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Themes of future issues:
Vol. 9, No. 2 (December 2006)
Christian Mission and Scholarship

Vol. 10, No. 1 (June 2007)
Methodology in Gospel and Culture Research

The cover design is based on Adinkra symbols, which are found in West Africa, especially in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana. Each symbol has a distinctive proverbial or religious meaning. ‘Adinkra’ means ‘farewell’ and Adinkra cloth, that is, cloth stamped with Adinkra symbols, is usually worn at funerals as a way of bidding farewell to the deceased.
This issue of the Journal of African Christian Thought comprises for the most part the papers and edited discussion from a consultation that was made possible through assistance from the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Department of the National Research Foundation of South Africa. The consultation concluded a two-year project of the African Theological Fellowship, entitled ‘Integrating IKS as Intellectual Resource in Theological Education and Christian Scholarship in Africa’. It was held at the Emaphetelweni Dominican Conference Centre, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, from 4 to 6 April 2006.

The purpose of this consultation was specific and forward-looking, in recognition of the kairos moment of a new phase in Christian history. As the preamble to the consultation programme stated:

A hitherto unquestioned assumption that Christianity as a faith is the religion of the West, an assumption that lasted for a thousand years and more, has now been succeeded by a realisation that Christianity is in fact a non-Western religion. A world Christianity beyond the West has emerged, in which Africa, alongside Asia and Latin America, perspectives have become the standard measure of Christianity in the world.

Most significantly, this new world Christianity is living and growing outside of the Western Enlightenment frame. Whatever else may be said about globalisation as the impact of the West upon the rest of the world, this is not translating into a generalised acceptance of Western value-setting for Christian faith and practice.

This realisation shaped the African Christianity programme, initiated and designed by the African Theological Fellowship (ATF) and offered at both MTh and PhD levels in collaboration with the School of Theology, University of Natal (subsequently the School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal) since 1998. The teaching and research on this programme sought to demonstrate that Christianity is properly an African religion, having deep affinities with African traditions of history, culture, religion and language. It was this focus that attracted the attention of African and deeply Christian, we may have, perhaps, no greater vocation.

This consultation therefore seeks to identify, to map out and to share our reflections on the pertinent academic challenges that face us as scholars with a commitment to serve our generation and so contribute to the shape of the future. As the preamble again noted:

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As scholars who understand ourselves as both deeply African and deeply Christian, we may have, perhaps, no greater vocation.

The four plenary papers covered a range of topics. Kwame Bediako’s opening reflections, ‘A new age in Christian history: African Christianity as representative Christianity – Some implications for theological education and scholarship’, gave an overview of the historical moment in which African Christian scholarship is now set. The paper laid out some of the concerns and challenges that arise with respect to engaging with Africa’s indigenous knowledge systems, as a basis for the ensuing discussion.

This was followed by a presentation by Maarrman Samuel Tshehla on ‘A Sesotho instance of the perennial challenge of considering African indigenous knowledge systems from a Christian perspective’, in which he showed how, contrary to what is usually assumed, the religious and cultural concerns that engage African Christian scholars today were also shared and expressed in the vernacular by some of the earliest Basotho converts in the nineteenth century.

Gillian Bediako’s presentation, ‘Indigenous knowledge systems as intellectual and spiritual resource: Learning from Africa for a new perspective on the European Christian story – the case of the Heliand in early Saxon Christianity’, sought to show how the concerns of contemporary African Christian scholarship have a bearing on European Christian scholarship. They illuminate areas of European religious and cultural engagement that have hitherto been marginalised, and enable a fresh appreciation and a new understanding of the European Christian story.