

Prof. T.C. Sakupapa 

Department of Religion
and Theology, University
of the Western Cape 
Cape Town, South Africa.
E-mail: tsakupapa@uwc.ac.za
ORCID: [https://orcid.
org/0000-0002-6837-0310](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6837-0310)



[https://doi.org/10.38140/
at.v45i2.9844](https://doi.org/10.38140/at.v45i2.9844)

ISSN: 1015-8758 (Print)

ISSN: 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2025
45(2):308-328

Date received:
18 August 2025

Date accepted:
20 October 2025

Date published:
12 December 2025



Published by the UFS
<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at>

© Author(s)



OPEN  ACCESS

Breaking the silos: Decolonial theological education beyond the church-academy divide

ABSTRACT

This article interrogates the enduring bifurcation between theology and ministry in Southern African theological education, a divide historically reinforced by colonial epistemologies that separated intellectual inquiry from pastoral praxis. It argues that addressing this cleavage requires a decolonial reimagining of theological formation that resists Eurocentric paradigms, values local epistemologies, and integrates scholarship with embodied, communal, and contextual engagement. Drawing on Farley's Athens model of theology, Kelsey's curricular dialectic, and Naidoo's conceptualisation of integrative theological education, the article highlights the necessity of framing theology as praxis rather than abstract speculation. It critiques Eurocentric models such as Hiestand and Wilson's pastor-theologian typology for their limited applicability in African contexts and advances "mission from the margins" as a decolonial pedagogical stance that centres the lived struggles, wisdom, and aspirations of African communities. The article envisions theological education as a transformative, integrative enterprise.

1. INTRODUCTION

Theological education in Southern Africa, particularly in public universities, stands at a critical crossroads. Extensive research underscores its pivotal role in shaping academic discourse and training competent church leadership (Amanze 2012; Chitando 2010; Venter & Tolmie 2013; Phiri &

Werner 2013; Werner *et al.* 2010). Yet, despite this rich body of work, scholars continue to question its impact on the mission and witness of the church. Persistent calls for relevance within the literature on theological education in Southern Africa underscores a deeper need, namely to ensure that theology is not merely studied, but lived and liberating.

Historically, much of theological education in Africa has functioned within inherited structures and epistemologies rooted in colonial and missionary legacies, which have too often sustained a damaging bifurcation between theology and ministry. This divide, institutionalised through Eurocentric models of theological education such as the Berlin paradigm, has privileged detached, disciplinary scholarship over the integrative formation of intellect, character, and praxis. This enduring divide not only reflects disembodied scholarship but has often also resulted in the formation of clergy who unwittingly reinforce this separation. The consequence, as several scholars consistently observe (Naidoo 2013; Hadebe 2017; Sakupapa 2020), is a theological academy that, while intellectually sophisticated, produces pastors that are underprepared and detached from the urgent moral, social, and spiritual realities of African communities. Maluleke (2006) captures this critique vividly in his contribution titled “The Africanisation of theological education: Does theological education equip you to help your sister?”. He argues that theological education in African contexts remains overly academic and insufficiently responsive to the urgent needs of local communities.

These challenges are further intensified by the pressures of neoliberal market logics on theological education in Africa. Scholars have critiqued the increasing “commodification of theological education” (Hadebe 2017; Naidoo 2017), which risks reducing theological training to a market-driven enterprise detached from community transformation. At stake, in this instance, is the critical role of formal theological education in cultivating competent church leadership to address the contextual needs in the African context. This article argues that theological education in Southern Africa must transcend its colonial and commercial legacies and embrace a liberative model that integrates scholarship and ministry for transformative church witness. This calls for re-envisioning theology beyond the academy-church divide. Achieving this requires interrogating the models that have shaped theological education in the region. Accordingly, this contribution proposes a decolonial and ecumenical framework for theological education that bridges the academy-church divide, affirms local epistemologies, and positions the “mission from the margins” as both a theological orientation and a pedagogical approach. Such an approach entails epistemic shifts in theological education in ways that dismantle entrenched colonial binaries, including those between church and academy and theologian and pastor.

2. METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE

This article employs a critical literature review, engaging historical, theological, and interdisciplinary scholarship to interrogate the structural, epistemological, and historical forces that have sustained the persistent divide between theology and ministry. The analysis foregrounds a decolonial and liberative reconfiguration that seeks to bridge this divide. Specifically, the article engages with models such as Farley's *theologia* and Kelsey's dialectic of Athens and Berlin, subjecting them to decolonial scrutiny and reinterpreting them in light of the lived realities of Southern Africa's ecclesial and social contexts. Structurally, this article first delineates the historical and colonial legacies shaping theological education in the region. It then critically examines dominant models of theological education, highlighting how entrenched epistemologies perpetuate the separation of scholarly theology from pastoral practice. This is followed by an analysis of contemporary pressures, including neoliberalisation and the commodification of theological training, and their impact on ministerial formation. Finally, the article explores integrative, decolonial alternatives, drawing on the concepts of *theologia*, the pastor-theologian paradigm, and "mission from the margins", before offering concluding reflections on the implications of a decolonial, liberative, and ecumenical framework for the future of theological education in Southern Africa.

3. HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES AND COLONIAL LEGACIES IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

In Southern Africa, theological education exists within a historically complex landscape marked by diverse ecclesial traditions. It is delivered through multiple institutional forms, including public university faculties or departments of theology and religion, denominationally affiliated private Bible colleges and seminaries shaped by specific confessional traditions, and distance-learning initiatives such as Theological Education by Extension (TEE),¹ which address geographical, economic, and pastoral constraints (Mabuluki 2013). Beyond these formal structures, there is a largely undocumented sphere of informal theological formation, often initiated by founders of African Independent Churches (AICs), Pentecostal-charismatic churches, and other grassroots ministries. These informal modes are typically context-specific, practice-oriented, and embedded within the rhythms of local ministry, reflecting a more immediate relationship between theological learning and ecclesial praxis.

1 For details on early beginnings, see Kinsler (1983). For recent perspectives, see Kinsler (2008).

The historical trajectory of formal theological education in South Africa reflects legacies shaped by what some have called the unique case of the colonisation of South Africa² that set it apart from developments elsewhere in the region.³ South Africa's ecclesial and educational landscape was profoundly shaped by the interplay of Dutch Reformed, British colonial, and later apartheid-era forces, each leaving a formative imprint on the shape and purpose of theological institutions. The first formal theological institution, Stellenbosch Theological Seminary, was established in 1859 by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), with the explicit goal of producing ministers grounded in the Reformed theological tradition. This confessional model, closely aligned with a specific ecclesial polity, established a template for subsequent denominational initiatives and cemented the link between theological education and church authority.⁴

From the late 19th century, South Africa and the wider region witnessed the proliferation of denominational seminaries established to train ecclesial leadership for their respective traditions. In the Methodist tradition, the Kilnerton Institution was founded in Pretoria in 1886 to prepare indigenous clergy. The Anglican Church created St Bede's College (Mthatha, 1879) and St Peter's College (Rosettenville) to serve ordinands from diverse social and cultural contexts. The Lesotho Evangelical Church established the Morija Theological Seminary in 1882 which became a key centre for pastoral and evangelistic formation in Southern Africa. Similarly, the Lutheran Theological Seminary, rooted in the Church of Sweden Mission's Oscarsberg Evangelist School (1908), was reconstituted in 1921 to provide more structured ministerial training. In the Roman Catholic tradition, St John Vianney Seminary was founded in Pretoria in 1948, initially catering to White candidates before incorporating separate institutions for the training of indigenous clergy.

2 See, for example, Oliver & Oliver (2017).

3 Zeleza succinctly portrays the origins of higher education in South Africa as reflecting entrenched colonial and racial divisions. Beginning in 1829 with the South African College in Cape Town (subsequently University of Cape Town), education primarily served English settlers, while the 1866 establishment of Stellenbosch Gymnasium (later became Stellenbosch University in 1918) marked the creation of a parallel institution for Afrikaners. For Africans, the 1841 Lovedale Institution offered limited vocational training inspired by U.S. industrial colleges, and in 1873, the University of the Cape of Good Hope (renamed as University of South Africa in 1916) emerged as an examining and distance education body, all within a deeply segregated educational landscape. See Zeleza (2006).

4 For a historical analysis of theological training in the Black Reformed Church in South Africa, see Ramantswana (2015). On the establishment of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria see Du Toit (2009). For an informative account of the establishment of various faculties of theology in South Africa, see De Villiers (2016).

From the 1960s onwards, English-speaking universities such as Cape Town, Rhodes, and Natal (Pietermaritzburg) emerged as significant centres of theological inquiry, engaging critically with Bonhoeffer's political theology, Barth's neo-orthodoxy, and Niebuhr's Christian realism. These institutions initially drew students primarily from Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian traditions and, in doing so, cultivated a theological ethos that was more dialogical, ecumenical, and internationally attuned. By contrast, Afrikaner universities such as Stellenbosch, Pretoria, and Potchefstroom remained bastions of neo-Calvinism and Reformed orthodoxy, reinforcing the theological underpinnings of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid (see Klaaren 1997:371-377). A significant departure from both models came in 1959 with the establishment of the Faculty of Theology at UNISA, which, operating outside the direct oversight of a single denomination, introduced a new paradigm of theological education aligned with public university structures. The creation of the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in 1972 by the Dutch Reformed Church to train "coloured" clergy marked yet another critical shift. UWC was initially designed to be what Boesak (1976:9) described as a

proper bush college ... a place where the Apartheid government hoped 'good coloureds' would be produced. Domesticated, manageable ... educated to the limited extent of their coloured capabilities ... readied to play their role in the upliftment of 'their people', ready to fit into the separate, coloured political, social and economic slot the government reserved for them.

Despite these constraints, UWC rapidly became a hub for radical theological thought and liberationist critique. As later reflections in *Becoming UWC* argue, the university's identity was never static; it emerged as a contested intellectual space that disrupted apartheid's epistemic order and gestured towards a deracialised, transformative vision of knowledge (Lalu & Murray 2012). These divergent trajectories illumine enduring tensions within South African theological education between confessional and ecumenical, Eurocentric and contextual, orthodox and liberationist impulses.

Efforts to establish theological institutions rooted in African indigenous spirituality and leadership have historically faced significant challenges. During the 1970s, the African Independent Churches Association sought to create a theological college that would embody an authentically African approach to ministerial training. This vision briefly materialised in the South African Theological College of Independent Churches that was established with support from the South African Council of Churches and was housed at St Ansgar's School in Roodepoort (Mashabela 2023). Although this initiative was short-lived, it demonstrated the ongoing aspiration among

African Independent Churches (AICs) to claim theological space that affirms their distinctive ecclesial identity. Overtime, AICs have continued to pursue partnerships with mainstream seminaries and universities, thus reflecting a persistent commitment to integrating indigenous perspectives within formal theological education.

By the late 20th century, theological education in South Africa had grown significantly, with the vast majority of tertiary institutions establishing faculties or departments of theology. Elsewhere in Southern Africa, the establishment of theological education was more directly a legacy of the early 20th-century missionary movement, which sought to train local leaders for ministry (Werner 2011:2). In Zambia, for instance, theological education emerged in the late 19th century, with Catholic and Protestant missions establishing schools to train catechists, evangelists, and teachers (Ragsdale 1986:157). Across the region, the majority of theological institutions founded in the 19th and 20th centuries were products of European missionary societies. These institutions were shaped by Western theological curricula, pedagogical methods, and languages of instruction. As scholars such as Hadebe (2017), Naidoo (2013; 2016), and Sakupapa (2018) observe, even after formal decolonisation, these inherited Western epistemologies and instructional models largely persist. In the South African context, in particular, theological institutions have historically been dominated by White leadership, with a marked privileging of the Reformed tradition, thereby reinforcing a Eurocentric theological paradigm that continues to shape ministerial formation nowadays. Venter (2016:2) aptly characterises this picture:

Deeper and more hidden traces of colonialist, modernist, racialised and even patriarchal power dynamics often escape scrutiny, especially in the epistemic practices in the curricula and research agendas and paradigms. The dominance of certain intellectual traditions, especially the Reformed one, at the four remaining faculties of Theology (Bloemfontein, Potchefstroom, Pretoria and Stellenbosch) is still a huge remnant of the past.

3.1 Reassessing patterns of theological education in Southern Africa

Theological education in Southern Africa has largely followed Western-Enlightenment models, a legacy inherited from the colonial and missionary enterprise (Duncan 2000:23; Naidoo 2016). As I have argued elsewhere, the curricula, pedagogical methods, languages of instruction, and underlying theological frameworks remain predominantly Western-centred (Sakupapa 2018:417). This orientation reflects the enduring imprint of missionary and colonial influence, which entrenched Eurocentric epistemologies and

pedagogies across seminaries and university faculties. Consequently, indigenous knowledge systems, local epistemologies, and context-specific forms of theological reflection have often been marginalised, despite the formal end of colonial rule and post-apartheid reforms in higher education. Such patterns underscore the need to critically reassess theological education in Southern Africa, not merely as an academic enterprise, but also as a formative practice that must engage African epistemologies, local contexts, and the broader project of decolonising knowledge.

Among the various paradigms that have shaped theological education (Conradie 1997),⁵ the Berlin model has been particularly influential. Rooted in Enlightenment rationality and formalised in Germany through the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (2011 [1811]), this model positioned theology as a modern academic discipline within the university, shaped by ideals of critical inquiry, scholarly detachment, and methodological rigour. Schleiermacher's framing of theology as a "positive science" in service to the church provided the architecture for modern theological education, systematised into the fourfold structure encompassing biblical studies, historical theology, systematic theology, and practical theology (Farley 1983:10). This "theological encyclopaedia" approach not only organised the theological study into discrete academic subdisciplines; it also entrenched Eurocentric epistemologies and pedagogies (Naidoo 2013; Hadebe 2017; Sakupapa 2018). In the South African context, the Berlin model became embedded in seminaries and faculties of theology historically dominated by White scholars, predominantly within the Reformed tradition. Although the specific content of the fourfold structure varied across institutions, its epistemological and pedagogical assumptions consistently privileged Western modes of knowing over locally grounded, contextually responsive approaches.

In contrast to the Berlin model's disciplinary fragmentation, Kelsey (2011 [1993]:29-35) identifies the Athens model as a paradigm of *paideia*, the holistic cultivation of the whole person in wisdom, virtue, and piety. Rooted in classical antiquity and reconfigured in early Christian contexts, particularly the Catechetical School of Alexandria, this model integrated intellectual instruction, moral formation, spiritual discipline, and theological reflection.

5 Farley (1983) contrasts the Athens model (theorised as holistic *theologia*, integrating head, heart, and practice) with the Berlin model (fragmented, research-focused, theological disciplines) and argues for the recovery of what he views as the classic vision of *theologia*. Edgar (2005) continues along the geographical typology of theological education and adds the Geneva model, also known as the confessional model. Rooy (1988) identifies four historical paradigms of theological education, namely catechetical, monastic, scholastic, and seminary. Banks 1999 [1991] contrasts the Athens (classical), Berlin (vocational), and Geneva (confessional) models, and proposes the Jerusalem model (missional) as a corrective.

Farley (1983) regards this integrative logic as the classical ideal of *theologia*, in which academic learning, spiritual maturity, and ministerial competency are inseparably intertwined. In Farley's analysis, the Berlin model disrupted this unity, by subsuming theology under the modern university's disciplinary logic, thereby reducing it to a set of discrete sciences systematised into the fourfold structure mentioned earlier. This resulted in privileging scholarly detachment over ministerial formation (Farley 1983:10). This "Theological Encyclopaedia" movement, as Farley terms it, precipitated the "loss of *theologia*" and entrenched pedagogical assumptions that marginalised formation as the ultimate purpose of theological education. Within the South African context, where theological education remains deeply shaped by Berlin-derived structures, revisiting the Athens model from a decolonial perspective opens a critical space for reimagining theological curricula in ways that reintegrate intellectual, spiritual, and ministerial formation, as essential contributors to theological knowing and praxis.

Ultimately, Farley emphasises the integration of theology and ministry. His call for a formational telos resonates with efforts within the South African discourse on theological education to resist purely technocratic, commodified, or imported models of ministerial training (Wahl 2013). Farley's formational model envisions theological education as an integrated process that develops wisdom, character, and ministerial competence. This arguably recovers the classic *theologia* as the intersection of head, heart, and hand. Kelsey (2011), by contrast, diagnoses the tension between the Athens model's formative ethos and the Berlin model's academic rigor, proposing a productive dialectic between the two as a way to balance scholarly excellence with holistic formation. In this light, Kelsey's work offers a diagnostic lens for assessing the structural and epistemological limitations of Southern African theological education, while Farley provides a normative framework for reorienting curricula toward integrated, contextually grounded, and socially engaged ministerial formation. For Kelsey, what is needed is a productive dialectic between the two. In my view, Kelsey's work may well serve as a diagnostic tool for reflecting on theological education in the Southern African context, while Farley's formative argument serves a normative goal.

3.2 Reconfiguration of higher education and implications on theology

The landscape of theological education in South African higher education has undergone significant reconfigurations, shaped by both the legacies of colonialism and the pressures of globalisation. Ford (2007:305) argues that globalisation has accelerated the commodification of higher education and advanced research, whereby universities increasingly function as

market-oriented enterprises focusing on revenue generation and research outputs. Within the South African context, Heleta and Dilraj (2024) critique these neoliberal reforms in higher education, highlighting the growing corporatisation and managerialism of universities (see Boughey & McKenna 2021). Heleta and Dilraj (2024:5) further argue that the neoliberal university, guided by cost benefit logic that is typical of corporate enterprises, prioritises revenue-generating disciplines often marginalising critical fields vital for justice and redress in South Africa's ongoing transformation. Theology has not been immune to these pressures. The commercialisation or framing of higher education as a "private good" poses a threat to the humanities and social sciences, including religion and theology (Boughey & McKenna 2021:144). Over the past century, the number of theological faculties at public universities in South Africa has halved from eight to four, with several reconfigured as departments of Religion and Theology or similar entities. Faculties and Departments of Religion and Theology are constantly faced with the challenge of justifying their continued existence within public universities⁶ and asserting their legitimacy as scholarly disciplines within the university (Venter 2016:2).

Scholars highlight the consequence of this commercialisation. Hadebe (2017) argues that neoliberal reforms in South African higher education have increasingly reduced theological education to a market commodity, where both knowledge and ministerial formation are subjected to economic valuation and consumer logic. Naidoo (2017:2) similarly critiques the commercialisation of theological education, while Hadebe (2017:3) observes that this commodification perpetuates systemic inequalities rooted in colonial and apartheid histories. Carpenter (2008:178) illustrates this dynamic in the broader Southern African context, where the logic of "usefulness is winning out" exemplifies the prioritisation of market-oriented utility over holistic formation.

Next to these institutional challenges, African scholars have identified a number of issues affecting theological education (Naidoo 2015).⁷ These issues include access to theological education, the lack of resources, and the need for an Africanised scholarship and curricula (see Wahl 2013; Werner

6 The most recent robust reconfiguration of theological education was undertaken at the University of Pretoria, resulting in the renaming of its Faculty of Theology to the Faculty of Theology and Religion in 2017. For discussion on the historical context and the motivations behind this reconfiguration, see Buitendach (2017). At the University of Free State, the then Vice Chancellor Jonathan Jansen engages in epistemological transformation. For reflections on transformation at the Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State, see Venter & Tolmie (2013).

7 In an edited volume by Naidoo (2015), a number of South African theological educators examined multiple contested facets of theological education, including its institutional structures, accreditation processes, curriculum reform, pastoral formation, issues of diversity, the integration of technological innovations, and the rise of entrepreneurial ministry models.

2011:5). At the core of these debates lies what Naidoo (2013:6) identifies as the enduring “foreignness” of theological education in Africa. African responses to these challenges have included calls for the contextualisation (Amanze 2012; Chitando 2010; Mugambi 2013:117), Africanisation (Maluleke 2006; Naidoo 2016), and decolonisation (Kaunda 2015; Sakupapa 2018) of theological education. Responding to this, Venter (2016:4) underscores that genuine transformation requires inclusion and epistemic justice and calls for the articulation of “a new contextual Theology” (Venter 2016:2). Venter and Tolmie (2013:7) frame the challenge for theology as a constructive one, namely to develop creative theologies of transformation. Despite growing calls for the decolonisation of theology and theological education, there is hesitancy among some theologians towards decolonisation as a critical aspect of the transformation of higher education. Naidoo (2024) recently showed how, despite the increasing use of decolonial theoretical language in South Africa, actual implementation remains anxiety-ridden and intermittent. In this way, “coloniality mediates and attempts to erase decolonising praxis” (Naidoo 2024:2) and theological education is complicit in sustaining colonial difference. I argue that transformation in theological education is not a one-off event, but a continuous, context-responsive process of disrupting and unlearning colonial legacies, while reimagining knowledge for liberative futures.

The pressures of neoliberalisation, corporatisation, and historical colonial legacies have not only challenged the survival of theological faculties in South African universities. They have also exacerbated longstanding tensions within theological education itself. Central among these is the bifurcation between academic theology and pastoral formation. In South Africa, this divide is particularly acute, as faculties often prioritise accreditation metrics and scholarly productivity, while ministerial formation receives secondary attention (Naidoo 2017; Hadebe 2017). Addressing this bifurcation is crucial for re-envisioning theological education as a transformative enterprise that is simultaneously academically rigorous, contextually grounded, and pastorally effective. The question therefore is: How can theological education break free from silos and effectively address both the legacies of the past and the urgent demands of contemporary African society? Within such a context, theological education is called to transcend these pressures through a decolonial reimagining of theological praxis.

4. THE BIFURCATION OF THEOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND PASTORAL MINISTRY

The bifurcation between the vocation of the theologian and that of the pastor raises important questions about the relationship between the academy and

the church, and ultimately, about the nature and purpose of theology itself. What is theology, and what role should it play in the life of the church? These are not merely abstract concerns, for they speak to real tensions in how theological identity is understood and embodied within ecclesial and academic contexts alike.

Too often, the figure of the theologian is presumed to be that of the academic; that is, someone engaged in theology “developed and sustained within an academic social location and driven by academic questions and concerns” (Hiestand & Wilson 2015:69). This assumption contributes to a broader perception that theology is primarily theoretical, abstract, and distanced from the everyday realities of church life and ministry. Conversely, the pastoral office is frequently associated with the practical dimensions of ecclesial leadership: administration, preaching, pastoral care, and social engagement. In this configuration, the pastor becomes the practitioner, while the theologian is cast as the theorist. This presents a division that not only distorts both roles, but also impoverishes the church’s theological and ministerial witness.

The Christian tradition has long affirmed the inseparability of theological reflection and pastoral vocation, as embodied, among others, in the notion of the pastor-theologian. A number of theologians have made constructive proposals to address the divide. Tracy (1981) offered a dialogical model that sought to bridge the divide between academic theology, ecclesial practice, and societal engagement, by repositioning theology as a discipline that is accountable not only to the church and the academy, but also to public life. According to Tracy (1981:154),

[t]heology is public when it takes place in a manner that invites and sustains dialogical exchange with the wider culture and its institutions.

Others such as Anderson (2001) compellingly argue that ministry is not merely the field where theology is applied but rather the very location where theology is born, tested, and reformed. According to Anderson (2001:22), “[t]heology is not a conceptual exercise in search of application; rather it is generated from the praxis of ministry.” Anderson (2001:40) would go as far as depicting ministry “as the womb of theology”. In this way, he insists that theological reflection does not precede ministry; rather, “it follows it, arises from it, and returns to it”. Stated differently, the pastoral context is not a secondary site of application but the primary locus of theological reflection.

Hiestand & Wilson (2015) offer a detailed engagement with the divide between theology and pastoral ministry. They opine a threefold typology of the pastor-theologian, namely the local theologian, the ecclesial theologian, and the scholarly theologian. Their call for the recovery of the pastor-theologian

vision directly challenges the Berlin paradigm, by advocating for a model in which theological reflection is not outsourced to the academy but is embodied within the pastoral vocation itself. By affirming the church as a legitimate site of rigorous theological scholarship, their typology contributes towards dismantling the inherited binary. Their typology demonstrates how theological reflection can be rooted in pastoral praxis at local, ecclesial, and scholarly levels.

The pastor-theologian reflects theologically from within the life of the church, and their ministry is informed by rigorous, faithful, and contextually engaged theology. In contexts such as Southern Africa, where the church has often played a prophetic role in resisting systemic injustice – as in the struggle against apartheid – this integrative model becomes all the more urgent. It challenges contemporary ecclesial and academic structures to reimagine theological education, not as the domain of detached experts, but as the formative ground for leaders whose theological vision is both intellectually robust and pastorally embodied. This vision challenges approaches to theological education that trains clergy to think *about* ministry rather than *from within* the lived realities of their communities. This necessitates addressing what Naidoo (2021:74) described as “the tension between theory and practice” in the theological education. As Fulkerson (2007:300) observes, the perceived opposition between theory and practice often arises because “people struggle to talk about different ways of knowing”, highlighting the epistemological tensions that underlie this divide.

In the South African context, figures such as Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak can arguably be said to have embodied an integrated pastor-theologian identity, where theological reflection and pastoral praxis become mutually constitutive. In Tutu's prophetic witness against apartheid, theology was not simply an abstract but a lived commitment to justice and reconciliation (Battle 2021). In Boesak's case, one can very clearly discern, from his corpus of writings and political activism, a praxis in which the pulpit and the streets are in a dynamic, dialectical relationship in ways that inform and reconfigure the other (see Maluleke 2017). This illumines a liberationist hermeneutic that is deeply rooted in the lived struggles of the people.

5. TOWARDS A DECOLONIAL AND LIBERATIVE MODEL OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

I argue that addressing the bifurcation between theologian and pastor requires a decolonial reimagining of theological praxis. This entails reuniting intellectual rigour with embodied, communal, and contextual engagement, thereby bridging the gap between theology and ministry. In so doing, an appropriation

of Farley's (1983) Athens model of *theologia* as holistic wisdom is instructive. Re-envisioning theological education in Africa, therefore, requires decolonial approaches that bridge this divide, valuing local epistemologies, integrating pastoral formation with scholarly work, and preparing ministers who are both academically and contextually competent. Farley's Athens model provides a useful conceptual tool, in this instance, as it emphasises holistic formation that integrates intellect, moral development, and ministerial praxis. Further, Kelsey's perspectives on the plural curricula and Naidoo's (2021) conceptualisation of integrative theological education complement my argument that there is no universally valid way to structure theological education. Theological education ought to be contextual.

While Hiestand and Wilson's pastor-theologian vision demonstrates how theological reflection can be rooted in pastoral praxis at local, ecclesial, and scholarly levels, it may be critiqued, given its underlying assumptions and epistemic foundations that are mainly Eurocentric. It assumes Western Protestant-like traditions and church structures that resemble those of the Global North. Their model presumes access to academic resources, congregational structures, and epistemic norms characteristic of the Global North, so that their typology potentially privileges Western theological frameworks. In Southern Africa, there are various modes of doing theology, including oral, communal, and performative modes. As the World Council of Churches' ecumenical affirmation on mission and evangelism *Together towards life* observes, "today we are facing a radically changing ecclesial landscape described as 'world Christianity'" (Keum 2012:5). The Southern African context is characteristically a world of world Christianity. Secondly, the model assumes pastoral ministry along the lines of congregational or denominational structures that are familiar in the Western church. In Southern Africa, ecclesial forms are diverse, including African Independent Churches and a variety of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Therefore, while this model offers a corrective to the Berlin bifurcation, it requires decolonial reimagining. Without this, it risks reproducing the same Eurocentric epistemologies it seeks to resist, namely by valorising elite theological discourse while remaining disconnected from the epistemic agency of grassroots communities. Questions about whose knowledge and knowledge for whom should be taken very seriously. There is a need to grapple seriously with the decolonial questions of knowledge by whom, for whom, and towards what ends.

The enduring divide between theology and ministry in Southern Africa is not only institutional or functional, but primarily epistemological in nature. It reflects the persistent legacies of colonial knowledge systems that privileged disembodied, universalist Western epistemologies. Addressing this divide requires a decolonial turn in theological education. Such a turn entails an

interrogation of dominant epistemological frameworks and the reclaiming of theology as a contextual, embodied, and praxis rooted in lived experience. Within such a framework, the hierarchies of knowledge that have historically privileged European theological frameworks as normative while marginalising local expressions of faith and lived religious experience must be deliberately challenged. Such a shift entails recognising African communities not simply as recipients of theological knowledge but also as active producers of theological insight, thereby opening space for pluriversal epistemologies that valorise diverse forms of theological engagement.

Reimagining theological education in Africa requires a transformative alternative to the colonial academy-church bifurcation if it is to serve both the intellectual formation of church leaders and the lived realities of African Christians. Central to this is the notion of “mission from the margins”, which reframes the pastor-theologian as a contextual theologian whose theological reflection emerges directly from the struggles, spiritualities, and aspirations of local communities. In this approach, the lived realities of African Christians are not secondary sites for the application of theology but constitute its generative source. As Sakupapa (2023:217) argues, mission from the margins resists both the colonial missionary gaze and neoliberal commodification, conceiving the margins not merely as spaces of deprivation but also as sites of knowledge, creativity, and theological insight. Framing theological education in this way restores the epistemic agency of African communities and opens the way for a pluriversal theology that integrates multiple epistemologies into the formation of ministers who are both academically grounded and pastorally responsive

Further, reimagining theological education requires framing theology as praxis rather than as an abstract or elitist discipline. African scholars have long articulated orality, narrative, communal memory, and lived experience as authentic and indispensable sources of theological reflection. Oduyoye (1995), for instance, foregrounds the lived experiences of African women as legitimate theological loci, challenging traditions that marginalise embodied knowledge. Such praxis-oriented theology arises from within the concrete realities of people’s lives, where faith is practised, narrated, and embodied, rather than merely theorised. This stands in sharp contrast to the rationalist and universalist modes typical of Eurocentric theological education, which have historically privileged detached intellectualism. In place of such frameworks, decolonial approaches privilege embodied, communal, and participatory ways of knowing. In this instance, African contributions on inculturation, indigenisation, contextualisation, and liberation emerge as vital decolonial epistemes. A significant contribution comes from Kaunda (2015:87), who proposes a theo-pedagogy of materio-spirituality that relocates theological

education into African ways of knowing. His call for a theology of wholeness and harmony underscores the need to place integrative, life-affirming epistemologies at the centre of decolonised theological education.

An ecumenical dimension is equally indispensable for reimagining theological education. Saayman (2013:134) rightly observes that, at the turn of the 21st century, “ecumenical theological education is the only viable option” in Southern Africa. Such an approach fosters collaborative theological engagement across denominational boundaries, cultivating a shared formation ethos that integrates diverse theological traditions and perspectives. Historically, the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Theological Education programme has played a pivotal role in advancing this vision, by promoting and resourcing ecumenical cooperation in theological training (Werner 2011).⁸ In the contemporary Southern African context, however, the call is not only for ecumenical but also for diversified forms of theological education. De Beer’s (2019) proposal of theological education that equips for vocations beyond conventional ecclesiastical roles resonates with this vision. His framing widens the scope of theological formation, preparing leaders for faith-based engagement in society, public life, and development work. This broadens theological education beyond the confines of the church, fostering a praxis that is integrative, context-responsive, and oriented towards the common good.

Finally, re-envisioning theological education requires renewed attention to its formational character within a holistic framework. Conradie (2025) identifies a persistent tension at public universities between the perception of theology as primarily confessional and spiritual, on the one hand, and the reduction of theology to purely academic excellence, on the other. Both risk marginalising praxis-oriented approaches. Farley’s (1983) notion of *theologia* offers a corrective by framing theological education as an integrative and formational enterprise, in which intellectual inquiry, spiritual cultivation, moral discernment, and ministerial praxis are inseparably linked. Building on this, Naidoo (2015:3) describes formation as a “multi-faceted activity” encompassing critical thinking, knowledge acquisition, skills development, and religious identity formation. Later, Naidoo (2021:68) insists that theology must be understood not only as knowing, but also as doing and being. De Beer’s (2019) emphasis on fostering “faith-based agency for the common good and flourishing societies” further underscores this vision. These perspectives contribute towards a model of theological education that is decolonial, integrative, and transformative and one that reclaims formation as the heart of theological education.

8 For a comprehensive study examining the impact of the WCC’s ETE programme, see Kaunda (2013).

6. CONCLUSION

Addressing the divide between theology and ministry requires not only curricular reform but also an epistemic reconstruction that dismantles colonial binaries of church versus academy and pastor versus theologian. Theological education in Southern Africa must be reimagined as liberative, integrative, and contextually rooted, resisting commodification, while affirming the epistemic agency of African communities. Models such as Farley's theologia and Kelsey's Athens-Berlin dialectic provide conceptual resources; yet they gain transformative power only when reinterpreted through a decolonial lens. In this instance, "mission from the margins" is central, not as mere missional slogan but as an epistemological and pedagogical stance that situates theology within the lived wisdom and struggles of local communities. Such a vision reframes theological education as a holistic and formational enterprise that unites scholarship, spirituality, and praxis, equipping leaders for the flourishing of African societies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AMANZE, J.N.

2012. The voicelessness of theology and religious studies in contemporary Africa: Who is to blame and what has to be done? Setting a new agenda. *Missionalia* 40(3):189-204. <https://doi.org/10.7832/40-3-28>

ANDERSON, R.S.

2001. *The shape of practical theology: Empowering ministry with theological praxis*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

BANKS, R.J.

1999 [1991]. *Reenvisioning theological education: Exploring a missional alternative to current models*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans.

BATTLE, M.

2021. *Desmond Tutu: A spiritual biography of South Africa's confessor*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

BOESAK, A.

1976. *Farewell to innocence: A socio-ethical study on black theology and black power*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

BOUGHEY, C. & MCKENNA, S.

2021. *Understanding higher education: Alternative perspectives*. Cape Town: African Books Collective. <https://doi.org/10.47622/9781928502210>

BUITENDAG, J.

2017. Draft framework document. In: J. Buitendag (ed.), *Centenary celebrations colloquium – Reimagining curricula for a just university in a vibrant democracy: Carrying the conversation forward*, (Pretoria: Faculty of Theology, University of Pretoria) pp. 65–72.

CARPENTER, J.

2008. New evangelical universities: Cogs in a world system or players in a new game? In: O.U. Kalu & A.M. Low (eds), *Interpreting contemporary Christianity: Global processes and local identities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans), pp. 151-186.

CHITANDO, E.

2010. Equipped and ready to serve? Transforming theology and religious studies in Africa. *Missionalia* 38(2):197-210.

CONRADIE, E.M.

1997. An ABC in theological education? *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 38(4):349-361.

2025. *From the theological encyclopedia to doing ecotheology: On finding and losing the way*. Paper prepared for a Multi-Disciplinary Theological Conference on the Ecological Crisis in Southern Africa, Zomba Theological University, 12-15 August.

DE BEER, S.F.

2019. Faith-based agency and theological education: A failed opportunity? *HTS Theological Studies/Teologiese Studies* 75(4):1-13. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i4.5541>

DE VILLIERS, P.G.R.

2016. The nature of knowledge in the South African theological discourse. In: R. Venter (ed.), *Theology and the (post)apartheid condition: Genealogies and future directions* (Bloemfontein: SUN MeDIA), pp. 26-49.

DUNCAN, G.A.

2000. Theological education: Mission birth – African renaissance. *Missionalia* 28(1):23-40.

DU TOIT, P.R.

2009. The Dutch Reformed Church and the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 30(3):1-18. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v30i3.263>

EDGAR, B.

2005. The theology of theological education. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29(3):208-217.

FARLEY, E.

1983. *Theologia: The fragmentation and unity of theological education*. Philadelphia, PN: Fortress Press.

FORD, D.F.

2007. *Christian wisdom: Desiring God and learning love*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511487699>

FULKERSON, M.M.

2007. *Places of redemption: Theology for a worldly church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199296477.001.0001>

HADEBE, N.M.

2017. Commodification, decolonisation and theological education in Africa: Renewed challenges for African theologians. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(3):1-10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4550>

HELETA, S. & DILRAJ, I.

2024. Decolonisation is not even a footnote: On the dominant ideologies and smokescreens in South African higher education. *Transformation in Higher Education* 9:1-10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v9i0.416>

HIESTAND, G. & WILSON, T.

2015. *The pastor theologian: Resurrecting an ancient vision*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

KAUNDA, C.J.

2013. Imagining a just and equitable African Christian community: A critical analysis of the contribution of Theological Education Fund/Ecumenical Theological Education (1910-2012). Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

2015. The denial of African agency: A decolonial theological turn. *Black Theology* 13(1):73-92. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1476994815Z.000000000048>

KELSEY, D.H.

2011. *Between Athens and Berlin: The theological education debate*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

KEUM, J. (ED.)

2012. *Together towards life: Mission and evangelism in changing landscapes: With a practical guide*. Geneva: WCC Publications.

KINSLER, F.R. (ED.)

1983. *Ministry by the people: Theological education by extension*. Geneva: WCC Publications.

2008. *Diversified theological education: Equipping all God's people*. Pasadena, CA: WCIU Press.

KLAAREN, E.M.

1997. Creation and apartheid: South African theology since 1948. In: R. Elphick & R. Davenport (eds), *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social, and cultural history* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers), pp. 370-382.

LALU, P. & MURRAY, N. (Eds)

2012. *Becoming UWC: Reflections, pathways and unmaking apartheid's legacy*. Bellville: Centre for Humanities Research.

MABULUKI, K.

2013. Theological education for all God's people: Theological Education by Extension (TEE) in Africa. In: I.A. Phiri & D. Werner (eds), *Handbook of theological education in Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications), pp. 832-840. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ddcphf.89>

MALULEKE, T.

2006. The Africanisation of theological education: Does theological education equip you to help your sister? In: E.P. Antonio (ed.), *Inculturation and postcolonial discourse in African theology* (New York: Peter Lang), pp. 46-55.

2017. The making of Allan Aubrey Boesak: Theologian and political activist. *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 45(1):61-76. <https://doi.org/10.7832/45-1-224>

MASHABELA, K.

2023. Training of African Independent Churches students at the Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 49(3):1-15. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/14157>

MUGAMBI, J.N.K.

2013. The future of theological education in Africa and the challenges it faces. In: I.A. Phiri & D. Werner (eds), *Handbook of theological education in Africa* (Oxford: WCC Publications), pp. 118-125. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ddcphf.20>

NAIDOO, M.

2013. Persistent issues impacting on the training of ministers in the South African context. *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 112(1):1-16. <https://doi.org/10.7833/112-0-57>

2016. Overcoming alienation in Africanising theological education *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(1):18.- <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3062>

2017. The globalising effect of commercialisation and commodification in African theological education. *HTS Theological Studies/Teologiese Studies* 73(3):1-8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4577>

2021. Integrative ministerial training: Methodological and pedagogical integration within the curriculum. *Acta Theologica* 41:66-83.

2024. The mediation of coloniality in decolonisation developments in South African theological education. *Religions* 15(2):1-10. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020160>
- NAIDOO, M. (ED.)
2015. *Contested issues in training ministers in South Africa*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media. <https://doi.org/10.18820/9780992236014>
- ODUYOYE, M.A.
1995. *Daughters of Anowa: African women and patriarchy*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- OLIVER, E. & OLIVER, W.H.
2017. The colonisation of South Africa: A unique case. *HTS: Theological Studies/Teologiese Studies* 73(3):1-8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4498>
- PHIRI, I.A. & WERNER, D. (EDS.)
2013. *Handbook of theological education in Africa*. Oxford: Regnum Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1ddcphf>
- RAGSDALE, J.P.
1986. *Protestant mission education in Zambia, 1880-1954*. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press.
- RAMANTSWANA, H.
2015. Theological training in the black Reformed Churches in South Africa. *In die Skriflig* 49(1):1-17. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i1.1814>
- ROOY, S.
1988. Historical models of theological education. In: C.R. Padilla (ed.), *New alternatives in theological education* (Oxford: Regnum Books), pp. 51-72.
- SAKUPAPA, T.C.
2018. The decolonising content of African theology and the decolonisation of African theology: Reflections on a decolonial future for African theology. *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 46(3):406-424. <https://doi.org/10.7832/46-3-277>
2020. Theology amidst wickedness: Is African theology equipped to address intractable societal issues? *Philosophia Reformata* 85(2):212-225. <https://doi.org/10.1163/23528230-8502A007>
2023. Tracking the decolonial in African Christian theology: A Southern African perspective on mission from the margins as a decolonial mode of mission. *International Review of Mission* 112(2):202-217. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irrom.12476>
- SAAYMAN, W.
2013. Mission as theological education: Is Christian mission history coming full circle? *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 41(2):133-145. <https://doi.org/10.7832/41-2-10>

SCHLEIERMACHER, F.D.E.

2011. *Brief outline of theology as a field of study. Third edition. Revised translation of the 1811 and 1830 editions, with essays and notes by T.N. Tice.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

TRACY, D.

1981. *The analogical imagination: Christian theology and the culture of pluralism.* New York: Crossroad. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900018983>

VENTER, R.

2016. Theology and the (post-)apartheid university: Mapping discourses, interrogating transformation. *Transformation in Higher Education* 1(1):1-6. <https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v1i1.5>

VENTER, R. & TOLMIE, D.F. (EDS)

2013. *Transforming theological knowledge: Essays on theology and the university after apartheid.* Johannesburg: UJ Press. <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781920382261>

WAHL, W.P.

2013. Towards relevant theological education in Africa: Comparing the international discourse with contextual challenges. *Acta Theologica* 33(1):266-293. <https://doi.org/10.4314/actat.v33i1.14>

WERNER, D.

2011. Ecumenical learning in theological education: The World Council of Churches perspective. *The Expository Times* 123(1):1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524611414478>

WERNER, D., ESTERLINE, D. & KANG, N.

2010. *Handbook of theological education in world Christianity.* Oxford: Regnum.

ZELEZA, P.T.

2006. Beyond Afropessimism: Historical accounting of African universities. *Pambazuka News* 30. [Online.] Retrieved from: <https://www.pambazuka.org/governance/beyond-afropessimism-historical-accounting-african-universities> [7 November 2025]

Keywords

Decolonial theology

Theological education

Pastor-theologian

Mission from the margins

Trefwoorde

Dekoloniale teologie

Teologiese opleiding

Pastor-teoloog

Sending vanaf die kantlyn