

Alertly Rooted! Energetically Engaged!

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Introduction

It is a privilege to be invited to deliver this keynote address at this ICETE International Consultation for Theological Educators. The Consultation theme: *Rooted in the Word : Engaged in the World*, seeks to capture the double purpose of the **Cape Town Commitment**: a) to provide a fresh articulation of our biblical faith in such a way as to show that all mission has its roots in the Bible (Part 1 “The Cape Town Confession of Faith”), and b) to reflect the range of issues, challenges and contexts with which the **Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town 2010** sought to engage (Part 2 “The Cape Town Call to Action”).

Many from the ICETE family took part in that amazing Congress. The Lausanne Movement is committed to world mission. ICETE is committed to global theological education. It is very encouraging that both movements are taking note of each other and recognizing the strong links between them. On the one hand, the relevance of theological education for mission was recognized in Cape Town and included in the *Cape Town Commitment*, and on the other hand, ICETE has chosen to use the two parts of that document as a broad template for this 2012 Triennial, and to provide all participants with a copy of it.

Part 1 was prepared before, and presented to, the Congress, at the request of Lindsay Brown (International Director of Lausanne), by myself working with an expanded and international Lausanne Theology Working Group. Part 2 was generated and written up during and after the Congress itself, with the help of the Statement Working Group, a group of 8 men and women from all continents.

The *Cape Town Commitment* has been translated into 25 languages so far and is being used as a ‘road-map’ for the Lausanne Movement for the coming decade. I trust it will be well used in the seminaries and churches represented here at ICETE.

A. Rooted

1. In what ways does *Cape Town Commitment* Part 1 ‘root’ mission in the Bible?

That is to say, how does its presentation of the core Christian faith bind together our biblical roots with our missional calling and engagement? I believe it does this in three ways.

a) *The language of covenant love, and its missional combination of faith and practice*

Part 1 of the CTC is trying to express our Christian faith in the language of love, to draw attention to what such love actually does - in terms of stating what (or who) is the focus of our commitment of faith (what / whom we believe), and at the same time stating what we will *do* because of that commitment. Biblical love includes heads, hearts and hands: what we affirm in our minds, the commitment of our hearts, and the practical action of our hands.

It might be of interest to know how that framing of Part 1 in the language of love came about.

In December 2009, Lindsay Brown convened a conference in Minneapolis to which a representative group of theologians was invited, 18 women and men from all of Lausanne's global regions. Its purpose was to prepare a clear statement of evangelical Christian faith that could serve the global church, alongside a call to action that would emerge from the Cape Town 2010 Congress. There was extended discussion of the shape of the desired document and the thrust of its content. Some initial but inconclusive drafting was done by a small committee of the larger group. As the conference came to a close, I was invited to prepare a draft document that would be circulated to the Minneapolis group for comment and revision. I accepted this responsibility with great trepidation.

So it was that I found myself early in January 2010 driving the five hours from London to The Hookses, John Stott's writing retreat cottage in Wales to spend a week alone working on the requested draft. As I drove I prayed in some desperation, "Lord, how is this thing to be done? How should it be structured? What is the primary, fundamental, message that it needs to carry?" It was as if I heard a voice replying, "The first and greatest commandment is: 'Love the Lord your God...', and the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" Then a whole bundle of other "love" texts came tumbling into my mind like a waterfall. And I thought, "Could we frame a statement in the language of covenant love – love for God, for Jesus, for the Bible, for the world, for one another, for the gospel, for mission....?" As I drove I sketched an outline in my mind, and when I arrived at Hookses, I phoned John Stott, shared what I was thinking, and asked if he thought it could work. He not only thought it could, but strongly encouraged me to follow the idea through. Somehow I felt that if the idea had come from the Lord in prayer, and John Stott agreed, perhaps it was on the right lines!

I spent a whole week on an initial draft, with the headings that you can see in Part 1 – all starting with "*We love...*" The draft went through the hands of many theologians and groups before it was finalized just before the Congress, but that basic structure and flow remained.

And I hope as you scan those headings and paragraphs that you can feel that dynamic flow of love - the love of God for us and through us for the world, and our love for him expressed in the exercise of love in its many dimensions. Here is the opening paragraph. In the document almost every phrase is supported by a biblical text in the footnotes:

Love for God and love for neighbour constitute the first and greatest commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and the first named fruit of the Spirit. Love is the evidence that we are born again; the assurance that we know God; and the proof that God dwells within us. Love is the new commandment of Christ, who told his disciples that only as they obeyed this commandment would their mission be visible and believable. Christian love for one another is how the unseen God, who made himself visible through his incarnate Son, goes on making himself visible to the world. Love was among the first things that

Paul observed and commended among new believers, along with faith and hope. But love is the greatest, for love never ends.

We affirm that such comprehensive biblical love should be the defining identity and hallmark of disciples of Jesus. In response to the prayer and command of Jesus, we long that it should be so for us. Sadly we confess that too often it is not. So we re-commit ourselves afresh to make every effort to live, think, speak and behave in ways that express what it means to walk in love - love for God, love for one another and love for the world. (CTC I.1).

This kind of covenantal love claims our minds, wills, emotions and actions. It governs the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains. More simply, it is for our heads, hearts and hands. The language of biblical love binds the *affirmation* of faith and the *obedience* of faith together. Theological education should surely do the same.

b) The constant inclusion of both Old Testament and New Testament texts in the formulation of our convictions -- i.e. a fully canonical survey of Christian doctrine

Many statements of faith that come from evangelical sources tend to major on words, phrases, doctrines, etc., drawn primarily from the New Testament. The *CTC* deliberately tries to be “whole Bible” in the way it articulates the great truths of our faith. An example of this can be seen in the way the following extracts from the paragraphs on God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, include Old Testament texts (again, in the document, each paragraph has copious biblical references in footnotes).

We love God as the Father of his people. Old Testament Israel knew God as Father, as the one who brought them into existence, carried them and disciplined them, called for their obedience, longed for their love, and exercised compassionate forgiveness and patient enduring love. All these remain true for us as God’s people in Christ in our relationship with our Father God. (*CTC I.3A*)

We trust in Christ. We believe the testimony of the Gospels that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the one appointed and sent by God to fulfil the unique mission of Old Testament Israel, that is to bring the blessing of God’s salvation to all nations, as God promised to Abraham. (*CTC I.4A*)

In the Old Testament we see the Spirit of God active in creation, in works of liberation and justice, and in filling and empowering people for every kind of service. Spirit-filled prophets looked forward to the coming King and Servant, whose Person and work would be endowed with God’s Spirit. Prophets also looked to the coming age that would be marked by the outpouring of God’s Spirit, bringing new life, fresh obedience, and prophetic gifting to all the people of God, young and old, men and women. (*CTC I.5A*)

c) The use of the grand narrative structure of the Bible as the framework for all our mission, including theological education as part of our mission

It is not just that the *CTC* proof-texts from both Old and New Testaments, but rather that it tries to express all our doctrinal understanding and our missional engagement within the flow of the great biblical story – from creation to new creation.

The story the Bible tells. The Bible tells the universal story of creation, fall, redemption in history, and new creation. This overarching narrative provides our coherent biblical worldview and shapes our theology. At the centre of this story are the climactic saving events of the cross and resurrection of Christ which constitute the heart of the gospel. It is this story (in the Old and New Testaments) that tells us who we are, what we are here for, and where we are going. This story of God's mission defines our identity, drives *our* mission, and assures us the ending is in God's hands. This story must shape the memory and hope of God's people and govern the content of their evangelistic witness, as it is passed on from generation to generation. (CTC I.6B)

Similarly, the outline of the gospel in section I.8B makes it clear that the good news of the biblical gospel begins in Genesis, not in Matthew. Accordingly, when it comes to speaking about mission, the climax of Part 1 sets all our mission activity within the framework of God's own mission, from Genesis to Revelation.

We are committed to world mission, because it is central to our understanding of God, the Bible, the Church, human history and the ultimate future. The whole Bible reveals the mission of God to bring all things in heaven and earth into unity under Christ, reconciling them through the blood of his cross. In fulfilling his mission, God will transform the creation broken by sin and evil into the new creation in which there is no more sin or curse. God will fulfil his promise to Abraham to bless all nations on the earth, through the gospel of Jesus, the Messiah, the seed of Abraham. God will transform the fractured world of nations that are scattered under the judgment of God into the new humanity that will be redeemed by the blood of Christ from every tribe, nation, tongue and language, and will be gathered to worship our God and Saviour. God will destroy the reign of death, corruption and violence when Christ returns to establish his eternal reign of life, justice and peace. Then God, Immanuel, will dwell with us, and the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign for ever and ever. (CTC I.10)

Such a broad narrative rendering of the Bible not only shapes our mission, but also covers the whole structure of doctrines that are usually collated under the heading "Systematic Theology". It ought to provide the over-arching framework for our theological curriculum.

I would love to see such a "whole-Bible approach" become characteristic of all theological education – across all disciplines. We should be learning together to read the Bible as a whole and to root our theology and our practice deeply in the "whole counsel of God." We need to help our students see that the Bible is not just an *object* of their study (limited to when they are doing "Biblical Studies", but the subject of their thinking – about everything. That is to say, the Bible is not just something we "think about", but rather something we "think with". The Bible informs and guides the way we think about everything else – whether in the classroom or in all the rest of life in the world.

We are tempted to multiply the number of bolt-on courses on this or that new issue that has just arisen in the world. Something else becomes "a big issue", and we feel we must add a course on it to our already over-burdened curriculum, often squeezing out the biblical courses to make room. But of course, as soon as the students graduate and leave college some other "big issue" will hit them. Now they are stumped because they didn't "take a course in that

subject at seminary”. Rather, we need to teach people how to *think biblically* about any and every issue that will arise. They need to have learned how to bring every issue into the light of all the key points along the Bible narrative and how to hear the major “voices” of the biblical canon. The Bible may not have a direct answer (chapter and verse) to the new problem, but systematically shining the light of biblical revelation along the whole sweep of the canon on to the issue, will help generate a response that can have some claim to being “biblical”.

That’s teaching students to bring new contextual issues *to the Bible*. It’s equally important to help them wrestle with the issues that arise *from the Bible*.

I’d like to say, “I have a dream...” At least, I once *had* a dream, which I used to muse upon when I was the principal of All Nations Christian College in the UK. I dreamt of a “Bible College” which would be exactly and only that – a place where we would teach and study only the Bible together in depth, sequentially from the very beginning, and let everything else flow out of the exegesis, interpretation and application of the biblical text. And immediately you would be forced not only to be rooted in what the Bible says, but also to be engaged with all the issues that the Bible itself engages with. You would have to deal with cosmology, issues of science and faith, the nature of humanity, sex and marriage, the problem of evil, gender relations and disorder, creation care and ecological challenges, violence and corruption, ethnic diversity and conflict, urban development and culture - and that’s before you even get past Genesis 1-11.

2. Why does the *Cape Town Commitment* call for all theological education to be re-centred (rooted) in the Bible?

It does so quite emphatically twice.

We long to see a fresh conviction, gripping all God’s Church, of the central necessity of Bible teaching for the Church’s growth in ministry, unity and maturity. We rejoice in the gifting of all those whom Christ has given to the Church as pastor-teachers. We will make every effort to identify, encourage, train and support them in the preaching and teaching of God’s Word. In doing so, however, we must reject the kind of clericalism that restricts the ministry of God’s Word to a few paid professionals, or to formal preaching in church pulpits. Many men and women, who are clearly gifted in pastoring and teaching God’s people, exercise their gifting informally or without official denominational structures, but with the manifest blessing of God’s Spirit. They too need to be recognized, encouraged, and equipped to rightly handle the Word of God. (*CTC IID.1.d.1*)

We long that all church planters and theological educators should place the Bible at the centre of their partnership, not just in doctrinal statements but in practice. Evangelists must use the Bible as the supreme source of the content and authority of their message. Theological educators must re-centre the study of the Bible as the core discipline in Christian theology, integrating and permeating all other fields of study and application. Above all theological education must serve to equip pastor-teachers for their prime responsibility of preaching and teaching the Bible. (*CTC IIF.4.d*).

So the *Cape Town Commitment* brings theological education into the sphere of Christian mission, and then urges that it should be biblically rooted and centred. Why should this be

so? Let me suggest three reasons: the biblical mandate, the global need and the pastoral priority.

a) The biblical mandate

Teaching is integral to the growth and mission of God's people. Teaching, indeed, is included within the Great Commission itself. Theological education (as one dimension of the church's broader teaching ministry), is therefore an intrinsic part of the missional life and work of the whole church. The Bible provides robust support for this conviction.

i) Old Testament. "The Old Testament is the oldest and longest programme of Theological Education." This remarkable affirmation was made by Professor Andrew Walls in a paper given at the Mission Leaders Forum at the Overseas Ministry Study Centre, New Haven, Connecticut. Throughout the whole Old Testament, for a millennium or more, God was shaping his people, insisting that they should remember *and teach to every generation* the things God had done ("what your eyes have seen") and the things God had said ("what your ears have heard"). He gave his people the Levitical priests as teachers of the Torah, and the prophets to call them back to the ways of God, and Psalmists and wise men and women to teach them how to worship God and walk in godly ways in ordinary life. When reformations happened in Old Testament time (e.g. under Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, Nehemiah-Ezra), there was always a return to the teaching of God's word. God's people were to be a community of teachers and learners, shaped by the word of God, as we see so emphatically in the longings of the author of Psalm 119.

ii) Jesus - It's not surprising then that when Jesus came, he spent years doing exactly the same - teaching, teaching, teaching his disciples as the nucleus of the new community of the Kingdom of God. Even as a twelve-year-old boy he showed that he was rooted in the scriptures and able to engage with the rabbis in the temple. And in the Great Commission, he mandates his apostles to teach new disciples to observe all that he had taught them. Teaching was at the heart of Jesus mission and ministry.

iii) Paul - The importance of biblical teaching in the missionary work of Paul can hardly be missed. There is his personal example of spending nearly three years with the churches in Ephesus, teaching them "all that was needful" for them, as well as "the whole counsel of God", and combining that with systematic teaching in the public lecture hall (Acts 19:8-10, 20:20, 27). There was his personal mentoring of Timothy and Titus to be teachers of the Word. There was his mission team, including Apollos whose primary training, gifting and ministry was in church teaching. His curriculum in Corinth included Old Testament hermeneutics, Christology and Apologetics (Acts 18:24-28). And Paul insisted that his own work as a church-planter and Apollos's work as a church-teacher (watering the seed) "have one purpose" (1 Cor. 3:8). Evangelism and theological education are integral to each other within the mission of the church.

The Bible as a whole, then, highlights the importance of teaching and teachers within the community of God's people - teaching that is rooted in, and shaped by, the Scriptures and which in turn brings health and maturity to God's people and shapes them for their life in the world. So, to be very frank at this point, whenever theological education neglects or marginalizes the teaching of the Bible, or squeezes it to the edges of a curriculum crammed with other things, it has itself become unbiblical and disobedient to the clear mandate that we find taught and modelled in both testaments. Theological education which does not produce

men and women who know their Bibles thoroughly, who know how to teach and preach the Scriptures, who are able to think biblically through any and every issue they confront, and who are able to feed and strengthen God's people with God's Word – whatever else such theological education may do, or claim, or be accredited for, it is failing the church by failing to equip the church and its leaders to fulfil their calling and mission in the world. That is why the *Cape Town Commitment* makes its strong plea for the re-centring of theological education around the Bible.

b) The global need

The *Cape Town Commitment* goes on to identify several of the most disfiguring aspects of 21st century evangelicalism. As in the *Lausanne Covenant* there is a healthy awareness of ways in which we, as Christians, have failed to live up to our calling. There is confession of failure (in repentance) as well as confession of faith (in affirmation). There is a willingness to look at ourselves, as a global Christian community using the name “evangelical” and making the claims implicit in that word, and to admit that we are not always particularly attractive in the way we live and behave, and that we simply do not look like the Jesus we proclaim.

When there is no distinction in conduct between Christians and non-Christians - for example in the practice of corruption and greed, or sexual promiscuity, or rate of divorce, or relapse to pre-Christian religious practice, or attitudes towards people of other races, or consumerist lifestyles, or social prejudice - then the world is right to wonder if our Christianity makes any difference at all. Our message carries no authenticity to a watching world.

We challenge one another, as God's people in every culture, to face up to the extent to which, consciously or unconsciously, we are caught up in the idolatries of our surrounding culture. We pray for prophetic discernment to identify and expose such false gods and their presence within the Church itself, and for the courage to repent and renounce them in the name and authority of Jesus as Lord (*CTC IIE.1*).

We are reminded of the temptations and idolatries of pride, exaggerated success and greed (idolatries which can infect the academy and theological education as much as any other part of the church). And we are called to return to the Christlikeness of humility, integrity and simplicity. We are warned about the damaging poison of the so-called Prosperity Gospel. We are, in short, faced with the short-comings of the contemporary church and the constant need to address them alongside our commitment to active mission engagement.

But what lies behind these areas of failure? Is the moral confusion and laxity of the global church a product of a “*famine of hearing the words of the LORD*” (Amos 8:11)? – the lack of biblical knowledge, teaching and thinking, from the leadership downwards? As in Hosea's day, are there not multitudes of God's people who are left with “*no knowledge of God*” – at least, no adequate and life-transforming knowledge, and for the same reason as Hosea identified – the failure of those appointed to teach God's word (the priests in his day) to do so (Hos. 4:1-9)?

Decades ago, **John Stott** believed that it was this more than anything else that was to blame. And he believed that the key remedy, “the more potent medicine” as he called it, was to raise the standards of biblical preaching and teaching, from the seminaries to the grass-roots of the churches. Here is an extract of a document I recently found among his papers, dated 1996,

expressing his personal vision for the work of **Langham Partnership** (which he founded) and the need for it. He pulls no punches and spares no part of the global church in his illustrative samples. And he is crystal clear in his prescription, and prophetically exalted in his vision of a different reality.

QUOTE FROM JOHN STOTT

1. The Ambiguity of the Church

The statistics of church growth are enormously encouraging. But it is often growth without depth, and there is much superficiality *everywhere*. As in first-century Corinth, there is a tension between the divine ideal and the human reality, between what is and what ought to be, between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’. Thus the church is both united and divided, both holy and unholy, both the guardian of truth and prone to error.

Everywhere the church boasts great things, and everywhere it fails to live up to its boasts. Its witness is marred by conspicuous failures – for example by litigation in India (Christians taking one another to court, in defiance of the plain teaching of the apostle Paul), by tribalism in Africa (so that appointments are made more according to tribal origin than to spiritual fitness), by leadership scandals in North America (revealing a lack of adequate accountability), by apathy and pessimism in Europe (the consequence of 250 years of Enlightenment rationalism), by hierarchy in the Chinese, Japanese and Korean cultures (which owes more to Confucius than to Christ), by anti-intellectual emotionalism in Latin America, and everywhere by the worldly quest for power, which is incompatible with the ‘meekness and gentleness of Christ’.

2. The Word of God

All sorts of remedies are proposed for the reformation and renewal of the church, and for its growth into maturity. But they tend to be at the level of technique and methodology. If we probe more deeply into the church’s sickness, however, we become aware of its need for more potent medicine, namely the Word of God.

Jesus our Lord himself, quoting from Deuteronomy, affirmed that human beings live not by material sustenance only, but by the spiritual nourishment of God’s Word (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4). It is the Word of God, confirmed and enforced by the Spirit of God, which effectively matures and sanctifies the People of God.

3. The Power of Preaching

If God reforms his people by his Word, precisely how does his Word reach and transform them? In a variety of ways, no doubt, including their daily personal meditation in the Scripture. But the principal way God has chosen is to bring his Word to his people through his appointed pastors and teachers. For he has not only given us his Word; he has also given us pastors to teach the people out of his Word (e.g. Jn. 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 4:13). We can hardly exaggerate the importance of pastor-preachers for the health and maturity of the church.

My vision, as I look out over the world, is to see every pulpit in every church occupied by a conscientious, Bible-believing, Bible-studying, Bible-expounding pastor. I see with my mind's eye multitudes of people in every country world-wide converging on their church every Sunday, hungry for more of God's Word. I also see every pastor mounting his pulpit with the Word of God in his mind (for he has studied it), in his heart (for he has prayed over it until it has inflamed him), and on his lips (for he is intent on communicating it).

What a vision! The people assemble with hunger, and the pastor satisfies their hunger with God's Word! And as he ministers to them week after week, I see people changing under the influence of God's Word, and so approximating increasingly to the kind of people God wants them to be, in understanding and obedience, in faith and love, in worship, holiness, unity, service and mission.

END OF QUOTE FROM JOHN STOTT

c) The pastoral priority

Seminaries exist mainly for the training of future pastors (not exclusively of course, but historically they have been 'invented' to serve the church by training those who will serve in ordained pastoral ministry).

But what should a pastor be able to do? What should a pastor-in-training be trained and equipped for? We should start to answer that question by consulting the list of qualifications that Paul gives for elders / overseers in the churches he had founded which were now being supervised by Timothy and Titus. We find extensive lists of qualities and criteria in 1 Timothy 3:1-10 and Titus 1:6-9. What is striking is that almost all the items Paul mentions are matters of character and behaviour – how they live and conduct themselves and their families. Pastors should be examples of godliness and faithful discipleship. Only one thing could be described as a competence, or ability, or skill - '**able to teach**'. The pastor above all should be a teacher of God's word, able to understand, interpret and apply it effectively (as Paul further describes in 1 Tim. 4:11-13; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:1-, 15; 3:15-4:2). In fact the pastor's personal godliness and exemplary life is what will give power and authenticity to this single fundamental task. The pastor must live what he or she preaches from the Scriptures.

So then, if seminaries are to prioritize in their training what Paul prioritizes for pastors, they ought to concentrate on two primary things: personal godliness and ability to teach the Bible. Now of course there are many other things that pastors have to do in the demanding tasks of church leadership. They will need basic competence in pastoral counselling, in leading God's people in worship and prayer, in management and administration of funds and people, in articulating vision and direction, in relating to their particular cultural context etc. But above all else, Paul emphasizes what they must *be* (in godliness of life), and what they must commit themselves to *do* (effective preaching of God's Word).

All that is taught and learned (formally and informally) in seminary should contribute to producing those who can preach the Word. Now immediately I would add, this is NOT to say that the Homiletics Department takes over the curriculum (any more than to say that all that a seminary does should be "missional" means that the Missions Department takes over the curriculum)! Rather, it means that every part of the curriculum should deepen, enrich and resource the life and mind and skills of future pastors for their preaching ministry. When a

pastor comes to preach a biblical text, he or she should be able to draw not only on the resources of the Biblical exegetical courses they may have done, but also on the riches gleaned from Systematic and Historical Theology, from the lessons of Church History, from the insights and applications of Cultural or Anthropological or Religious Studies. All of this can give depth and breadth to the preaching of the Bible. As Paul Windsor said, in the title of his seminar at the ICETE conference, “it takes an entire college to raise a preacher” - a preacher who can feed the flock with preaching that is faithful to the biblical text and the historic tradition of the Christian faith, and that is strong and effective in its contextual relevance and application.

The Langham Partnership’s Oxford consultation in June 2010 on the teaching of preaching in seminaries issued a document: “*Sixteen Affirmations*”. Here are numbers 5 and 6:

- Learning to preach incorporates a mixture of the formal, or *taught*, dimensions of preaching together with the informal, or *caught* dimensions. What happens in classrooms (right across the curriculum), in the chapel, and in the wider community all contribute to the shaping of preachers. And so we affirm that it takes an entire college, with a united faculty, to ensure the effectiveness of the homiletics course(s) within the training programme.
- In the majority world anyone who graduates from a theological college is expected to be a preacher. Therefore we affirm that the teaching of homiletics needs to be an indispensable, inter-disciplinary, and integrating exercise at the core of the mission, vision and practice of the institution.

Yet equipping future pastors with that skill of careful, diligent, imaginative and relevant preaching of the Bible seems sadly neglected in many seminaries. Or so it seems from the response I often get when, at a Langham Preaching seminar somewhere I ask participants who I know have already been to a seminary, “Did you not learn how to preach from Bible passages at seminary?” “Well,” comes the answer many a time, “we did have a course called ‘Homiletics’, but it was just ten lectures on different kinds of preaching. We were never taught how to move from a Bible text to a biblical sermon, or given any practice and assessment in doing it.” Frankly, that points to a tragic abdication of what ought to be a primary responsibility.

B. Engaged

I am very aware that I have majored on the “Rooted in the Word”, part of my brief in this keynote address for the Conference theme, and that the next section will necessarily be shorter. But I do believe that the more we are rooted in the Word, actually the more we will find ourselves having to engage in the world, since the Word itself comes to us embedded in its own context and engaging with all the issues that faced God’s people in both Testaments. If we are preaching an “engaged Word” we cannot help but take up the challenge of engaging that Word with our own contemporary and varied cultural and missional contexts. Likewise, if a seminary deliberately seeks to “re-centre the study of the Bible as the core discipline in Christian theology, integrating and permeating all other fields of study and application” (*CTC IIF.4.D*), then inevitably it will be compelled to address the issues thrown up by the world around it, in the light of the Bible’s teaching. If the Bible is the product and the record of

God's mission for the sake of God's world, then you cannot be truly and wholly biblical without also being thoroughly missional – in thinking and practice.

“Engaged in the world” is one way of expressing what we mean by “missional”. A “missional church” (is there any other kind?) is one that recognizes and acts upon the primary identity and calling of the church to be the agent of God's mission in God's world for God's glory. So when we say that theological education must be “engaged in the world”, we are saying that it must be missional – that is, it must play its full part in serving God's purpose in and through the church for the sake of the world.

It is in this sense that the *Cape Town Commitment* insists that theological education is *intrinsically* missional (that is to say, it constitutes an integral dimension of the full-rounded mission of the church), and therefore it ought to be *intentionally* missional (that is, preparing people for fully engaged mission in the world). Here are the relevant paragraphs:

The mission of the Church on earth is to serve the mission of God, and the mission of theological education is to strengthen and accompany the mission of the Church. Theological education serves *first* to train those who lead the Church as pastor-teachers, equipping them to teach the truth of God's Word with faithfulness, relevance and clarity; and *second*, to equip all God's people for the missional task of understanding and relevantly communicating God's truth in every cultural context. Theological education engages in spiritual warfare, as ‘we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.’

Those of us who lead churches and mission agencies need to acknowledge that **theological education is intrinsically missional**. Those of us who provide theological education need to ensure that it is **intentionally missional**, since its place within the academy is not an end in itself, but to serve the mission of the Church in the world.

We urge that institutions and programmes of theological education conduct a ‘missional audit’ of their curricula, structures and ethos, to ensure that they truly serve the needs and opportunities facing the Church in their cultures. (CTC IIF.4)

Two questions remain, that I cannot answer in depth here, but which should stimulate further reflection and resolution: Why and How?

1. Why must all theological education be missionally engaged?

The answer to this question follows very similar lines to the answer given above (A2a) as to why theological education should be biblical rooted. That is not surprising if it is true, as I've said, that to be truly biblical is necessarily to be missional. The teaching ministry within the people of God was never an end in itself but a means towards shaping and equipping God's people for their mission in God's name in the world.

a) Even in the Old Testament you can see this. Israel did not have a “missionary mandate” to go out to all the nations (in the way that the post-resurrection Jesus sent out his apostles to all nations). But their mission was to live visibly among the nations, as a “light to the nations”, bearing witness to the God they worshipped through the kind of society they were intended to

be. Thus, for example, Moses urges the people to follow his detailed teaching in order that the nations would take notice and ask questions (Deut. 4:5-8).

b) Most significantly, teaching is included at the heart of the Great Commission itself. How was the mission of making disciples of all nations to be accomplished? Not only through evangelism leading to baptism, but by “*teaching them* to obey all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20 – a phrase which is in itself essentially Deuteronomic). And if we ask what is implied by the “all” that Jesus had taught his disciples, it certainly includes that they should be salt and light in the world, engaged in the work of the kingdom of God, through words and works, preaching the good news about King Jesus, seeking justice, showing mercy and love, practising forgiveness and generosity – and doing so to the ends of the earth until the end of the world. Thus, the teaching task itself, and the obedience of faith that should flow from the teaching, are both essentially missional. Theological education, then, as one formal embodiment of the teaching work of the church, participates in the mission of God as mandated by Christ.

I very much resist the tendency in some circles of separating evangelism and teaching (since they are both essential to the formation and growth of healthy believers and churches), and of using the term “Great Commission Christians” as implying those whose priority (in strategy or in gifting) is in evangelism. I would say to all of us at this conference – “Theological educators, we *are* ‘Great Commission Christians’! We *are* engaged in mission – mission as Christ himself defined it. We are therefore necessarily engaged in the world.”

c) This is a pattern that we also see in Paul’s ministry. He had not stopped “being a missionary” when he settled in Ephesus for a few years and spent most of his time teaching the churches there, as well as engaging in evangelistic and apologetic work in a public lecture hall. And in an interesting pair of verses in Acts 20 we can see that Paul’s teaching was very much rooted in the Word and engaged in the world.

- In Acts 20:27 he says that he had not hesitated to preach to them “the whole counsel of God” - which almost certainly means the great sweep of biblical revelation (predominantly what we now call the Old Testament) about the saving mission of God culminating in the cross and resurrection of Christ and ultimately leading to the new creation. He taught them the depth and breadth of the biblical story (as is very evident from the letter written to the Ephesians and the assumptions it makes about what they already knew from Paul’s teaching).
- But in Acts 20:20, Paul says he had not hesitated to preach to them “whatever was needful for you” – which almost certainly means that he would systematically (“from house to house” – in the local fellowship meetings around the city) answer whatever questions they raised from their context. There would be all kinds of issues in this newly founded church – such as caused the riot in Acts 19, or the issues of food and meat and sex and money, etc., that we read about in the Corinthian correspondence. These new Christians needed biblical teaching to help them engage with the world around them – and Paul made sure they had that teaching for that missional purpose, often quoting great biblical texts in support.

Paul’s preaching then was both rooted and engaged, both expository of the scriptures and topical in its local relevance. It is an excellent pattern for a biblical preaching ministry.

d) And it is the pattern that Paul envisaged for all those whom God would give to the church as pastor-teachers. Their whole purpose is “to equip his people for works of service” (Eph. 4:12). So if theological education is to train such pastor-teachers for the task Paul says they have been given for, then it must equip them to go out and be *equippers* of all the rest of God’s people for *their* ministry in the world, in their homes and workplaces and in the whole of their lives. We do not train people for a clerical ministry that is an end in itself, but for a servant ministry that has learned how to train disciples to *be* disciples in every context in which they live and move.

I sometimes say to congregations when I am preaching on a text like 1 Peter 2:9-12, where all God’s people are to be his holy priesthood in the world, “I hope you do not think that you come to church every Sunday to support the pastor in his ministry. It is precisely the other way round. The pastor comes to church every Sunday to support *you in your ministry*, which is out there in the world, in the front line of your every day life and work. *You* have the ministry, the mission, where it really counts. You need to be fed and taught and equipped for whole-life discipleship in the world, and it is the pastor’s job to do that. Make sure he does, and pray for him until he does!” Are we training future pastors to think like that and to shape their preaching and teaching ministry for that goal?

2. How can all theological education be missionally engaged?

All I can say at this point is that I am encouraged to have discovered over the past few years a number of seminaries in different parts of the world where they have deliberately sought to become “missional”. In some cases this has meant a complete review and re-designing of their curriculum, with the deliberate intention that everything that is taught across all the disciplines, and everything else that happens in the life of the institution, is subjected to the question and criterion: “How does this contribute to shaping men and women to be missionally engaged in *this* context, in *this* culture, with depth of understanding of the Word (and the Christian tradition of faith and history flowing from it) and of the world, and the ability to relate both to each other?”

It would be a very worthwhile task to collate the experience of a number of such institutions that have made this journey and share it with the rest of the evangelical theological academy so that we become more globally fully biblically rooted and effectively missionally engaged.

Conclusion.

Seminaries seem to swing in two possible directions.

- Aiming at the “glittering prizes” of the highest academic standards and excellence of scholarship in Biblical and theological disciplines, but with little engagement with the outside world in terms of any missional teaching or involvement.
- Being passionately concerned for missional impact and engagement, seeking to be “relevant” over a wide range of social and political issues, but with very slender if any biblical roots, or an ever diminishing attention to deep biblical study and knowledge.

I long to see models of healthy combination of high standards of biblical and theological scholarship with effective contextual engagement – training the future leaders of the church

to know how to do both, or rather to know how to equip God's people to grow in maturity and Christlikeness through Bible teaching and to live missionally in the world. But it seems to me that the first has priority, and that indeed the *more biblically rooted we can be, the more we will be driven to be missionally engaged*, and the better equipped we will be to do so. For the more the Bible impacts and informs us, the more the Bible will drive us into the world to serve God there. I like the line in the Micah Declaration, also quoted in the *Cape Town Commitment*:

If we ignore the world, we betray the Word of God, which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the Word of God, we have nothing to bring to the world.