

Re-Claiming A Theo-Ethical Prophetic Response of the UMC/WESLEYAN-RELATED Institutions in Polarized Contexts

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Introduction

The HEART of the Church with its Wesleyan tradition has given birth to Methodist institutions. The University remains an incomparable campus of creativity and dissemination of knowledge for the good of humanity. By vocation, the *university* is dedicated to research, teaching, innovation, community outreach and industrialization. The university shares that joy of searching for, discovering and communicating truth in every field of knowledge. A Methodist University's privileged task is to unite existentially two key aspects- "knowledge and piety"¹ expressed in the search for truth and emanating from the source of truth, Jesus the Christ and then pushed to ensure that "inquiry and action are inseparable."² Indeed, we step into this space of the Church and her related-institutions with the conviction that even in the polarized contexts, we remain warned that we must undergird the polarized tendencies that often are driven by material gain whose foundation is the scientific method that trusts only conclusions derived from tested data while negating the spiritual view of life.³

When prophet Isaiah declares, "*I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, 'my purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please'*" (Isaiah 46: 10), not many realize that that prophetic declaration points to polarized times that required people to go back to the roots, more specifically, the root of faith, to reclaim their roots, which meant that Faith, then and now is the substance of things hoped for, built upon the sure rock of God for true shalom. This faith has informed my theo-ethical thought as I reflect on the various scenarios/future scenarios that various disciplines, organizations, provide as we rethink about our futures.

Our generation is totally controlled by polarization as "the monikers of 'us' and 'them' range havoc around race, gender, class, socio-economic status, political beliefs, and loyalties. Our cultural, political, theological interpretations and practices have enhanced this polarization.⁴ This polarization has left some fetishes to this day, for example, around race and colonialism and persecution in Africa: Persecuted by who? In the third century it was the Romans, in the seventh century the Arabs, in the 19th century the colonial powers. Now it is the Jihads in Sudan, the Boko Haram in Nigeria, Ali Shaabab in Somalia and throughout the continent are the economic hitmen

¹ John Wesley,

² Elliot T. Michael & Others, *A College-Related Church: United Methodist Perspectives*, 1976, pg. 20.

³ John D. Gross, *Guiding principles for Higher Education-Methodist Church*, 1948

⁴ Meredith Stone and Mary Knox, *Editorial Introduction: A Polarized Church in a Polarized World*, 2019.

(both local and international) that that undermine and exploit Africa's natural resources to the deprivation of Africa's populace.

Unfortunately, in a polarized society, mistrust and suspicions become the foundations of dismissing any idea.⁵ However, the Christian gospel summons us to reject "us versus them" ways of thinking, speaking, and acting, instead to understand their role in the world through the lenses of "us for them" and "God for us all." Polarization dehumanizes and should be replaced with depolarization which involves listening to all views with the hope of attaining truth and justice⁶ and embrace the quality of disagreement rather than the degree of disagreement. This will indeed allow us to engage in an understanding that Christians are not called to avoid conflicts, rather engage in real-life problems as their Master did through constructive conflict resolution that is characterized by cooperation, mutual gain and trust.^{7,8}

The polarization of the church is easily witnessed where theological/pastoral training followed a certain pattern: experiencing a calling, attending school, getting credentialed and serving. In what we refer to as mega churches, we note that credentialing is now embraced as a competency-based act rather than a licensing, hence, training is tailor-made as a pastor services in a church while discerning a sense of calling. We hope that this will not change within the Wesleyan tradition, where we understood that for a Methodist, education is a means to serve, a clear evidence in the words of retired Bishop and AU Emeritus Chancellor De Carvalho while addressing this kind of Gathering in 1984 Observed in relation to Africa that Church missions pioneered schooling in Africa, and indeed investing in higher education in Africa is creating the instruments that would turn its people to joy and opportunities in creating a new society.⁹

UMC Involvement in Colleges and Universities

Therefore, I desire to share with everyone my profound respect for United Methodist and Wesleyan universities and colleges and to express my great appreciation for the work that is being done in them and through them in the various spheres of knowledge. These Wesleyan tradition related institutions are for me a lively and promising sign of the fecundity of the Christian mind in the heart of every culture. They give me a well-founded hope for a new flowering of Christian culture in the rich and varied polarized changing contexts, which certainly face serious challenges but which also bear so much promise under the action of the Spirit of truth and of love.

The UMC is keen in embracing the University as a prophetic institution for the church in the transformation of society. When you listen to the number of schools, colleges, and universities that are UMC/Wesleyan tradition-related, it only behooves us to truly endeavor more to ensure that our history and heritage is safeguarded at all costs.

In this course then, we must be ready to address polarization by emphasizing value-centred inquiry, (that goes beyond value-addition), that emanates from John Wesley's conviction that education

⁵ Russell Johnson, "Building Peace in a Culture of War: Christian Witness in a Polarized Society," pg. 234

⁶ Russell Johnson, *Ibid.*,

⁷ Paul Ledrach, *Reconcile*, pg. 127

⁸ Susan Opatow, *The Scope of Justice, Intergroup Conflict*, pg. 82

⁹ *Ibid.* Pg. 120

entails character building (the correlation of knowledge and piety as per Wesleyan tradition). The value-centred inquiry entails impacting an individual holistically. Indeed, from a theological perspective, the Wesleyan tradition that embraces a liberally educated laity and clergy through liberal arts education shall also cultivate STEM to ensure that future generations going through our institutions of higher learning are not left behind.

The polarization in the church and the academy should not kill the understanding that “The united Methodist church is in higher education because it is the nature of the church to express itself in the intellectual love of God”¹⁰ In essence, learning then becomes an act of worship and joy as we seek more creative ways of knowing, seeing, innovating and loving one another. How do we ensure that both Church and Academy sustain the intelligent and faithful ways of holding our polarized society in dialogue especially in an era that’s being dominated the ‘digital natives’ as they occupy the church pew in person or virtually? Unfortunately, “Higher education is a joyless affair for most in our time.”¹¹ For the Christian, education ought to be the highest joy because it is an act of the acknowledgement of the freedom for us to be what God intends us to be. Jesus is spoken of as “the truth,”...“know the truth and the truth will make your free.” And this is the mantra for the 21st century church and academy. This truth must remind us that “Not all knowledge is of equal value...clearly there is a compelling need for value-centred inquiry.” (Issues-related to artificial intelligence, technological advancement, internet of things, internet of Bodies; who is accessing the data? Who is using the data? Indeed, the polarized society and academy may be crying out in the fasted technological advancement, is the church still relevant or is the academy relevant?

Covid-19 in the last two years generally pointed to a church and an academy that failed in the environmental analysis that would affect the future of higher education and church operations. Such environmental analysis must include the social, economic, and demographic trends which will affect independent higher education and the Church. (Just as it was in patristic periods of the early Church, the outstanding academic centres of excellence then in Alexandria & Carthage and in Milan should point to us the essence of developing such centres of excellence in relation to the pressing polarized contexts across the globe- the centres of dialogic communities, the centres of peace and reconciliation; the centres of climate change; the centres of pressing oncological needs, the centres of childhood studies and child-rights, the centres of transformative leadership; the centres of social justice; the centres of data mining; etc. This must also provide opportunity for theological interpretations and practices that take us back to our roots in times of polarization. This shall enhance the denomination desire to invest in higher education. We cannot just be church-related rather we must be church-value inquiry related.

Reclaiming our Roots: UMC/Wesleyan Theo-Ethical underpinnings

When the Psalmist says, “when the foundations are shaken, what will the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3)? If our roots were uprooted, who has the capacity and the will to replant them?

¹⁰ Elliot T. Michael and Others. A College-Related Church: United Methodist Perspectives, 1976., pg. 13

¹¹ Elliot T. Michael, *Ibid.* pg. 15

I have been reflecting on reports that such agencies like the Rockefeller Foundation, and the World Economic Forum have been releasing the last 20 years and only fools will not take time to gauge its findings and recommendations, and what our response must be as a church through our universities. Then projecting the world under “technological evolution/advancement, these corporations, utilizing resources, they tend to create scenarios and from those scenarios simulate the potential futures of humanity. In the year 2012, they then created scenarios that would alter world after 10 years, and indeed, within that period, appeared COVID-19! They then alerted the world that this would be followed with global recession/inflation, coups, hunger, etc. I am not sure, how many of us got to see such predictions! What did the Church and the related institutions do? Recently, the WEF has just released what they call Global Risks 2022, 17th edition. In this report, they warn us again of the global risks we will face the next 10 years, namely: Economic (marked by debt crises, prolonged economic stagnation, severe commodity shocks etc); Environmental (Climate action failure, extreme weather, major geophysical disasters, natural resources crises); Geopolitical (Geo-economic confrontations; collapse of multilateral institution, Geopolitical contestation of strategic resources, weapons of mass destruction); Societal (employment and livelihood crises, erosion of social cohesion, infectious diseases, large-scale involuntary migration, severe mental degradation etc); Technological (adverse outcomes of technological advances, digital inequality, failure of cybersecurity measures, failure of technology governance, breakdown of critical information infrastructure). HERE WE ARE IN NASHVILLE, what is the Spirit saying to the Church and her-related institutions?

The rapid developments in science and technology today provides the UMC-related universities with an ever-greater importance and urgency. While scientific and technological advances create enormous economic and industrial growth, it is important that there is a corresponding response to guarantee that the new discoveries be used for the authentic good for individual and of human society as a whole. It is critical that since it is the responsibility of every University to search for such meaning, a UMC-related University because of its Christian inspiration, is called in a particular way to respond to this need by including the moral, spiritual and religious dimension in its research, innovation, technology advancement an evaluation in the perspective of the totality of the human person.

Therefore, UMC-related Universities must remain on a continuous renewal, since what is at stake is the very meaning of the human person. Such renewal is what we are doing here today, where we meet to discern a clear awareness that by its Methodist character, a university is made more capable of conducting an impartial search for truth, a search that is neither subordinated to nor conditioned by particular interests of any kind. Whether it is within a theological or another discipline task, we must ensure that the collection of data, testing, elaboration, dissemination and application is within our calling as we seek to spread scriptural holiness.

Reclaiming our roots means looking into the shaken foundations, reflect the potential end, and get into the present as we reframe the agenda for the young digital natives. From the context where I stand, there is no way this discourse of our United Methodist higher education task can be understood, without getting into the roots. For example, within the context of our UMC and its related institutions in the continent of Africa, Oden argues “cut Africa out of the Bible and Christian memory, and you have misplaced many pivotal scenes of salvation history. It is the story of the children of Abraham in Africa: Joseph in Africa; Moses in Africa; Mary, Joseph and Jesus in Africa;

and shortly thereafter Mark and Perpetua and Athanasius and Augustine in Africa.”¹² We may attempt to delete this historical link, but we can’t erase history. We must acknowledge that Africa indeed shaped and conditioned Christianity’s first millennium. WHAT IS AFRICA SAYING TO THE WESLEYAN FAMILY in the 21st century?

The keenness of the United Methodist church to join the knowledge and vital piety is in a sense to celebrate diversity. It is critical that we understand that diversity is one of the celebrated hallmarks of the United Methodists in higher education. The linkage between knowledge and vital piety that Wesley championed, can also be traced back to the first millennium of Christianity where global Christianity through ecumenical councils such as the Nicea, African exegetes and moral theologians such as Athanasius, Augustine and Cyril, Cyprian of Carthage, Demetrius of Alexandria, and Augustine of Hippo.¹³ As we dialogue on polarization in church and academy, we may draw examples from these early African church patriarchs and keep encouraging each other in our time that the uniting work of the Holy Spirit may re-energize and re-mold the United Methodists into a new whole. This shall provide us with our own unique identity where then our academics remain united, but we must also be aware that from among us they will rise some who will bitterly oppose their own heritage, and thus ignore the essence of embracing knowledge and vital piety. And should we not be worried that the works of the saints in the years past may be lost in the wrong influences? And shall we keep quiet and just walk away? Or shall we create and support dialogic communities to ensure our heritage is not extinguished? Just as it was for John Wesley, the UMC-related institutions must not be confined to the lecture halls of schools and universities, rather traverse both rural and industrial cities as we seek to transform our polarized contexts.

We learn much more from John Wesley on “Knowledge and vital piety”¹⁴ as illustrated from the manner John Wesley was interested in the poor (Only 10% of the world population own 76% of all wealth). From those earlier years of his engagement with the Holy Club members in attending to all acquittances, the prisoners, families who needed to access food, medicine, a bible and common prayer-book provides us with a model that we must reclaim.¹⁵ Indeed this is well amplified in the UMC social principles which speaks to a long history of concern for social justice as the social principles speak to the faithful commitment witnesses to the gospel and to the depths of our common life and work as we use and abuse the *natural world*; as we *nurture existing and emerging communities*; as we celebrate the rights and privileges of the *social community* in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained and strengthened; claiming all economic systems to be under God so as to perpetuate an *economic community* in providing for an economic life of individuals and corporate entities; acknowledging the vital function of government in ensuring the strengthening of the *political economy*; commitment to the *world community* in strengthening a fellowship of persons who honestly love one another. In essence, our social principles remain the hallmark of knowledge and vital piety in practice. Is this the experience of all God’s people in the UMC faith family and her related-institutions?

¹² Thomas C. Oden, How African shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity, pg. 14

¹³ Oden., Ibid. pg. 51

¹⁴ Elmer L. Towns, John Wesley and Religious Education, 1970.

¹⁵ John Wesley, Works 1:10

In order for us to embrace the close workings of John Wesley as he argued that “both thought and action produce the character of the Methodist”¹⁶ this can be equivalented to Kwame Nkrumah’s Consciencism, where he argued “Thought without practice is empty; and action without thought is blind.”¹⁷ Re-think again how thought and action relate; how emptiness and blindness of a thought can be? Wesley showed that the essence of his ethic is enshrined in the ethos of freedom (liberty) which should allow us in the era of polarization to engage in liberty discourses without tearing one another into pieces. In order for this to happen, we must embrace the Christian life expressed in love in the era of selfishness, greed, and the rule of love should guide us more. This kind of Christian life was expressed by John Wesley himself as he engaged fighting slavery as informed by the understanding of scripture, more specifically the Sermon on the Mount and the Ten Commandments, his over-riding virtue was “true Agapeism”¹⁸- by giving the neighbor he/she deserves. In this engagement, the church and the academy can surely reform and transform our polarized contexts.

IF indeed the Ten commandments would serve as the basis of Wesleyan perfect love, how did he amplify the place of law in a Christian’s life. Whether in the church, academy or society, the role of the law remains an ethical dilemma. John Wesley understood the use of the law in three ways: the law is to convict one of sin, the law is to restrain wickedness, the law is to inform Christian conscience. What kind of law is this if in the Christian church and or the academy, we are not sure if the three roles are being played? If the law does not safeguard us from sin; if it doesn’t raise our conscience, and if it does not restrain, then we must ask, are we engaged in willing sin, and how do we come out? **Start.**

Faith was another aspect that was central “Faith is the means by which humanity is re-established in love. The faith in Christ leads to the knowledge of the love of God that produces the love of neighbor.”¹⁹ It is interesting that faith is meaningless if not linked to the love of God and neighbor, which in essence means that within the UMC and her related institutions, whatever engagement we undertake, faith establishes learning, research, advancement and innovation. Faith that despite the disassociation calls being made will at the end be driven by the ethic of love. Faith that allows us to grow in the knowledge of love. This should then cultivate our piety and render us to active service of the neighbor. However, how do we achieve this in a polarized Church and academy for the transformation of society? One way is for the church and the academy to seek to foster structures, relationships and attitudes that empower both laity and clergy, faith communities and university communities to have constructive conflicts that emanate from truth-seeking argumentations in order to experience the “unconditional affirmation of God”.²⁰

The Church-Related Institutions prophetic Response

¹⁶ Ronald H. Ston, John Wesley’s Life and Ethics, pg. 218

¹⁷ Kwame Nkrumah, Consciencism Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with particular Reference to the African Revolution, Heinemann, 1964, pg. 2.

¹⁸ Ronald H. Stone, Ibid. pg 215.

¹⁹ Ronald H. Stone, John Wesley’s Life and Ethics, pg. 214

²⁰ Russell Ibid. pg 245

In order for us to embrace the church and its academies as the prophetic voices of our time, then we must revisit John Wesley's conviction where he expressed the fact during the Methodist Conference in 1744 where he posed three questions:

- What do we teach?
- How do we teach?
- What do we do?

The Church and the role of the academy as a prophetic voice in our time must then attend into the current polarization of society as we move from the internet of things into the internet of bodies, the genome sequencing, the calls to embrace artificial intelligence in every field raising more ethical dilemmas. What shall we do if we the church buys into what the multi-international corporations believe in, namely global development, hence globalization? As David Korten asks, "What would development look like if instead of being growth centred- with people treated only as a means of achieving growth- it were people centred- with people being both the purpose and the primary instrument?"²¹ Consequently, One of the hallmarks of the UMC traditions and its academies is not to lead to restrictions, exploitation, falsification or discrimination of any kind. We must emphasize that man be seen in the whole of his human dimension. Man must not be reduced to the sphere of his merely material needs. Progress cannot be measured by economic categories alone. The spiritual dimension of the human being must be given its right place.

Indeed as Wesley would observe, "the bias of nature is set the wrong way; education is designed to set it right- how do we ensure the wrong economies/politics do not compromise value-based inquiry/value in the sense of life-saving. We must continuously discover that common good we have for the common good of humanity. How wrong nature can be that driven by greed and monetization of every engagement, education must at all costs turn nature right. Our engagement as academies is to design an education that must address the gaps that nature has wrongly appropriated among societies by addressing such contemporary issues around the dignity of life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, equitable sharing of resources and a new economic and political world order that provides for opportunities that allows universities to become campuses where the roots and causes of our problems are researched and solutions provided through innovation, incubation, industrialization, entrepreneurship, commercialization, with clear ethical standards that enhances the holistic well-being of God's people. All these activities must be informed by a theological discourse that addresses current needs in an interdisciplinary manner that embraces the UMC guiding principles so as to enrich through research and teaching the students educated in the various disciplines for various sectors by giving meaning a new dignity to human life/condition.

The UMC can bear testimony that its prophetic voice for years has been through its academies at all levels. Where new mission stations were opened, either a school or health centre got established.

²¹ David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World*. San Francisco, CA: Berret-Koehler Publishers/Kumarian Press, 1996, pg. 5)

The aim was then very clear as Gross argues that “Without apology, the Methodist institution must seek to win its students to Christ. Our schools must be Christian without apology and Methodist pride. Our faculties must be Christian in fact.”²² Have we remained to the roots of our vocation and establishment? Are our Churches and academies avenues of growing in Christ and making Christ Known? One trend that we have witnessed is the cross-border movements and collaboration in higher education meant to promote brand recognition, increasing market share, or service expansion, and where possible, driven by national strategic interests. Often, universities have tended to move campuses by establishing new ones, rather than moving students.²³ While this meant intellect sharing, nowadays, it is one of the greatest hindrances of personal and national development as it has become a negative through brain drain (movement from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere).

In order for us to transform our UMC and our academies, managing research in our universities is quite central. We must be reminded that academic research has become an engine of economic development and transformation. We are discovering that academic inventions in various fields, whether it is in healthcare, agriculture, alternative energy is generating billions of dollars, hence the need for us to engage in an academic research. As UMC and all our related institutions—may we name our global and national academic research centres: what are they innovating? What are they incubating? What are they patenting? What are they commercializing? What are they trademarking? Together, here today, we must ask ourselves, have we provided the tools needed for good management of complex research engagement? Do we have the right personnel? Do we have enough finances? Do we have regulatory support for compliance purposes? Do we have appropriate investments? We must remember that “through its technology transfer activities, universities spin out high-tech intellectual capital that stimulates economic development.”²⁴

While we may be waking up to the leftovers of racism and colonialism, today’s realities of negative ethnicity, polarized politics, homophobia, global inflation, terrorism, cyber-security, classism, corruption, unemployment, unprotected refugees, and exploited indigenous natural resources. When crime is being committed unabated by the powers be, we show a blind eye, and as if this is not enough, atrocities committed left-right, leave churches and universities as quiet as mice. The Church and her academies cannot remain silent, otherwise we will be accused of conspiracy to exploit God’s people.

Surely, we seek to be ambassadors of true shalom, but we have become elements of negative shalom; or should we say we have become instruments of breaking true shalom into pieces. Even with the advancement of technology and the world knowing what is going on, both the church and its academies have not evolved in the same rate- in most cases the church and its academies are followers and not leaders. We must seek to become avenues of building a positive peace by creating attitudes, relationships, and structures that facilitate recognition and cooperation in problem-solving. The Church institutions must be at the forefront in providing a prophetic, critical biblical interpretation that emphasize justice and positive works (of breaking down the barriers of

²² John D. Gross, *Ibid.*, 13)

²³ Robin Sakamoto and David Chapman, *Cross-border Partnerships in Higher education*, New York, Routledge, 2011, pg. 6

²⁴ Dean O. Smith, *Managing the Research University*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2011.

privilege, greed and class) to counteract the oppressive polarization of society. Just as it was for Wesley, we must seek to reform the self, the church/academy for the transformation of society.

The future of higher education or the kind of higher education of the future we anticipate has one over-riding factor: increased investment. With COVID-19 experience that has culminated in compressed global economies, rising food scarcity, increased job losses and unemployment, and yet increased university graduates, only reminds us of the that this scenario is not likely to change soon. So, what must we do? And yet this is the challenge for our UMC-related institutions. As Michael Shattock argues the concept of being a good university demands that we must invest in ensuring that excellent staff are appointed, incentivize them, act upon non-performance, provide the right infrastructure for academic work to take place, create a climate of collegiality in critical decision making in teaching, research and provision of facilities for students to study.²⁵ In other words, as Shattock has argued “maintaining a climate of intellectual vibrancy and the encouragement of academic entrepreneurship makes a major contribution on managing universities for success.”²⁶ Therefore, no UMC-related institutions will cover up “superficial academic work” and poor scholarship while celebrating the roles of piety, and if this happens, then we must be reminded of our Wesleyan tradition: “sound scholarship and vital religion are complimentary- not exclusive”²⁷ and this is what we must contribute in the midst of polarized contexts.

Co-creating with God: Love, Faithfulness and Commitment

Is the academy immune from polarization? Is the Church immune from polarization? How do we ensure that the ivy-covered walls and ivory towers of higher education have attained their goals as established? We are called to co-create with God being rooted in love, faithfulness to the call and commitment to all our endeavors, ensuring that our Wesleyan tradition, remain relevant in our futures.

How do we reclaim our roots in co-creating divine economies? How do we reclaim our roots in polarized contexts? Let’s borrow from John Wesley’s divine economy that was rooted in an economic discipline and effort guided by the principles of earning all one could without harming self or others, saving all one could without depreciation of family, giving away through the church and then to the broader population all one could after family needs had been mostly met.²⁸ Only those committed to the virtues of love, faithfulness and commitment would then realize the need to keep transforming our polarized contexts. In this commitment, we will hold to a discipline, hope, learning, organization and networks that transform our contexts.

Let me be clear, from where I stand, and from where I come from, I would like to say that the church and its academies in the continent of Africa are providing key foundations that are enabling the continent to continue rediscovering its own history, identity, potential, utility, and the

²⁵ Michael Shattock, *Managing Successful Universities*, McGraw Hill. Society of Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, 2010, pg. 115

²⁶ Michael Shattock, *Managing Successful Universities*, pg. 195.

²⁷ John D. Gross, *Ibid.*, page 18

²⁸ Russell, pg. 225

rereading of world history. As far as the Wesleyan related institutions are concerned; Africa University as a Pan-African university is leading from the front in the formation of African minds that will continue to take care of the holistic well-being of all peoples- whether it is the formation of leaders in the area of spiritual well-being, healthcare, education, laws, legislations, policies, innovations, protection of usage of natural resources endowed in the continent, governance, peace, and reconciliation; our aim is to ensure that we have cultivated discursive spaces where mined data from the past and the present is utilized in creating the future where people can recognize the dignity and shared humanity of all peoples.

Key question: How do we ensure peaceful co-existence in a polarized society? How will history judge our generation that had all the tools necessary to guide and pull God's peace to positive peace that is rooted in justice rather than negative peace constructed in tension? We discover that the ministry of reconciliation is the ministry of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as scriptures dictate. This is the Christian imperative that distinguishes Christians from a conflicted world. Reconciliation paired in liberation; rooted in a cosmology of peace rather than delusive nostalgia will continue to remain our vocation

How do we ensure that our church-related academies remain rooted in the foundations of dialogic communities? How do we allow at the formational stages of our digital natives in our Sunday school classes, in our freshmen classes, in our extra-curricular activities, will build dialogic communities that are not necessarily driven by such labels as conservatives, progressives, libertarians, radicals or minoritized? How do we ensure that these spaces become formational spaces for our digital in truth-speaking driven by love, faithfulness and justice rather than judgment, humiliation and/or deprivation by those in position of power? This can only take place in a dialogic community- which I believe the Church and the university provides. The vision of a dialogic community is congruous with Christian ethics, specifically the idea that everyone has gifts to contribute, the idea that each person's perspectives is distorted by sin and limited by finitude, and the idea that we are mostly fully human when we are in relationships of giving and receiving. In our dialogic communities we will then embrace Paul's admonishment of the Ephesians, "speak the truth in love" for in this way, all members of the body (Church and university) will manifest "the wisdom of God in its rich variety", for the well-being of God's people.

Conclusion

Where do we go from here?

When Jesus Christ declared to Peter, "on this rock, I will build my Church", the Lord spoke in the future tense. Literally, the Lord was speaking about the Church of the Future, and its ministries, which I portend to argue, includes its universities of the future. The building of the Church today is for tomorrow's salvific practices since are aware that in living out our convictions through trial and error, sin continues to prevent us to attain flawless results of perfect love in an imperfect world. Just as it was that the Exodus event in scripture took place in Africa, and the memory of that exodus would later return to "instruct Africa about the one God who dwells with and guides the suffering people"²⁹ whether in the continent or the diaspora, the Wesleyan university is without any doubt

²⁹ Oden, pg. 122

one of the best instruments that the Church offers to our generation which is searching and yearning for certainty and wisdom through the university. The Church must interest herself in the university, and I dare say, this is what the Church has done and must continue to do for Africa University by assisting in the manner most appropriate to our times in becoming the instrument of the Spirit in the formation of leaders who continue to traverse and transform the continent of Africa and the world at large. Because of such church investment and other state agencies and universities, I am thrilled to see that “Africa is now poised to rediscover its own history, its deeper identity and its renegeed vocation within world history.”³⁰ I am therefore convinced that this gathering here today, provides a Kairos moment coming out of COVID-19 (where we experienced injustice, skewed services, access to the basics for human dignity were being extinguished), where our renewed call of a united force through the support of the entire church, we must together remain united for the urgent call never fail to attend to the needs of our contexts through our universities, and never stop in founding new Wesleyan universities wherever this might be necessary.

In our polarized contexts, we have discovered that knowledge tampered with piety remains the core foundations of responding to the contemporary cries and hopes of our 21st century society. Indeed, we must learn to behave and return to the roots that believe in building dialogic communities. And as God would have it, He intended to warn the Northern Kingdom over the bending judgment and would only do so by sending the prophet from the South just to see if they would listen to God’s messenger. Today, the southern hemisphere while reeling from the worst calamities faced by humanity in this century, God continues to speak out of this hemisphere in the words of C.S. Lewis, “pain is God’s megaphone to arouse the world.” Polarization in our contexts will continue, however, as those called to co-create with our creator, may we together embrace the five ministries of the church as declared in the letter of Paul to the Ephesians 4: 11: Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers and as enshrined in our social principles, may we embrace and champion: the Natural World; the Nurturing Community; the Social Community; the Economic Community; the World Community; our Social Creed. This is our Theo-ethical imperative! We will not go wrong! We will not go alone, we must have our neighbor too with us!

Thank you for listening to me!

Ahsante Sana! (Thank you!)

³⁰ Oden, pg. 124