

**THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
OGBOMOSO, NIGERIA**

**2019 International Theological Education Conference  
President's Address**

**IS THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH ASSURED IN  
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA?**

The vitality and growth of the Christian faith in Africa, Asia and Latin America in the twenty first century is certainly a thing of joy to the global church. While the decline of Christianity in the western world is a matter of regret, it calls for critical reflection on the future of Christian faith in the majority world. What is the future of Christianity that is now growing like wild fire in Africa? The Christian faith once flourished in the first century in both Asia Minor and Northern Africa. Vibrant churches were planted by Apostle Paul in Turkey and beyond. Will sub-Saharan Africa become North Africa in the future? Will Nigeria become another Turkey? What do we make of the painful observation that with the full presence of vibrant churches in some African nations, the societies are also filled with social vices like materialism, corruption, poverty, kidnapping, armed robbery and misgovernment? What of the elements of truth in the popular but costly joke that “African Christianity is one-mile-long but one inch deep”? Will that kind of Christian faith survive in Africa? While the trend described above is a complex phenomenon, the intention of this author<sup>1</sup> is to call attention to an aspect of the matter: the critical need to raise visionary, transformative leaders for the church in Africa.

One presupposition of this article is that, the future of Christian faith will be guaranteed in Africa if church/Christian leaders of today are trained to make the gospel of the kingdom to have transformative impact on African nations. The African church is in dire need of theological institutions that will be preoccupied with raising and multiplying transformative learners (church pastors, theological educators and civil leaders) that will be committed to living and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, to contribute to the transformation of African nations. These two issues of vision and leadership are closely interwoven and I will like to analyze their interrelatedness to sustain Christian faith in the African context.

What type of theological education will guarantee the future of genuine Christian faith in Africa? Africa is a bright continent with sunny, tropical, climate. Quite unfortunately and ironically/paradoxically too, many African societies are in darkness because they lack leaders with vision for the transformation of their societies. How true is the parable of the Lord Jesus Christ: when a blind man leads another blind man both will fall into a pit (Luke 6:39). Evangelical theological educators in Africa need to work

with clear and bright institutional vision. In the recent ecclesiological parlance, African theological training programmes need to be more purpose – driven.<sup>2</sup> I wish to assert that the future of Christian faith is assured in Africa if theological education offered is able to equip learners to respond effectively to the contextual realities of the society.

My overarching burden now is how will theological education bring better transformative impact to sub-Saharan Africa? In February 2017 I conducted a spiritual emphasis for the NBTS staff and students on a reflection of Matthew 6:25-34 with the theme “Wanted: Gospel Ministers Who are Kingdom Workers.” I wish to propose that theological education must be revitalized in Africa with kingdom motif for the leaders. Educational processes, including curriculum and methodologies, are to be conducted with the goal to establish the Kingdom of God in the hearts and lives of African students who will carry out such kingdom ministries in the church and society. The curriculum of ministerial education should be focused to help students access the knowledge, secrets, mysteries and keys of the kingdom (Matthew 13:11, 16:19). This emphasis on preaching and living the gospel of the kingdom is imperative for theological education to serve and enable the African church to fulfill its prophetic and missionary roles in the continent.

I wish to report sadly that the kingdom of God focus of the gospel is been largely compromised in many places in Africa. Many African Christian religious activities have become largely utilitarian. I am inwardly troubled and a little disturbed. At the risk of sounding alarming I wish to state that many African preachers are deviating from the true gospel. Rather than concentrate on the gospel of redemption that will transform lives and societies, many are preoccupied with “other gospels” of physical/material possession and achievements – money, positions, pleasures (Gal. 1:6-7). When the church abandon the authentic gospel message and lifestyle a society is made poorer.

The mission of theological education in Africa is crying for renewal of emphasis to establish the fear of God in people and righteousness in the land. (2 Chronicles 7:14). I was privileged to attend the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Association of Evangelicals in Africa in November 2016; I pleaded that evangelical theological education remain committed to training in godliness (I Timothy 4:8). Knowledge of academic theories and sharp ministerial skills cannot redeem souls, grow the church, transform society and expand God’s Kingdom except church and Christian leaders are spiritually formed and buoyant. For the Christian faith to survive in Africa, theological education must accept the priority of spiritual formation. Contextual application of global best practices in education and administration, including improvement in facilities, and the acquisition and use of technology, become more significantly profitable to the extent that they are able to enrich and energize kingdom vision.

Now more specifically to the issue of the contribution of quality leadership to preserve the Christian faith in Africa. Africa is bedeviled with many, many problems: social disharmony, cultural perversion, moral erosion, economic poverty, political disorientation and religious deception. I align myself with Christian analysts who affirm that one great need to transform the contemporary African society are leaders who would model the Christian faith, biblical obedience and true discipleship. Many African nations are deficient of exemplary, honest, purposeful, and sacrificial leadership. Africa need more political leaders like Nelson Mandela of South Africa and religious leaders like Jasper Akinola of Nigeria.

The truth of the matter is that regrettably, with regard to leadership election and performance, the African church is not better than the larger society. The choice of apex leaders of many churches, denominations and organizations is sometime done with quarrels, intrigues, desperation and sometimes mud-slinging litigation. Thus, personality clashes resulting from ego not disciplined, sit-tight syndrome and such other manifestations of poor leadership usually associated with partisan party politics and governance are also common in church and para-church establishments. Thus, a desperate Christian witness needed in Africa is quality church / societal leadership. One way to contribute to the survival of the Christian faith in Africa is for theological educators to embody and exemplify principled, godly Christ-centred, servant leadership. Only teachers who serve as role models can train, equip and transform learners who in turn will offer Christian service and leadership with transformative impact on the African society.

Theological institutions need help in many areas: competency in administration/management, standard finance system, staff development, facilities (especially library and technology), review of curriculum to become more balanced, student-centred, church-related and society-friendly with more effective instructional delivery and scholarship assistance for students. However, I am of the opinion that ***one of the most critical needs to assure the future of Christian faith in Africa is to develop, encourage and support heads and teachers of theological institutions to offer visionary services and transformative leadership*** characterized by:

- A faith that is equally true to the biblical revelation and authentic African spirituality,
- Critical reflection on contemporary Christian praxis/practice so as to increase the root and depth of African Christianity,
- Dialogue with and response to socio-economic poverty, hunger, ill health and other inhuman development indices plaguing the continent,

- Victory over the growing and pervasive storms of liberal Christianity globally through good hermeneutics and theology,
- Breakthrough from enslavement to religious and cultural superstitions and an antidote to the upsurge of aggressive Islamic aggression,
- The practice of evangelical faith and obedient Christian life in the context of emerging pluralism of ideologies, philosophies and religions in Africa and beyond.

How will the Christian faith survive in sub-Saharan Africa? One strategy is to develop spiritually buoyant, academically competent and ministerially experienced faculty who will live, lead and teach transformatively.

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<sup>2</sup>I am happy to note that this is the first objective of the Vital Sustainability Initiative (VSI) project. I am happy to report that the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria has benefited tremendously from a renewal of mission through involvement in the Vital Sustainability initiative. NBTS is one of the sixteen schools participating in the VIS project.