

Africa goes Online

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REGNUM STUDIES IN GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

Handbook of Theological Education in Africa

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Contents

Forewords:

- John Mbiti

xv
- Andre Karamaga

xviii
- Russel Botman

xx
- Olav Fykse Tveit

xxi
- Mercy Oduyoye

xxiii
- Denise Ackermann

xxv

Editorial xxvii

List of Contributors

PART I: HISTORY OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA	1
1. Theological Education from its earliest Jewish and African Christian beginnings – some currents in the wider history of Christianity <i>Andrew Walls (Scotland/USA)</i>	3
2. Good News Turned by Native Hands, Turned by Native Hatchets and Tendered with Native Earth - A History of Theological Education in Africa <i>John S. Pobee (Ghana)</i>	13
3. Historical Developments of Theological Education in Eastern Africa - The Example of Julius Krapf <i>Julius Gathogo (Kenya)</i>	28
4. Bishop Stephen Neill, the IMC and the State of African Theological Education in 1950 <i>Dyron Daughrity (California, USA)</i>	47
5. Ecumenical Theological Education and The Church in Africa Today <i>Nyambura J. Njoroge (Kenya, Switzerland)</i>	64
6. Viability and Ecumenical Perspectives for Theological Education in Africa: Legacy and New Beginnings as seen from ETE/WCC <i>Dietrich Werner (Germany, Switzerland)</i>	70
7. The Cross-cultural mission. An Agenda for Theological Education in Africa <i>Tharcisse Gatwa (Rwanda)</i>	84
8. The past and presence of Christian theology in African universities <i>James Kombo (Kenya)</i>	100
9. The Future Is Not What It Used To Be: Changes and choices facing theological education in Africa <i>Bill Houston (South Africa)</i>	108
10. The future of Theological Education in Africa and the challenges it faces <i>Jesse Mugambi (Kenya)</i>	117

PART II: REGIONAL SURVEYS ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA	126
11. Evangelical Theological Education in the Middle East and North Africa <i>Richard Hart (Jordan)</i>	129
12. Theological Education in West Africa <i>Kwabena Asamoah Gyadu (Ghana)</i>	146
13. Theological Education in East Africa <i>Christopher Byaruhanga (Uganda)</i>	154
14. Theological Education in Ethiopia <i>Desta Heliso (Ethiopia)</i>	164
15. Theological Education in Francophone Africa <i>Tharcisse Gatwa (Rwanda)</i>	175
16. Un tour d'horizon des Facultés de théologie de francophone Afrique <i>Simon Dossou (Senegal/Kenya)</i>	193
17. Theological Education in Angola and Mozambique <i>Luciano Chianeque (Angola)</i>	218
18. Theological Education in Southern Africa <i>James Amanze (Malawi/Botswana)</i>	223
19. Theological Education and Ministerial Formation in Madagascar <i>Laurent W. Ramambason</i>	234
20. Theological Education in South Africa <i>Christina Landmann (South Africa)</i>	239
21. If God Is For Us, Who Can Be Against Us? Theologizing Survival, Hope and Mobility in the African Christian Diaspora <i>Afe Adogame (Nigeria/Scotland)</i>	246
PART III: DENOMINATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA	261
22. Theological Education in the Coptic Orthodox Church (The Church of Alexandria) <i>Wedad Tawfik (Egypt)</i>	263
23. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church Tewahedo Church and its Traditional Theological Education System <i>Ayalkibet Berhanu Tesfaye (Ethiopia/South Africa)</i>	281
24. Theological Training and Formation in the Eastern Orthodox Churches in Africa <i>John Cosmas Njoroge (Kenya)</i>	292
25. Unleashing Theological Energy for Africa and the World Church – Roman Catholic Perspectives on African theological education <i>Gosbert Byamungu (Tanzania/Italy)</i>	301
26. Theological Formation in the Roman Catholic Church in Africa <i>Paul Béré (Côte d'Ivoire)</i>	307
27. Theological Education for Roman Catholic Religious Sisters in Africa <i>Chika Eucharia Eze SHCJ (Nigeria/South Africa)</i>	315
28. Studying and Doing Lutheran Theologies and Theological Education in Africa <i>Paul Isaak (Namibia)</i>	323
29. Anglican Theological Education in African and the role of ANITEPAM <i>Henry Mbaya (Malawi)</i>	336
30. Theological Education in Presbyterian Churches in Africa <i>Isabel Apawo Phiri (Malawi/ Switzerland)</i>	345
31. Theological Education in South Africa from a Reformed Perspective <i>Nico Koopman (South Africa)</i>	354

32. Major Concepts and Understandings of Theological Education in Baptist Churches in Eastern and Southern Africa <i>Hany Longwe (Malawi)</i>	363
33. Theological Education in Methodist Churches in Africa <i>Kwabena Asamoah Gyadu (Ghana)</i>	380
34. Theological Education in Evangelical Churches <i>Bill Houston and Victor Nakah (South Africa/Zimbabwe)</i>	386
35. Pentecostal Theological Education – A Ghanaian Perspective <i>Opoku Onyinah and Emmanuel Kwesi Anim (Ghana)</i>	393
36. The Development and Role of Pentecostal Theology in Botswana <i>Fidelis Nkomazana (Botswana)</i>	402
37. Theological Education in African Pentecostal Churches—Perspectives from Zimbabwe <i>Kudzai Biri (Zimbabwe)</i>	411
38. Theological Education in African Independent Churches in East Africa <i>John Njeru Gichimu (Kenya)</i>	420
39. Theological Education in African Independent Churches: A Plethora of Pedagogies <i>Thomas Oduro (Ghana)</i>	423
40. Theological Education in the African Independent Churches in Botswana <i>Obed Kealotswe (Botswana)</i>	433
41. Theological Education in the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) <i>Mary Getui (Kenya)</i>	440
PART IV: KEY ISSUES AND NEW FRONTIERS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA	443
Biblical Studies	
42. Les Etudes Bibliques Dans L'enseignement Theologique En Afrique <i>Priscille Djomhoue (Cameroon)</i>	455
43. Biblical studies in South(ern) Africa: An Overview <i>Madipoane Masenya (South Africa)</i>	454
44. Biblical Studies in Theological Education in Africa: Some Methodological Considerations <i>Lovemore Togarasei (Zimbabwe/Botswana)</i>	466
45. L'hébreu biblique dans l'enseignement théologique en Afrique centrale <i>Levi Ngangula Manyanya (DRC) et Viateur Ndikumana</i>	475
46. Bible Translation and Christian Theological Education in Africa – A Historical and a Pan-African Overview <i>Aloo Mojola (Kenya)</i>	486
47. Bible Translation and Theological Education in Lusophone and Spanish Speaking Africa <i>Gosnell Yorke and Edouard Kitoto Nsiku (West Indies and Mozambique)</i>	500
48. The significance of Bible Translations for African Theological Education <i>Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole (South Africa)</i>	508
Mission and Dialogue	
49. Restoring mission to the heart of theological education <i>Michael McCoy (South Africa)</i>	523
50. Inculturation Theology in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Developments <i>Justin Ukpong (Nigeria)</i>	530
51. The Contribution of Missiological Theology to the Theological Education in Africa <i>Paul Isaak (Namibia)</i>	543

52. Doing Theological Education from the Context of Migration in Southern Africa: A Theology of Reconstruction in Missiological Perspective <i>Chammah Kaunda (Zambia)</i>	555
53. Teaching African Religion in Theological Institutions <i>Tabona Shoko (Zimbabwe)</i>	566
54. Theological education and the relevance of African Worldviews – shifting the paradigm <i>Tony Balcomb (South Africa)</i>	576
55. Theological Education in Africa in the Context of Modern Science <i>Peter Barrett (South Africa)</i>	589
56. Ethnicity in theological education in Africa <i>Peter Nyende (Kenya)</i>	600
57. Christian-Muslim Relationships in retrospect and lessons for theological education in Africa <i>Nathan Samwini (Ghana)</i>	611
58. The Inclusion of the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations as an Imperative for Theological Education in Africa <i>Johnson Mbillah (Ghana/Kenya)</i>	624
Gender and HIV and AIDS	
59. HIV Research, Gender and Religion Studies <i>Sarojini Nadar (South Africa) and Isabel Apawo Phiri (Malawi/ Switzerland)</i>	632
60. Mainstreaming Gender in Theological institutions in Francophone African: Perspectives from Cameroon <i>Priscille Djomhoue (Cameroon)</i>	639
61. "...For Gaining instructions in wise dealings, righteousness, Justice and equity": Theological Education for Gender Justice and Sexual Empowerment. <i>Fulata Moyo (Malawi/Switzerland)</i>	647
62. Methods of interrogating HIV and AIDS in Biblical Studies <i>Musa Dube (Botswana)</i>	653
63. Religion and Masculinities in Africa: An opportunity in Africanization <i>Ezra Chitando (Zimbabwe)</i>	662
64. The Tamar Campaign: returning Tamar's testimony to the church <i>Gerald West (South Africa)</i>	671
65. Gender, religion and politics in theological education <i>Verena Grueter (Germany)</i>	682
Public theology - Justice, peace and ecology	
66. Political Theology in Theological and Bible Colleges Curriculum <i>Godfrey Ngumi (Kenya)</i>	689
67. Theological education for dignity in Africa - A Public Theological Perspective <i>Nico Koopman</i>	698
68. Sustainability in African Theological Education <i>Ernst Conradie (South Africa)</i>	707
69. Environmental Issues in African Theological Education <i>Makamure Clement (Zimbabwe)</i>	714
70. Poverty and justice as crucial themes in African theological education <i>Rogate Mshana (Tanzania)</i>	722

71. EDAN's Journey in Introducing Disability Studies in African Theological Education Institutions <i>Samuel Kabue (Kenya) and Micheline Kamba (DRC)</i>	731
Practical and pastoral theology	
72. Pastoral Theology in African contexts <i>Maake Masango (South Africa)</i>	744
73. Spiritual Formation in Theological Education <i>Marilyn Naidoo (South Africa)</i>	755
74. Theological Education for African Ecumenism - Proposals from the Perspective of Christian Spirituality <i>Christo Lombaard (South Africa)</i>	771
75. African initiatives in the Ecumenical Movement - Theological Education for the Future of African Ecumenism <i>James Amanze (Malawi/Botswana)</i>	779
76. Sunday Schools as the Foundation of Christian Nurture and their Relevance for Theological Education in Africa <i>Peter M. Mumo (Kenya)</i>	793
77. A Church Where Children are Welcome: A New Paradigm for Children's Ministry in Africa <i>Dirk Coetsee and Jan Grobbelaar (South Africa)</i>	803
Forms and models of theological education	
78. Contextualizing Theological Education in Africa by Doing Theology in a Missional Hermeneutic <i>Jurgens Hendriks (South Africa)</i>	818
79. Theological Education for all God's People: Theological Education by Extension (TEE) in Africa <i>Kangwa Mabuluki (Zambia)</i>	832
80. Distance and Open Learning Models of Theological Education in Africa <i>Vengesai Chiminige (Zimbabwe)</i>	841
81. Mentoring younger scholars in Theological Education in Africa <i>John De Gruchy and Lyn Holeness (South Africa)</i>	852
82. Mentoring younger scholars in Theological Education in Africa <i>Esther Mombo (Kenya)</i>	858
83. Academic Theology and the Church – A West African Perspective <i>Godwin Ironeng Akper</i>	869
84. What is 'Quality' in Theological Education? <i>Bill Houston (South Africa)</i>	875
PART V: SELECTED INNOVATIVE MODELS AND CASE STUDIES OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA	881
85. Theological Education as an Instrument of Socialisation and Church Growth of African-Jamaicans in the 19th Century <i>Roderick Hewitt (South Africa/Jamaica)</i>	883
86. From St. Paul's Divinity School to St. Paul's University - A story of Theological Education from Kenya <i>Esther Mombo (Kenya) and John Chesworth (Britain/Kenya)</i>	893

87. Case Study on Theological Education and the African Inland Church in Kenya <i>Peter M. Mumo (Kenya)</i>	902
88. Higher Education as Mission: The Case of Uganda Christian University <i>Stephen Noll (Uganda)</i>	912
89. The School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics: doing contextual theology in Africa in the University of KwaZulu-Natal <i>Gerald West (South Africa)</i>	919
90. Seth Mokitimi – A New Way of Doing Seminary? <i>Peter Storey (South Africa)</i>	927
91. Developments of Theological Education at the United Seminary of Ricatla, Mozambique <i>Hette Domburg and Isaias Titoce (Mozambique)</i>	934
92. The Akrofi-Christaller Institute, Ghana, as an Innovative Model of Theological Education in Africa <i>Gillian Bediako (Ghana)</i>	939
93. The African Theological Fellowship – an Innovative Model for Evangelical Theological Education <i>Gillian Bediako (Ghana)</i>	947
94. Doing Popular Theology through the Institute of Women in Religion and Culture in Accra, Ghana <i>Mercy Oduyoye (Ghana)</i>	956
95. Theological Education by Extension – A Case Study on TEE College Johannesburg. <i>Michael Taylor and Craig Dunsmuir (South Africa)</i>	958
96. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians – Transforming Theological Education <i>Isabel Phiri (Malawi/ Switzerland) and Lilian Siwila (Zambia/South Africa)</i>	966
97. CEPROFORE – Le Centre Protestant de Formation et de Rencontre in Togo <i>Frank Agbi-Awume</i>	974
98. The contribution of the Anglican Church to theological education in South Africa: the Case of St. Paul's Theological College, Grahamstown <i>Henry Mbaya (Malawi/South Africa)</i>	979
99. University of San Francisco in Zambia Service-Learning Program: A Synergist Approach to Theological Innovation <i>Lilian Dube (Zimbabwe/USA)</i>	990
PART VI: NETWORKS AND RESOURCES FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA	999
100. Reliable Leadership, Sustainable Seminaries: The NetACT Story 2000-2012 <i>Jurgens Hendriks (South Africa)</i>	1001
101. Ecumenical Theological Education in Africa: The Case of the Theological Association of Theological Institution in Southern and Central Africa (ATISCA) <i>James Amanze (Malawi/Botswana)</i>	1018
102. West African Association of Theological Institution (WAATI): History, Activities and Challenges, (1973-2011) <i>Thomas A. Oduro (Ghana)</i>	1032
103. Association of Theological Institutions in Eastern Africa (ATIEA) <i>Edison Kalengyo (Uganda/Kenya)</i>	1039
104. The Association of Theology Institutions in Francophone Africa (L'ASTHEOL) in the period between 1966 and 2011 <i>Priscille Djomhoue (Cameroon)</i>	1043

105. African Pentecostalism Coming of Age: The Association for Pentecostal Theological Education in Africa (APTEA) from an Ecumenical Perspective <i>Chammah Kaunda (Zambia/South Africa)</i>	1050
106. African Network of Higher Education and Research in Theology, HIV and AIDS (ANHERTHA) <i>Edwina Ward (South Africa)</i>	1059
107. ACTEA and Quality Assurance in Evangelical Theological Education in Africa <i>Philippe Emedi (DRC/South Africa)</i>	1064
108. Le Role De la CETA Dans l'Enseignement Theologique en Afrique <i>Simon Kossi Dossou (Benin)</i>	1075
109. Le CITAF: Ensemble pour une formation théologique de qualité en Afrique francophone <i>Sylvain Allaboe</i>	1083
110. The place and role of theological training in CEVAA <i>Samuel Johnson (Cameroon)</i>	1088
111. Africa goes Online: The Global Library for Theology and Ecumenism <i>Christoph Stueckelberger (Switzerland)</i>	1093
112. Challenges for Theological Publishing and Scholarly Books in Africa <i>Jesse Mugambi (Kenya)</i>	1101
113. Theological Education in Africa Needs Money <i>Manfred Waldemar Kohl (Canada)</i>	1106

(111) AFRICA GOES ONLINE: THE GLOBAL LIBRARY FOR THEOLOGY AND ECUMENISM

Christoph Stückelberger

1. Challenges of Theological Education Globally and in Africa

The following article concentrates on access to theological documents as a basis for theological education. What the hoe and the tractor are for the farmer, the book and libraries are for theologians: basic professional instruments. Each continent has its challenges and opportunities in theological education. In relation to access to theological documents in the perspective of world Christianity, they can be described, in simplified terms, as follows: European and North American theological institutions have good online access through their (university) libraries and networks of libraries, but decreasing budgets for physical books and journals. Students and scholars are often still focused on publications in their own language, Americans primarily in English, Europeans (whose multilingual capacities are better developed than in the US) primarily in German and English. In both continents, theological production from the Global South is still not much known and recognised, except in special, "exotic" disciplines such as ecumenism, missiology and contextual theologies. In Latin America, online access is quite good and a number of national or Latin American networks of academic online resources compensate more and more for the lack of books and journals in physical libraries. In most Asian countries – not only the emerging markets – internet access is good and online access is growing fast. Some scientific networks from national institutions offer a broad range of online content, but theological content is still mainly on paper and unavailable online. In Africa, the biggest challenge is fast, affordable broadband internet access. The improvements in the last few years are remarkable. The plans for new internet cables around and across the African continent and highly accelerated access through mobile phones are promising. But technological innovation needs awareness of the importance of fast internet access for all sectors of life – economic competitiveness as well as social, cultural, religious and political development – and political commitment to national and transnational cooperation. The obstacles to better internet access are mainly political.

All in all, internet access today is good on all continents, but still expensive in the Global South and less developed in Africa. In the Global North, access to university databases is normally possible via a virtual private network (VPN) connection. In the Global South, this is limited because the institutions do not allow access or because of the relatively high costs of private internet access.

The language barriers on all continents are much stronger than often recognised: In Europe, theological exchange between Francophone/South European and Central/North European countries is still weak, between Western and Eastern Europe almost non-existent. In North America, many European works are translated, but what is not translated is often unknown. In Latin America, many scholars and students still read only or mainly in Spanish and Portuguese, some of the older generation also in French, but not sufficiently in English. In many Asian countries, contemporary North American theological publications are much better known than their European equivalents. Publications in languages other than the national language (e.g. Korean, Chinese) and English are not well recognised. In Africa, the language barriers between Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone Africa are still substantial. South-South exchange and translation of theological publications is increasing, but still too low.

All these challenges imply huge potential for the future, especially for free or affordable online access to theological products.

2. Encouraging Examples

As a visiting lecturer, speaker at conferences and trainer of church leaders in many countries of the Global South, including Cameroon, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Indonesia, India and China, I always visit the theological libraries, librarians, and lecturers in theological institutions. In Africa, many lecturers, students and librarians complain that they have not sufficient access to new print publications. The Protestant University in Kinshasa, rated as one of the best universities in the DRC, with over 6000 students, has some international journals in science, but only four in theology, and none of them with the volumes of the last two years, as I saw during my lectures in 2010. In South Africa, where excellent theological books are produced, theological faculties have had to cut journal subscriptions drastically due to lack of funds. At the Protestant Free University of the Great Lakes in Goma in the eastern DRC, with over 5000 students, the librarian told me that for twelve months she could not add a single new book. The few books ordered have never been delivered; they disappeared at the border, according to the librarian.

But online access is one important (not the only) solution. Encouraging examples with the global online library on ethics of Globethics.net: In 2008, I asked the librarian of the Protestant University in Yaoundé/Cameroon to show me the doctoral theses in ethics accepted by the theological faculty during the previous year. Next day, after receiving permission from the Faculty, I uploaded the doctoral thesis (in French) of Pitshi Ngoy Kazadi on the role of the Methodist Church in DRC related to internally displaced people during the war of 2000-2003 to the Globethics.net library via the online submission system. It took ten minutes. In this way, four months after acceptance by the faculty, the thesis was available worldwide, including the whole of Africa. It can be downloaded for free.¹ In 2010 I met Ngongo Kilongo Fatuma, doctoral student at the Protestant University of Congo (UPC) in Kinshasa. She published with the university press a book on violence against women in Bukavu in the DRC during the recent war in theological perspective. Ten dollars per copy was cheap, but still too much for many of the teachers and students in Bukavu. Next day, she brought me the book on a USB stick, with the confirmation that she owned the copyright. We uploaded it together² and now it is available worldwide.³ The journal *African Journal of Business Ethics*, produced in South Africa, was available for print subscription, with a few hundred subscribers. Since 2009, it is now available online for free,⁴ and the number of paid print subscriptions is at the same time increasing! E-books are also an important future step for theological publishers. The Kenyan commercial publisher Pambazuka Press signed an agreement with Globethics.net, which buys the books for 1.5 times the price of the print copy and gets the online version as a PDF to put in its online library; 35 books on African themes are already available for free.⁵ At the same time, the print books are still selling well.

3. Global Online Library for Theology and Ecumenism

Globethics.net is a global network of people and institutions involved in ethics and religions around the globe. This foundation, created in 2005 and based in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland, with an international Board of Foundation with representatives from all continents, includes 29,000 registered participants from 211 countries and territories (as of July 2011), 150 registered organisations, and over 50 partner organisations. Globethics.net offers the leading global online library on ethics and on theology and ecumenism.

¹ www.globethics.net: login, go to library, search, enter the author's name.

² www.globethics.net, login, go to library, submissions.

³ www.globethics.net: login, go to library, search, enter the author's name.

⁴ www.globethics.net/journals.

⁵ www.globethics.net/web/dg-pambazuka-press-fahamu-books/overview.

3.1 *The Globethics.net ethics library (GlobeEthicsLib)*

The Globethics.net library is a global digital library specialising in applied ethics.⁶ Since Sept 2011, it is enlarged by a second library, the Library for Theology and Ecumenism which together build the Globethics.net libraries, built on the same technology and with the same concept. They include over 750'000 full text documents (articles, books) and over 250 journals. The libraries are global, because the target public is located everywhere on the globe and the content comes from all the countries in the world; digital, in that all the content is available in a digital format (there is no physical library); specialising in applied ethics, in that the content is intended to enable a researcher to study an ethical issue, a teacher to teach ethics or an ethical challenge or a professional to consider and overcome a work-related ethical issue.

The Globethics.net library tackles the challenge of the information gap that still separates the global North from parts of the global South. This is, in applied ethics, an injustice that needs to be overcome. In today's world ethical challenges are by definition global: Climate change, society, politics, economics, information and religion cannot be dealt with seriously and justly or taught on a global scale by only one part of the world population (one part of the world, one religion, one pool of experts, etc.) Global ethical challenges need global ethical discussions and responses. Globethics.net aims to contribute to the emergence of this dialogue by connecting people (network) and offering access to content (digital library) that users normally cannot access. In the South, many people do not have access to knowledge and information from the global North, because it is too expensive; whereas in the global North, many people do not have access to knowledge and information from the global South, because it is not distributed in the channels they normally use.

The Globethics.net library means sharing of resources. It gets its content from three major sources: commercial publishers; open access actors; Globethics.net participants. Globethics.net buys journal subscriptions from commercial publishers and therefore receives the right to display the copyright protected content in its library. Registered users can access this content for free after having logged in (registration to Globethics.net is free). As specified before, this service addresses the issue of poor access to information/knowledge because of financial reasons. Globethics.net also harvests content from so called open access repositories, which are university-based or institution-based document servers providing free access to scientific or institutional documents. This content is harvested in a bulk import to the Globethics.net server and is then screened, as far as possible, for free full text ethics-related content before being displayed in the library. The last but very important source of the Globethics.net library are submissions of Globethics.net participants. Every registered user (=participant) is encouraged to submit his/her own ethics-related books and articles to the library. This can be done directly in four simple steps through an online submission process. Each submitter becomes a librarian supported by the quality control of reviewers.

The advantage of the Globethics.net library in comparison with a traditional physical library is that full-text content can be accessed from anywhere on the planet provided one has access to a computer and an internet connection. This means that people do not have to move to a physical place (often far away and expensive in transport) and do not have to be affiliated to an institution. Of course, this also implies some limits to the service: a physical library has real librarians, who can help and provide training in information systems that can be complicated to use. At Globethics.net assistance to participants is provided by email, but hopefully, communication technologies can soon allow for some distance training. Obviously, nothing can ever totally replace human contact.

⁶ See for this chapter also Christoph Stüeckelberger and Amélie Vallotton, "The Future Role of Online Libraries: Globethics.net's Innovative Model", in Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang and Joshva Raja (eds), *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives, Ecumenical trends, Regional Surveys* (Oxford: Regnum, 2010), 307-311.

The advantage of the Globethics.net library in comparison with other digital libraries is its specialisation: the content is preselected in order to respond to the needs of the target users and the service is trying specifically to meet the needs of a global community of people working or simply interested in applied ethics. This makes the library very appropriate as a first source of information for this community. At the same time, the fact that this community is global implies some difficulties that need to be overcome. The collection that is selected for the library needs on the one hand to be representative of the diversity of religious, cultural, philosophical, linguistic, educational and professional background of our users and on the other hand to be coherent in order to ensure a proper documentary treatment and organisation of the information in the database.

The Globethics.net library aims to offer constantly improving services to the library users. It contributes to the effort of the open access community to develop better and fairer information services in order to improve education (life-long self-education as well as institutionalised education), mutual understanding, and the quality of lives and societies through value-oriented behaviour.

3.2 *The online library on theology and ecumenism (GlobeTheoLib)*

Lecturers, students and church leaders asked us if the ethics library could be enlarged by such subjects as biblical, ecumenical and dogmatic theology. Between April and December 2010, a joint planning group of Globethics.net and the World Council of Churches, through its programme for Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE), worked on a concept for a global online Library on Theology and Ecumenism (GlobeTheoLib). This library has the same basic *characteristics* as GlobeEthicsLib: It includes documents that are

- full-text
- for free (after registration and login at Globethics.net)
- downloadable, printable, storable
- multilingual (documents in all languages possible, metadata mainly in English)
- accessible from every internet access
- cross-searchable between the theological and ethics library
- with the possibility of online submissions to the library by all registered participants (with a professional quality control/review by Globethics.net)

It has a special focus on documents from the Global South and the *content* of both libraries (journal articles, books and encyclopaedias, unpublished documents) comes from four main sources:

- *commercial publishers*, where Globethics.net pays the subscription fee, as other libraries do (GlobeTheoLib is like the library of a virtual university)
- *open access repositories/databases* (about 1700 exist in the world; Globethics.net harvest the relevant ethics and theological content)
- *institutional submissions* through library agreements with partner institutions such as churches, ethics centres, international and ecumenical organisations, theological journals
- individual submissions from participants

Participants are encouraged to submit their own books and articles to the library. This can be done directly in four simple steps through an online submission process. Each submitter becomes a librarian, supported by the quality control of reviewers.

Specific characteristics, challenges and opportunities of GlobeTheoLib are:

The *consortium*⁷ of over twenty theological and ecumenical organisations from all continents is the consultative organ for strategic guidance and supervision of the library to make it as inclusive and as sensitive to regional and contextual participation as possible.

⁷ Founding Institutions are the World Council of Churches and Globethics.net. Members of the consortium as of 1 July 2011 are All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), Anglican World Communion (AWC), Association for

The *classification*⁸ of the subject: How to organise the subjects of theology and ecumenism in a global and contextual perspective? The way in which a discipline is classified is highly dependent on worldview, theology, context, and library-specific and software-related requirements. Examples of the intense discussions we held: Under the heading “Intercultural and contextual theologies” the discussion was about continental differentiation: “African Theologies” or “Asian Theologies” seem to be clearer than “European Theologies”, which often claim to be global but are in fact as contextual as others. “Feminist Theologies” was enlarged to “Feminist, womanist, mujerista theologies, ecofeminism”. And how to acknowledge in “Global church history” that the early church is not only western but also includes, for example, India? A draft of the classification was sent to about twenty experts on all continents and the feedback has been integrated as much as possible in the final classification.

Harvesting of open repositories: Globethics.net, through its software partner Pointsoftware in Zurich, harvests all existing open repositories (databases with a common software protocol, open to everybody by definition, mainly provided by universities around the world, with a strong focus on science): How to find the relevant theological documents out of more than 30 million documents in these 1700 repositories in order to include them in GlobeTheoLib? “Theol*”, “teol*”, meaning all words with theological, theology, théologie, teología, etc. are selected. To cover English, French, German, Portugese, and Spanish is easy. But how to ensure that relevant documents in Swahili, Yoruba, Arabic, Chinese or Afrikaans are found? How to define the relevant search terms so that they are as inclusive as possible? This ongoing task is scientifically challenging but also rewarding. African scholars are invited to participate in this process by sending search terms in different languages they want to be included in the global theological library

The definition of “scientific”: As a professor of ethics and an editor and publisher of many books and articles in and from all continents, I become more and more critical of today’s understanding of “scientific”. The rating systems of journals often discriminate against and unfairly exclude authors. Experts whose main language is not English are already at a clear disadvantage, and the conditions of knowledge production are often not considered. Theological scholars in Africa with daily power cuts of many hours, internet costs beyond their means, and teaching obligations three times higher than their colleagues in Europe or North America may have “only” twenty footnotes and quotations of latest articles, instead of sixty, and will then not be accepted in some well-known journals in the Global North. GlobeTheoLib wants to help to make visible and accessible important theological production from the Global South that is often not visible, neither in the South nor the North.

The type of content: Different contexts need different ways of teaching, training, research and communication. The Lutheran World Federation suggested that GlobeTheoLib include not only scientific documents but also, for example, sermons and other liturgical material. In many contexts, sermons are the main source for theological reflection. This is the case not only in Africa or Asia today but also in church history. The main sources for the ethics of John Calvin, the 16th-century Reformer, are his sermons! A theological library should include step by step selected documents of what is scientifically labelled “grey literature”. One addition: Audio and video files are other materials for teaching and training to be included.

Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA), Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), Conference of Orthodox Theological Schools (COTS), Forum of Asian Theological Librarians (FORATL), Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA), Institut Catholique de Paris (ICP), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Red Latinoamericana de Información Teológica (RLIT), Volos Academy for Theological Studies, World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCATI), World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), World Methodist Council (WMC), University Institute (ISEDET) Argentina, University Library of Tübingen (Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Theologie und Religionswissenschaft – VirTheo). Pending are Conference of European Churches (CEC), Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias (CLAI), Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC).

⁸ See the classification of subjects in GlobeTheoLib on www.globethics.net.

Participation or domination? A global online library on theology and ecumenism may be tempted “to define the world” again from a centre of power in Geneva or elsewhere. It runs the risk of continuing domination in the soft form of knowledge management. Search machines such as Google or Yahoo and social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn or Koprol are not neutral. To define the mathematical algorithms behind search machines (as in the case of Google) is an invisible exercise of global power. For GlobeTheoLib, the solution is methodological transparency and the critical participation of as many stakeholders as possible. The consortium, users, publishers, librarians, and theological scholars are all stakeholders. Participation can be enhanced by two additional instruments: Special collections and archives.

Special collections in GlobTheoLib offer documents by institution (institutional collection) or by theme (thematic collection).⁹ For example, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), a publisher or a theological faculty can put all their publications in one collection and offer them both on their own website and as a special collection in GlobeTheoLib. Or the network of African Women Theologians can start a thematic collection of publications on African Women Theologies. Collections give an institution or theme additional visibility and outreach in the whole of Africa and worldwide.

Online Journals: Many Protestant universities in Africa have their own journals. Due to lack of staff, editorial capacity or money, they are often not published regularly or appear just once a year, in a few hundred copies. “Local” interests often make it difficult to form a consortium of Protestant scholars and institutions to produce more powerful theological journals, regularly published and well recognised both in the continent and internationally. Theologians in Africa, as in all continents, are often frustrated if their articles are not published in one of the “famous” journals in the North. An alternative is to start more African online journals. In the African Journals Online portal AJOL, the leading platform for peer-reviewed African-published scholarly journals¹⁰, there are already 410 journals in many disciplines (e.g. 106 on health), but only a few in theology (4 under “Religion”. Theology does even not exist in the list of categories!) Globethics.net offers a system of online production of journals, including international marketing. Two are already online (“African Journal of Business Ethics”, South Africa, and “Ramon Llull Journal of Applied Ethics”, Spain).¹¹

Archives are important sources for research in and on Africa in church history, contextual theology, ecumenism and many other disciplines. It is a waste of time, energy, and money if each institution develops its own archiving system. Archives should be made available step by step online so that researchers can save on expensive travel and do a good part of the research from their own workplace. Such archives – even if they start with scanning and digitising only such materials as general assembly documents or key historical documents – can be easily established as a collection in GlobeTheoLib. The software and library system does not need to be reinvented. It is available for free. Thus, for example, an “AACC Archive” or archives of National Council of Churches could be accessible and fully searchable all over Africa by member churches and others interested. On the AACC website, the “AACC Archive” folder would be identical with the folder in the GlobeTheoLib collections.

3.3 Online doctoral theses series

In the Global North, doctoral theses have to be published in order to get the title of a D.Theol. In the Global South, many doctoral theses are never published, mainly for cost reasons. Important theological production is therefore not known. Theological institutions need a clear strategy of online publications of theses. E-theses need the same careful editing as printed monographs. Layout is no problem today and the characteristics of a book to be found via ISBN number and cataloguing are the same for e-books as for

⁹ Existing collections can be found here: www.globethics.net/library/collections.

¹⁰ See African Journals Online: www.ajol.com.

¹¹ For more info contact Globethics.net, Dr. Stephen Brown brown@globethics.net.

print books. E-theses are relatively cheap since there are no printing costs. Print on demand for some copies is still possible.

In 2012 Globethics.net will start a series of electronic doctoral theses on ethics, with a focus on works from the Global South. The concept is to produce them at low cost and make them available online for free in GlobeEthicsLib, and also in GlobeTheoLib if they relate to theological ethics.¹²

4. About Money: Costs and Benefits

Leading commercial publishers from the Global North such as Springer are starting to earn more from online download of articles and books than from print products. But downloading online articles is expensive. One scientific article costs USD 20-30! This is unaffordable for many in the Global South and difficult for many in the Global North. That is why the GlobeTheoLib offers documents for free. But this system needs support from donors and library budgets, just as for physical libraries that subscribe to journals.

The authors still do not see the benefit of publication. As an author who has published scientific books and articles in many countries on all continents, I never received royalties, except for some tiny amounts. But I often had to subsidise the publisher in order to sell the books at an affordable price. I meet African authors and theologians who still hope to be able to get remuneration for publication. The expectation is justified but not realistic. We should rather look for a system of open access,¹³ where the works are produced at low cost and published and made accessible as widely as possible. This is the "mission" of theology and ecumenism. Authors get not direct, but indirect rewards: more publications increase their rating and position in the university teaching system, support their applications for jobs, create invitations to conferences, speaking engagements, etc.

5. Recommendations for theological institutions in Africa

1. Each theological institution (faculties, seminaries, churches, Christian schools, hospitals, diaconal, development and research centres) appoints a person (e.g. the librarian, documentalist, dean of research) responsible for submitting documents to GlobeTheoLib¹⁴ and making GlobeTheoLib known to the users of the institutions.
2. Each theological institution decides a policy of open access to its knowledge production (books, audio, video) in order to get the best outreach.
3. Each theological institution asks students and authors to mandate an electronic copy of their master thesis and other publications as a precondition for an open access policy.
4. Larger institutions such as universities including their theological faculties register their scientific production as open repository,¹⁵ which facilitates discovery in the internet. Such a repository can then be harvested automatically by GlobeTheoLib.
5. South-South exchange of theological publications is given special emphasis. The global platform of GlobeTheoLib should be used to make Southern production accessible to the North, Northern production to the South and Southern production to the South.

¹² For more information and sending manuscripts, send an email to the author: stueckelberger@globethics.net.

¹³ More on the Open Access movement and its importance in Stückelberger/Vallotton, *The Future Role*, 308-310.

¹⁴ <http://www.globethics.net/web/guest/submit-my-documents>. For questions: Stephen Brown, Programme Executive GlobeTheoLib. brown@globethics.net.

¹⁵ More information from brown@globethics.net.

6. Special collections and archives are offered by theological institutions in Africa in online form within GlobetheoLib. Compared with isolated efforts, this common platform saves costs and increases theological cooperation and connection.
7. Journal editors review their policy and examine the possibility to go online and to seek cooperation with other theological journals with similar interests in Africa.

Authors and theological institutions develop a policy to guarantee that doctoral theses are published online for free or an affordable price.