

**Keynote Address at  
St Joseph's Theological Institute's  
Graduation 19 March 2010  
CEDARA  
By**

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Mr Grand-Chancellor - Very Rev. Dr. Stuart Bate OMI  
 Very Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Mosoeu – Vice President of the Africa-Madagascar Oblate Region  
 Your Eminence Wilfrid Cardinal Napier OFM – Archbishop of Durban  
 Cluster Partners of the Institute  
 Mr President - Father Sylvester David OMI  
 Staff and students of St Joseph Theological Institute, Cedara  
 Dear guests, ladies and gentlemen  
 Dear graduates

A graduation ceremony is always a joyful event, since it marks achievement through years of dedication, hard work and study. But today's ceremony has a double character in that it is connected with the installation of the first Grand-Chancellor of St Joseph's Theological Institute.

Today, on your patronal feast of St Joseph, we have witnessed the solemn installation of the first Grand Chancellor of St Joseph's Theological Institute. Allow me therefore to start by congratulating the first incumbent of this office, Professor Dr. Stuart Bate, my former colleague at St Augustine College of South Africa, and to wish him well in this new task. I am delighted that I could witness this ceremony which also marks a further development of this Private Higher Education Institution, that can confer its own bachelor degrees, Certificates and Diplomas.

And, of course, I want to congratulate our graduates. This is your day of celebration. You have achieved a milestone, the completion of your studies, which for many of you this has come at the cost of great personal effort, dedication and sacrifice. Most of you are now looking forward to your priestly ordination, others to the application of what they have studied, learnt and researched, to a career of their choice. Today's graduation is therefore a joyful celebration of an achievement in the immediate past, and a looking forward to the future.

As we are already in the second decade of the new millennium, facing an age of globalization, this looking forward gains momentum for us. After all, the future is before us - daunting, challenging, and even frightening because of so many uncertainties and fears in a society that is still going through the trauma of transformation. Despite the excitement around the Soccer World Cup, we are daily confronted with the symptoms of a society that has lost its moral fibre, with unemployment, poverty and of course Aids. Seemingly endless problems have to be faced in the educational sector. And yet, in exactly this scenario our graduates should become

- messengers of **hope and optimism**,
- **ethical leaders**, who, having accepted the challenge of our time, are willing to shape the future;
- **ethical leaders** who will help the country to get out of its moral bankruptcy.

Let me broaden the horizon of this celebration by placing it in a much wider framework, namely the story of higher education in Africa, and by showing that Africa has been leading in higher education.

The origins of higher education in Africa can be traced back to antiquity.<sup>i</sup> Contrary to a generally held belief, Africa has had a proud – but rather unknown - history of higher education that dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. Several institutional traditions have played a major role in the origins of higher education in Africa from about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. until at least the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and beyond.

The oldest tradition is that of the Alexandria Museum and Library (Bibliotheca Alexandrina) which was established in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. in Egypt and became a large centre of learning and research in the ancient world, supporting up to 5000 scholars and students, attracting leading Egyptian, Greek, Roman, African and Jewish scholars of the ancient world such as the preeminent mathematicians Archimedes and Euclid. The Bibliotheca Alexandrina was among the world's earliest known prototype universities. It is not surprising that, after St Mark who – according to tradition – founded the Church in Egypt (c. 40 AD), the great school of Christian theology developed in this academic environment of Alexandria, a school that is associated with names such as St Clement of Alexandria (d.c.100), Origen (185-253), St Athanasius (296-373) and St Cyril (376-444). Alexandria became the patriarchal see second in influence only to Rome, and despite persecutions in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, Christianity spread rapidly from Egypt to other parts of Africa.

The second tradition is linked to the period of the Roman colonization of North Africa, when some Roman institutions of higher learning flourished along the northern borders of the continent, first and foremost the university in Carthage, the “capital of Africa” as it was known, where eminent scholars such as Tertullian (160-220), St Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258) and St Augustine of Hippo (351-430) lived, studied and taught, scholars who exercised a profound influence on North Africa and the world of learning in the West right to the present.

A third tradition started with the early Christian monasteries in the Egyptian desert. They developed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. when thousands of Christians gathered at these places of learning and reflection. But it was especially in 4<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopia where Christianity introduced monastic education that gradually developed into higher education, although this was restricted to clergy and nobility. In 392 A.D. Christianity was made the state religion, but in 451 A.D. the larger part of the Egyptian Church separated from Catholic unity in response to the Council of Chalcedon (451) and came to be called “Coptic”. With the Arab conquest (639-642) the rich Christian tradition of higher education in Egypt came to an end.

A fourth tradition came about with the Islamic mosque universities. Africa is the centre of the world's oldest Islamic universities, and some of the oldest surviving universities. Since the

8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. mosque universities like the ones in Tunis (732), Fez (859), Cairo (969) and others became prestigious centres of Islamic education, attracting students and scholars from Andalusian Spain to West Africa.

All these traditions were located in **North Africa**.

The history of higher education in **sub-Saharan Africa** is more recent and linked to the process of European colonialism. Western-style universities were first introduced to Africa by missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This process was concentrated in the expanding European settler colonies at the extremities of the continent, first of all in **South Africa** (1829, 1841, 1866, 1873) and in Algeria (1857, 1879), as well as in Sierra Leone (1826) and Liberia (1862). It was, however, only during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that one saw a growing number of colonial universities in Africa. After World War II universities were systematically established by the colonial authorities, especially in the British, French and Belgian colonies. Initially these universities were still few and far between, and enrolment was limited to the elite. During the European decolonization of African countries in the 1950s and 1960s the number of higher institutions on the continent grew rapidly. Many of the newly independent states had to establish or expand their higher education system. This led to a phenomenal growth in higher education. The number of universities on the continent grew from less than three dozen in 1960 to more than 400 in 1995. Since then many more have been established with the “explosion” of private universities.

Presently there are around 5 million students enrolled in African universities. Nevertheless, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest in the world, standing in some African countries at around 5% at the turn of the century, i.e. 5% of the population that are able to enroll for tertiary education find themselves in these institutions. This does not compare favourably to a GER of 51.5% in the developed world and the world average of 17.4 %. Considering that in 1965 the African figure was only 1% there are definite signs of progress in this respect, although a lot of work in terms of development is still required. There is also a large discrepancy in gross enrolment ratios country-wise: only two countries have GERs higher than 10% - South Africa has by far the highest with 15.0 %, followed by Mauritius with 11%.

This shows that there is an urgent need for African countries to expand their enrolment in higher education. And here the growth of the private sector is seen as one of the viable alternatives. At present there are about 212 state universities in 45 African countries. The “explosion” of private universities added a further and important dimension to higher education in Africa, so that today universities are to be found in most of the countries in Africa.

### **Private higher education in Africa**

Until recently the public universities had a monopoly in providing tertiary education in African countries. During the period of independence there was a strong move towards public universities, but the 1990s saw the emergence of private sector institutions in Africa.

Today the private sector is the fastest growing segment in higher education in many countries in Africa. However, in some countries there was strong opposition from the state

against this trend. In South Africa it was only in December 1997, with the promulgation of the new Act on Higher Education, that private higher institutions could be established, but with stringent restrictions, such as prohibiting the name “university” and other titles associated with state universities (such as Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Rector, Professor). Private institutions were seen as a potential threat and competition to the state universities.

Between 1991 and 1999 nearly 65 private universities were established in sub-Saharan Africa. It is not easy to obtain information about private institutions in Africa and the exact amount of private institutions on the continent is not entirely clear. In 2004 a rough estimate was that more than 100 private universities were operating in sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Catholic universities and higher institutes in Africa**

The Catholic Church was leading in the development of private universities. Against the backdrop of the rise of private institutions in Africa in the 1980s, it is interesting to note that the first *Catholic* institutions of higher learning came about much earlier than other PIHEs (Private Institutions of Higher Education). In 1945 – after an earlier decision taken in 1938 by the **Synod of Catholic Bishops of South Africa** “to provide African Catholic students with post-matriculation and religious guidance” - the “Roman Catholic Hierarchy of Southern Africa” founded the Catholic University College at Roma (Lesotho), which, in 1950, was ceded to the congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and was then called Pius XII College. In 1964 the College was replaced by a non-denominational, inter-territorial university and eventually in 1975 became the National University of Lesotho.

Francophone countries followed.

The Catholic Faculties of Kinshasa / Les Facultés Catholiques de Kinshasa (FCK) were founded in 1957, followed by the Catholic University of Madagascar (CUMA) in 1960, the Université Catholique de l’Ouest (UCAO) in 1969 and the Université Catholique d’Afrique Centrale (UCAC) in 1989.

Two factors need to be considered, (1) the place of Catholic institutions vis-à-vis state universities, (2) the percentage of the Catholic population in the respective countries, because these factors play a decisive role in the mission and unique contribution of Catholic universities.

All the Catholic universities find themselves in an academic landscape with numerous public, state funded institutions as well as many PIHEs. Apart from South Africa with only 6.36% Catholics, the percentage of Catholics in the other countries varies from 12% - 50%. This of course does affect the scope of operation of a particular Catholic institution. Often it is difficult to determine what is the exact status of a PIHE. In South Africa, for example, multidisciplinary tertiary institutions function as degree awarding universities but the title “university” is not allowed.

Nearly all the Catholic universities in Africa were initiated and partly funded by the respective Episcopal Conferences or in some cases by Religious Orders or individual bishops, with the exception of St Augustine College of South Africa which was an initiative of committed lay academics and business leaders and is run as a not-for-profit company.

Many of the early Catholic universities and institutions in Africa had a strong emphasis on theology and were largely focused on the training of clergy, like St Joseph's Theological Institute. Others had started as diocesan seminaries and some as teachers' training colleges. But gradually the focus changed to address the actual needs of society in Africa.

The main reason for the creation of new Catholic institutions at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the realisation that state education appears to be losing ground in a time when post-independence problems have become the main concern of governments. This leads to an undermining of important values, and strategies have to be found to stop the downhill movement affecting societies. In the light of this a need exists to find new ways to train and prepare leaders for Africa. The goals of the newly founded as well as the already well-established Catholic institutions are simple but practical. The focus is on academic excellence, service to the poor and underprivileged, broader international cooperation with other Catholic universities, and attending to the needs of their home countries.

### **Major challenges for Catholic universities in Africa**

The objectives of Catholic Universities in Africa come clearly to the fore when compared with some of the key challenges for institutions of higher learning in developing countries outlined by UNESCO and World Bank in their reports (published a few years ago) on the challenges of higher education in developing countries. Both reports emphasize the critical role of institutions of higher learning in development, economic growth and poverty alleviation. This is because of a shift in world economy from physical capital as a source of wealth to knowledge: "Knowledge has become the most important factor in economic development." Global economy is knowledge-based and as knowledge becomes more important so does higher education because a knowledge-economy demands a higher level skilled workforce. Accordingly, knowledge has become a springboard for economic growth and development, making the promotion of a culture that supports its creation and dissemination a vital task.

In addition, HIV/AIDS has had a negative impact on tertiary education in Africa. For example, research done at the University of Kenya found that an estimated 20-30% of students were HIV positive, in South Africa the percentage of HIV positive students is estimated at 30%. It is not only students who are affected but faculty and other skilled personnel. These losses of students and staff hamper the capacity of universities to provide qualified faculty which affects training and education of students. These are some of the issues raised in the reports.

ACUHIAM (Association of Catholic Universities and Higher Institutes in Africa and Madagascar) needs to develop strategies to provide an alternative tertiary education at well governed institutions. Catholic universities must excel as centres of academic excellence in teaching and research and service to the poor. Catholic universities may not fall prey to the temptation of becoming market driven "knowledge factories" for a global "knowledge-driven economy". They have a special task to promote the humanities in their curricula and apply Catholic Social Thought in teaching, in the ongoing formation of the staff and in their governing structures. In a post-colonial Africa the in-depth-study and promotion of the dignity of the human person therefore should take centre stage. The emphasis must be on the "social capital",

the formation of ethically formed and motivated future leaders who have the capacity and commitment to build a better and more just society in Africa.

It is good to see that Saint Joseph's Theological Institute is planning to introduce a Certificate Course in Development.

The question of *research* needs to get special attention because by their very calling Catholic universities should be centres of research that produce “new knowledge” based on the Catholic intellectual tradition. Ideally, this research should be socially relevant, i.e. deal with issues of leadership, values-based education at all levels, inculturation, and with problems such as corruption in all levels of government, poverty, crime, moral decay, diseases and HIV/AIDS, economic meltdown, and many other areas that have been posing a threat to the development of Africa. Considering that many of our Catholic Universities in Africa do not offer any postgraduate programmes, and only six give doctorates (apart from three institutions training medical doctors), there are serious lacunae in Catholic higher education that need to be addressed.

Mr Grand Chancellor and honoured guests, I have described in broad outline the tremendous role that Catholic institutions of higher education should play in Africa. I want to pay tribute to the work and great contribution of SJTI, the teaching and research of its staff and its students. Our graduates have made a significant contribution through their work and studies, and the fruit of these endeavours. While I congratulate you on your achievements, dear graduates, I would like to encourage you to continue learning, searching for truth and values – and to apply the fruit of your studies to an inspiring ethical leadership in whatever your profession will be – as priest, as teacher or community leader.

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<sup>i</sup> This speech is based on my research and the article “Catholic universities in Africa”, published in *Sciat ut Serviat*, the Festschrift of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, Paris 2010, pp. 147-177.