

The Challenges of Theological Education in Africa. Sharing Thoughts with WOCATI at its Council. St Colm's, Edinburgh 31 May 2010

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My role as a theological consultant for the All Africa Conference of Churches is to be a member of a team within the newly revitalised Theology, Ecumenical and Interfaith Department and on the part-time basis advice on theological literature production, take part as member of the organising team and facilitator in the consultations of theological associations, be a member of the organising team of theological institutes, be a member of the Theology, Ecumenical and Interfaith Advisory Committee and other duties. In this regard, I have been associated to a number of activities including the organisation of two theological institutes (December 2008 and December 2009); I have visited a number of theological institutions and new Christian universities and shared thoughts out of my reports.

Across the continent, new Christian universities are emerging out of theological seminaries. In fact education like many other sectors of society in Africa were the monopoly of a dictatorial, multi present State up to the end of 1980s. Political and democratic changes brought about liberalisation in many different sectors including education. Henceforth, the trends were the same everywhere: all churches have planned or are planning to transform theological seminaries into universities.

Compared to the growth of the Church (see the beginning of the 20th century) Africa represented less than 10 % of the world population, today it is more than 40%, then you compare to the performance of the existing theological institutions, there is a question mark to whether theological institutions as they exist and function are the answer to the needs of the church in Africa.

Up to recently theological institutions were still relying on the contributions from church founding members or ecumenical partners. Because of the high costs, and lack of resources, they accuse a small enrolment entirely subsidised.

The ecumenical faculty of theology in Butare, Rwanda, had more or less 100 students in 2008/9; it had graduated 248 laureates between 1970 and 1992 in the school of theology and only 62 laureates between 1990 and 2007 in the Faculty of Theology. It has put in place infrastructures including premises, an impressive library of more than 20,000 volumes with a plan of building a much larger space. In 2008 Butare enrolled 85 students.

Justo Mwale, Zambia, Zambia had 112 students in 2006 and had offered only 120 certificates in theology from 1951 to 1989; it offered 85 diplomas between 1992 and 2005, it offered 75 bachelor degree in theology from 1992 to 2005. Addition programmes (two years women in ministry, lay training and leadership), all together offered 264 certificates. Sagamu (Nigeria), 270 in 2008, Ricatla (Mozambique), 55 in 2008 and managed to graduate one student in 2008; Zomba had 107 students in 2008 for 9 teaching staff.

Transcultural Global Mission and theological education in Africa

The growth of the church in Africa and many questions raised regarding the uncertainty affecting Christianity in Europe, have urged many different calls towards African theologians to fulfil in maturity and responsibility God's mission in a global changing world. It is a New Moratorium not from Africa but from the North. What the 1970s Moratorium didn't do – it was about challenging the unilateral sending of the missionaries and the funds from the North towards the South - requesting the African Christians communities to bring the gospel back to Europe, many Christians in Europe are asking now with persistence. However, the precipitation of some to go ministering in Europe hide the depth of unprepared stance and may be source of misunderstanding and disappointment. It is the hope theological gatherings like WOCATI's share a plan of action aiming at a coherent program for Africa to train the trainers and form servant leaders of churches and ecumenical movement (e.g. with well known universities accepting to be the accreditation university), setting up a cluster of theological literature publication and developing schools of theological thought in Africa; developing library.

The rapid growth of Christianity in Africa may be attributed, to a large extent, to theological education, which has been part of missionary and local Christians work from the very beginning: the planting of the churches, translating the Bible, creating theological seminaries, building schools and offering many social services to the populations. However despite a huge mushrooming of biblical and theological seminaries, the whole project of theological education and the formation of a leadership are hindered by the absence of theological literature produced on the continent. From the missionary period to recent decades, theological seminaries have continued to train theologians and ministers and other church servant leaders both with curricula and literature produced in different contexts and for different realities by people who mostly never visited the churches in Africa. Institutions involved in education do not have expertise nor resources to engage in editorial work. Adding to that dramatic absence of publishers ready to consider literature production as a profitable business and take the risk to invest in book production and distribution. Therefore, the story of African Christianity is recounted mostly by non-Africans. It is hoped that integrating theological education in the universities will increase chance and possibilities of access to library tools.

Section I:

Theological education in a church- related seminars models

I have argued that because church-related institutions develop in a certain isolationism and ghetto, they would hardly capture the reality of the context let alone engage in a theology of solidarity with the most vulnerable sections of the society. Fundamentalism is a second handicap of the Church-related institutions, particularly those small institutions located in remote regions. Fundamentalism as opposed to openness and wider interactions never allow a rupture to happen. In fact, if Christian leaders were to become catalysts for the transformation of our societies, there is a need for a rupture with what Lucette and Ebenezer Woungly-

Massaga call a certain Christianity of “conformism and opportunism”.

The great majority of Christians and of the general public in Africa today expect the theologians to really engage in interaction and praxis within their communities then strategise for the education, social transformation in particular the eradication of poverty within their communities. Yet because of the inadequacy of methodologies and content of the curricula, the state of the libraries that leave much to be desired, the gap between theory and practice, it is unlikely that such a desired radical change is to happen soon. For the changes to arrive there should be effort to resolve a number of hindrances.

Denominationalism

The autonomy of the churches coincided in many cases with the effort of the ecumenical family to trigger the creation of ecumenical institutions to bring about unity among the churches. But they have returned gradually to denominationalism to compete with some schools founded by groups which broke off from the institutional churches. Equally, some schools were founded as schools for catechism teachers by the missions when they began their work of evangelism, the new churches had trouble cutting their umbilical cords to their “mother missions”. Some of these divisions were exported by the Europeans to Africa, other were locally triggered. In any case this crumbling of the church has serious consequences; it leads to the dissipation of energies and resources, and to isolation, hardening of positions, and ultimately to mediocrity.

Lack of Vision

To set up a University education institution, even in countries which have the means, requires not only the availability of resources, but a comprehensive vision. The Bible reminds us the importance of planning, setting strategies for the use of human and material investments, research and forecasting. A university is not only a forum for knowledge, but a crossroad for exchange of ideas and for synergies horizontally and vertically. On this basis, one wonders what sort of planning took place for a multiplicity of denominational institutions many as small as 16 students, competing on the same territory, while most of the churches belong to the same national and international ecumenical bodies. The need for intellectually well trained leadership should lead churches to plan for a social and cultural environment suitable for such institutions: number of students, geographical location, well equipped libraries, infrastructures, well trained staff.

Intellectual Ostracism

Intellectual ostracism, the worst thing to happen to someone involved in academic activities, is nonetheless part of the problem faced. Everything is deficient: not enough teachers and their qualifications are insufficient, libraries

and research facilities are lacking.

There are no established programmes of instruction at a wider ecumenical academic level leaving the issue of standardisation and accreditation open for many. So it is up to each faculty member to decide on the basis of personal experience what should be taught. In most cases there is neither an academic council nor a scientific structure qualified in accreditation and standardisation of programmes and degrees. All this consigns the few dozen students and the handful of teachers to such intellectual and cultural isolation and marginalisation that they are unable to develop partnership and exchange with other university – level institutions.

In one group intentionally organised to discuss the findings, one student said:

“Theologians need to know that there are other branches of knowledge. They need to be humble, to dialogue and share with others, and to accept questioning of their own point of view. But a faculty of theology which has been stuck somewhere in the mountains is shut up in an ivory tower. Each faculty needs to be able to teach the humanities, and that is expensive. The protestant Churches must be helped to set up real universities, so that faculties of theology can evolve in a coherent university environment. Here theologians can realise that there is not such a great distance between them and the other disciplines, nor between the future leaders of the churches and future business managers and political decision-makers, in the one nation which they are all called to serve”.

Today Church leaders are nationals of African countries, and there are more trained than 30 or 50 years ago. But as we are reminded by Antoine Babe and Paulin Poucoute, many Africans have taken the reins without fully understanding the responsibility involved in, for example, truly preaching the Gospel which liberates people from colonisation, spiritual imperialism and financial mendicancy, and cures them of the stigmata of racial prejudices.

Very few have made the effort to inculturate the Gospel, to say nothing of emphasising the role of Africa in the salvation history of humanity. If Africa is to be rehabilitated its historical role, if African Christianity are to develop their confidence as citizens of a continent where Christianity has a future worldwide, there is thorough-going work to be done. A link must be established between academic rigour and the requirement of the pastorate in Churches and society. The discussions in many fora tend to show that the absence of a wider production and distribution of knowledge leave our institutions and the persons who run them less credible, less listened to, in fact at the margin with little influence.

Ostracism in the pastorate

Ostracism in the training institutions follows the African pastor or theologian into the performance of his or her ministry. This brings us back to two other points made by the group students who reflected on theological education in Africa : the

absence of dialogue between theologians and the people of God in the churches, the lack of culture in general. Apart from occasional private encounters, African theologians and Church leaders do not communicate or dialogue with one another at the denominational level, and even less so between different denominations. This lack of communication and dialogue can also be observed at the local level where many think their pastor very seldom listens to his congregations. If this is the case, the theologian speaks only for herself, autonomously, neither knowing nor sharing with others the problems of the society.

In various issues hanging as the Damocles sword onto our societies: Climate change, desertification, exploitation and looting of the ecosystems, the impoverishment and marginalisation of the population, the “clochardisation” of the intellectuals, HIV/AIDS, etc the church guidance is not there because of the incapacity to interact with society.

Reformulating the curricula of theological education so as to meet the challenges in human rights, economic and political justice, dialogue between the different sectors of the society, and of fundamental education for the faithful, learning from history are of crucial importance for theological education.

Section II:

University: Equipping for Future Generations. But Do we Care?

Theological education in the university settings model, I will argue provides ground to interact within interdisciplinary approach on issues affecting church and society. This I illustrated with the catholic faculties of theology that inspired an outspoken theological thought in three major francophone centres, Kinshasa, Yaoundé and Ivory Cost, however not considered here.

From recently the protestant world in Africa has started thinking and planning university. Daystar University, Nairobi the largest private university in that country may be in Africa, was launched in Southern Africa in 1952 in Southern Africa, moved to Nairobi, Kenya in 1974 and in 1985 launched its bachelor's degree programme and became a University college. It has two campuses and in 2008/9 has enrolled 3662 for 250 academic staff.

Self-reliant, the University draw its resources from the fee paid by the students. Though independent from churches, it functions as a Christian university on the basis of a declaration of faith both for students and academic staff.

St Pauls' theological seminary changed recently into university; it has 1000 students of whom *300 in Divinity*; its library fully automated is worth 40,000 volumes. It offers 3 programmes: Certificates, bachelors, masters degrees. Lumiere, Bujumbura started in 1990s, it has five faculties (theology, Communications, Business and management, Law, Computer science). In 2008,

2000 students were enrolled (of whom 30 were in theology). The academic staff was worth 127 members of whom only 20 were permanent. The library is worthy 10,000 volumes. From 2000 to 2008 the university graduated 4000 (four thousands) laureates. Its neighbour, Espoir d'Afrique started in 1992 in Nairobi, then moved to Bujumbura in 2000. The university offers up to the master degree and doctorate (Medicine) in its 6 faculties (Theology and Biblical studies, Science of education, Law, Business and professional management; Medicine and Civil Engineering and Urbanism) the university had 1800 students (2008) for 100 teaching staff of whom 30 permanent. Its library is worth 15000 volumes.

The Protestant faculty of theology, Butare, Rwanda, has just obtained the authorisation to transform into the Protestant Institute of Arts and Social Sciences to start with two new faculties, Education and the Studies of development in addition to theology. It has a library of more than 25000 volumes and plans to open a new campus in Kigali in the future. It has appointed a new Rector, a retired dean of the Protestant faculty of theology in Brussels.

Uganda Christian University arise out of Bishop Tucker theological seminary and became a university in 1997. From 250 students it has now more or less 7500 students in seven faculties, theology being one of them with more than 150 students. The entire university functions on the basis of a Christian university with a declaration of faith for both students and the staff, and four core courses for all students oriented to form a Christian worldview for any laureate graduating from UCU.

These institutions, Daystar, UCU, Limuru, Lumiere, Espoir d'Afrique report to be enjoying gradually self-reliance. The more they recruit, and the more they put laureates on the market, the more they become popular. More than a theological seminary, they integrate well in the academic and university environment, a very important move for changing contexts.

Issues arising

1. ***Running and managing a university*** is different from running a theological seminary. From the philosophy point of view, the experience in the management of large institutions, the university environment, all seems to be different.

2. ***Philosophy of education, quality and excellence*** judged from the perspective of a theological seminary and a university has a different meaning. Theological seminaries form people of Christian faith for ministry or theological education.

3. ***Relations with the Government's bodies in charge of Accreditation and Standardisation*** has started to be a big issue. Many churches or associations of individuals who initiate new universities have no competent staff nor were acquainted with these realities.

4. ***The production and distribution of knowledge***, a key feature of university education is very low in the contexts of south-south. The lack of viable publishing houses; the difficulties in intracountries communication in Africa (the only means

of transport between the African countries are mostly by air; but many air companies have collapsed in recent decades). Therefore print material is not circulating from countries to countries. Yet many of the institutions have poor connection and those who can afford connection do not have skills and competences to do and maintain it.

5. **Research tools lack resources:** libraries and research centres, and publication the very fundamental characteristics of a university are not yet in the priorities of these new universities due to the lack of resources. The libraries are poorly supplied, some times with books that are irrelevant to disciplines taught; the reading room is small some times let to be desired; the conditions of books conservation are not met, etc.

6. **The lack of resources,** competent academic staff, research tools, inadequate infrastructures, etc extend in many different sectors thus hindering the credibility of these institutions.

7. **The growth of the Church in Africa requires an increase in number of ministers trained yet the reality is different.** Following the move to upgrade theological seminaries into universities the existing small number of theologians comes even deeper down. Many students want to enrol in disciplines where job opportunities are guaranteed.

Yet the growth of the church in Africa is accompanied by the increase of the general education of the population. Therefore there is not only a need for a big number of ministers but well educated theologians to minister in various sectors of societies including in the universities where young people are widely open to the gospel. May be need to doing formal training on local level.

Ways forwards

1. Education, University and Spirituality.

African population is mostly a young population. The hopeful of them are at school and university most of them open and eager to receive the gospel. These are the future decision makers of our societies. And their spiritual needs are not being met. If we miss to bring the gospel to the campuses within the present generation, there will be no future for Christianity in Africa, at least the sort of Christianity that is ecumenical. Equip the people of God for present and next generations, then you have a responsible church, ethically driven governments.

2. Sharing Resources, the poorest side of the ecumenical family

Approach for issues raised: the financial support theological colleges were getting from churches is not enough; the seminars want to survive. It is important to look at how to set up innovative ways of training church workers. The creation of universities may be a way of commercialisation of education. But do we have alternative at the time of the scarcity of ecumenical resources.

Clearly there is a widely acknowledged transcultural global agenda for Christianity and theological education. When an engagement is taken within churches of evangelical or Pentecostal family, you shall be sure that an action is

ahead; when an ecumenical family faces a call to action, all is about uncertainty and diversion of resources towards destinations that have enormous source of income including secular sectors. Then the churches and Christian communities are left on their own. The World Council of Churches, the World Lutheran Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Methodist, the world Baptist, the world Orthodox, the world Mennonites, the World Anglican Communion, the World this and that that committed in Harare (1998) to concentrate on areas of great needs including theological education in Africa still have to focus on an well shared agenda. We need to plan strategically for a viable and sustainable church growth. We need to bring together resources for doing mission on the six continents if we're not planning the death of Christianity; therefore SHARING RESOURCES is critically at stake.

3. To Promote contextual theology in Christianity

The production of contextual theology is one of the priority areas AACC's theology Department was given. In 2009, the first meeting of its Advisory Group took place in Nairobi and started reflecting on the strategies and key areas of investigation. A particular accent should be put on emerging issues including healing and reconciliation, religious fundamentalism, ethnicity and identity; Christian in mission in a global and plural world. Therefore, it is appropriate that theological associations and institutions work hands in hands to organise the "theological intelligence " of the continent for new initiatives in mission and evangelism to emerge including the production and distribution of contextual theology, the formation of a leadership well acquainted with the aspirations and expectations of the ecumenical movement to edify and channel Christian thought locally and worldly.

Revitalising theological associations is the first priority of the newly reorganised theology department of the AACC. A number of consultations have been held or are being held in the four regions of the continent so as to draw the attention of the theological institutions and theologians on the need for a training and formation that meet the needs of the people of God on the continent.

The process in the growth of the church in post-missionary era; the africanisation (liturgy, theology, literature, self-administration and self-organisation; self-financing), theological and philosophical though; the autobiographies of key leaders who took over from missionaries and contributed to the vitality of today church; urban and rural mission; leadership formation; the church and its public role, the church and socio-economic development, the church and self-hood...are all grey areas that need to be investigated.

4. Pay Ministers or Equip all People of God to Minister

A vital issue however is that Churches are not able to pay the ministers. There is a risk to having a growing number of universities in the future yet face the shortage of ministers. There should be a process aiming at sensitising churches

both in North and South to increase plans for the sustainability and paying pastors. If this was not done, we will need to change our strategy then to train theologically and extend the mission of the Church to the people of God ready to fulfil their missionary responsibility. In this regard, AACC has areas of emphasis including theological Institutes (two took place as said earlier), setting up a fund for theological education; equipping and training African leadership through residential programs or through TEE; this comprises equipping them for dialogue with other religions.

5. Sharing Knowledge : Improve Teaching tools

With regard to research and teaching tools, there is a urgent need to modernise and interconnect the libraries of these theological institutions and universities. It is amazing how some initiative arise to give a light of hope then disappear or disconnect leaving behind no clear foundation. Clearly the issue here is that of the rich North accepting to share knowledge. Otherwise, this author suspects that it does not cost treasure to interconnect the libraries of major institutions in a number of countries to start with. After all, a number of small cooperatives and microfinance do it with their branches. The ecumenical organisations have resources and expertise, yet the Protestant world is so selfish.

6. Quality and Standards

The emergence of universities out of theological seminaries is a challenge to churches. To deal with the government bodies of accreditation and standardisation will not be an easy task for some. Within the Anglo-Saxon world or the Germanic systems, theology has been always a matter of university. Therefore, there is expertise and resources for an agenda aiming at quality and standards within the ecumenical family. Yet things are happening like God's work in the South is our own struggle; our private work not that of the universal Church. Institutions in the South struggle on their own. The World Council of Churches, the World Lutheran Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Methodist, the world Baptist, the world Orthodox, the world Mennonites, the World Communion, the World this and that... have thought through... What really would have prevented all these to put a percentage of their resources together so as to structure a body that looks after comprehensive quality and standards within the churches of the ecumenical family.

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