Contested issues in **training ministers** in South Africa

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Editor
Marilyn Naidoo

Dealing with the Other: managing diversity in theological education

Marilyn Naidoo

Introduction

Theological education faces the same challenges with growing diversity as the rest of higher education in South Africa. In our post–apartheid society, church denominations have gone through a process of reformulating their identity and have restructured theological education for all its members, resulting in growing multi–cultural student bodies (Dreyer 2012). These new student constituencies reflect a wide spectrum of cultural backgrounds, personal histories, and theological commitments, and represent diversity in race, ethnicity, culture, class, gender, age and sexual orientation.

Within theological education, this issue of diversity is theologically complicated and contested as it is attached to religious dogma. In dealing with 'otherness', educators cannot agree whether the goal is to 'understand' or to 'convert', or to bring them 'into the fold' or to explore the 'interconnectedness' (Foster 2002:21). For example, one of the most significant changes in theological education has been the increase in women students, resulting in political leverage for feminist theological education that continues to challenge traditional practices in seminaries (Chopp 1995:iv). Diversity exists both as a threat and promise, problem and possibility (Foster 2002:22). The aim of this chapter is to unpack the contested nature of diversity and diversity management in theological education in South Africa in order to show how this impacts on the training and formation of church ministers.

To begin with, diversity is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance towards embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of divisions and differences contained within each individual (Foster 2002:5). As such, diversity represents a mix of characteristics that makes a person or group unique, or assigns them an identity. However, it must be emphasised that social markers of difference and privilege are neither innocent nor innate, but rather the result of socially structured boundaries between individuals or social groups (Cross and Naidoo 2012:229). The boundaries between different categories of social groups and knowledge are a function of power relations, as "power relations create boundaries, legitimise boundaries, reproduces boundaries between different categories of groups, gender, class and race" (Bernstein 2000:5). Attitudes towards diversity have shifted, and in South Africa diversity is valued across the political spectrum. It responds to what is perceived as a future trend towards a multi–cultural, multi–ethnic, multi–lingual, multi–gender and multi–sexual order (Rosada 2006). However, given the apartheid legacy, the pursuit of diversity in South Africa is only meaningful within the framework of human rights and social justice (Cross 2004).

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Within theological education, reflections about diversity begin with the exploration of theological visions of the theological institution and its education, or more concretely, the responsibility of the college or seminary to the mission of the Church (Speller and Seymour, 2002:2). Meyer (2009:32) identifies four reasons why faith-based higher education institutions must be concerned about diversity. Firstly, Christian colleges and universities must reckon with the history of discrimination against women and racial/ethnic groups and their participation in discriminatory systems. Secondly, is the concern for students to grow through cross-cultural experiences as they prepare to work in an increasingly diverse world. Valuing difference, developing multi-cultural competence, and being globally minded are essential skills in today's workforce. Furthermore, colleges and universities exist to serve the needs of their constituencies which are changing and becoming more diverse. Finally, diversity is fundamentally a matter of justice.

Attention to diversity is not simply a matter of inviting participation, but a lens in the theological school's "essential task of learning, teaching, research and formation" (Gilligan 2002:9). However, diversity is a challenging, sensitive and often divisive task. In some seminaries the institutional culture only sees the need to adapt some procedures in order to respond more effectively to students' needs, or to include some courses that reflect theological perspectives distinct from those of the dominant culture (Riebe-Estrella 2009). In these cases the fundamental worldview of institutions and of pedagogy remain the same, while some accommodation is made for those who come from diverse cultures and ecclesial experiences. Even though it become unacceptable and politically incorrect for most educational institutions not to take diversity seriously, theological institutions have not done enough to prepare students from different cultural and racial backgrounds for effective ministry in a variety of cultural settings (Foster 2002).

Despite the efforts to increase diversity in theological education during the last three decades in the United States (Cascante 2008:21), some, but not enough, progress has been made. In general, the lenses of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality have only been used as hermeneutical, pedagogical and critical perspectives on the production and function of knowledge in many theological disciplines (Androas 2012:5). According to Riebe-Estrella (2009:19), no new vision of theological education is being proposed in which differences are lifted and divisions are unmasked. Rather the institutional culture remains one of privilege for those who have held the power to maintain their dominance, making the educational enterprise fundamentally reflective of that same group.

In South Africa, there is scarcity of literature on how diversity is managed in theological institutions. One wonders how theological institutions are dealing with diversity while forming students within their institutional cultures, as this kind of socialisation is seen as most formative (Hindman 2002). Religious organisations are mediating institutions between the private and public spheres (Smith, Stones, Peck and Naidoo 2007). As such, churches and theological institutions have the potential to draw people out of their private, racially segregated lives into a social space where human interactions are more intimate

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than in the public arena. If anyone should be doing something about our racialised society, they say it should be the Christians, as their religion calls for it and their faith gives them the tools and the moral forces needed for change. The new interracial, non-sexist relationships that are created in these institutions can become a model for South African society. However, the reality in many cases is that "churches, the presumed agents of reconciliation, are at best impotent and at worst accomplices in strife" (Volf 1996:36). A church should, by definition, be a place of acceptance and love; however, it is also an arena for subtle racial tension and sexism. Here one may question, for example, how the Church in South Africa is dealing with racism, sexism and homophobia, what kind of Christians will such a church and its accompanying theological training institutions form, and how are future ministers being equipped to deal with this kind of diversity? How will ministers provide the necessary leadership that will enable churches through their outreach to become beacons for the reign or rule of God in which all persons are treated with equity, dignity and respect?

Engaging diversity in higher education

Higher education institutions play an important role as sites where issues of tolerance, inclusion, access, and structural inequities could be addressed effectively. Consequently, 'diversity', 'diversity issues' and 'diversification' have become part of the education debate and policy, and pose new challenges to South African tertiary institutions (Cross 2004:397). Most institutions are attempting to respond to these challenges within the context of a transformation process which impacts on every aspect of academic life – from student access and support, outreach programmes, staff recruitment and retention, to academic programme development, research, scholarship and the social and learning environment on campus. Generally, conceptualisations of diversity converge on or point to the need for integrating the politics of cultural and identity recognition with the politics of social justice and equity, which represents a key strength in South African diversity discourse (Cross 2004:400).

The management of diversity issues are challenging in many institutions. For example, despite the continuing problems related to racism, there are cases – especially in public schools and universities – where few people are talking about race, sometimes even affirming that "we don't have a problem here" (Carrim 2000:33). Schools and universities attempt to conceal negative racial attitudes because, according to Carrim, it is related to at least three kinds of fear: (1) fear of losing privilege; (2) fear of continuing with the ways of the past; and (3) fear of civil strife (2000:33). Stevens corroborates this denial of racism by stating, "Whatever the reasons, South African society's pre-occupation with not being pre-occupied with 'race' and racism provides an initial impetus for continued critical research, theorising and study into these phenomena" (2003:192).

Linked to racism is also gender discrimination or sexism, which legitimises unequal relations of power between men and women, and oppressive patriarchal relations that relegate

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women to subservient lower status and deny them access to societal rewards. This is not to play down the significance of the ideological manipulation of other forms of difference. Homosexuals are welcomed in the faith community and regarded as devoted Christians, but church councils are officially allowed to exclude homosexuals who are honest about their sexual lifestyle (Dreyer 2008:1236). At the same time the point needs to be made that gender is not just about women and sexuality is not just about gay and lesbian people, although they are often the ones who highlight the issues precisely since they have been defined as not the norm. Here we see that categorisation tends to homogenise groups and create a discursive illusion that members of a category share more in common than they in fact do. This hides the variety of interests, social positions, and identities ascribed to the group by that category (Cross and Naidoo 2012). At the same time it must be noted that individuals have multiple identities and these identities must be understood as they intersect with each other (Smith 2009). Simplifying the complexity of experience makes it difficult, if not impossible, to account for the nature of the intersections of race, class, gender and other forms of difference, and these intersections have yet to be explored and theorised (Cross and Naidoo 2012:231).

It is important to note an instrumentalist view of diversity issues existing in scholarship in our South African context (Makgoba 1999, Goduka 1996). In this sense, the debate on diversity has been dominated more by practical concerns than critical ones. Diversity has emerged as an applied enterprise or problem-solving exercise, more concerned with 'how to' and less with 'why' (Cross 2004:399). Traditional emphasis on the pursuit of diversity knowledge as part of the wider academic programme on race, class and gender studies, are giving way to the workshop-type skills-based programmes on diversity management, diversity awareness, teaching and learning in diverse classrooms, gender sensitivity, etc. Institutional practice has not been accompanied by adequate academic scholarship and intellectual practice grounded in disciplinary knowledge. At the same time, according to Cross (2004:396), the development of campus social/integration programmes are taking a backseat in some institutions: There is a firm belief that programmes that systematically promote social integration represent a form of undesirable 'social engineering' and that 'these things must happen naturally'. This brings into the debate the relative value of 'evolutionary' versus 'managed' change in higher education (Cross 2004:396).

Contestations in managing diversity in theological education

Within theological education, the aim of exploring diversity is to involve the theological community to look at the ways in which difference is constructed, how its significance shifts, how it is operationalised in society, and, most critically, why difference continues to matter. Gilligan (2002:9) takes this definition further by stating that diversity means resisting the homogenising of racial, ethnic, cultural and class differences into uniformity. Gilligan (2002) believes that learning how diverse constituencies use power to control and shape the agenda of theological education and its mission, is critical. The reason for

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these initiatives related to diversity in theological education is not to ferret out racists or sexists, but to examine the unrecognised ways in which power assumptions embedded in institutional culture might disenfranchise certain groups of students (Riebe-Estrella 2009:19), whether knowingly or unknowingly, and undermine the educational mission of empowering students for work.

A significant part of the challenge in exploring diversity has been the insistence on universalism in the name of Christianity, which all too often has amounted to the eradication of difference in the interest of hegemony of the dominant (Christerson et al. 2005). These very claims were often the reason why Christian churches could avoid dealing in a concerted way, head on, with concerns about stereotyping and racism. Important to note is that dogmatic and fundamentalist adherence to personal beliefs have been positively associated with racist attitudes (Duriez and Hutsebaut 2000:85). "One's creed, per se, does not particularly associate with such prejudice, but the attitude that one's beliefs are the fundamentally correct, essential, inerrant ones, is associated with bigotry" (Altemeyer 2003:19). The relationship between spirituality and racism is, therefore, moderated by the historic-cultural context and by the degree of dogmatism with which the beliefs are held.

In theological circles, differences have been lifted up and celebrated, but only to the extent that Christians could 'tame' it, and only when it was difference that was preferred. Therefore, instead of finding a common matrix upon which to relate serious differences of opinions, many feel they have no place of acceptance, sometimes no sense of identity grounded in the Church's tradition and history (Christerson et al. 2005). Church traditions are filled with polarities and different approaches, with an unwillingness to "sit down at the table and have fellowship, to talk with and learn from one another" (Speller and Seymour 2002:2). For example, within theological education, while there is theological agreement that racism is morally wrong and that seminaries need to address the issue of race, there is less theological agreement about how to do it (Aleshire 2009:2). Theologically, some, like the evangelicals, view sin and salvation as personal, stating that racial prejudice is a personal sin. In this theological worldview, the wrongs of racial discrimination are dealt with by looking inward, dealing with individual prejudice, and can be solved by the repentance and conversion of the sinful individuals at fault (Emerson and Smith 2000:48). This approach comes from relationalism (a strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships) derived from the view that human nature is fallen and that salvation and Christian maturity can only come through a personal relationship with Christ (Emerson and Smith 2000:48). Some other main line traditions perceive sin and salvation as having deeply social dimensions. Racial discrimination is more than the sum of the personal prejudice – it is a function of power, class and systems of domination. In this theological view, social systems and structures must be addressed, which, if corrected, will impact the effects of personal racial prejudices – whether or not individuals become more righteous. These two examples highlight different perspectives in approaching an issue of diversity which further challenges the process of managing diversity.

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Nowhere is the failure to see diversity as a unifying force or concept more visible than when Christians speak of God; when Christians think and speak theologically. Indeed, the tendency of such talk to divide is so great that many theological institutions go out of their way not to talk about God or beliefs stemming from a particular theological perspective. Here is another irony: the primary basis of Christian belief and value systems is something Christians do not or cannot share. The implications of this for unity or comprehensive approaches towards education for ministry in churches filled with diversity and difference, are great.

In our context, theological institutions educate students for service in a democratic and pluralistic society, and to engage through scholarship and participation in the issues of that society. From this perspective, the very survival of training institutions is contingent upon adaptation to the current culture. Societal pressure is not the only source of 'push' – there are also forces *within* the institution that push towards this adaptation (McMinn 1998). Scriptural teachings and the missional focus of theological education all direct Christians towards a religious praxis that welcomes diverse peoples as equal partners in faith. Theology courses itself are well-suited for investigating and challenging social inequalities, since theology deals with fundamental beliefs about the self, God, community and society. As these internal and external forces push Bible colleges and seminaries towards greater pluralism, the institutions are also pulled towards greater homogeneity. Thus the need to preserve the institution's core values and beliefs makes it difficult for it to fully embrace those who do not look or sound like the majority of its constituents (Abadeer 2009).

One of the reasons Christian intuitions struggle with diversity, is the fear that embracing diversity will ultimately result in the theological institution's environment becoming contrary to the faith and, in the context of the United States, becomes secularised (Parades-Collins 2009). Locally, Bible colleges maybe fear that an unintentional by-product of incorporating diversity could be that their colleges will become 'politicised'. When institutions do not employ initiatives for diversity or engage in a passive role as it relates to race relations on campus, negative reactions and misunderstandings amongst students are likely to occur. Steele (1995:177) reminds us that "on our campuses, such micro-societies, all that remain unresolved between black and white, all the old wounds and shames that have never have been addressed, present themselves for attention – and present our youth with pressures they cannot always handle." The institution's culture is not really a self-contained culture; it is more accurately a sub-culture of the broader social and religious world outside the school.

Once theological institutions do face the full magnitude of diversity, there could be the temptation to adopt a 'colour blind' position that shields institutions from differences rather than help the seminary community appreciate and learn from their experience. This is exactly where the problem lies: a lack of consciousness of the ways in which institutions are organised that holds direct consequences for students, identity and transformation. This attempt to neutralise cultural particularities in an educational environment maintains

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the *status quo*, creating an ethos that favours the dominant group as the norm rather than the dynamism of unity within diversity (Hurtado 2005:600). Educators who apply this colour blind approach often try to suppress and gloss over their prejudice against students from racial groups other than their own, by professing not to see colour. Furthermore, what is implied in these practices is the belief that newcomers to institutions come from educationally and culturally inferior backgrounds, and that adjusting the curriculum to meet their needs amounts to lowering the otherwise high standards. Assimilation has proved to be inadequate, as it was premised on absorbing diversity into dominant ways of being and doing. In addition, the multi-cultural educational approach has also been seen as weak by celebrating diverse cultures in isolated events. It is only seen as a benign form of assimilation, but is unable to challenge social structures, processors and attitudes that perpetuate unjust power relations between groups (Cross and Naidoo 2012:237).

To overcome the 'colour blind' stance in theological education, an analysis of power relations between dominant and oppressed groups is done, using theories of critical pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, anti-racist education, critical multi-cultural theories, and post-conflict or reconciliation pedagogies (Androas 2012, Cascante-Gomez 2008, Reddie 2010, Riebe-Estrella 2009). It assumes that structural social change will result when power relations are challenged (Brookfield 1995). As we know, the internalisation of apartheid stereotypes, structures and beliefs has resulted in degrees of resistance, rigidity, and low levels of adaptability of the individual or groups to the changing South African environment and its new value system. Jansen (2008:5) calls this "bitter knowledge" and it represents "how students remember and enact the past." This is a product of intergenerational transmission of spoken and unspoken messages from parents, the Church, school, cultural associations and the peer group (Jansen 2008:5). These messages have not been interrupted over the period of transition, despite the major changes in the formal institutions of democracy. The question remains as to how South Africans can un-think old categories of citizenship and refine themselves as a nation in order to move beyond racial categorisation and their own political bondage.

To sustain learning environments that are welcoming and empowering to all students, for example in the classroom, would involve a reassessment of pedagogy, theological content, methods of communicating and knowledge construction. In *Fighting the Elephant in the Room: Ethical Reflections on White Privilege and Other Systems of Advantage in the Teaching of Religion*, Hill, Harris and Martinez-Vazquez (2009:4) offer a strategy for re-imagining liberating education that takes social justice seriously. They write of the elephant in the room as the complex nexus of systems of advantage, with a special focus on white privilege. In developing models of anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices for Christian ministry, Reddie (2010:96), in the United Kingdom context, speaks of challenging unaware white students to reflect on what privileges and opportunities are accrued by the simple fact that they are white. It begins with an acknowledgement of the unearned privileges that whiteness confers. Whiteness studies is an emergent field that examines "white inflections in which whiteness as a form of power is defined, deployed, performed, policed and

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reinvented" (Steyn and Conway 2010:284). The point of these practices is to conscientise students to the dynamics of difference, to challenge assumptions, so that difference is not seen negatively but as an opportunity to deconstruct their past with all its attendant behaviours (Lee 2009:21). These reflections are undertaken within a multi-disciplinary framework, similar to the forms of analysis advocated by womanist theologians in that issues of gender, class, sexuality and disability (how many used the terms 'male' or 'heterosexual' or 'able-bodied') are also discussed and reflected upon.

At the same time the perennial dominant Eurocentric approach to teaching and learning needs to be critiqued. These approaches dominant in the field of theology include both the content and method of communicating knowledge. Whether the theology taught in institutions is Christian dogmatics or constructive theologies, it invariably focuses on Western formulations of faith and philosophical thought. The very language of discourse that has developed is inherently racialised as white and normative. The work of unmasking these dominant frameworks of knowledge and their interconnectedness with colonial power in all its forms, past and present, is not new (Androas 2012:6). However, not enough attention has been given to this, because cultural colonisation, which involves colonised minds and education systems, is a deeper and long-lasting form of colonial power. This form of power is more subtle and more difficult to identify, resist and transform.

To transcend the Eurocentrism of theological education, the cultural, religious and theological knowledge represented in the classroom needs to be acknowledged as being *not* equally valued. Using Mignolo's terms, "persons who come from different places and think from different locations," that is from different worldviews, are not interacting mutually (Mignolo 2007:490). There is a hierarchy of systems and sources of knowledge, with the Western perspective at the top of the pyramid which is consistently affirmed in subtle ways as universal. The approach advanced by Mignolo (2007:453) for decolonising knowledge, is described as 'delinking' – understood as a de-colonial epistemic shift leading to other universality and brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding. Pedagogical strategies rooted in these discourses, as can be seen from the examples presented above, place emphasis on critical thinking as the foundation for new meaning construction, self-discovery, and self-creation against the legacies of prejudice and alienation. Through exploration and reflection, students are challenged to question the taken-for-granted notion of their rootedness in a culture or a nation.

This dominant Eurocentric universality claim must continue to be dismantled; however, to challenge this worldview is not only to introduce change, but also to threaten the fundamental stability of the educational enterprise. There should be a discussion about maintaining the current theological 'canon' and about widening the dialogue to include other voices. This is more than simply adding black scholars to the syllabi. It has significant implications for the shape of theological discourse, the redefining of who should be the

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'gatekeeper' and who should be involved in the 'de-colonialisation' of the curriculum (Andraos 2012).

Impact of diversity management on ministerial formation

Within the theological institution, the content and structures of religious faith are both essential for the student to develop an understanding of the relationships between self, community and God, and for developing character and morality that help them become better leaders. It is important to note that the institutional culture plays a powerful role in how students are actually shaped by institutional culture. This 'culture' is not easily changed or manipulated, and gives meaning to the life of the institution. However, it must be noted that students are not clones of the community (Hindman 2002). Instead they negotiate with it, contest aspects of it, and use it as a tool kit for constructing perspectives that are in varying degrees of agreement or disagreement with the normative core of the culture (Mezirow 2000). In their interactions with the institutional culture, students are, in varying degrees, influenced and moulded by the culture even as they (students) affect the institution's culture. Faculty and students can be helped to understand the formative means that institutional culture employs so that they might find a common theological discourse together.

Within this institutional culture, students are being shaped within diversity and socialised in how to respond to diversity. The way in which diversity is managed could create a source of division, or it could be used as a positive element in religious identity formation. For example, Kleinman (1984) analysed the culture of a Midwestern theological seminary and focused on the way the school's culture has a paradoxical effect in certain ways of de-professionalising its students while, at the same time, equipping them for a professional calling.

The question at play here is, how can students relate theology to their own context while also attempting to understand the other to such an extent that their own presuppositions are challenged and their work in society becomes more effective? This question belongs to the work of formation which is about ongoing development of ministerial identity, of moving towards what may be referred to as greater authenticity, more authentic identity, and authenticity vocation (Palmer 2000). Reclaiming one's race, culture, gender sexuality and other aspects of identity, is part of moving towards greater authenticity.

Parks (2000) explores how community can best challenge and support students in their spiritual development, which also includes identity formation. Fowler (1981) suggests that spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes manifested through image, symbol, ritual, art and music. These dimensions of spirituality are often deeply cultural, hence the connection of spirituality to cultural identity. To progress towards internalised and autonomous racial identity, for example, students need to cross racial borders of learning and growth. As students meet

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each other, they reach new levels of engagement either by challenging their development process and forming new values, or by confirming their current values (Parks 2000). Tisdell (2003) believes that in reclaiming their cultural identities, individuals will typically go through a process of unlearning what they have unconsciously internalised (Hurtado 2006). Part of this process is learning from their own histories, reclaiming what has been lost or unknown to them, and reframing what has often been cast subconsciously as negative in more positive ways (Hurtado 2005:605). This encounter of 'otherness' within one's immediate peer group provides opportunities of genuine encounter. Pettigrew and Tropp's (2000) meta-analysis of hundreds of studies of interactions amongst groups and intergroup contact theory, highlights the power of these conditions to reduce prejudice and discrimination. Learning to see the religious dignity and humanity of the other is a first step towards encounter and dialogue (Hurtado 2007).

Since handling diversity in education is so complex, educators need to recognise the validity of differences. This will, in turn, require an appraisal of the educator's personal as well as institutional ideologies and perceptions, and a frank dedication to facilitate and manage student diversity (Meier and Hartell 2009:180). This formative educational process is challenging enough, more so for educators who do not share the same ecclesial or cultural perspectives as students, and are expected to prepare students for ministry. The ambiguity arising from this lack of shared experience is exacerbated by gendered, socio-economic, educational experience and by ideological commitments through which educators understand who they are in relation to students (Foster 2002:24). At a very profound level, people who do work with these issues are engaged in changing people's social identities. It is not enough to merely train teachers and students to understand people's differences at a superficial level. They need to have a deep grasp of their own social and personal contradiction which requires soul-searching and self-reflexivity.

Conclusion

The question is no longer whether to acknowledge or pursue diversity, but to understand the conditions that are needed to make diversity work in different contexts. Smith (2009) argues that a comprehensive approach towards diversity is needed — one that shifts the emphasis from individuals and underrepresented groups to institutions. For Christian institutions, building institution capacity for diversity can be supported through its unique identity, mission and theological foundation as a source of strength. The problem diversity poses is to locate a common intersection amongst and between the ideas, myths and dreams undergirding these identities and cultures, and then to create an educational and conversational space sturdy enough to allow the restructuring of 'what counts' as theological education. In spite of the contested nature of managing diversity by embracing and encountering difference of many kinds, there needs to be an awareness that this profoundly impacts on the spiritual, academic and professional formation of students.

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Theological training institutions are gifted with the lenses of faith and values, and are challenged to identify, reinterpret, and dismantle barriers that prevent diversity. This becomes an opportunity to 'live out the Gospel, institutionally'. Once the institutional culture begins to see its own situatedness, it can begin to shed its parochial and paternalistic tendencies (Foster 2002:16). This is only possible when 'whiteness' or 'blackness' or heterosexuality or being male is no longer conceived as the norm, but as one contextual position amongst many, albeit often carrying with it particular privileges and considerable power. It is hoped that the giftedness of diversity in our context can become an opportunity for empowerment, healing of memories, and re-imagining racial, cultural and religious reconciliation.

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