

Navigating through institutional identity in the context of a transformed United Church of Zambia University College in Zambia

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The article investigated the rising trend that has not received attention in Zambian scholarship of institutions that started as theological institutions transforming or shifting from the provision of theology only to other disciplines to meet the growing demand for higher education. Using the United Church of Zambia University College (UCZUC) as a case in point, the paper explored how the institution had experienced and repositioned itself in the context of transformation with reference to its identity and diversity from a descriptive case study perspective. Data was collected through document analyses and recorded interviews and informed by secularization of institutions' theories. The study established that the institution had transformed into a university college and diversified its programmes from theology alone to other disciplines in order to broaden its scope of service in the area of education support to the nation. However, the integration of theology and other secular disciplines in the institution had not only transformed the institutional identity but also diversified the institution, and this required finding a balance between the two. Transformation had also initiated new marketing strategies to sell its products (programmes) to the public. The paper argues that in the context of sustainability challenges associated with theological education, UCZUC presents a potential success story of theological institutions' quest to maintain viability in modern times through striving for active and intentional integration of sacred and secular (theology with other disciplines) as a contribution to higher education and society.

Introduction

The United Church of Zambia University College used to offer theology only but has now expanded the scope to include School of Education, and School of Humanities and Social Sciences in addition to the School of Theology ... (Kabaila 2014)

The 1990s' changes in legislation through the 1996 national policy document 'Educating our Future' provided for the establishment of private universities in Zambia (Ministry of Education 1996:4). Since then, Zambia has witnessed the growth of Christian universities with some institutions, which started as theological institutions transforming into Christian universities. For example, by 2013, the Ministry of Education reported that there were 16 government colleges of education, 17 private colleges of education, 21 private universities and 3 public ones (Ministry of Education n.d.). As of 2017, there were 55 private universities in Zambia (Gazette Notice No. 232 and 561 of 2017).

Undoubtedly, the history of Christian universities in Zambia is intertwined with the history of theological education which traces its beginning to the 'early missionary efforts aimed at converting the locals' (Carmody 2000; Snelson 1974:269). In order for the theological institutions to diversify, compete and sustain themselves, deliberate efforts that border on commercialising and commodifying the role of a theological institution in the 21st century have taken place in Zambia. For example, until very recently, renowned theological colleges in Zambia such as Justo Mwale Theological College and United Church of Zambia Theological College (UCZUC) have transformed into university colleges and in turn expanded their programmes on offer to other disciplines.

The transformation has come with its own challenges and opportunities, and a significant complexity centres on how diversifying programmes from theology alone to other secular disciplines creates an institutional identity crisis. More so, diversification of education provision at the UCZUC brought with it new models of operations such as the adoption of the market or business model in order to facilitate the running of new programmes alongside the traditional

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theological education programmes. However, by adopting a market model, the institution has indirectly commercialised and commodified university education. This transformation and commercialisation of programmes offered at an institution of theological education have received little scholarly attention in Zambia. Therefore, this article explored how UCZUC had experienced and repositioned itself in the context of transformation with reference to its identity and diversity.

Brief historical perspective of the University College

The United Church of Zambia University College, whose comprehensive history as a provider of theological education is yet to be written in the history of Christian higher education, has a special place in the history of Zambia. For example, Kangwa (2017) has discussed how Goodall-Nielsen report inspired the formation of the UCZ Theological College. Weller and Linden (1984:151) note that the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) was a result of African initiative and is a unique church because it grew out of the work of four separate missions, each representing a different type of Christianity: These were the London Missionary Society, Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, the Presbyterians of the Free Church of Scotland and the Primitive Methodists. Thus, the UCZ was formed when the churches from these missionary groups merged in 1965 (Chuba 2005).

As a college, the theological institution began in the 1930s when it started as a Bible school at Mbereshi, Kashinda Mission, in Mporokoso District of Northern Zambia, where in 1949, the London Missionary Society provided training in the Ministry of the Word and Sacrament (UCZ 2001). The transition from a Bible school to a theological college took place between the 1930s and 1960s (Henkel 1989). In 1949 and 1959, the institution was called the Church of Central Africa in Rhodesia ministerial training school and United Church of Central Africa in Rhodesia, respectively.

After the union of the missionary societies, the college took on its current name. In 1961, the mission of training the clergy moved to the present site within Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation grounds, in Kitwe, on the Copperbelt province of Zambia, which at that time was called the Mindolo Mission (Mwale & Chita 2014:98; UCZ 2001). Today, the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation grounds are home to numerous colleges, with the majority providing teacher education.

Transformation of theological education institutions to universities in wider scholarship

The transformation of theological education institutions into Christian universities is a global phenomenon despite being a new phenomenon in Zambia. Glanzer, Carpenter and Lantinga (2011) observed that the old trend still continues of colleges, which began as missionary endeavours or Bible schools gradually expanding their programmes with fewer Christian institutions operating as traditional universities. This drift has largely been linked to remodelling of various

institutions to suit the changing times. All Christian institutions that originated between 1700 and 1850 in Europe and Latin America were secularised largely because of the secularisation of nation-states and national institutions of higher education that were previously religious (Glanzer et al. 2011).

The debate surrounding transformation (a heuristic term that refers to changes in higher education, Reddy 2004:7) in theological education has been centred on, among other aspects, its place in the public university. For example, Venter (2016) problematised the place of theology at South African universities in the wake of developments on campuses that propelled the necessity for greater commitment to radical transformation in higher education to public attention.

One of the contemporary discourses identified in transformation was the irony of the declining place of theology in public universities (Zakai 2007). As Glanzer et al. (2011) had observed, this has been linked to the growing influence of secularisation, resulting into the question of whether theology ought to receive space at a public institution such as a university, and the implications of such a location in a pluralistic and democratic country for theology itself (Hauerwas 2007; Kelsey 2009; Werner 2012).

Suffice to note that transformation has occurred in different sectors of higher education, including in theological education. For example, from a South African context, Venter (2016) spotted numerous changes that had taken place in theology such as some faculties being phased out; some departments being reconfigured; widening access and appointment of persons either excluded or marginalised; and revised curricula. Beyers (2016) explored the place of the faculty of theology at a South African university, while Landman (2013:239), in her overview of theological education in South Africa, observed that theological education in South Africa had developed from being white, male and denominational to liberational, ecumenical and inclusive of gender, race and belief over time.

In Zambia, the recent traces of transformation have occurred not so much outside theological institutions, but within theological institutions by opening up to other disciplines. This transformation was supported by scholars such as Van der Walt (2010:129) who argue that there is currently a greater need for Christian universities than theological schools in Africa and suggest that one way of addressing this is that existing theological schools could broaden their sphere of influence by further growth and by developing other faculties.

Whereas this reality has occurred in Zambian theological education, little attention has been given to show how this transition has led to the commercialisation and commodification of university education in the context of a theological institution founded and built on a religious character.

Defining a Christian university colleges and institutional identity

Christian university college and theological education institutions are concepts that need clarification owing to their diverse usage in different contexts. With regard to the former, Benne (2001) has provided meaningful insights on the typologies of the range of church-related colleges and universities that help to understand Christian university colleges.

Benne classifies church-related colleges into orthodox, critical mass, intentionally pluralist and accidentally pluralist and opines that the category of an institution can be determined by examining eight aspects of an institution's life (the public relevance of its Christian vision, public rhetoric, membership requirements, the role of the religion or theology department and whether any such courses are required, the nature and frequency of chapel, the overall ethos, the degree of support by the sponsoring church and the role of the associated church in matters of governance (2001). As the types move from orthodox to accidentally pluralist, they become more secular. Therefore, Benne's basic division was found helpful because the emphasis was on a Christian university college that uses its particular Christian identity and vision as an important organising paradigm.

Consequently, we are defining as 'Christian' that university college that currently acknowledges and embraces a Christian or denominational confessional identity in their current mission statements and also alters aspects of its policies, governance, curriculum and ethos in the light of its Christian identity (for instance, required courses in Christian theology or the Bible; the presence of Christian worship at protected times that are supported by the institution, a college-funded Christian chaplaincy) (Schroeder 2002:9). These attributes in turn shape and inform the identity of the institution as Christian. Most importantly, a Christian university college is also one that has been established and registered by the *Higher Education Act* (No. 4 of 2013). While Theological education can simply be understood as the study about God, it has also been defined as the transmission of Christian memory, the education for God's peace and justice, and the formation for church and community leadership (Werner et al. 2010). Formation for church and community leadership has been envisioned as being more likely to be pursued through individual faculty contributions and extra-curricular activities in protestant theological institutions (Smith 1999; Thomas 2008). Stuebing (1999) has adequately explored spiritual formation in theological education in Africa using the case of five selected theological colleges. We, therefore, define theological education institutions as those institutions that offered theology alone as a discipline.

Research project

This study arose out of the observable realities of institutions that started as theological institutions with the aim of training ministers, transforming or shifting from the provision of

theology only to other disciplines to meet the growing demand for higher education in Zambia, a trend that has not received attention in academia. While this shift can be deemed as a contribution towards widening access to university education, the perceived financial gains cannot be overruled because of the commercialisation and commodification of theological education in the process. This study therefore sought to explore how the transformation of the university college had shaped the institutional identity amidst diversified programmes. This study is therefore deemed significant by way of contributing to the emerging body of knowledge on Christian higher education in Zambia and the broader studies on the trends of theological education in a globalised context.

Theoretical framework

The remodelling of theological institutions into Christian universities has largely been framed around secularisation theories (Glanzer et al. 2011). Secularisation is spoken of in terms of its inclination to institutions, as Sommerville (2009:197) claims that secularisation of institutions points to the *transformation* of an institution that had once been considered religious in character into something not thought of as religious.

In this regard, extensive studies have been conducted on the concept of secular and sacred (Bosch 1991; Bourdillon 1990; Ellis & Ter Haar 2004; Fox 2005; Panneneberg 1989; among others). It is acknowledged that secularism is an ideology where God, religion or the sacred is removed or underestimated within the public arena (Shorter & Onyancha 1997). This understanding is expanded to denote material or physical realities: whether nature, humanity or related disciplines. The sacred is simply used in general terms to designate an association with the divine, often represented through theology or religion (Eliade 1987). The transition from theological institutions to Christian universities is thus perceived as a move from the sacred to the secular as other disciplines are embraced (Sommerville 2009).

Other than the use of the concept by some sociologists as a particular theory whose contents are subject to debate, secularisation as a term has also been used to refer to a change in governance, control or influence from a particular church to secular rulers or a change to lay leaders and teachers from church leaders and teachers (laicisation) (Altschuler 1994:147–154). It has further been used broadly to refer to the overall weakening of Christianity's or religion's role in the university's mission, governance, curriculum, beliefs, practices and ethos (Arthur 2008), while others link it to the privatisation of religion which involves religious higher education moving solely to the realm of private education (Glanzer 2008).

Secularisation theories are used for purposes of locating the study. As such, when secularisation is applied to Christian higher education, it predicts the eventual secularisation of all religious colleges and universities and thus uses the concept

in relation to theological education institutions moving towards the realm of private education and the associated weakening of religion's role in a university's curriculum (Sommerville 2009). Secularisation therefore becomes a lens through which the transition (institutional identity versus diversity) of UCZUC from a theological college to a university college is interpreted.

This article argues that in essence, the transformation of the UCZUC into a university college and most especially the expansion from theology to other 'secular' disciplines not only has secularist tendencies, but it is also an avenue of sustaining theology as a discipline in a context of rising challenges of offering theological education only. Therefore, striking a balance between theology and other disciplines within the institution was a move towards navigating through the tension between institutional identity and diversity or the old (theology alone) and the new (diversified programmes) in a context of change.

Method

The study employed qualitative methods and a descriptive case study in particular because of the explorative nature of the phenomenon. Du Plooy (2009:48) advances that exploratory research can be used to obtain new insights and familiarity with unknown situations, conditions, policies and behaviour. Case studies present the researcher with multiple methods of data collections (Creswell 2003). For example, Yin (2003) recommends six types of information to collect: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations and physical artefacts. In this regard, the main methods of collecting data were recorded interviews and document analyses.

The central question that sought to be addressed was centred on how the transformation of a theological institution had shaped its identity in a context of change. Fieldwork conducted in 2012 before the college become a university college informed also this study. The article also relied on what Brunson and Lotter (2011) refer to as auto-ethnography in the field of qualitative research, where the participant gets the opportunity to write about his or her personal experiences within a particular situation.

Sample

The respondents in the study were purposively sampled as Mason (2002) observes that purposive selection of participants in a study is based on their relevance to the aim of the research. Creswell (2007) advances that the unit of analysis for case studies can be an event, a programme, an activity or more than one individual; hence, nine participants (students and church ministers). These included three students who were asked to write about their experiences (one who just graduated, theological and non-theological students), and six church ministers (both male and female) who had studied at a theological college before the transformation were

interviewed on their perceptions of the transformation of theological colleges into university colleges.

The sample was chosen on the basis of relevance and accessibility (Bryman 2001:97). The participants were drawn from the recently transformed United Church of Zambia University College, and data were collected between October 2015 and April 2016. The single case of the institution was also purposively sampled, and it is acknowledged that the United Church of Zambia University College is not the only recently transformed institution but has a special place in the history of theological education in Zambia.

However, the names used herein are not their real names for ethical reasons. Consequently, the findings in this article are not for purposes of generalisation, but may be used as stepping stones to understanding the phenomena in transforming theological institution into university college in terms of what becomes of the institutional identity amidst diversity, commercialisation and commodification of theological education.

Data analysis

The data in the study were inductively analysed through description of the case and themes of the case (Creswell 2007). In this regard, the analysis of the data was conducted by following the process of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006:77–101), which can be used across different methods (Boyatzis 1998:78). It involves the generation and application of codes to the data, and the identification, analysis and report of patterns (themes). Insights from scholarships on the phenomena aided analysis and interpretation of findings. Therefore, the findings are reported using the themes that emerged in the study.

Results

Transforming from a theological college to a university college

Though scholars in the past have argued that 'theological institutions and departments of theology and religious studies and university faculties of theology tend to be conservative, moving at a snail's pace when it comes to curriculum transformation' (Messer 2004: 162), UCZUC like many other theological institutions in Zambia defied this assertion when they started dreaming of turning the college into a university with secular programmes (Kangwa 2017).

In 2014, UCZUC embarked on a major transformation. Reverend Jonathan Kangwa, in his capacity as Registrar of the United Church of Zambia University College at the time, noted that the institution had broadened its scope of service in the area of education support to the nation (Kabaila 2014). In this regard, the institution had registered with the Ministry of Education under the 1999 *University Act* and 2013 *Higher Education Act*, in order to widen its horizon by opening more educational programmes to cater for the demand of the Zambian community and beyond (Kabaila 2014). The new

schools established were Theology and Religious Studies, Education and Humanities and Social Sciences. In addition, the institution was in the process of opening a School of Agriculture and Veterinary at Chipembi Farm College in Chisamba near Lusaka.

Accounting for the transformation from theology only to other disciplines (diversity) institutional identity amidst the transformation

The major reasons that accounted for the transformation were related to the need for the institution to respond to the social demand for university education:

'The university was compelled to expand after realisation that apart from educating the clergy, the institution could still do more to the development process of the country by training leaders needed for effective governing of the country.' (Kabaila 2014, UCZ Synod news, 2nd April)

The institution's mission statement captures the aspirations and motivations in the transformation, 'To seek and impart knowledge that transforms the society through selfless service and values that promote the wellbeing of all God's creation'.

Other factors were associated with the quest to be relevant to the society and the need to reposition the institution in the light of unsustainable models of running the theological college. In an interview, a participant in the study noted that:

'The college was supported through the church headquarters in Zambia (representing the synod). In this approach, sponsors dictate what has to be done in the college. This model encouraged the dependence on donations to run the affairs of the institutions and thus not sustainable in the long run.' (Mwala, 18 June 2012)

Thus competition for scarce resources in the church and in the provision of tertiary education also accounted for the transformation. As other theological education institutions broadened their programmes, UCZUC had to open doors to other disciplines too.

As such, diversification of the programmes offered was also a response to the increasing demand for higher education, seen through the institution's quest to increase access (Kabaila 2014). For example, more than 50 000 pupils complete secondary school each year, while higher education institutions have a total intake of about 10 000, including some mature students (Mweemba & Hampwaye 2012). As such, only about a quarter of the applicants to higher institutions are admitted each year. This led to increased number of institutions offering higher education in the private sector (Mwale 2016:22). The transformation of the institution also bordered on remaining relevant to the changing educational landscape in the country.

Other than opening the doors of the theological college to other disciplines or programmes, transformation was mirrored through accreditation with secular bodies such as the Ministry of higher education (Higher Education Authority of Zambia), and expansion of faculties:

'The University works closely with the Synod of the United Church of Zambia, the government and other stakeholders through active feedback and advisory mechanisms ... The University will ensure that it listens more and works closely with the plans for higher education and with other institutions of higher learning.' (Muzala, UCZ Synod News, 20 July 2015)

These actions brought with it changes in name (from a theological college to university college), curriculum (theology alone to embracing other courses), staff development (to meet the requirements of the new programmes), applicants and student population (diverse religious affiliation and programmes of study), calendar and model of operation among other ways.

It is for this reason that in response to the growing student population, UCZUC had embarked on infrastructure development and was raising funds to build a modern lecture theatre, which, when constructed, would serve as a multipurpose hall and at the same time serving both administrative and academic needs. In this regard, the University College appealed to the members of the UCZ, Christians and the general public to become friends of the university and provide both financial, material and moral support (Kabaila 2014).

The inability of the public and private sector to satisfy the growing social demand for higher education contributed to the expansion of theological colleges to offer diverse programmes. Varghese (2004) maintained that private-sector university enterprises have appeared to cater for a demand in the market, and their role could best be described as supplementing the state system rather than supplanting it.

Upholding institutional identity amidst diversity

The diversification of the programmes offered not only created identity concerns between the sacred (theology alone) and the secular (other disciplines), but also the need to find a balance between the two. Therefore, in order to adapt to the changing context amid diversity, UCZUC had to reposition itself while at the same time holding on to its mandate of theological education. For this reason, theology was at the centre of the institution's mandate. The institution's motto is anchored on Christian principles and values.

In other words, the teaching staff development and curriculum diversification have been coupled with a theological orientation. For example, the institution has continued with the compulsory morning worship in which trainee ministers were assigned to preach. In an interview on 20 January 2016, Mpundu Mwape (student) said that:

'We are made to attend worship service in which those doing theology are assigned to preach as part of their assessment ...'

The old missionary architectural designs, which have been preserved also, give the institution its identity as a Christian college, alongside the institutional motto and general ethos. These efforts to uphold the institutional identity were

appreciated as having the potential to enrich theological education as reflected in the quotes below:

'... transformation is an opportunity for trainee church ministers [*those studying theology*] to interact with people with diverse backgrounds and interests ... This is an enriching experience as trainee ministers interacted with people who did not share their ideals.' (Penias Zimba, Student, pers. comm., 15 November 2015)

'Interaction with people doing other programmes enables us to learn how to deal with different people, this prepares us for real ministry.' (Grace Mtala, Student, pers. comm., 19 January 2016)

In this way, the expansion was an avenue, which provided real-world experiences and exposure for students in different programmes (Kapambwe Mwelwa - Student, pers. comm., 25 March 2016). Pobe and Kudadjie (1990) argue that the topmost requirements on the list of qualities demanded for the kind of theological education should include: Being able to demonstrate faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour; and living the life of obedience in accordance with the Bible.

Discussion

The views presented by the participants and the document analyses reflect a quest for an institution to uphold its identity as a theological education institution on the one hand, and live up to the expectations of being a university college offering other secular disciplines on the other hand. The main driver of this shift was centred on the sustainability challenges associated with running a theology alone college in a context of a growing demand for university education in other disciplines. This shift is not only historical but also a global reality. For example, Marsden (1994) observed that many of America's elite universities (such as Harvard and Yale) that had religious origins slowly moved from overtly denominational origins, rigid curricula and standards of orthodoxy, mandatory chapel attendance and so on, to pluralistic and secular tendencies as the demands of democracy and pluralism came to overshadow those of religious fidelity.

In this way, transformation was seen as a move towards some secularisation tendencies when secularisation is viewed as privatisation of religion which involves religious higher education moving solely to the realm of private education (Glanzer 2008) and the overall weakening of Christianity's or religion's role in the life of the university (Arthur 2008) seen through embracing other disciplines and student population with diverse religious orientations other than the UCZ faith.

The theological identity of the transformed institution was not only centred on the integration of theology and other disciplines, but also by the new demands of accrediting with secular academic bodies. Degbe (2015) was thus of the view that the theological heritage was being softly killed on the altar of accreditation and affiliation systems which largely do not seem to appreciate the vision and mission of theological schools, suggesting that accreditation to secular bodies were indirectly weakening theological institutional mandates.

These experiences and concerns which Joeckel and Chesnes (2010) refer to as the slippery slope to secularisation are not unique to UCZUC. For example, as learning continued in many mission organisations and new programmes being developed, and expanded beyond the theological curriculum, one of the oldest mission organisations in Kenya, the Africa Inland Mission (AIM), which founded the Africa Inland Church (AIC) was fearful of the secularisation of such learning (Ward 1999), thus the saying 'it is easier to move a cemetery than a seminary!' (Messer 2004:162).

In addition, the findings also reflect ways in which the institutional Christian identity has been upheld amidst some secularisation tendencies. For example, some core courses in theology and philosophy have remained at the centre of the institutional curriculum, including worship, which has continued to occupy a central place. In this way, the Christian ethos runs through all facets of the institutional activities such as academic, extra-curricular, music and the arts, worship and atmosphere.

These endeavours are closely related to Benne's analysis of the strategies for colleges and universities to keep their Christian faith (2001). However, this theological institutional identity has been upheld, and it has had implications on other disciplines and non-theology student population who have diverse religious beliefs. Thus these efforts to integrate a Christian ethos is in some way sacralising or Christianising other disciplines, a reality that has implications on those who may not share the faith of the institution, given that some of the Christian (UCZ) activities are compulsory.

Most importantly, the transformation of the institution mirrors not only the identity and diversity complexities, but also how the institution has traversed through commercialisation and commodification of theological education model through diversification of the programmes offered in the institution. This is because the diversification of the programmes from theology alone to other disciplines not only shaped the identity of the institution, but was also linked to the global discourse of commercialising and commodifying theological education institutions in the process. For example, at the expense of traditional models of running theological institutions in which financing was solely dependent on church or donors and friends of the Church, theological institutions have had to take up market or business models that integrate theology and other disciplines and in turn render theological education a commodity and commercialised.

Altbach (2008:11) notes that the marketisation of higher education is closely related to privatisation, and that the functions of the university are increasingly subjected to market forces to the point that fields that produce little income are de-emphasised or even discarded and tuition fees are an example of market forces at work. These shifts that have accompanied transformation through changes in the operation models have been prompted by changes in many spheres of society. For example, the cost of theological

education institutions translated into challenges of sustaining sponsorship and support of theological education by the church:

'The world today seems to be supporting all fields of study that have economic value and theological education appears to have nothing to offer as people misunderstand it to be ecclesiastical. This leaves the church to fund it but the cost of running theological education is not the same as it was in the past, hence the temptation to go commercial.' (Lunda, interview, 18 July 2012)

This resulted in calls for a self-sustaining church or institution in which communities took up the responsibility of supporting and sponsoring their own candidates who enrolled in theological formation.

Over time, with diversity and expansion of programmes offered, candidates started paying for themselves; commercialisation and commodification of theological programmes became part of the new business model. For example, the new institutional identity of diversity resulted into developing strategies of marketing the new programmes in order to sale them out to the public. Finke and Iannaccone (1993:29) point out that in a competitive environment, a particular religious firm will flourish only if it provides a product at least as attractive as its competitors. The strategies to market and sale new programmes in the university college have therefore rendered theological education a commodity for public sale. This economic strategy has in turn attracted new clients, brought money to the institution and led to new partnership or affiliations, competition and co-existence of theology and academic programmes.

Therefore, while the institution can be viewed from secularisation lens as moving towards the secular, the transformation presents a potential story of the transformed university college to be experienced by the ability to amalgamate the institutional identity (both old and new) and diversity in the context of the transformation. As such, the integration should not be indicative of some grudging appeasement of a 'secular' accreditation body, but an active and intentional integration of Christ with the world in which a balance is sought in upholding identity amidst diversity.

The findings also reflect the transformation as a timely development, which provides an opportunity to enrich theological education. This is as Okesson (2007) points out that if theological institutions want to maintain any viability in modern times, they must strive for active and intentional integration of sacred and secular (or, commonly stated: theology with other disciplines) and this must be their contribution to higher education, and ultimately to society as a whole.

Conclusion

The article sought to reflect on the transformation of theological colleges into university colleges by exploring how a new Christian university college had repositioned itself in the context of the transformation. It has demonstrated

that the integration of theology and other secular disciplines in the institution had not only transformed the institutional identity but also diversified the institution, and this required finding a balance between the two.

Thus the institution could only be viewed as secularised through embracing other disciplines and accreditation with secular bodies. Most importantly, as transformation manifested a move from sacred (theology alone) to secular (other disciplines) resulting in the integration of the sacred and secular within an institution, the institution developed new operation models and marketing strategies to sell its products (both new and old) to the public, resulting into commodification tendencies. Ultimately, these changes have demonstrated that instead of losing its place in the transformation, theology has been retained and thus will survive through co-existence with other disciplines.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

N.M. was the lead researcher and wrote the manuscript while J.C. was responsible for data collection and management.

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