

Impact of new policy developments in higher education on theological education

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Abstract

This article analyses the impact of recent South African higher education policies on education in general and theological education in particular. This will be done in three stages. First, I offer a brief description of recent South African higher education policies imposed by the state. Second, I reflect on the effects of this policy intervention on curriculum practices in Theology. Finally, I highlight a few challenges facing theological education in South Africa.

Introduction

Professor Simon Maimela, who has retired after working at the University of South Africa for over 20 years, is a man of many talents. A few of these are briefly highlighted below to set the scene for the focus of this article, namely the impact on theological education of recent policy developments in higher education.

First, Professor Maimela is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. Before his retirement from active ministry at the end of 2009, he was pastor in charge of the Atteridgeville parish, where he was responsible for two congregations. He served the Atteridgeville parish, Pretoria circuit, Central Diocese and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa with distinction. Second, Professor Maimela is an accomplished academic who has contributed to the education of many, young and old, through the numerous courses he has taught at the University of South Africa (Unisa). He has successfully supervised countless Masters and Doctoral students and helped several students to further their studies overseas. Third, Maimela is a prolific writer who has published a great many articles and books. Fourth, he is a dedicated, hardworking and visionary administrator whose leadership qualities were demonstrated in several capacities throughout his career, at Unisa and elsewhere.

Fifth, Maimela has contributed a great deal not only to the fight by blacks against white domination during apartheid, but also to the transformation of higher education in South Africa. Maimela's interest in and contribution to this transformation is worth noting:

- He is the founding shareholder and currently the Executive Director (Academic) and Principal of the CACC Colleges of Learning, a private educational group with colleges in South Africa and in neighbouring states.
- He is a former Vice-Chair: South African Universities' Vice-Chancellor's Association (SAUVCA).
- For several years he served as Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Tuition at the University of South Africa.
- He also served as Acting Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of South Africa until his retirement.
- He co-edited a book on distance learning (Baijnath, Maimela & Singh (eds.) 2001).

Finally, Simon Maimela is one of the fathers of Black Theology. He developed a Black Theology of Anthropology (Hopkins 1989:109; Maimela 1979:22-23, 1981:67ff, 1982:58). Although this article does not focus on Maimela's Black Theology of Anthropology, we need to highlight four of its major theological themes. First, a God of liberation "who is essentially for us and for our well-being" is revealed in Scripture. Second, God gave humans authority to be "creative and meaningful and helpful beings who act in God's stead". "So anthropology is one key doctrine". Third, "awareness that life as it is structured in society today is not necessarily according to God's will ... It is within our power and we are agents of change". Finally, "the broadening of that concept [of salvation] to include the social and physical dimension of liberation". The essence of the above four themes patently hinges "primarily on a theological anthropology of liberation" (Maimela 1979:22-23, 1981a:67ff, 1981b:27-42, 1982:58).

Clearly, Maimela's Black Theology of Anthropology would today inspire us to be "agents of change" in transforming an education system that was designed to exclude and marginalise black people.

The aim of this article is to honour the role of Simon Maimela in higher theological education by critically examining the impact of recent South African higher education policies on education in general and theological education in particular. This will be done in three main stages. First, I offer a brief description of recent South African higher education policies introduced by the state. Second, I present a critical reflection on the implementation of such policy intervention and its consequences for the curriculum in Theology. Finally, I highlight a few challenges facing theological education in South Africa.

Key features of recent South African higher education policies

After 1994, policy developments in the sphere of higher education, both teaching and learning, have been consistent with the dual emphasis adopted in all higher education framework policies from this date onwards: the imperative of responding both to the apartheid legacy and to global trends (CHE 2004:95; Luckett 2000). So the driving forces behind these policy developments are issues of transformation and equity which are not confined to education but affect other sectors, such as health and the economy, as well.

From the early 1990s, broad policy formulations began to emerge for teaching and learning in a transformed education system, although little direct attention was paid to higher education curricula before the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was instituted in 1995. When one reads documents such as the NEPI reports (1992), the ANC's A Policy Framework for Education and Training (1994), early post-1994 policy and legal documents such as the White Paper on Education and Training (1995), and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (1995), one becomes aware that they identify certain emphases that served as a broad context for the work of the Commission (CHE 2004:95). First, a desire to steer South Africa along a high-skills, high-growth path of economic development (CHE 2004:95). Second, the mechanism of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to bring academic and vocational education into closer alignment within a single coordinated system of qualifications (CHE 2004:95). Third, modularisation of curricula to allow for the acquisition of skills and to facilitate the transferability of learning in a system of credit accumulation and transfer (CHE 2004:95). Fourth, erosion of disciplinary boundaries in favour of interdisciplinarity. Fifth, an outcomes-based approach to teaching and learning (CHE 2004:95; Luckett 2000; Breier 2001). The implications of these emphases for theological curricula will be briefly spelt out later under point 2 below.

The NCHE was influenced by three main themes in policy developments in contemporary thinking about globalisation and higher education after 1994. First, it was envisaged that massification would be a logical result of democratisation, as large numbers of previously excluded youth and adults entered higher education institutions (HEIs) (CHE 2004:96; Luckett 2000:3). Well, looking at the number of students registered for theology degrees today, especially at undergraduate level, one sees that the advent of democracy in South Africa did not necessarily result in the massification of theology programmes; quite the opposite, in fact. Second, it was thought that changes in institutional arrangements would weaken the boundaries of academic departments and promote flexible teaching teams (CHE 2004:96; Luckett 2000). Although this may have been partially achieved in certain modules, clusters have caused discomfort among colleagues in certain schools. Third, globalisation was expected to lead to a shift in knowledge production, from "Mode 1" (discipline-based knowledge production in universities) to "Mode 2" (interdisciplinary or "transdisciplinary" research, conducted by teams of researchers based inside, and increasingly outside, universities). Mode 2 was considered more relevant to the solution of real-world economic, technological, social and cultural problems in developing countries and elsewhere. It also seemed to imply necessary shifts in curriculum organisation: not only from disciplinarity to interdisciplinarity but also from "courses" to "credits"; from "departments" to "programmes"; from "subject-based teaching" to "student-based learning"; from "knowledge" to "competence"; and from "theory-based learning" to "problem-based learning" (CHE 2004:96; Luckett 2000). Interdisciplinary research is indeed important: it opens doors to partnerships and networking which can only enrich one's own discipline. The challenge may arise when one applies to the National Research Foundation (NRF) for rating, as they seem to encourage disciplinary as opposed to interdisciplinary research.

Below I briefly highlight five aspects of policy with critical relevance for teaching and learning. They are as follows: SAQA policy and regulations, the New Academic Policy (NAP), the NQF consultative document, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) frameworks, and merger policies (CHE 2004:96).

SAQA policy and regulations

SAQA policy and regulations promoted the discourse about articulation and flexibility in learning through a set of key concepts for higher education qualifications, to be registered on the NQF. Academic programmes are defined as “a planned combination of learning outcomes with a defined purpose or purposes” (CHE 2004:96). These programmes are expected to do several things. First, they must provide qualifying learners with “applied competence” (i.e. the ability to put learning outcomes into practice). Second, they must open up access routes to additional education and training. And, third, they must promote lifelong learning by providing both specific and “critical cross-field outcomes” (i.e. generic skills) (CHE 2004:96). SAQA also highlighted the importance of qualifications that might “be achieved in whole or in part through Recognition of Prior Learning” (RPL), with the aim of widening access routes for potential learners whose qualifications for study might not be formal (CHE 2004:96-97; Luckett 2000; Breier 2001). Teaching and learning strategies typically include bridging, foundation or extended curriculum programmes that facilitate a special focus on building skills for academic study, expanded tutorial systems, and other forms of support such as mentoring. With respect to the application of alternative admissions criteria and RPL, practices have developed unevenly across the system (CHE 2004:101; Breier 2001). Although the RPL has noble ideals, the challenge was always going to lie in the implementation process and procedure. Furthermore, although few students are using this channel to enter Bachelor of Theology studies, RPLs are proving extremely costly to implement.

New academic policy

The NAP, designed to provide an academic planning framework to underpin the National Plan, linked up with key policy goals such as an integrated qualifications structure for higher education, articulation between institutions, and multiple entry and exit points in the qualification structure. The NAP recognised that a programmes- and outcomes-based approach to curriculum design

signified a shift away from the traditional higher education approach of apprenticeship in a single discipline. It proposed that mainstream qualifications in higher education should be placed in one of two learning pathways: the “general” (traditional academic) and ‘career-focused’ (vocational) tracks (CHE 2004:97).

Furthermore, the NAP proposed that higher education qualifications should be designed in a “nested” way, with specialised qualifications always meeting the requirements of the generic ones within which they are nested (CHE 2004:97).

Several concerns about the appropriateness of outcomes-based education (OBE) for universities may be highlighted here. The first concern is that outcomes or competency-based education is premised on an outdated behaviourist psychology which assumes a certain uniformity and predictability in human behaviour. The outcomes-based method of curriculum design envisages linear, instrumental reasoning in which micro-level action and behaviour (in the classroom) is meant to be determined by pre-specified learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The key to sound curriculum design is curriculum alignment based on a close alignment between learning outcomes, selection of content, teaching methods and assessment procedures among others (Luckett 2000:7). Second, the Humanities aim to develop creativity, a critical approach, and diversity. OBE can lead to an atomised and accumulative outlook on knowledge that could undermine disciplinary knowledge structures if the units of learning become too small. It also tends to ignore the teaching and learning context. This in turn can diminish the professional role of the teacher and the active role of learners in curriculum implementation and assessment. The third concern is about knowledge: that it could be based on wrong assumptions about the transferability of learning (which cannot be stripped of its sites and contexts of acquisition) (Luckett 2000:7). Fourth, it is and will continue to be extremely difficult in practice for poorly resourced schools with under-qualified teachers to deliver on the OBE model. This approach may result in “task completion” or “assignment completion” as the dominant form of student activity and at best provides a way for under-qualified teachers to cope with over-sized classes – a modern version of the rote learning it was designed to replace! Fifth, Curriculum 2005 could actually de-skill the better-qualified teachers (Young 2001:36; CHE 2004:98ff; Breier 2001; Trowler 1998).

Although former education minister Kader Asmal appointed a committee to review the OBE curriculum in 2000, this has not resolved all concerns arising from the implementation of the policy. In certain schools, for example, “inadequately trained teachers have misread it as meaning that textbooks should not be used and pupils should learn to read and write on their own” (Gower 2004). This

unmistakably shows that both teachers at school level and lecturers at tertiary institutional level need proper training in OBE if they are to provide proper teaching and learning at their respective levels. The question is whether in OBE we are experiencing a policy failure or whether the problem lies in the implementation. There is no doubt about the intentions of the OBE policy as stated above; but it is not equally clear whether the government adequately ensured that all stakeholders have been properly empowered, by the provision of adequate human and infrastructural resources, to implement it.

The NQF consultative document

The NQF is designed to integrate all education and training, and all higher education qualifications are meant to be registered on it (CHE 2004:96). The 2003 NQF consultative document proposed three types of learning and interdependent learning pathways: discipline-based learning; trade, occupational and professional (TOP) learning; and a third type “which habitually emerges between these two poles”, described as “career-focused learning” (the higher education term) or “general vocational learning” (the further education and training (FET) term) (CHE 2004:97). A view of the relationship between learning pathways and across the three bands of the learning system (general education, FET and higher education) is proposed as the conceptual scheme on which the new organisation of the NQF is to be built (CHE 2004:97-98; Breier 2001). It is important to note that most theological subjects will fall within the discipline-based learning category. The registration of all higher education qualifications is in itself a welcome move, as long as the registration process is clearly stipulated and will not be so unnecessarily prolonged as to delay the process of teaching and learning.

Scholars have raised several concerns about the NQF, a few of which are highlighted here.

First, those already in employment will be in a position to benefit from the NQF, while the mass of the unemployed are unlikely to be affected (Luckett 2000:6). Second, those educational institutions with sound human and financial resources will be able to use the programmes- and outcomes-based method of curriculum design and the NQF system to improve their operation, while those who lack such resources will fall further behind (Luckett 2000:6; Young 2001; Breier 2001). Third, the NQF proposals are controversial in that they raise questions about how successfully three distinctive learning pathways can, in practice, be integrated into a single qualifications framework, or how well they will support the integration of theory and practice by learners in the higher education system (CHE 2004:98). Fourth, the claim that the NQF system will contribute to national economic development may well be “wishful thinking” (Luckett 2000:6; Trowler & Knight 2002:144). There is no empirically proven connection between economic performance and the levels of education in any given country. In most cases, the literature suggests, educational improvements follow rather than generate improved economic performance (Luckett 2000:6). Granted; but if human resources, with the necessary skills and improved infrastructure, are made available to previously disadvantaged HEIs, will this not go a long way to ensure that the implementation of NQF policy proposals proceeds with minimal challenges?

HEQC frameworks and policies

The fourth key aspect of national policy development that affects teaching and learning is the quality assurance formulated by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). This includes, first, the need for curricula to be simultaneously connected to national and regional contexts, to national policy goals and targets (e.g. for throughput and graduate success), and to a distinctive institutional mission. Second, a continuous-improvement orientation at institutional and programme levels should facilitate teaching and learning innovation and renewal. Third, teaching and learning approaches should promote access and success for students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds (CHE 2004:98). Orientation is welcomed, especially for new academics; but such orientation should include new teaching and learning methods, which can best be facilitated within the education disciplines. It follows therefore that theologians will not only be content with the knowledge of their specific theological disciplines; they also need to familiarise themselves with new teaching and learning methods that will enable them to facilitate teaching and learning in a conducive environment.

One of the ways in which teaching and learning approaches could promote access and success for students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds could be the introduction of African languages as official teaching and learning languages in our Theology curriculum. This will be further explained in section 3 below.

Mergers and incorporations

The fifth issue is mergers and incorporations. South African higher education restructuring proceeded not only by way of programme-level restructuring but also by reconfiguration through mergers and incorporations (CHE 2004:54).

The state has accordingly prescribed mergers and incorporations as part of an explicit agenda of transformation, equity and efficiency in the sector. Restructuring has as its goal the dismantling of the apartheid landscape (36 institutions) of higher education and the configuration of a new landscape (22 public institutions) which will allow higher education to achieve the goals set for it in national policy (CHE 2004:54).

Policy guidelines have been formulated and are being further detailed in certain areas. At the institutional level, challenges have been both structural (reorganising faculties, departments and schools) and specific to aspects of teaching and learning (determining the programme and qualifications mix, aligning quality management systems, and aligning teaching and learning delivery approaches). While the range of challenges is wide, two may be highlighted to demonstrate the complexity inherent in all of them. First, a key question had to be negotiated in all mergers and incorporations: whose curriculum is most appropriate and by whose lights? (CHE 2004:101). A second challenge for curriculum development is posed by the new comprehensive institutions (HEIs that offer both university- and technikon-type programmes). It is hoped that these institutions will address access and opportunity issues in higher education, offering programmes with varying entry requirements, bringing diverse kinds of learning programmes (general formative, professional, vocational) within one ambit, and presenting articulation and progression pathways between general academic and career-focused programmes and qualifications (CHE 2004:102).

There are other challenges which, though not directly related to curriculum development, affected the morale of staff members. First, mergers in certain institutions never justly and equitably resolved the issue of the retirement age: there are those who will retire at 65 (mainly former Unisa employees) and those who will retire at 60 (former TSA employees). Second, there is a lack of harmonisation (in other words, a disparity) in salary scales among merged staff.

It is important to emphasise once more that the above policy guidelines were part of the agenda of transformation, equity and efficiency introduced into the educational sector to assist in addressing the apartheid legacy that fragmented the sector. In the next section we shall look at the impact of these policy interventions on curriculum practice in Theology programmes.

The effects of policy intervention on curriculum practice in Theology

It is important to note that policy intervention affected not only Theology curricula but all other disciplines as well. Furthermore, what follows is not an exhaustive and detailed study of the impact of new education policies on Theology curricula; it is a preliminary study that needs to be followed up.

To understand OBE policies fully, we need to be aware that there are several factors at play. First there is government subsidy, which plays a major part in determining which changes should happen and how. Then there is the role of university bureaucracy, which is responsible for the smooth implementation of these policies. University bureaucracy has incurred its fair share of blame in policy implementation.

The introduction of the SAQA-NQF system and the shift to outcomes-based programmes has had several effects on Theology programmes in the faculty/college of the Humanities, Social Sciences and such, which includes Theology. These may be highlighted here.

First, theological disciplines are seriously threatened by the new system. Religion and Theology are not vocational disciplines and the link between these disciplines, work and “national development” has traditionally been very tenuous (Luckett 2000:11). The previous president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, has on numerous occasions discouraged young South Africans from enrolling for Biblical Studies which would get them nowhere. He said, for example: “If you qualify and come out of teacher training, for instance, with Biblical Studies you are not going to get very many jobs for that” (Mbeki 2004:1). Mbeki regards Biblical Studies, and by extension Theology, as disciplines that “are not readily marketable except in teaching” (Mbeki 2004:1). I think the former president’s remarks are unfortunate in that surely South Africa needs ethics and morality in order to safeguard equity, transformation and redress, which are the main aims of the government’s new policy developments in higher education.

Second, because of abysmally poor school-leaving results in maths and science (particularly at black schools), the Humanities – with the exception of Theology at undergraduate level – are among the most popular disciplines. As Luckett correctly observes, “it is this imbalance in the size and shape of the system and the perceived irrelevance of the Humanities to the national development agenda which the state is anxious to correct” (Luckett 2000:11).

Third, those theologians who operate from within a hermeneutic paradigm or curriculum in their teaching, especially within the Biblical Studies programme, would find it extremely difficult to embrace the “can do” performative epistemology which underpins outcomes-based education and the “new vocationalism” (Luckett 2000:11).

The fourth issue is assessment. In several theological and religious disciplines there is a commitment to the contextualisation of the curriculum. As stated above, most of these theologians operate within the hermeneutic paradigm. Accordingly, theologians within this paradigm firmly believe that learning is situational and context-dependent. Thus they would find it difficult always to have to specify beforehand exactly what learners will learn. They firmly believe that their assessment methods must take the context into account and that only they, as the teachers, are in a position to design the appropriate assessment methods. Luckett echoes these concerns:

In terms of the OBE methodology, this means that the specification of assessment criteria is far less important than allowing HET practitioners to design their own task-specific criteria (sometimes called performance criteria) in consultation with their students, to be interpreted by lecturers, from within their own knowledge of their learners and their contexts. This means that in terms of assessment policy, concerns for validity are prioritised over reliability and contextualised assessment practices are encouraged (Luckett 2000:19).

The fifth issue is semesterisation. Universities have been pushed to introduce semesterisation into almost all their courses. This has adversely affected the quality of teaching and learning, as there is simply not enough time in a semester for proper teaching, assessment and learning to take place. The languages (Hebrew and Greek) are probably most affected by the semesterisation system.

The sixth factor is modularisation. According to the new HEQF, a Bachelors degree is an NQF exit level 7 programme which must have a minimum of 360 credits in total (HE ACT 1997:23). Although the composition and content of the 360 credits prescribed by the policy is the responsibility of duly accredited institutions such as universities, the policy implementation has several implications for an ordinary Bachelor of Theology degree. The immediate challenge is that as this new BTh requires students to be more focused, modules can no longer offer broad scope or orientation. In other words, it is no longer possible to offer detailed systemic course content. Furthermore, modularisation pushes us into rationalisation of major subjects in the Bachelor of Theology degree. Several universities have introduced what they call “capstone modules”, which integrate and harmonise the knowledge and skills in all other modules with the learner’s experience. The assessment procedures for capstone modules pose challenges and need careful structuring.

Seventh, as stated at the beginning of this article, one of the main aims of the NCHE was that the democratic dispensation in South Africa should be followed by massification, as large numbers of previously excluded youth and adults would enter HEIs. While massification may have become a reality for other degrees, this has not happened in the case of Theology - quite the opposite, indeed. Most universities in South Africa today do not boast enrolment numbers higher than pre-1994, especially not at the undergraduate level.

Eighth, in order to survive at university level, modules must attract certain numbers of students if they are to avoid being discontinued. Some universities have been flexible and understanding, especially when it comes to specialised skills such as Hebrew, Greek and Exegesis. Other universities, however, would apply the policy without compunction to any subject with few students. Although the cost factor is taken into account, it must be noted that these actions adversely affect students who would like to pursue further studies in these specialised fields.

In addition, the issue of student numbers has also forced Theology programmes to discontinue joint courses with non-theological disciplines (such as psychology) in order to concentrate on increasing student numbers for their own courses.

The ninth issue is the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Very few students enter their theological studies through this door. However, it would be interesting to appraise the success of RPL by exploring the progress or otherwise of students who do enter universities by this route. It is also important to note that the programme seems excessively costly.

Tenth, although some of the disciplinary boundaries are disjointed at undergraduate level, they are fully respected at the postgraduate level. Furthermore, academic societies still maintain disciplinary boundaries in their annual meetings/conferences.

Finally, mergers reconfigured the structures of faculties and schools. At some institutions, faculties of Theology were discontinued in favour of faculties or colleges of Humanities and the like.

Some academics in these faculties and schools point out that there is no longer any unifying formal structure for communicating among themselves as theologians.

In this section I have briefly highlighted a few effects of the new education policies on curricula in Theology. In the next section we focus on a few challenges facing theological education in the twenty-first century, of which our curriculum may need to take cognisance.

Challenges facing theological education in the twenty-first century

Theological education faces several challenges today.

First, as I have mentioned before, former South African president Thabo Mbeki has discouraged South Africans from pursuing biblical studies and, by implication, Theology in general. This was really unfortunate, coming from the head of state, who should be sensitive to the feelings of churches and other stakeholders who took offence at such a statement – especially from someone who claims to be an advocate of the African Renaissance. The part that theology and religion do and can continue to play in moral regeneration should not be undermined. So it is important that the new government under President Jacob Zuma should empower tertiary institutions to “increase their efforts to strengthen, to accompany, and to enhance theological education” (Werner 2009:5, 15).

The second challenge is linked to the first, namely that theological education therefore needs regular contact with the “existing realities of church life, involvement and close touch with the challenges of mission, ministry and life witness of churches today, but it also needs critical distance and a certain degree of autonomy from the daily pressures of church work and from the direct governing processes and power interests of church institutions” (Werner 2009:6; Duncan & Hofmeyr 2002:656; Mohler 1996: 280).

Third, theologians have for some time now been talking about Africanising and contextualising the curriculum. Introducing a curriculum in which teaching and learning happen through an African language will go a long way to Africanise or contextualise the Theology curriculum. The degree offered by the University of Limpopo “is South Africa’s first and only dual-medium degree in which an African language, Northern Sotho, is used as a medium of instruction and assessment with English” in their BA CEMS (Keepile 2010:1).

Furthermore, as part of the Africanisation and contextualisation efforts, our curricula should be the products of academics who are representative of the demography of our country.

Fourth, women theologians have challenged and renewed methodology, orientation, and the content of the curriculum in theological education across the world (Werner 2009:9). In Africa, Isabel Phiri and other women theologians have reflected on the major challenges for African women theologians in theological education over the period (1989–2008) and have identified four major challenges that have faced, and still face, African women theologians who are members of the Circle: (1) redefining the identity of African women theologians; (2) promoting more women to study Theology and be on permanent staff; (3) including African women’s theology in the theological curriculum; and (4) collaborating with male theologians (Phiri 2008:1; see also WOCATI 2008:4; Werner 2009:10). These are very serious issues in which all of us should be actively involved to ensure that our curricula not only takes note of them but places them at the centre of our curriculum design and practice.

The fifth challenge facing theological education is how to equip churches to respond to religious plurality (Werner 2009:10). Thus theological education will have to take interreligious issues seriously in curriculum design.

The sixth challenge is the need to continue innovative programmes that contextualise theological education. Thus there are urgent needs for new curriculum developments taking up the challenges of marginalised groups and/or new issues such as HIV/AIDS, women’s issues (Phiri, Haddad & Masenya 2003), eco-theology, bio-ethics, poverty and communication ethics (WOCATI 2008:4, 5; Bowers 2007:4; Duncan & Hofmeyr 2002:656).

The seventh challenge is ethnicity. Biblical texts have been abused to foment ethnic segregation and conflict in Africa. Maimela (1997:118) has argued that in Africa, ethnic diversity has been used by “politicians to destructive ends” (cf. also Oddland 1997:63; de Jong 1999:5). The destructive ends include “tribal or ethnic conflicts which have given rise to civil wars, conflict, refugees and destruction of African society” (Maimela 1997:118; see also Pierli et al 1999:36; Farisani 2004).

Maimela then explains that in South Africa “the political ideology of apartheid was implemented precisely to exploit the reality of ethnic diversity to further the socio-economic and political interests of the dominant whites”. Maimela reminds us that the advocates of apartheid used Scripture to justify their ideology:

Their favourable text was the story of the tower of Babel which tells us of the confusion of tongues. It was deduced from the story that it is God's will that separate races and nations should be separated to live far from each other. As the will of God, this separation was not revoked in Christ's reconciliation work. Hence the Acts of Apostles narrates the speaking of different tongues at the Pentecost the difference being only that the spirit enabled different races to hear one another (Maimela 1997:118).

What, then, should be the role of theological education in addressing ethnicity?

That role will lie mainly in designing a curriculum that focuses on ethnic issues, dealing with the following among others:

- encouraging co-existence and harmony among different ethnic groups, and thus
- promoting unity within diversity (see also Shorter 1999:31ff; Farisani 2004).

Thus theological educators, bearing in mind that ethnic categories in Scripture have been used to "manipulate and to rule", should encourage the use of Scripture to promote "modes of resistance" to ethnic conflict (Brett 1996:8; Farisani 2004). And, finally, students should be encouraged to undertake postgraduate studies on topics related to ethnic issues.

Conclusion

The introduction of new policies in higher education was a bold attempt by government to deal with the apartheid educational legacy by addressing issues of transformation, redress and equity in the sector. This article has not focused on various definitions of transformation, as we agree with Lis Lange that transformation is not a settled notion. There are many ideas of transformation that emphasise issues such as "equity and redress, review of conceptual frameworks, purposes and orientations in higher education" (Lange 2010:1).

It is important, however, not to respond to the transformation challenges posed by the new education policy by sitting back and complaining. Such an approach will get us nowhere.

According to Lis Lange (2010:1):

A way of responding to this is for progressive academics, managers and students to question their position, contribution and ethical practices in the non-symmetrical relationship of obligations that academic teaching is.

The purpose of this article was threefold

First, we examined the impact of recent South African higher education policies on education in general and theological education in particular. Amongst other observations it became clear that changes in teaching and learning cannot be brought about simply by imposing policy frameworks, nor will quality be assured by the mere forms of programmes and outcomes-based higher education.

Second, we discussed several challenges facing theological education in South Africa today. We highlighted eight of these challenges, among them interreligious tolerance/dialogue, biblical hermeneutics, gender equality and ethnicity.

Finally, it is important to note that this article is not an exhaustive but a preliminary study of the implications of new education policies for theological education in South Africa today. There is a need to go deeper in flagging these and other relevant issues not discussed in this article. This is critically important, as most critiques of OBE and other new policies come from educationists. This article challenges those theologians who have been involved in discussions in the Standard Generating Bodies (SGB) and other forums to reflect critically on the impact of these new policies on theological education, to enable theologians in general not only to impart a better understanding of the policies but also to position ourselves with others in providing informed teaching and learning in our theology curriculum.

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