:398)

The struggle is not merely conceptual but a serious, practical tussle to design and deliver curriculum that meets rigorous academic standards while nurturing disciples of Jesus Christ who can go and make disciples.

If the marriage between higher education and spiritual formation is to work a different pedagogy, a different view of learning and a different kind of educator is needed. It is my conviction that a Transformative Learning approach can serve well. Before we introduce the ideas of Transformative Learning let's pause to briefly identify some of the values in the Pentecostal tradition that may shape the priorities of Pentecostal theological education.

A brief exploration of values in Pentecostal Tradition

Many of the values within the Pentecostal tradition are shared with other forms of evangelical Protestantism. For example, the centrality and inerrancy of the Bible, the need for a personal conviction of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and an emphasis on mission are widely accepted convictions (values).⁷ However, Pentecostalism includes other convictions for example, living a Spirit-filled life that is manifest in speaking in tongues. I will leave a proper examination of values in the Pentecostal tradition to scholars of Pentecostalism and will only offer a few remarks to support the call for a more rigorous engagement.

At the roots of 20th century Pentecostalism was a holiness movement that was characterised by prayer and spiritual experience. Pentecostalism in the later 20th century (from 1970s) spread across the globe and its certain characteristics were shared worldwide. Vinay Samuel⁸ (2011) describes Pentecostalism as a global culture. This suggests that there are distinct characteristics of Pentecostalism shaped by an emphasis on certain underlying values. Writing about Pentecostalism as a Global Culture Samuel highlights the following characteristics of Pentecostalism worldwide including:

- Indigenous leadership
- Little cultural dislocation for members
- Strong commitment to family life and traditional gender roles
- Emphasis on healing and deliverance
- Pragmatic and open to spiritual experiences - making Pentecostal churches inclusive and able to draw on ideas, models and strategies from elsewhere (2011: 253-258)

The centrality of Scripture has also been a hallmark of Pentecostalism. Wonsuk Ma⁹ (2011) argues that in Pentecostal tradition the centrality of Scripture is a strong value. However, how this 'Bible-centred' value is expressed in Biblical Studies has changed over the decades. Ma shows how Bible reading in the 1970s was characterised by a literalistic approach, a non-critical devotional reading, stress on Luke-Acts narratives, an apologetic use of Scripture and an eschatological/mission orientation. Since the 1970s Ma suggests that Biblical Studies in the Pentecost tradition have shown greater critical scholarship, are often based on biblical narratives (especially Acts) and have a missional focus. Ma shows the rise of critical scholarship in Pentecostalism that continues to multiply with Journals (e.g. *Agora*, *Pneuma*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*) Associations (e.g. EPTA-European Pentecostal Theological Association) Conferences, books, thesis and dissertations.

Descriptions by scholars such as Samuel and Ma suggest some of the underlying values in the Pentecost tradition. For example, an emphasis on holiness, prayer, spiritual experience, centrality of Scripture, indigenous expression, indigenous leadership and mission orientation.

For the purpose of this discussion I summarise these values into three sets of overlapping values namely; Spiritual (holiness, prayer, spiritual experience), Biblical (centrality of Scripture) and, Missional (mission orientation and mission identity) values.

Serious reflection on these spiritual, biblical and missional values underpinning Pentecostalism is needed to understand how these values are shaping theological education today. It is beyond the scope of this article to explore how each of these spiritual- biblical- missional values have been expressed and the ways in which they have been prioritised over the decades. My plea is that these values are re-engaged, restated and where necessary, reshaped, so as to be a relevant guide to theological education.

From Ma's study of emerging Biblical studies within the Pentecost tradition we see one example of how traditional Pentecostal values are being reshaped. Pentecostals in the late 20th century were so focused on the spiritual life (and especially the work of the Holy Spirit) that they placed little importance on formal study. While the centrality of scripture was a Biblical value, formal study and academic rigor were not a priority. Space for theological education and reflection was competing with a stronger value namely, authentic spiritual experience. It is not surprising therefore, that Pentecostal scholarship has taken time to emerge and Pentecostal Universities have needed to restate their Biblical values to include scholarship. Today Pentecostals are making a valuable contribution to Biblical scholarship¹⁰.

Values are not static and must be critically reviewed and renewed for them to remain valuable guides. For example, there are vital questions concerning how holiness – as a spiritual value – is understood and relates to making disciples today. According to Vinay Samuel (2011) one of the pressing challenges for the Pentecostal church worldwide is the challenge of Christian ethics. Scripture is clear that faith in Yahweh has ethical consequences.¹¹ God says “Be holy because I am holy” (Leviticus 11: 44-45; 1 Peter 1:16) At its roots Pentecostalism focused on holiness yet a recovery of holiness is needed that restates holiness as more than a denial of certain worldly things (dancing, drugs, dating and so forth.) Holiness can be restated as a life consecrated to serving God and God alone. ..

Jesus said you cannot serve God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24, Lk16:13) and further, we serve God as we love our neighbour – a radical command that has all kinds of ethical consequences! Vinay Samuel reminds us that a recovery of holiness also requires that human agency is restated. Where the destructive and divisive work of Satan is given focus and used to answer the problem of temptation and sin then human agency is downplayed and the result can be passivity in dealing with sin and temptation.

However, my interest in this present discussion is not to do the work of critically reflecting on the values in Pentecostal tradition but to ask how these values (spiritual-biblical-missional) may influence theological education today and tomorrow. As Pentecostalism globalized, their values have travelled and interacted with other Christian traditions. Pentecostalism has and is influencing other Christian traditions and at the same time there are influences shaping Pentecostalism. I believe that values in the Pentecostal tradition can offer important critique and insights to a wider discussion about theological education, especially as it continues to be developed across Africa. Isabel Phiri and Dietrich Werner (2013)¹² highlight several issues facing theological education in Africa today including; the rapid numerical growth of the church, the social and public relevance of Christian theology on the African continent, the need to strengthen collaboration and quality standards for theological education and the urgent need for cooperation between denominations and denominational universities. The spiritual-biblical-missional values of the Pentecostal tradition can offer a frame in which to hold – and reform – other values including technical, scientific or ethical values.

Today, Pentecostal institutions in the global south are caught in a juggling act as they hold on to traditional values while balancing the demands of rising numbers that need training with rigorous requirements of accrediting bodies. Upon these demands is added the challenge to effectively equip graduating students for pastoral ministry in rapidly changing and ethically challenging contexts.

Facing such complexities, it is hardly surprising that traditional Pentecostal values can become buried under more pragmatic and expedient concerns. Perhaps it is time to recognise and restate those

values that shaped the explosion of the Pentecostal church 50 years ago. If these values are simply assumed, they may not be recognised and restated in ways that are relevant to the current and future needs of the church. Without an intention to hold these values there is a danger of mission drift.

What Kind of Leaders?

One key concern is that theological education is the training of the churches' leaders of tomorrow. In a recent publication by *Globethics.net*¹³ Singh and Stuckelberger (2017)¹⁴ warn that values are caught and shape future leaders. They state that:

“Higher education is leadership education. The values and virtues practiced in universities heavily influence the future leaders... Many professionals with a higher education are excellent specialists but moral crooks.” (2017:36)

Christian Higher Education institutions need to examine their underlying values to ensure that their priorities foster the training of excellent thinkers and exemplary ethical leaders for the church of tomorrow.

The Cost of Values

Before we move on, there is a warning in promoting guiding values. Values have a price-tag. Values cost something. For example, promoting spiritual-biblical-missional values requires educators with spiritual-biblical-missional capacity. In other words, developing educators who are not only subject specialists but also role models and can provide the kind of mentoring and pastoral care that nurtures spiritual formation. Educators who can critically reflect on both the Biblical text and the context. Educators who are experienced mission practitioners, being effective in communicating the good news in various contexts. Educators who are spiritually mature role models, giving time in the curriculum to pastoral groups and mentoring. That is costly investment – in human resource terms - but values cost something.

If we are concerned for the spiritual health and maturity of tomorrow's church leaders, for leaders who can handle God's word well, who can bring God's word into the contexts of our broken world, then perhaps the cost of promoting spiritual-biblical-missional values should be seen as a wise and worth-while investment.

We may count the cost and be prepared to prioritise guiding values but exactly how are these spiritual-biblical-missional values to be engaged and fostered alongside the value of academic rigor? Here we turn to an approach to higher education and adult learning called Transformative Learning.

Transformative Learning as a Framework for Theological Education

After years of designing teaching and learning in Higher Education contexts, I have seen how the intentional use of a transformative learning framework is able to integrate the competing values of academic rigor and spiritual formation. This approach to teaching and learning is also able to integrate the kinds of spiritual-biblical-missional values discussed above. Therefore, I offer Transformative Learning as a useful framework for developing theological education today and tomorrow.

What is Transformative Learning?

Transformative Learning is learning that goes beyond 'addition' (adding to what is already known), to learning that fosters change (transformation in what we know) leading to new ways of thinking and being. This is close to Paul's exhortation in Romans chapter 12 verse 2, "*metamorphousthe*" ('*be transformed*').

Transformative Learning understands the learner as a unique and whole person, recognising that they are shaped by personality and preferences, family, culture, experiences and context. Transformative learning employs participatory approaches to teaching and learning seeing the teacher as a guide and facilitator of learner rather than the 'expert' who is there to download their knowledge into empty minds. Transformative Learning rests on three core processes of learning namely; critical reflection, dialogue and action.

A working definition of Transformative Learning (2014) that draws from a number of education theorists and practitioners can be stated thus:

Transformative learning engages learners in constructing new ways of thinking and being and is fostered by a purposive and social process that supports the whole person. (Wall, 2014:48)¹⁵.

Transformative learning enables learners to review their taken-for-granted assumptions through learning how to ask questions and to reflect and dialogue with others. Transformative Learning engages the whole person in the learning process, recognising that 'whole person learning' has a cognitive (thinking), emotional (attitudes) and social (relationships) dimensions.¹⁶

Employing a Transformative Learning approach to theological education means viewing the learner as a person whose thinking, attitudes, motivations, emotions and relationships are all impacted by the learning. In a Transformative Learning approach learning experiences inside and outside the classroom are integrated and made explicit so that learners see the importance of giving attention to all three dimensions of learning (thinking-emotions-relationships) and to connecting and applying theories with practice.

A Transformative Learning approach employs the whole curriculum – both the formal curriculum and the informal (implicit) curriculum so that the aspirations of knowledge creation and spiritual formation are achieved inside and outside the classroom.

A Transformative Learning approach requires the formation of a learning community where teachers and learners participate together in the shared learning process so that together they learn how to learn from one another.

How is Transformative Learning fostered?

For disciples of Jesus, transformation is not a hoped-for 'add-on' in the process of learning but is the essence of learning itself. If we are seeking to nurture this kind of learning in theological education, then intentionally adopting Transformative Learning approaches may be helpful. Three essential aspects for fostering Transformative Learning are the design of the curriculum, the formation of a learning community and building the capacity of the educators.

In designing a curriculum one must keep in mind the whole person and offer learning tasks that connect thinking and emotions and challenge learners relationally. The curriculum needs to integrate theory and practice so that ideas are applied to real life situations.

Relationships play a crucial role in learning. Long after the formal content of the curriculum has faded from memory the relationships will be remembered. The classroom needs to be experienced as a hospitable learning space where openness and acceptance are demonstrated leading to the establishment of trust. Where trust is established students and teachers are able to learn together and from one another.

Fostering transformation depends upon educators who are able to demonstrate their own capacity for critical reflection and dialogue. Alongside textbooks we need text-people who demonstrate emotional maturity and good relationships as well as academic excellence.

Conclusion

The values of Christian Higher Education institutions need to be critically reviewed and reshaped so that Christian institutions are guided by these values rather than inadvertently drifting on the prevailing economic and socio-political currents. In Pentecostal tradition there are overlapping spiritual, biblical and missional values that need to be re-engaged and re-stated so that they remain relevant and vital in shaping the priorities of theological education not only within the Pentecostal tradition but also more widely.

The marriage between academic excellence and spiritual formation has long been strained but a Transformative Approach to learning may be able to offer a coherent framework for holding these priorities together.

Transformation is the essence of learning, not an optional add-on for Christo-and Cruci-centric institutions. Therefore, intentionally seeking to foster transformative learning is a priority for those who seek to equip followers of Jesus Christ to be “mature” and equipped “for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:12.)

A Transformative Learning approach comes with a price-tag for it calls for a renewal of the curriculum, the formation of learning communities and the mentoring of educators who can guide and demonstrate what it means to be lifelong learners. Are we able to pause in the relentless activity of higher education to ask the questions that matter or are we too busy to reflect on how the leaders of the church tomorrow are being formed in the theological institutions of today?

Endnotes

- ¹ Activism here is not meant in the political sense of vigorous campaigning to bring about change, but doing for doing's sake without regard to why it is done or what the outcomes are.
- ² Verbalism is defined as "words only, without any real meaning" Collins English Dictionary. Paulo Freire in his classic book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (First published in Portuguese in 1968, Translated into English 1970) wrote about 'praxis' where informed action brings freedom.
- ³ E. Olsen.; (2007) *Strategic Planning* Hoboken, Wiley, 105
- ⁴ Wall, Michael.; (2015) *Understanding Organisational Values*. PhD Thesis London School of Theology
- ⁵ Hofstede ,G.; (2005) *Cultures and Organizations - Software of the Mind* London: McGraw-Hill
- ⁶ Anim, Emmanuel & Onyinah, Opoku.; (2013) *Pentecostal Theological Education- a Ghanaian Perspective* pp393-401
- ⁷ Bebbington, David W.; (1989) *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* Bebbington sets out a quadrilateral of evangelical convictions and attitudes that he calls Biblicism, cruci-centrism, conversionism and activism.
- ⁸ Vinay, Samuel.; (2011) Ch 11 *Pentecostalism as a Global Culture: A Response*. In *Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel* Eds: Dempster, Klaus & Petersen Published: WIPF STOCK, Eugene, Oregon
- ⁹ Ma, Wonsuk. (2011) Ch 3 *Biblical Studies in the Pentecostal Tradition: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. In *Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel* Eds: Dempster, Klaus & Petersen Published: WIPF STOCK, Eugene, Oregon
- ¹⁰ For example, Craig Keener, Gordon Fee, Amos Yong, Stanley M. Horton, Stephen Seamands, Opoku Onyinah, Ogbu Kalu and Asamoah-Gyadu are among several contemporary Pentecostal theologian scholars.

- ¹¹ Wright, Christopher.; (2010) *Old testament Ethics for the People of God* IVP
- ¹² Phiri, Isabel, & Werner, Dietrich.; (2013) *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa* . Regnum
- ¹³ www.globethics.net Globethics.net is a global community with an online library, publications and information to encourage critical thinking and dialogue.
- ¹⁴ Singh, D. & Stuckelberger, C.;Editors.; (2017) *Ethics in Higher Education. Values-Driven Leaders for the Future* Globethics.net
- ¹⁵ Wall, Ruth.; (2014) *Preparing adults for crossing cultures. A transformative learning approach to Christian mission training.* PhD Thesis. Institute of Education, University College London
- ¹⁶ Wall, Ruth.; (2015) pp181-193 in *Reflecting and Equipping for Christian Mission* Eds: Bevans, S. Chai, T. Jorgensen, K and Jennings N. Regnum, Oxford.