

Contemporary Curriculum Concerns for Theological Education in Africa

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Abstract

This article explores crucial issues of concern for theological education (TE) in Africa. The article particularly sets the motion towards a more compelling discussion on current influences on the shape of TE and to which those tasked to develop its curricular programmes are compelled to critically reflect on the relevance of the models and methodologies used. Based on the analysis of the available related literature, the author is convinced that contextual curriculum for TE is essentially best served in effecting transformative TE that is oriented towards participatory approach. Ideally, TE exists to enable God's people to meaningfully participate in fulfilling God's purpose for the Church in the world. However, its current model is inadequate to address the ever-urging needs of society, since it not only falls short of sharpening the required knowledge, skills and personal spiritual formation but also fails to address the real needs of the people to whom the student is called to minister. Consequently, the church is disengaged from the culture and the social and physical needs of society it is designed to serve. An ideal TE programme should be geared to address some crucial issues in Africa such as the challenge of diversity, which threatens the essence of the African culture; inadequate approach to power encounter, which results from the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, the presence of poverty, which demands the humanitarian focus of development; power encounter, and professional development issues, which require consideration by theological educators and curriculum developers. Theological educators should not only be cognizant of but also proactively attend to the present and future trends that tend to influence the shape of TE in Africa.

Keywords: *Contextual theology, faith-based, trends, God's telos, curriculum, ethnicity, power encounter, evangelical*

Introduction

On the opening page of his article, which deals with a critical look at the curriculum of theological education (TE) in Africa, Peter Nyende (2009) observes that, "By virtue of its subject matter, theological education ought to infuse life with morals and values, thus moulding a just, moral and peaceful society such as is envisaged in God's telos for His world."¹ However, current literature on TE in Africa reveal that the church is still facing various challenges. For

¹ Peter Nyende. Ethnic Studies: An urgent Need in Theological Education in Africa. *International Review of Mission*. Volume 98, Issue 1, Version of Record online (25 Mar 2009), 132.

instance, Houston (2009) claims that 80% of African pastors are still insufficiently equipped to minister in their churches.² Even so, a question can still be raised regarding this observation. Is Houston really referring to the number of trained pastors, or to those who are inadequately prepared to address the challenges facing the African church despite their extensive period of study in theological institutions? I suppose he was particularly concerned with the latter.

Indeed, curriculum is often a dynamic process. In reference to TE in Africa, Botsman (2013) points out that “new perspectives on curriculum matters will continue to emerge, hence taking stock of theological education on the continent is bound to be an open-ended affair” (p. 20).³ In other words, views and perspectives on the need for relevance in TE will continue to be subjects for examination both in the present and in the future. This article, which particularly takes on an evangelical perspective, spells out the current concerns regarding the context and content of theological education offered through theological seminaries, schools of theology and departments of theological studies in private, faith-based higher educational institutions in Africa. It examines related literature and data to critique, explore and appraise curriculum issues in TE, which Jurgens Hendriks (2014) regard them as having “become bogged down in traditional and institutional hierarchies.” (p. 2).⁴ The article does not promise to exhaust all the pertinent issues, but only explores some crucial concerns of theological educators. This analysis will make it possible for the drawing up of suggestions and recommendation about curriculum content, context, resources, methodologies and other issues of curriculum concern to shape the current and future shape of theological education in Africa. The few issues raised will certainly provoke a worthwhile discussion on current issues for curriculum and instruction in TE. This will also help us to reflect in a critical way on the implications of contemporary realities for the future of theological education in Africa.

The Purpose of Theological Education (TE)

In general terms, theology deals with the doctrine of God and his creation (i.e. his attributes and actions, his nature, character, his world and his plans for humanity).⁵ With regard to Christianity, Tite Tienou defines theology as “... a reasoned statement of biblical revelation, in specific places and specific times, which makes possible the transmission of the Christian faith to future generations.”⁶ This implies that the main purpose of TE has to do with the rational study of the doctrines of the Christian faith. More precisely, it has to do with the disciplined investigation of the coherence and implications of the claims of the Bible (source of Christian theology) on the teaching about the essential nature of God (or religious ideas) and

² B. Houston. Missiological and theological perspectives on theological education in Africa: An assessment of the challenges in evangelical theological education. Presented at the Joint Conference of Academic Societies in the Fields of Religion and Theology, Session A11. 22-26 June 2009, University of Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch.

³ H. Russel Botman. *Handbook on theological education in Africa (forward)*. Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Warner, Eds. (Oxford Belgium Books International, 2013), 20.

⁴ H. Jurgens Hendriks. Theological education in Africa: Messages from the fringes. *NGTT DEEL* 55, NO 1, (2014), 1-20.

⁵ Peter Nyende. Ethnic Studies: An urgent Need in Theological Education in Africa. *International Review of Mission*. Volume 98, Issue 1, Version of Record online (25 Mar 2009), 132.

⁶Tite Tienou (Ed.). *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa* (2nd edition). (Lagos: Africa Christian Press, 1990).

divine things. This, then, forms the basis for the quipping of persons for Christian service, thereby enabling them to accomplish God's telos in the world.⁷

Robinson (2000) seems to put into proper perspective the meaning of TE by identifying its two-fold purpose: the broader and the narrower senses. In the broader sense, TE is meant to prepare the people of God to accomplish His ultimate purpose in this world. In the narrower sense, TE is meant to equip persons for ministry in the Church of Christ. Robinson further asserts that TE specifically "concerns the formation of leadership for the Church of Christ in its biblical mission. This formation combines the spiritual and the practical with academic objectives in one holistic integrated educational approach."⁸ In essence, all we are doing in TE is spiritual and ministerial formation. According to Edgar, what is crucial in TE is its content; it is education about God.⁹ Cunningham further argues that "it is theological because its philosophical underpinnings and its goals are theocentric in addition to its content."¹⁰ This could be the reason why Steve Hobson summarizes the whole purpose of TE in this sense:

The task of theological education is to work alongside the church to prepare leaders for the ministry... To enable and facilitate student learning according to the school's mission and goals, the program goals and the needs of the students, churches and context.¹¹

In other words, TE exists to provide knowledge and skills for service in the church and the "wider society where the church lives."¹² In an article focusing on some broader issues in TE, Danny McCain (2009) seems to bring to rest the core purpose of TE by highlighting three main areas of concern, namely, (1) instruction in Bible and theology, (2) training in ministry, and (3) spiritual formation.¹³ Therefore, McCain emphatically states that

It is the goal of every seminary, Bible college and other Christian training institutions to help future Christian leaders to be more precise and accurate in their understanding and teaching of Biblical theology, more successful in their roles as pastors, teachers, evangelists, counsellors, administrators, mentors, and communicators of vision, and to do all of this with a warm heart.¹⁴

In a general sense, TE is undertaken in order to enable the student to:

1. understand more truly one's own religious tradition,
2. understand more truly another religious tradition,

⁷ K. Bediako. (2001). The African Renaissance and Theological Reconstruction: p.29; see also Bediako, K. (2000) Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religious Dimension. African Affairs 99, 303–323.

⁸ Robinson, G. Theological Education in India: The Journey Continues. *Chennai, The Literature Society*, 2000, p. 32.

⁹ B. Edgar. The Theology of Theological Education. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 16, 2 (1997): p. 80.

¹⁰ Cunningham, S. Who is a Theological Educator? *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 16, 2 (1997): p. 80.

¹¹ Steve Hobson. Creative Leadership Development: Breaking out of Traditional Seminary Mold, in *Educating for Tomorrow*. (Bangalore: SAIACS & Overseas Council International, 2002), 180.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Danny McCain. Beyond the Centre: A Focus on Some Broader Issues in Theological Education. *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 28.2 (2009), 27.

¹⁴ Ibid.

3. make comparisons among religious traditions,
4. defend or justify a religious tradition,
5. facilitate reform of a particular tradition,
6. assist in the propagation of a religious tradition, or
7. draw on the resources of a tradition to address some present situation or need,
8. draw on the resources of a tradition to explore possible ways of interpreting the world,
9. explore the nature of divinity without reference to any specific tradition.
10. challenge or oppose a religious tradition or a religious world-view.¹⁵

A critical look at each of the above objectives seems to indicate that TE enables its graduates to intelligently and soundly articulate and practice the Christian faith to address critical issues facing the church and society at large. As will be examined later, the kind of theology offered in Christian institutions of higher learning during the medieval and the reformation periods primarily helped the church pursue the clarification and defense of its doctrine, and in supporting the legal rights of the church over against secularism. One may wonder what kind of curriculum characterized this theological education. Bebbington (n. d.) clearly responds to this by asserting that,

.... They were highly clerical institutions. Students all wore the tonsure, ensuring good business for local barbers. Each university was an integral part of the church. Paris was under the authority of the city's bishop, whose chancellor actively directed the university. Oxford, though more independent, owed allegiance to the Bishop of Lincoln. When Queen's College, Oxford, was founded in 1341, it was supposed to possess thirteen chaplains.¹⁶

Similarly, denominational church leaders in several parts of Africa are being called upon to help in addressing thorny national and regional issues and theological education must equip them to respond appropriately. Indeed, TE in Africa (either residential or distance) has recently brought into sharp focus some concerns. Some of these concerns are the right to justice, ethnic and tribal clashes, political or election-related violence, liberation, advocacy for the right political leadership, the fight against corruption and violence, the place of human rights in the witness of the church, faith and ideology, the relationship of church and state, the role of women in the ecclesiastical and societal affairs, among others. Theological education then exists primarily to equip the people of God in the truth and wisdom of God for the purpose of personal renewal and meaningful participation in the fulfilment of God's telos for the Church in the world.

Paul Bowers observes that, currently, "theological schools form the backbone of organized evangelicalism in Africa. Like monasteries for Christianity in medieval Europe, theological schools are beacons of steadfastness, hope and constructive engagement, surviving, and conserving and rejuvenating."¹⁷ Theological concerns exist in all moral and value issues in different fields and disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and ethics, (among

¹⁵ Steve Hobson. Creative Leadership Development: Breaking out of Traditional Seminary Mold, in *Educating for Tomorrow*. (Bangalore: SAIACS & Overseas Council International, 2002), 200.

¹⁶ D. W. Bebbington. *Christian higher education in Europe: A historical analysis*. (n. d), 2; Also in Southern R. W. 'From Schools to university', in Catto (ed.), *University of Oxford*, 23.

¹⁷ Paul Bowers. Theological education: Does it matter? *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 25, 2 (Sept 2007.), 130-138.

others) and are being offered in the existing several Bible or theological colleges, seminaries, schools and departments of theology in institutions of higher learning in Africa.

The Place of TE in Christian Institutions of Higher Learning

A number of scholars are of the view that the idea of university has its origin in Europe during the high Middle Ages. A few examples are Elie Buconyori (1993); Eckman (2002); G. K. House (2003); David Dockery (2000); Korniejczuk and Kijai (1994); Holmes (1975 and 1987) and D. W. Bebbington (n. d.).¹⁸ According to this narrative, the ascetic life in the monasteries was occasioned by the need to stay away to keep spirituality, hence preserve the faith. Over time, the desire for higher level of instruction gave rise to Cathedral schools which stressed the study of liberal arts. The Cathedral schools later evolved into medieval universities, since the monastic and cathedral schools could no longer meet the demands of the required new learning.¹⁹ Even so, Christian theological learning was held in

high regard and was the central component of study in medieval universities.

In spite of the theological crises of the Reformation and Post-Reformation periods, reformers endeavoured to confine all aspects of education within the context of a Christian worldview. Since the school system became under the influence of the church, rather than the state, universities then became the avenues through which every faculty sought to create an environment in which Christian principles and practices determined all campus' teaching and learning experiences. The major requirement of all university faculty was being sound in the Christian belief and practice, hence every faculty aimed at mentoring students as they "sought to promote the spiritual development as well as the intellectual growth of the students."²⁰ During this time, theology was the ultimate subject at universities as it was highly regarded as the queen of all sciences, hence other courses in the school curriculum existed primarily to help with theological thought. Indeed, "The heart of the university's service was its learning, applied in turn to the basics of human knowledge, to the church's law, institutions, and practices, and even to church dogmas."²¹ Consequently, universities played the crucial role of preparing students for ecclesiastical services, and in helping the church pursue the clarification and defence of its doctrines as well as supporting the legal rights of the church over against secularism. Universities could then help to "create uniformity of belief in medieval society."²² This was perhaps enhanced by the fact that university educators strived to maintain a closer

¹⁸ Elie Buconyori. *The educational task of the church*. (Nairobi: CLMC, 1993); James P. Eckman. *Exploring church history*. (Wheaton, Illinois: Evangelical Training Association, 2002); G. K. House. Evangelical higher education: History, mission, identity, and future. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 6, 4 (2003), <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.0604062013>; David S. Dockery. *Integrating faith & learning in higher education*. The Research Institute of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission Fall Meeting, Union University, 2000. Retrieved from <http://www.uu.eduldockery/092000-erlc.htm>; Arthur. R. Komiejczuk, 1994. *Stages of deliberate teacher integration of faith and learning: The development and empirical validation of a model for Christian education*. Doctoral dissertation, Andrews University, Berrien Spring, MI; Holmes. *The idea of a Christian college*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B, Eerdmans, 1975); D. W. Bebbington. *Christian higher education in Europe: A historical analysis*. (n. d).

¹⁹ Elie Buconyori. *The educational task of the church*. (Nairobi: CLMC, 1993), 125.

²⁰ Diememe Noelliste. Towards a theology of theological education. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 19, 3. (July 1995), 299.

²¹ Buconyori, 125.

²² D. W. Bebbington. *Christian higher education in Europe: A historical analysis*. (n. d), 1.

link with and stronger commitment to their respective Church traditions.²³ However, since the early 19th century, much of the debate concerning theology's place in the university curriculum has always centered on whether theology's methods are appropriately theoretical and scientific or, whether theology requires a pre-commitment of faith by its practitioners, and whether such a commitment conflicted with academic freedom.

Through the influence of the American missionary movement in the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century, many American churches and missionaries made expansive evangelism outreaches in Africa. Hence, most of the theological schools and colleges in Africa (especially in the Anglophone and Francophone countries) were established by Christian churches and missions. The Christian missionary leaders established these institutions to produce leaders who would ultimately transform their churches and the society at large. They sought to “shape an environment conducive not only to intellectual development and cultivation of character, but also where the Christian faith and Christian morality influenced the students and ultimately society.”²⁴ During this period, Christian theological institutions and Bible schools were also established. The main aim of setting up these institutions was that they would “produce Christian leaders who could transform their societies and bring hope to the African continent.”²⁵ This, therefore, implies that Christian higher educational institutions envisage service to the church and the broader society. As such Nwosu (1999) rightly argues that,

What differentiates a Christian university from other types of educational institutions is not the offering of religious courses, but the fact that the central Christian convictions infiltrate the total university life and that theology is acknowledged as the centre of the curriculum and the academic life is centred in the entire life of the Christian community. Additionally, what qualifies a university as distinctly Christian is when knowledge is a fellowship of inquiry under God (p. 7).²⁶

TE in Contemporary Africa and the Quest for Curriculum Relevance

In order for TE in Africa to meet its two-fold purpose (examined previously), its curriculum needs to match up with African realities both in its content and context. Such a curriculum will then enable the student to be adequately prepared to engage with the various challenges that confront the church and the wider society. However, in most current instances TE in Africa has been dubbed as inappropriate for the African context. Some Christian educators have observed that deliberations on the subject matter of TE have often taken place in “the very heights of an ivory tower,” with an emphasis on the actions of teachers or institutions rather than the needs, behaviours, or perspectives of students.²⁷ It has often been expressed that “although the

²³ Benne, Robert. *Quality with soul: How six premier colleges and universities keep faith with their religious traditions*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 50.

²⁴ Elie Buconyori, 126-127.

²⁵ F.W. Nguru. What can Christian higher education do to promote educational well-being in Africa?’ in N. Lantinga (ed.), *Christian higher education in the global context: Implications for curriculum, pedagogy and administration*, (Dordt College Press, Sioux Centre: (2008), 135–149.

²⁶ T.A. Lawrence, Burton, L. D. & Nwosu, C. C. Refocusing on the learning in integration of faith and learning. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 14, 1 (2005), 17-50; Purper, C., Bowden, A., Guignard, J., Farris, S., Hovey, M., & Crist, M. Faith integration in the higher education online classroom: Perspectives and practice. *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal* 15, (1), 2020, 2. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ictej/vol15/iss1/3>

²⁷ T.A. Lawrence, Burton, L. D. and Nwosu, C. C. 2005. Refocusing on the learning in integration of faith and learning. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 14, 1: 17-50.

current theological education and training still focuses on the ministerial formation, its model is inadequate to address the ever urging needs of the society, since it embraces a managerial approach to organization and maintenance of congregational ministry from inside the institutional structure.”²⁸ The curriculum of TE in Africa should not be concerned only with the accumulation of information, the sharpening of skills and personal spiritual formation but must be designed to go beyond and address the real needs of the people to whom the student is called to minister.²⁹ This concern has been echoed more convincingly in a statement made by Peter Nyende (2009) which underlines the fact that “Theological education in Africa is riddled with inappropriate curricula” (p. 38).³⁰ Nyende, then, proposes that “In the interest of continued appropriateness, curriculum revision is a necessity given the view of the constant movement and ever-evolving contexts” (p. 39).³¹ It is only out of the commitment to a context that our institutions can be transformed in their theologizing, particularly in the kinds of theologies that we teach. By extension, W.P. Wahl from the Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein (South Africa), rightly asserts that “Theological education in Africa is currently facing a number of challenges and those tasked to develop its curricula, programmes, institutions and methodologies are compelled to critically reflect on the relevance of the models used.”³²

The greatest challenge that contextual theology poses to us is how to formulate a new academic language to articulate our theologies. This situation has arisen because, “while we have become well trained in Western forms of theologizing, when people are dying all around us these theologies which we have inherited and learned so well are epistemologically inadequate to respond critically to the crisis.”³³ Theological relevance is concerned with the aim of reaching a fair consensus on the responses to Susan Murithi’s contextual curricular questions: “What does the African context look like? What are her celebrations? What problems or challenges does she face? How can we address these to enable a more vibrant Christianity? What kind of education does Africa need? What are the real needs and felt problems in the African church?”³⁴ Dealing with these questions is essential if a theological institution’s curriculum expects it to be effective and indeed successful in a long-term, substantive way. Regarding curriculum relevance, Kagema (2008) categorically states that:

The curriculum of any learning institution is very important as it determines the kind of products produced by that institution. If the curriculum is haphazardly done, the people produced by it are also haphazard and their work is haphazard ... The clergy produced by these colleges are “half-baked.”³⁵

²⁸ De Gruchy (1994), Maluleke (1998), Bediako (2001) and Gundani (2002).

²⁹ Denny McCain. Beyond the Centre: A Focus on Some Broader Issues in Theological Education. *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 28.2 (2009), 126-150.

³⁰ Peter Nyende. Ethnic Studies: An urgent Need in Theological Education in Africa. *International Review of Mission*. Volume 98, Issue 1, Version of Record online (25 Mar 2009), 138.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Pieter Verster. A Christological approach to poverty in Africa: Following Christ amidst the needy. *Herv. teol. stud.* vol.71 n.1 Pretoria, 2015.

³³ Sarojini Nadar. “Contextual Theological Education in Africa and the Challenge of Globalization.” In *Theological Education in Africa, World Council of Churches 9th Assembly*. Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006.

³⁴ Susan Murithi,

³⁵ Kagema, D.N. “Leadership Training for Mission in the Anglican Church of Kenya.” Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation/DTh thesis, UNISA, Pretoria (2008), 232.

Benjamin Musyoka, too, makes a critical observation on the effectiveness of curriculum for TE in Christian institutions of higher learning in Africa and argues that

Many theological educators give little thought to how the theological school or institute fits into the mission of the church, what that mission is and what it ought to be. They make no attempt to relate their teaching and scholarship to the church's mission and rarely do they make this a subject of discussion and reflection...³⁶

Indeed, a theological institution (i.e. school of theology, department of theology, theological seminary, Bible college or Christian university) is the educational arm of the church-hence, its curriculum needs to be rooted in God's mission in the world. When TE is not connected to what goes on in the church, the church will have little or no influence on the philosophy and practices of those institutions. As a result of the irrelevant TE curriculum, the church in Africa finds itself confronted with enormous community needs since graduates from theological institutions feel inadequate to deal with 'demo-crisis' of society for there is little in their seminary or bible colleges or theological institutions background that could have prepared them to equip the members for God's service. Consequently, "the church is disengaged from the culture and the social and physical needs of the community and the nations. Rather than discipling the nations at the level of culture, the church is being disciplined by their nations and influenced by retrogressive cultural beliefs."³⁷

Based on an analysis of the church as a community called by God, the essence of the community development and the people-centred participatory development process, contextual curriculum for TE is essentially best served in effecting social change by orientating itself according to the people-centred participatory approach. This then enables TE to escape the ever-deliberating cultural impediments that keep it entangled in an outdated paradigm. It will then pass through the "needle of an old paradigm- the paradigm shift from an institutional to a missional paradigm."³⁸ According to Sarojini Nadar, the reason for lack of commitment to contextual theology, especially in institutions of the third-world regions, is the fact that "there has been reluctance on the part of African theological educators in moving from a globalized understanding of theology to a more "global village, a shift from *cognizance of* to *commitment to context*."³⁹ This shift should compel us to make an epistemological shift in our approach to theological education.

Crucial Curriculum Issues for TE in Africa

To address the issue of context, TE in Africa needs to pay attention to certain curriculum concerns that are crucial in many African contexts and how these are impacting Christianity in

³⁶ Benjamin Musyoka. The Integration of Faith and Learning: Aligning Values and Intentionality with the Mind of God. *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 34.2, (2015), 161.

³⁷ Transformational Compassion Network. Curriculum for Diploma Programme in Theology and Development. Unpublished, 2020, p. 1. *Transformational Compassion Network (TCN) is a registered religious organization dealing with practical theology and development in holistic health, physical environment, humanitarian aid, development, livelihoods, entrepreneurship, among other human aspects.*

³⁸ Jurgens Hendriks. Theological education in Africa: Messages from the Fringes. *Ngth Deel* 55, No 1, (2014), 61. *Missional* paradigm in TE refers to "Christian formation, spiritual formation or missional formation". See Susan Murithi. Contextual Theological Education in Africa as a Model for Missional Formation. *The Asbury Journal* 69, 02 (2014), 54.

³⁹ Sarojini Nadar. Contextual Theological Education in Africa and the Challenge of Globalization. *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 59, No. 2-3. (April-July 2007), 238.

general and the Christian church in particular. In this article, a few of these concerns are examined: the challenge of ethnicity; poverty, theology of prosperity and suffering; power encounter; a theology of HIV/AIDS pandemic; the rise of academic theology; the shift in the mode of learning and the effects of transition from a theological college to a Christian liberal arts college or university on the TE program and the crisis brought about by the phenomenon growth of new religious movements.

The Problem of Ethnicity

One of the critical areas of concern in the continent of Africa is ethnicity, which emanates from the challenge of diversity. Peter Nyende (2009) particularly concentrates on this issue in his article, which argues for an urgent need to include ethnic studies in the curricular of TE in Africa.⁴⁰ Regarding this issue, Nyende ardently expresses the fact that since Africa is made up of several ethnic groups, people in each community have instrumental attachment and loyalty to others of the same ethnic group. This is in line with Sarojini Nadar's argument,

In Africa there is the presence of a primary *face-to-face* and *reciprocal* relationship in which everybody respects everybody else . . . and the *concern* of one person is the concern of all. Inherent in his statement and the concern of one person is the concern of all lies the clue as to how theological education in Africa can be part of the global village rather than part of the project of globalization.⁴¹

In Africa, commitment to one's ethnic group is often demonstrated in positive ties to each other and negatively through jealousy and hatred toward members of different ethnic groups particularly in religious, political and social arenas.⁴² Professor John Mbiti rightly asserts that African traditional philosophy can be described simply as "I am because you are, and because I am therefore you are."⁴³ On the contrary, however, the perennial challenges of Africans are rampant cases of conflicts, politics of identity, violence and wars, which are actually threats to the very survival of Africa. Churches have often been called upon to be agents of peace and harmony, by mediating conflicts and demonstrating the possibility of living in egalitarian societies, which transcend ethnic boundaries. As such, Nyende recommends that theological institutions in Africa should respond to the challenge of ethnicity by offering ethnic studies in any one of the following four ways:

First, TE should be offered as a *distinct discipline* alongside other traditional courses. Suggested content includes: "meaning and understanding of ethnicity, the history of ethnic groups and ethnic relations in Africa, their underlying assumptions and philosophies, reasons for their enduring strength, the roles played by ethnic communities in the formation and identity of individuals and societies."⁴⁴ Alongside these content areas, Nyende spells out specific subject requirements, which must be met by theological institutions seeking to offer ethnic studies as a distinct course of study.

⁴⁰ Peter Nyende. Ethnic Studies: An urgent Need in Theological Education in Africa. *International Review of Mission*. Volume 98, Issue 1, Version of Record online (25 Mar 2009), 138.

⁴¹ Sarojini Nadar. Contextual Theological Education in Africa and the Challenge of Globalization. *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 59, No. 2-3. (April-July 2007), 238.

⁴² Nyende, Ethnic Studies: An Urgent Need in TE in Africa, 138.

⁴³ Murithi, 50.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

Much as what Nyende recommends is critical, it needs to be pointed out that for the student to engage with concrete realities of life, the above course content needs to be beefed up to include case studies on relevant biblical narratives and contemporary issues in Africa, which would lead the student to serious reflection and way forward for required action. This can further be enhanced through research and writing as part of course work requirements. In this regard, it is imperative to also specify that ethnic studies needs to be treated as a required (core) course for all students in a given school of theology, department of theology, theological seminary, Bible College or Christian university.

The second way that Nyende recommends is that ethnic studies needs to be positioned “as an *interdisciplinary* field of study.”⁴⁵ In this regard, TE is expected to draw relevant content from related fields of study such as religion, history, peace and reconciliation/resolution, sociology, anthropology, and political science. In essence, this is integration of faith and learning in that it requires that ethnicity be examined from the vantage point of other fields, which would lead to serious examination and reflection. With respect to course content, specific areas include: Biblical perspectives on ethnic reconciliation (i.e. drawn from the books of the Bible), Religion and ethnicity, nationhood and the emergence of ethnicity in Africa, ethnicity and conflicts in Africa, etc.

It is, however, important to note that each of the related fields of study mentioned above requires the student to have some background knowledge before undertaking ethnic studies. It therefore implies that ethnic studies should be offered more preferably at the student’s final year of study.

The third way recommended by Nyende is that ethnic studies “*can be offered across the TE curriculum.*”⁴⁶ This seems to be an indirect way of introducing ethnic studies in the curriculum in that it can be examined by addressing such issues as: the importance of tolerance and love, how ethnicity affects church congregation, a new humanity in Christ, etc. It is also clear that this approach does not guarantee a holistic examination of the subject of ethnicity since it only considers certain related issues.

Finally, Nyende proposes that ethnic studies “*can be offered as a general or core course.*”⁴⁷ In this approach, a specific unit content is determined based on the tradition or established theological discipline (e.g. for those undertaking biblical studies, missions studies degree, etc). However, this way of examining the subject of ethnicity leaves out a lot of other content areas that ought to be covered. It can, therefore, be done as a way of introducing ethnic studies especially in institutions where it has not been appreciated as an urgent need in TE in Africa.

The Challenge of Poverty

Ndulu et al. (2007) decry the remarkable level of poverty in Africa regarding it as one that is currently “assuming an African face,”⁴⁸ hence its eradication is indeed an African reality. As such, Africa has often been regarded as the most materially impoverished continent despite her vast material wealth and human potential. According to the United Nations Development

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.

⁴⁷ Nyende, Ethnic Studies an urgent need in theological education in Africa.

⁴⁸ J. Ndulu, Lopamudra Chakraborti, Lebohang Lijane, Vijaya Ramachandran, and Jerome Wolgin. *Challenges of African growth: Opportunities, constraints, and strategic directions*. (Washington D.C: The World Bank, 2007), 4.

Programme's (UNDP) rating on human development index (indicating quality of life), 17 out of the 21 poorest countries in the world are found in Africa.⁴⁹ Also commenting on the challenge of poverty in Africa, Pieter Verster of the Department of Missiology, Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State, (South Africa), points out that

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to nearly one-third of the world's poor, and their absolute numbers have increased from 268 million to 306 million over the last decade. It is estimated that the number of poor Africans may even be as high as 458 million (Africa Progress Report [2011:27]). The Africa Progress Report (2012:8) and The Africa Progress Report (2013:11) observe that much progress in Africa has been made but that the situation is still grave and, although economic development is present, poverty remains on extremely high levels.⁵⁰

The above sentiments, among others, indicate that poverty is one of the African struggles that need to be explored as a way of discovering its direct impact on the vulnerability of the people and how theological education can be used as a means to addressing it. The reason is that various factors have extensively been argued for as the root causes of poverty in Africa. Most of these causes can be traced to poor leadership. Indeed, "leaders are a reflection of the beliefs, values and behaviour of the larger society.... The root of the problem is not material, nor is it primarily located outside the continent."⁵¹

The issue of poverty, therefore, demands a theological and practical response from the church in Africa. However, Susan Murithi rightly argues that "Pastors with little or no knowledge about development and poverty eradication do not bother themselves with helping the church to care for the "least of these".⁵² In addition, J.N.K. Mugambi, being one of those who are strongly concerned about the situation of poverty in Africa, makes this strong statement:

Africa has remained poor despite its growing number of Christians. During the past thirty years, the economy of Africa has deteriorated at the same inverse proportion as church membership has grown. The more Christian the continent becomes, the more pauperized it is increasingly becoming.⁵³

Shouldn't poverty then become a central curriculum concern of every theological institution in the African continent? In TE a new theological paradigm in which theory re-orientates itself to a new paradigm of humanity is inevitable. According to this paradigm, the church should align itself with the humanitarian focus of development because development is ultimately about a new vision for society, about a new humanity, empowerment of the people to experience full life as given by God in full respect of creation. Only in developing a theological understanding of poverty and in assisting to equip people for development, will the church be able to adequately respond to her calling to continue the process which was started by God in creating the church as the 'first fruits' of the new humanity. A curriculum for theology and

⁴⁹ Disciple Nations Alliance and Samaritan Strategy Africa. *Against all Hope: Hope for Africa*. (Nairobi, Kenya: Samaritan Strategy Africa Working Group, 2005, 24.

⁵⁰ Pieter Verster. A Christological approach to poverty in Africa: Following Christ amidst the Herv. teol. stud. vol.71 n.1 Pretoria, 2015, Available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/HTS.V71I1.2090>

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Murithi, p. 50.

⁵³ J.N.K. Mugambi. "A fresh look at evangelism in Africa." *International Review of Mission*, 87(346), (1998) 342-360.

development based on the challenges of poverty, the sources of theology in the teaching tradition of the church, the realities of the African context and the principles of people centred participatory development approach is designed to empower the church to be an effective agent and or catalyst for social transformation, particularly in Africa.⁵⁴

Theology of poverty demands an examination with the view to analysing the various excuses or assumptions regarding Africa's causes of poverty and underdevelopment. What also needs to be explored in the curricular for TE in Africa includes: critiquing the current conventional wisdom in explaining Africa's brokenness; the church as an agent of societal transformation; integrating faith and community development; analysis of influential factors of Africa's economic growth in comparison (benchmarking against) with other developing regions; and the effective strategies on how the church should be involved in tackling the challenge of Africa's economic growth (i. e. "Breaking Out of the Slow-Growth Syndrome").⁵⁵

Power Encounter

Another issue of theological concern that has been an area of confusion both in the mainline and independent churches in Africa is the struggle to confront or engage in spiritual warfare. As Mrithi rightly puts it, "Teaching in African theological schools that faithfully follow the missionary curriculum has failed to respond adequately to the person afflicted by spiritual powers." (p. 49). That is, the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular seems to be the point of contention, which leaves the Africans wondering about this division, hence unable to deal with spiritual forces in their own life. Indeed, the teaching of theology in Africa continues to be a perpetuation of Western theological models. In fact some scholars have pointed out that the prevailing paradigm of theological education is still inclined towards a Western frame of reference that is fundamentally flawed. For instance, according to Chessman (1993), "Third-world Christians are radically rethinking the structure and context of theological education as they have received it at the hands of the missionary enterprise" (p. 484).⁵⁶ Hence, the biggest problem is the hermeneutical gap – a gulf between orthodoxy and orthopraxis and a problem to integrate doctrines into the thought system of the African recipients."⁵⁷ Worse still, few theological institutions, schools and departments of theology have courses that deal with power encounter as evidenced by lack of mention in systematic theology textbooks. Hiebert then strongly recommends that in TE in Africa there is need for a holistic theology that includes a theology of God in human history: in the affairs of nations, of peoples and of individuals. This must include a theology of divine guidance, provision and healing; of ancestors, spirits and invisible powers of this world..."⁵⁸

As a result of theological institutions ignoring the reality of power encountered from the African worldview, pastors only remain at the ivory tower with the academic theology while leaving the congregation at the mercy of oral interpreters who insist on the assertion that spirits might have been offended and are, therefore, responsible for the people's suffering.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Ndulu et al. *Challenges of African growth* (2007), 9.

⁵⁶ G. Chesman. Competing paradigms in theological education today, in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, (October 1993), p. 484.

⁵⁷ <https://silo.tips/queue/challenges-for-theological-education-in-the-21st-century?>

⁵⁸ Paul Hiebert. "The flaw of the excluded middle." *Missiology*, 10, 1 (1982). 35-47.

Prosperity and Suffering

Prosperity gospel preaching is rampant especially in Africa. The reason could be that the majority of the African population faces various challenges directly related to suffering. Examples are poverty (previously examined), ethnic and political-related violence, social discrimination or injustices, gender violence, health related crises, among others. In the attempt to address these issues, prosperity gospel preachers present themselves in cities, town streets and villages organizing gospel rallies. Most of these preachers succeed in “creating a scenario where problems are solved in magic-like style promising individual wellbeing rather than communal wellbeing.”⁵⁹ More often than not, this kind of preaching creates “false hope at the expense of any other biblical teaching in Christianity.”⁶⁰ That is, subjective experiences are accepted more quickly than constructive teaching. In fact other areas of Christian doctrine such as stewardship, accountability, deep relationship with God and other spiritual formations, receive less emphasis. The effects can be adverse if not immediately noticed and responded to. Therefore, it demands appropriate theological and practical response from authentic African Christian educators and leaders. However, a study reveals that, “theological education has four things wrong with it: it is taught by the wrong people in the wrong place with the wrong curriculum and has the wrong oversight.”⁶¹ How then can the products of such theological education prepare men and women for the ministry of the local church? I am strongly persuaded that the toxic gospel of prosperity can be properly addressed in theological education in the seminaries, schools and departments of theology through both residential and open and distance learning (ODL) and even through extension and non-formal curricular programmes.

Present and Future Trends in Curricular for TE in Africa

What are the realities that TE in Africa is beginning to face now and for some generations to come? The following issues have been seen as requiring reconsideration by current curriculum developers, administrators and leaders in TE institutions in Africa.

The ever-rising trend toward non-traditional mode of education making institutionalized learning unnecessary.⁶² Consequently, the notion that the way to be educated is to build a school is now under serious criticism. Formal and non-formal modes of education, (distance or e-learning learning/open learning) are currently providing a complex network of experiences, processes and relationships. In TE this demand is catalysed by the rising need for upgrading the educational levels of the laity and clergy. Because lay leaders in local churches, and Christian professionals in business, medical, political, and other sectors of society are increasingly in need of theological training, TE curricular and teaching will have to take into account a more sophisticated student body. The rationale for establishing the ODL programme from its inception in the later part of 19th century was to provide opportunity for adult learners to access university education regardless of their geographical, socio-economic and other possible constraints.⁶³

⁵⁹ Susan Murithi. Contextual Theological Education in Africa as a Model for Missional Formation. DOI: 10.7252/Journal.02. (2014), F.05.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶² Linda Cannel. “Contemporary Issues Affecting the Future of Theological Education”. (Paper Presented at Ted ward Consultation Conference at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, 2005).

⁶³ UNESCO. *Open and Distance Learning: Trends, Policy and Strategy Considerations.*

Indeed, the outbreak of the Corona (COVID-19) pandemic during the early part of the year 2020, offered hard lessons to all educational institutions worldwide. In particular, an empirical survey study was recently conducted by the eLearning Africa Network to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in Africa and its implications for the use of technology. In the study, which attracted approximately 1650 responses from respondents in 52 countries in Africa, 52% of the respondents were directly involved in the education sector, and particularly, 40% were teachers, lecturers and professors. The findings of the study were that “there is a widespread recognition that technology will play an important role in the future of education in Africa, and the virus provides a ‘wake up call’ to grapple seriously with this future.”⁶⁴ Other factors which make ODL programme a preferred option among many adult learners include:

- students’ flexibility to complete a program and enjoy the convenience in scheduling one’s classes and class assignments;
- students’ chance to take classes in the comfort of their respective home without commuting to the school premises;
- numerous choices for schools as the students have a wide variety of schools to choose from;
- higher affordability of education than in face-to-face programs in terms of fees, cost of access to classes, and accommodation;
- opportunity to acquire higher academic degree while working. Keeping one’s job gives them more access to financial stability, job security, and on-the-job training and experience.⁶⁵

The trend toward ODL indicates “a paradigm shift in education that has led to emergence of new learning models, new modes of educational delivery, new principles of learning, new learning processes and outcomes and new educational roles and entities.”⁶⁶ Given this scenario, traditional residential studies will tend to diminish as more open and distance learners opt to enroll for TE. An excellent illustration is the experience in Guatemala in Latin America in which the inability of traditional, residential theological institutions to catch up with the rapidly growing churches quickly led the Christian churches to adopt theological education by extension (TEE) as a modest experiment aimed at improving the effectiveness of a theological seminary.⁶⁷ Definitely, we expect to see more and more of such innovations in TE in Africa if institutional leaders and stakeholders will not open up to new trends in curriculum change.

Secondly, there is the rise of academic theology. It seems that this trend has promoted a practice in which teachers endeavour to maintain a detached academic objective and neutral

(Paris: UNESCO, 2002).

⁶⁴ eLearning Africa. 2020. Effect of Covid-19 on education in Africa and its Implication for the use of Technology. DOI 10.5281/zenodo.4018774

⁶⁵ T. Bates. 2005. *Distance Education in Dual Mode Higher Education Institutions: Challenges and Changes*. London: Routledge; C. E. Baukal. 2010. Continuing engineering education through distance learning. *European Journal of Engineering Education* 35, 2: 225-233.

⁶⁶ Aras Bozkurt, Ela Akgün Özbek , Sibel Yilmazel & Erdem Erdoğan. 2015. Trends in Distance Education: A Content analysis of Journals 2009-2013. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*.

⁶⁷ Robert L. Youngblood (Ed). *TEE Comes of Age*. (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1985), p.13.

pluralism. TE curriculum has, therefore, been considered fragmented to the extent that courses and programmes usually take students through the popular 2-4 years culminating in a diploma or degree. Consequently, more and more courses or skills are considered necessary for the preparation of the persons who would complete their theological education in this period.⁶⁸ However, the critical question is, what is wrong in running such a curriculum? I suppose this question can best be answered by what Stockton (2004) calls ‘fragmentation of knowledge,’ which accrues from overspecialization “that leaves the student with an abundance of information without any clue to how to put it all together” (p. 2).⁶⁹

Another challenge facing the theological task of the church in Africa, as applauded by Tite Tienou, has emerged. Tienou calls it ‘clericalism,’ which refers to the practice that entrusts the clergy with the responsibility of leading the church in all aspects.⁷⁰ Others often regard this practice as professionalism or elitization of the ministry, as it takes theological education away from the laity. Where clericalism reigns, “... a distinct class of people shapes church life by the formulation of doctrine and the celebration of religious rites.... It conditions people to trust first the specialist (priest, pastor or spiritual leader) before they trust God and his word.”⁷¹ Kinsler’s conclusive comments seem to quickly dismiss this kind of TE by suggesting that “if our educational system raises barriers between theological graduates and the rest of the people, the educational system must go!”⁷² There is a consensus that the tendency toward clericalization can be traced back to a TE curriculum that weakens the connections between belief and practice, piety and reason, and knowledge and virtue.

In the attempt to address the above issue, it seems prudent for theological institutions to provide education that is biblically rooted and theologically engaged, catering as well to other specialized roles required by the church-(e.g. Christian education, youth work, counselling, evangelism, communication, community health and social outreach).⁷³ Closely related to this is that, in the wave of strong emphasis on globalization, accreditation teams and school faculty must be vigilant in strengthening the lower rail emphases in their curriculum and creating effective integration points. That is, TE curriculum should be developed “*from the starting point of the needs of the learner, irrespective of the content and boundaries of existing subject,*”⁷⁴ while considering lower level-training programmes as much as possible. Curriculum relevance for TE should also be evaluated based on this issue.

On the positive side, however, professionalism especially in non-theological skills areas is indeed an indispensable part of our equipping for ministry in theological institutions. Danny McCain should be applauded for exploring these concerns in his article, which focuses on “...

⁶⁸ Linda Cannel. *Contemporary Issues Affecting the Future of Theological Education*. Paper Presented at Ted Ward Consultation Conference at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, 2005.

⁶⁹ W. Lamar Stockton. 2004. “A philosophy of the idea of Christian liberal arts education.” Dallas Baptist University, Symposium.

⁷⁰ Tite Tienou (Ed.). *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa* (2nd edition). (Lagos: Africa Christian Press, 1990), p. 35.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 36.

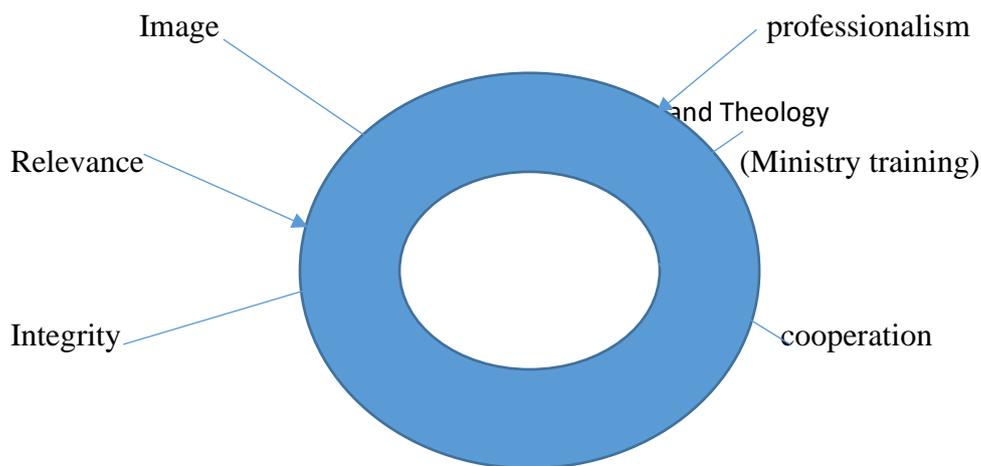
⁷² Ross F. Kinsler. *The Extension Movement in Theological Education*, (rev. ed.). (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981) p. xi.

⁷³ Robert Banks. *Re-envisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1999), p. 9.

⁷⁴ Grant Le Marquand and Joseph D. Galgalo (Eds.). *Theological Education in Contemporary Africa*. Papers from the Limuru Consultation on Theological Education at St Paul’s United Theological College in Nairobi, 2004.

*Some Broader Issues in Theological Education.*⁷⁵ One of the main skills areas discussed in McCain’s article is professionalism in teaching methodology. He ardently argues that all teachers, and especially those who are teaching in theological institutions, must have evidence of professional training. As a common practice in many faith-based universities and theological schools in Africa, however, academic staff including those with no professional training in teaching methodology, are hired to train those who will teach in the church or public schools. McCain, therefore, proposes three specific areas that relate to methodology, which require theological educators to focus on these areas: (1) understanding of learning (i.e. the art and practice of learning); (2) understanding of teaching (including preparation, variation and participation); and (3) professional understanding of modern tools (i.e. instructional technology).

Another area that McCain considers is professionalism in research and writing. He takes special note of the fact that there should be a balance between teaching and research among theological students and educators and that TE curriculum needs to be revisited with the view to maintaining a balance between the two. McCain emphatically posits that “Good classroom teachers are as important as researchers and writers.” (p. 133). Other areas of professionalism recommended by McCain are knowledge and skills in administration and the need for continuous learning, with special attention to providing in-service training (by TE institutions) for the ministers already in the field. In summary, McCain illustrates the various issues of concern for TE in a diagram similar to the one shown below:



Adapted from McCain’s figure on *Broader issues in Theological Education*

Other courses that are currently considered to be indispensable in TE curriculum in Africa include: Theology of Development, Crises Management, Peace and Reconciliation, Law, Mission and Evangelism, Elementary Accountancy, Ministry to the poor, and Ministry in the context of HIV/AIDS.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Danny McCain. Beyond the centre: A focus on some Broader issues in Theological Education. *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 34.2: 159-171.

⁷⁶ Grant Le Marquand and Joseph D. Galgalo, (eds.). *Theological education in Contemporary Africa*. (Papers from the Limuru Consultation on Theological Education at St Paul’s United Theological College in Nairobi, 2004).

One other challenge in TE, which is highlighted by Tite Tienou is the lack of proper historical perspective. This scenario “can lead to all kinds of distortions and misconceptions since faith and religion are living in an a-historical manner.... it imprisons people in superficial and shallow faith. *An evangelical who holds an a-historical faith has no real sense of the theological and spiritual continuity of his faith.*”⁷⁷ The antidote to which Tienou recommends is for the evangelicals to study the history of theology and Christian thought in order to minimize making the mistakes of the past. This should also be an issue for thought by those who plan and execute TE programmes in Africa.

Another curriculum concern centres on the impact of faculty on TE. This seems to be illustrated by survey research carried out by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), which employed a logistic regression model to predict faculty integration of faith and learning. The study found that “the most powerful predictors of faculty integration are full-time employment status, earning a degree from an institution that shares the same denominational affiliation, and a match between the faculty member's religious denominational affiliation and the institutional affiliation.”⁷⁸

What is implied by the above research findings is that recruitment, induction and professional development of faculty and administrative staff in TE institutions should not be left to chance. Governing councils should utilize holistic criteria when selecting and developing faculty and staff, since they have an enormous influence on the students and the learning community. Faculty should be models of the kind of people God wants our students to become. They should then be selected not only based on their academic credentials but also on their personal spirituality, character, ministry experience, closeness with the affiliate denominational church or organization and their capacity to mobilize energizing leaders for ministry.

Additionally, to bridge what Benjamin Musyoka calls “the disconnect of theological education from the church,”⁷⁹ suitable, qualified pastors and ministry leaders from the affiliate churches should be invited to the university or theological seminary, or rather given tasks to supervise internships and mentoring to students pursuing theology programmes. An excellent model of this kind of training is that of Seattle Association of Theological Education (SATE), in which half of the TE courses are taught by seminary professors, and half by clergy, church staff members or leaders of parachurch organizations.⁸⁰ When this was done, the diocese where the faculty member hails from, continued to send students to the college. University governing councils should, therefore, keep theological institutions accountable to the church! This confirms the fact that “Although our seminaries and Bible colleges and missionary training

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 37.

⁷⁸ Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). Task Force on Spiritual Formation in Christian Higher Education. (2011). *CCCU report of the task force on spiritual formation in Christian higher education*. Retrieved from http://www.cccu.org/professional_development/resource_library/2011/cccu_report_on_spiritual_formation

⁷⁹ Benjamin Musyoka. “The Integration of Faith and Learning: Aligning values and Intentionality with the Mind of God.” *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, 34.2: 159-171.

⁸⁰ Steve Hobson. Creative Leadership Development: Breaking out of Traditional Seminary Mould, In *Educating for Tomorrow*. (Bangalore: SAIACS & Overseas Council International, 2002). p. 35.

institutions do many things, instruction in Bible and theology that leads to personal and professional development must always be the primary focus.”⁸¹

Another curriculum concern for TE in Africa is the effects of transitioning from a theological college to a Christian liberal arts college or university on the theology programme. In a multi-case study in the East African context, Simeon Mulatu (2017) studied theological colleges, which had transitioned to Christian liberal arts colleges or universities. One of the issues in the study was to analyze and describe the ways in which this transitioning affected the theological program of the institutions (p. 11).⁸² One of the findings of the study indicated that as non-theology programs continue to increase, they tend to keep utilizing the resources which were originally designed for TE program. Consequently, TE programs were beginning to receive less attention in the total university curriculum. Related to this challenge was the tendency to assume a liberalized perspective in pedagogy and learning, even among theology faculty. In relation to this, there was an added challenge of the ever-rising tendency toward secularism; a worldview that does not have high regard for the existence and revelation of God. Rogers and Howell (2004) rightly argue that the trend towards secularism in higher education will likely lead to confusion in doctrinal matters as expressed in this statement: “The authors also predict that as globalization increases, state-sponsored institutions of higher learning will become more pluralistic and secular. This will likely create an increased demand for more faith-based education, which seeks to integrate spiritual and secular learning.”⁸³ This tendency will indeed pave way for the introduction of new practices among students, especially when a student has been exposed to scientific and other non-theology issues. As a consequence of this, the foundations upon which the Christian institutions were originally established can be challenged and even compromised. It is feared, therefore, that if this is not urgently attended to, the missional focus of TE program could be watered down.⁸⁴ Indeed, Christians are much less theologically and doctrinally sound than in previous generations, since the school and the media have promoted a postmodern worldview. This is compounded by the fact that an increasing number of students come from divorced, single-parent, or blended-family households.

One way in which some theological seminaries and colleges involved in the transition phenomenon mentioned above have attempted to sort out the challenge of secularism is the establishment of a school of theology within the university. This ensures the geographical separation of the Faculty of Theology from the other faculties. John Stott rightly advises that there is need for the church to “capture the seminaries of the world for evangelical faith, academic excellence and personal godliness.”⁸⁵ Also, TE provision should be expanded to include more emotional support and spiritual formation.

⁸¹ Simeon Mulatu. *Transitioning from a theological college to a Christian university*. (Carlisle: Cumbria, UK. Langham Global Library, 2017), 41.

⁸² *Ibid*, 11.

⁸³ P. Clint Rogers and Scott L. Howell. Use of Distance Education by the Religions of the World to Train, Edify and Educate Adherents. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*. Volume 5, (Number 3 2004): 1-17.

⁸⁴ Simeon Mulatu. *Transitioning from a Theological College to a Christian University*. (Carlisle: Cumbria, UK. Langham Global Library, 2017), 41.

⁸⁵ John R. W. Stott. *The message of 1 Timothy and Titus*. (Leicester, IVP, 1996), 184.

Another challenge facing TE in Africa is the ever-rising growth of new religious movements (NRMs). This phenomenal growth is considered to be tied to some causal factors such as cultural and social crises, the need for healing and the struggle to face life's challenges such as poverty, marriage and family issues, search for community or identity and spiritual quest, among others. These movements or groups are those which have modern origins and are peripheral to their society's dominant religious culture. The group leaders usually take advantage of the vulnerable in society and often use manipulation and brainwashing strategies to make them believe and be committed to what they teach.⁸⁶ What is most urgent and critical is that TE curriculum needs to be revisited with the view to including case studies and research on new religious movements so that the student will be equipped to deal with the challenges posed by these religious groups.

Conclusion

As we ponder on the issues heightened in this article, this statement from Paul Mwangi definitely requires critical reflection: "A theological education which does not lead men and women to embark on a continuous, ever-in complete but ever-sustained effort to study and understand the meaning of their work and of the institution in which they labour is neither theological nor education."⁸⁷ Also, the remarks from Saner and Harper with regard to some forces and issues that pose a threat to the future of theological education tend to summarize the contemporary curriculum concerns for TE in Africa. These concerns include:

1. The trend toward cultural accommodation in relation to moral standards.
2. The challenge of maintaining the goal and purpose of theological institution in the face of pressures to broaden their services, thus drifting into liberal arts colleges without deliberate purpose in doing so.
3. The rising educational level making Bible colleges unnecessary.
4. The challenge of getting qualified personnel who can integrate an academic field with the Christian faith.⁸⁸

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing review of literature from concerned theological educators and researchers, those tasked with curriculum development and implementation of TE in schools of theology, departments, theological seminaries, Bible colleges or Christian universities in Africa should pay attention to the following recommendations for the sake of TE curriculum relevance in both context and content:

1. There is a need for a relook at the mode of offering TE as the student body is increasingly being composed of adult learners from different professions, wholly engaged in the work place. In other words, TE needs to be properly addressed through both residential and open and distance or e-Learning and even through extension and non-formal curricular programmes.

⁸⁶ Marc Galanter (Editor). 1989. *Cults and new Religious Movements: A Report of the Committee on Psychiatry and Religion of the American Psychiatric Association*, ISBN 0-89042-212-5.

⁸⁷ Paul Mwangi. *The Challenges and Opportunities for Theological Education in Kenya: A case Study of Carlile College*, n.d.

⁸⁸ Elwood A. Sanner and A. F. Harper (Eds.). *Exploring Christian Education*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1978). p. 135.

2. Theological institutions should provide education that is biblically rooted and theologically engaged, catering as well to other specialized roles required by the church.
3. Curriculum relevance for TE should be evaluated based on the effectiveness in addressing African realities (i.e. the ever-arching needs of the learner with respect to content and context) such as the challenge of diversity, the presence of poverty, which demands the humanitarian focus of development, power encounter and professional development issues. It should also be evaluated based on its inclusion of lower level-training programmes as much as possible.
4. Governing councils should utilize holistic criteria when selecting and developing faculty and administrative staff not only on the basis of their academic credentials but also on their personal spirituality, character, ministry experience, closeness with the affiliate denominational church or organization and their capacity to mobilize energizing leaders for ministry.
5. Administrators and leaders in Christian universities in Africa need to safeguard the quality and relevance of TE program by establishing a school of theology within the university. This will ensure the perpetuation of evangelical faith, academic excellence and spiritual formation.
6. In Africa, TE programs in theological seminaries, Bible colleges, departments and schools of theology within universities need to be revisited with the view to including case studies and research on new religious movements so that the student will be equipped to deal with the challenges posed by these religious groups.

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