

## **Viability and ecumenical perspectives for theological education in Africa: Legacy and new beginnings in ETE/WCC**

### **Presentation for Stellenbosch Conference**

Dietrich Werner, ETE/WCC

#### **I. Accra 1958 - The Concern for Ecumenical Theological Education, rooted in the international missionary movement and started on African soil**

I am grateful for this Joint Conference of Academic Societies for the Study of Religion and Theology in Stellenbosch University to provide some space for a major dialogue on the future of theological education in Africa and for interacting both with ecumenical partners and with leading theological educators from other African countries. Coming from Europe and not from Africa I should probably not dare to speak on theological education in Africa whilst so many real experts are assembled here who have much more in depth knowledge on this. But representing the program of Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) of WCC as the program coordinator I wondered whether I could provide the humble service of at least reminding us of some of the important insights and steps in the journey of dialogue on theological education in Africa which is part of the precious history of this programme which in 2008 celebrated 50 years of its existence. In the following I will briefly highlight some 6 stations in the history of the WCC's commitment to theological education in Africa through PTE/ETE which since five decades has always stood for contextuality in theological education, catholicity (ecumenicity) in theological education, spiritual formation in theological education and inter-contextual networking and exchange.

Let me begin by referring to two different statements on the realities of African Christianity which underline the enormous relevance of the issues of theological education in Africa we are dealing with today:

John Pobee has argued: „Because Christianity is growing faster in Africa than in any other continents, the future of world Christianity may well depend on how African Christianity develops“<sup>1</sup>.

John Baur, author of 2000 years of Christianity in Africa has argued: „The picture of the church in Africa after thirty years of ecumenical history is disappointing. What has been achieved is a general peaceful co-existence, but little cooperation and muss less congruence. Almost nobody feels the urgency to go further, and it would be difficult to distribute the blame for this lethargy.“<sup>2</sup>

The future of African Christianity is of strategic relevance for the future of world Christianity as a whole – the first conviction expressed. And: The actual stage of African Christianity and church unity in Africa still leaves a lot to improve and to wish for. Both statements for me point to the strategic importance of theological education for the future of African Christianity. Without proper theological education fragmentation and both ethnic and religious disunity will increase in African Christianity. Without proper theological education African Christianity cannot play the vital role it should play for the future of world Christianity.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Pobee, Art. on “Africa”, in Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, p. 7

<sup>2</sup> in; Mercy Amba Oduyoye, History of the Ec. Movement Vol 3, p. 478

Both convictions are close to some of the very early motives in the international missionary movement which developed a key concern for theological education in Africa already in its early years in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a development ending up with the foundation of its first visible programmatic expression on African soil, the formation of the Theological Education Fund (TEF) in Accra, Ghana in 1958:

The concern for new models of education and theological formation is deeply rooted in the history of the ecumenical movement,<sup>3</sup> particularly in the history of the International Missionary Movement. Already in Edinburgh 1910 there was an intense debate on the “lack of adequate ministerial training in the Younger Churches” and it was emphasized, “that in no department of mission work are the efforts at present more inadequate to the necessities of the case than in that of theological education.”<sup>4</sup> IN particular there were two commissions in Edinburgh 1910 where there was an intense debate on theological education, namely commission III (“Education in Relation to Christianization of National Life”) and commission V (“The Preparation of Missionaries”). A decade later, in the 1920ies, some of the outstanding missionaries like Charles Ranson, the former British Methodist Indian missionary and later General Secretary of the IMC, articulated the conviction that it would be essential for the future of the younger churches to train indigenous persons for ministries and teaching responsibilities. The second world mission conference in 1928 in Jerusalem reiterated that the training of local pastors was grossly inadequate and demanded as a catchphrase for the “Transfer of responsibility and authority to Younger Churches.”<sup>5</sup> It consequently was the missionary movement that first established most of the poorly equipped colleges in churches and countries of the South, humble beginnings of an educational revolution without which much of what happened afterwards in terms of decolonialization, nation building, liberation and return to indigenous traditions would have been unthinkable. Following some crucial recommendations of Tambaram Mission conference in 1938 for the improvement of theological education in the Younger Churches a series of detailed studies on the needs and challenges for theological education in Asia and in Africa was developed in the years between 1941 and 1957, one of which was called “Surveys of the Training of the Ministry in Africa and Madagascar”(between 1950 and 1957) in which among other S. Neill, C. Baeta and B. Sundkler were involved.<sup>6</sup> It was the International Missionary Council (IMC) – and not Faith and Order which was regarded as the stronghold of all theology in the ecumenical movement - which drew some strategic consequences for action out of these study surveys and took the step to structure the concern for theological education programmatically.

The Ghana Assembly of IMC in 1958 received the series of critical surveys on theological education in Asia and Africa which were started by Charles Ranson (General Secretary of IMC at that time) and formulated as a consequence the action plan to create the so-called Theological Education Fund (TEF) as the first institutionalized attempt to promote theological education with a major global fund. The major goal of TEF was to promote creative indigenous leadership in the churches of the South and to support “theological excellence” (which at this time certainly still was understood primarily in terms of copying Western standards). It was by a major grant of J.D. Rockefeller – the same man who had donated for the founding of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey/Geneva – that the creation of TEF was achieved. His remarkable donation of 2 million US\$ which were given on the condition that within two years mission societies would raise the similar

---

<sup>3</sup> Comp. Ulrich Becker, *Ecumenical Formation*, in: *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, Vol. 3, 1968-2000, ed. By John Briggs, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, George Tsetsis, WCC Geneva 2004, p. 175ff

<sup>4</sup> Christine Lienemann, *Training for a Relevant Ministry. A Study on the Work of TEF*, p. 4, and *World Mission Conference 1910, Report of Commission II: The Church in the Mission Field*, p. 182ff

<sup>5</sup> Christine Lienemann, a.a.O. p. 6

<sup>6</sup> Christine Lienemann, a.a.O. 9ff

amount sparked off a remarkable history of solidarity in global theological education which lasted for some 50 years. The three distinctive dimensions or concerns in the understanding of the overarching goals of TEF's work were

- *Quality* of theological education combining intellectual rigor, spiritual maturity and commitment
- *authenticity* involving critical encounter with each cultural context in the design, purpose and shape of theological education
- *creativity* of theological education, understood as promoting new approaches of the churches obedience in mission.

Already in the TEF committee meeting in 1960 in Edinburgh a "Special Program for Theological Education in Africa" was launched which focused on "1) strengthening a limited number of theological schools, 2) assisting many theological school libraries, and 3) developing theological literature and aiding the "increased use of Africans as faculty members of theological schools".<sup>7</sup> A crucial role in this early program of TEF for Africa was played by Desmond Tutu who belonged to the core staff of the Theological Education Fund between 1962 and 1966.

In its three Mandate periods the Theological Education Fund has promoted different strategic objectives all related to the major aim of an indigenous or contextualized theological education in the churches of the South. It might be helpful just briefly to recall the key phases which all had it's own characteristic emphasize:

- First Mandate period 1958-1965: emphasis on indigenous and interdenominational places and institutions for theological education in the South
- Second Mandate period 1965-1970: emphasis on new curricula developments for the churches of the South and new teaching materials written by leading theologians from the South
- Third Mandate period 1970 to 1977: critique over against western concepts of theological education and major calls for contextualization of both forms of ministry and forms of theological education in the South.

If one reads the fascinating history of TEF which was published by Christine Lienemann<sup>8</sup> one cannot easily overestimate the role which TEF and its subsequent institutional forms have played for developing a certain number of increasingly high qualified institutions of theological education in the South. An overall history of theological education institutions in Africa as supported by TEF in these early decades still needs to be written – a wealth of resources is waiting in WCC-TEF archives to be brought to light and researched about.

Some of the key studies coming from TEF and early PTE programs were around various aspects of 'contextualization in theological education' – which has become a key concept in the 70's (see publications like „Ministry in Context“, „Learning in Context“, „Viability in Context“). These years were also the birthplace of the new concept of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) which was first introduced in the PTE publication on „Learning in Context – the search for innovative patterns in theological education“ in which Ross Kinsler reported about concepts of non-residential grass-roots theological education programs for lay leaders and theologians in Guatemala,<sup>9</sup> but later was also brought to Africa.

---

<sup>7</sup> TEF Committee Minutes Edinburgh 1960, p. 30 (WCC Archives)

<sup>8</sup> Christine Lienemann-Perrin, Training for a Relevant Ministry: A Study of the Contribution of the Theological Education Fund, WCC, 1981

<sup>9</sup> see Ross Kinsler new publication on „Diversified Theological Education“ which was published 2007 with William Carey International University Press.

## **II. Nairobi 1976 – Ecumenical Key convictions on the strategic role of theological education for liberation and development in church and society**

The Nairobi Assembly was the first WCC assembly on African soil and was focusing on the liberative and uniting dimension of the work of Jesus Christ (“Jesus Christ frees and unites”). The emergence of contextual theologies from the South was in the air, the revolution in education and pedagogy was debated. A whole section dealt with “education and renewal in search of true community”. The Theological Education Fund by this time had become an integral part of WCC, particularly the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism, which since the integration of IMC and WCC in 1961 was carrying on the tasks of the global missionary movement within WCC.<sup>10</sup>

The formulation of the core mandate of PTE program in 1977 clearly can be seen as reflecting the spirit and thrust of a liberative and contextual approach in both theology and pedagogy in the midst of the 70ies. PTE was asked to give attention to “the influence of the context and culture of theology and ministerial training and practices, 2) the need to liberate theological education and ministerial formation and practices from bondages which hamper faithfulness in their life and witness; 3) and cross-cultural discussion of key aspects of theological education.”<sup>11</sup> The fascinating 30 years history of the journal of the WCC program on Theological Education (PTE) which was called “Ministerial Formation” and started in 1976 by Ross Kinsler, can be seen as a proper reflection and unfolding of the spirit of liberation and contextualization in theology and education in these years. With the growing influence and discovery of development education emphasized by programs like CCPD these years also brought the formulation of “ecumenical learning” as a key concept to be explored and promoted in theological education.

Without being able to summarize all of what the period between Nairobi 1975 and Vancouver 1983 has brought in terms of a new common conviction about the urgency for a new commitment for ecumenical theological education some 9 key convictions might be formulated briefly as an inner core of WCC’s commitment to theological education from these years and beyond. This broad ecumenical consensus on the understanding and relevance of an ecumenical orientation in theological education can be characterized as follows:

---

<sup>10</sup> Comp. as a survey: John Pobee, Some Forty years of Ecumenical Formation, in: Ministerial Formation 38, July 1997, p. 25ff; also: Dietrich Werner (eds), Jubilee Issue of Ministerial Formation No. 110, April 2008 with key articles from the 50 years of history of WCC’s involvement in ecumenical theological education; from earlier publications see: Samuel Amirtham and John Pobee, (eds), Theology by the People: Reflections on Doing Theology in Community, WCC 1986; Samuel Amirtham and Wesley Ariarajah (eds.), Ministerial Formation in a Multifaith Milieu. Implications of interfaith dialogue for Theological Education, WCC 1986; Ross Kinsler, Ministry by the People. Theological Education by Extension, WCC 1983

<sup>11</sup> John Pobee, art. Education in: Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, p. 387

- 1) Theological education is the *most essential key and strategic factor for the renewal of the churches life and mission*. Without proper and relevant theological education the very future of the Christian church, its dialogue with society and its participation in the daily struggles and longings of ordinary people is endangered; the less churches and their leaders are investing in theological education the more the future of Christianity will be left to those who promote a distorted image of Christian identity and endanger dialogue and co-existence with other *churches* as well as other religious traditions. Theological education thus is vital for the transmission of Christian tradition from one generation to the other and essential for the renewal and continuity of the church and its leadership. Theological education is a matter of survival for an authentic and contextual mission of the church in contemporary contexts.
- 2) Theological education is *crucial for the interaction between church and society* where many issues demand for a sharpened stand and position of Christianity. This has become a commonly held conviction both in western and eastern Christianity, in both the churches of the South and the churches of the North. The role of theological education is never limited just to training Christian ministers. With all legitimate attention and emphasis on ministerial formation the road and inclusive approach emphasizing theological education as a process of renewal and formation for all God's people always needs to be kept in mind.
- 3) Theological education is *deepening biblical knowledge and the capacity to distinguish and to assess the different spirits and ideologies* in order to discern God's working in this world. More knowledge and awareness in the basic understanding of Christian faith is a vital contribution for the identity of Christian churches today and the lay involvement in church and society.
- 4) There are grave differences in the accessibility and quality of theological education programs in different parts of the world, therefore *equal access to theological education (between rural and urban areas, lay and ordained, men and women, young and old) is a key issue for all churches*. In some countries there are more institutions of theological education than a decreasing number of theological students can fill. In other countries despite fast growing local congregations only one or in some cases none theological colleges are available to offer BD, Master of Divinity or even Doctoral programs in theology. There is a need for a major step forwards in terms of bridging the divide between churches and countries with extremely different standards and availabilities of theological education programs.
- 5) *Ecumenical theological education and broad based ecumenical formation is a vital priority for the changed landscape of Christianity in the 21st century* and the continuation of the ecumenical movement (a conviction affirmed again by the assembly of WCC in Porto Alegre 2006). Without an increased commitment in theological education for ecumenical dialogue and cooperation, the unity of the church, its holistic mission and service in today's world and dialogue with people of other faiths, we might see an increased fragmentation of world Christianity. Growing trends of religious fundamentalism and a severe lack of properly trained Christian leadership in many fast growing churches in the southern hemisphere demand for more investments in infrastructure and programs of theological education.

- 6) Theological education is *not only serving the building up the church, but also is creating social awareness, political discernment, social involvement and Christian participation in transformation processes of societies*. Thus investing in theological education is a direct investment also into social and political development and transformation of society and the raising of its educational levels.
- 7) The only proper remedy against religious fundamentalism is investment in education. Lack of education and theological formation often is one of the root causes for ignorance over against other cultures, religious traditions and special social contexts. Churches which take seriously their responsibility for theological education of lay people and future ministers and exercise a proper *sense of ownership and support of the churches to all levels of academic and non-academic theological education* are better equipped to counteract trends towards religious fundamentalism and communal tensions in their own regions and worldwide.
- 8) In quite a number of churches *women still do not have equal rights and access to theological education* and can enter into the ordained ministry of the churches. Ecumenical theological education since long has particularly promoted the theological education of women in theology, for ministry and various fields of pastoral work within the church. A renewed and transformed of the community of women and men in the church and their mutual enrichment in the different ministries of the church can be greatly enhanced by theological education programs.
- 9) Globalization and acceleration of technological and communication progress as well as deteriorating standards of human rights and Christian ethos in many issues of the global world today is *demanding for more theological and ethical expertise in a number of crucial areas of social, medical and political ethics*. It is only theological education which enables churches as well as Christians in civil society to face new challenges and social demands of the churches in the context of globalization and radical ethical challenges. Many issues like bioethics, ecology, migration or inherited patters of social discrimination of marginalized groups demand for forms of interdisciplinary knowledge and expertise for which high-level forms of interdisciplinary dialogue and quality theological education is vital.

### III. Accra 1986: Theological Education in Africa: Quo Vadimus?

A decade after Nairobi a major new initiative for theological education in Africa was coming from PTE which has become known as the Accra 1986 consultation: Theological Education in Africa: Quo Vadimus? 90 theological educators from Africa and partner organizations in Europe and America came together in Accra in cooperation with the West African Association of Theological Institutions (WAATI) to discuss the question “*What kind of Church and what kind of Theological Education would be relevant to the African context?*” which at that time had become aware of the fact that the center of gravity of Christianity definitely had shifted towards the South and the future should be with African Christianity. Four major themes were dealt with

- a) Theology, Theological Education and the Church
- b) Continuity and Change in Theological Education
- c) Ecumenical Perspectives and Dimensions in Theological Education and
- d) Funding of Theological Education.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Reports from the Accra Conference can be found in: Ministerial Formation No 35, 1986, p. 2ff and in the report which was published as: Theological Education in Africa: Quo Vadimus?, ed. By John Pobee and J.N. Kudadjie, Asempa Publishers, Accra, 1990

Key proposals of the conference such as the creation of an African Ministerial Fund, the creation of a Centre for Women's Concerns in Africa and an Africa – Asia exchange program of at least 10 theological educators were asked and recommended to be followed up by CATI, the Conference of African Theological Institutions.

It is not possible to review the tremendous wealth of insights represented from well-known and distinguished African theologians during this conference (liked Archbishop Makhulu, Bishop Peter Sarpong, Mercy Oduyoye, Ambrose Moyo, Kwesi Dickson or Michael Bame Bame). But it is still worth noting what was criticized and what was recommended in the final message of the consultation:

According to this consultation in most of African churches and theological education in Africa it is still prevailing

- “a) the disparity between the context as well as the methodology of theological education and the context of people's life characterized by continuous exploitation, political instability etc.
- b) the apparent lack of commitment on the part of theological institutions to the on-going mission of the Church, in providing leadership in spiritual formation and the renewal of liturgical life of the Church
- c) the elitism in church ministry and theological education which not only excludes part of the people of God such as women, but also enervates the Church by depriving her of the full richness of the ministry
- d) the resurgence of denominationalism even within united theological colleges largely due to the unclear ecumenical commitment of the churches.”

The message from Accra 1986 goes on to positively recommend and to affirm

- “- the need for relevant theological education for all God's people to enable them to be involved in ministry. In this regard churches and theological educators are invited to reckon seriously with the complex and varied nature of the African context as well as theologizing in local languages;
- that the traditional residential forms have proven totally inadequate for the overall theological education needs of the churches in Africa and so alternate relevant forms have to be created;
- that we already enjoy a unity in the common humanity of our peoples which we seek to visibly express in Africa (and therefore) the need for a more unified common theological reflection in the teaching of religion, be it Islam, Christianity or traditional African religions, in universities and theological seminaries is affirmed
- that there is a need for new content and methods for theological education in the light of particular political, economic and multi-faith factors of the global village we live in;
- that ecumenism is affirmed through the informal structures of education as well as through formal courses in colleges and seminaries.”<sup>13</sup>

One of the most far-reaching proposals of that conference which apparently has not received much follow-up but still is worth considering is the recommendation

“to set up an *African Ministerial Formation Fund (AMFF)* to give a start to the African Churches and institutions in their effort to be self-reliant as a measure of their growing maturity in Christ. The Fund is to be owned by the African churches and CATI. The Fund is in respect of specific objectives and is to be invested not only in Africa but also in the North.”

---

<sup>13</sup> A Message to the Churches, African Theological Colleges and Associations of Theological Institutions, Ministerial Formation 35 (1986), p. 38f

The reasons given for the proposed creation this fund are interesting to note. Apart from referring to the gradual shift of the center of gravity of Christianity to Africa the consultation affirmed: “If theological education is the bedrock of the church, then it becomes the responsibility of all churches, especially the more affluent, to help to ensure the security and survival of African churches as much as of the word church. In that sense the support for AMFF is a kind of investment in the future of the world church itself. At present most of the financial support of the churches in Africa by the partners is more ad hoc responses rather than strategic giving. Thus the proposed AMFF is an attempt to introduce some rationality into the funding patterns with regard to African theological education. It is as well a challenge to the partners to pursue a policy of strategic giving.”<sup>14</sup>

There were seven key areas listed in which Africa Ministerial Formation Fund should give and channel strategic support:

- a) leadership formation programs
- b) women in theological education project
- c) literature development
- d) library development
- e) theological curriculum development in Africa
- f) advanced theological studies in Africa program
- g) alternative and innovative patterns of theological education program.

The proposal was transferred to CATI and its general secretary Msamba ma Mpolo for implementation and follow up. It would be interesting to know what has happened to this proposal since then and whether at any stage there was a serious attempt to call together a major group of both funding partners and African associations of theological schools to do some serious explorations around this proposal again.

#### **IV. Moffat Mission, Kuruman, Northern Cape Province 1995: Renewal out of Africa – Viability in Ecumenical Theological Education**

Some ten years later in 1995 a major consultation was held in Moffat Mission, Kuruman, Northern Cape Province which brought together theological educators from many parts of Africa and tried to articulate a new confidence on “the renewing power and promise of Africa's spiritual and human resources“: It was part of the ETE launched global study process on „viability in theological education“ which led to the Oslo World Conference on Theological Education in 1996. In the report from John de Gruchy it is stated: „The ancient Romans were aware that something new always comes out of Africa. Our report is entitled "Renewal out of Africa" because we believe that Africa's pain bears witness to the message of the cross that new life can only be born through suffering and because we have experienced the renewing power and promise of Africa's spiritual and human resources.“

At the heart of the conference message there is a vision for a renewed African Christianity: „Africa provides fresh metaphors for theology (our understanding of God). One metaphor which spoke to us in Kuruman was that of God as the root of the human tree with its many and diverse branches all of which belong together and draw sustenance from the same source. African sculpture often depicts the intertwined character of human society in which all members are organically

---

<sup>14</sup> John Pobee/Ambrose Moyo: Funding of Theological Education in Africa, Report from Quo Vadis-Consultation 1986, in: Ministerial Formation 35 (1986), p. 31ff

related in their need, their solidarity, and their sharing. For Africans, sin is essentially the breaking of such bonds and redemption, their healing. African spirituality and worship have a distinct character which expresses this vision of Christian faith and community. It is a spirituality which is joyous and spontaneous, a spirituality of solidarity in suffering, a spirituality integrated fully into daily life.

Four aspects to the renewing vision of African Christianity may be identified. It is:

An holistic vision: beyond dualisms of gender, body/soul/mind, spiritual/material; visible/invisible.

A healing vision: transforming the human, social and ecological condition.

A communal vision: stressing and celebrating the human family tree of interrelatedness and partnership.

An ecumenical vision: inclusive of all confessions, denominations, people of other faiths; recognizing all God's children created in God's image.<sup>15</sup>

As a consequence of this a commitment for Ecumenical Theological Education in Africa is formulated:

„Given the needs of Africa, ecumenical theological formation (ETF) is vital if the church is to witness to the reign of God and participate in God's redemptive mission in Africa. ETF is demanded by biblical ecclesiology; by the multi-faith character of the continent; and by the need to share resources.

We are particularly concerned that ETF embrace those traditions which have such a long history and rich tradition in Africa, notably Coptic Christianity and Ethiopian Orthodoxy; but we are also committed to pursuing our vision in company with African Initiated Churches, Pentecostals, and those Evangelicals who were not represented amongst us.

ETF in Africa must give special attention to the need for dialogue between Christianity-Islam-African Traditional Religion because of their dominance throughout the region. But other faiths (e.g. Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism) which are numerically smaller should be warmly included in such dialogue in terms of African concerns.

We are deeply aware that there are strong anti-ecumenical forces operative in Africa as elsewhere in the world. Part of the legacy of the missionary movement in Africa has been the proliferation of denominations, and this has been exacerbated by the rapid growth of independent church groups initiated within Africa itself. Denominationalism is a powerful reality, and the creation of denominational structures and pursuit of denominational interests often continue to undermine ecumenical endeavour. Some churches and leaders, even though they may belong to the World Council of Churches and other regional ecumenical organizations, are hesitant and suspicious and do not encourage ecumenism. This is a major obstacle to ETF. There are also many Christian missionaries and church groups which are ideologically anti-ecumenical and right-wing.“

The „Renewal out of Africa statement“ formulated a comprehensive list of perspectives and urgencies in the framework of an ecumenical understanding of theological education in Africa, defined as bringing together catholicity and contextuality of theological education, demanding for

- a new responsibility of theological education for the whole of the *laos*, the people of God
- for a new dialogue with African Independent churches
- for commitment of theological education to issues of practical theology
- for a continuous curriculum reform focussing on African religious heritage, new forms of ministry in African Independent churches;
- for new attention to gender issues and social and ethical questions surrounding human sexuality.
- for more efforts in financial viability in theological education.

---

<sup>15</sup> See also John Pobee, J.N. Kudadjie, *Theological Education in Africa: Quoi Vadimus?*, WCC/Asempa Publications, 1990, p. 176ff

Thus this consultation was strong in unfolding again the ecumenical vision of African Christianity which needs to be supported and prepared by African theological education. But it was less strategic in terms of recommendations for follow up. It was proposed to „establish a task force to develop a strategic plan for the region and sub-regions which will give concreteness to our vision. We will present this plan to the global consultation and to our ecumenical partners indicating our priorities and financial needs.“

The recommendations were both forwarded for WCC and AACC for being acted upon. But it is not clear immediately how the follow up of such a vast and broad agenda could be managed concretely in the years to follow.

## **V. Kempton Park, Lutheran Conference Centre, Gauteng Province 2002: Journey of Hope in Africa – Plan of Action**

A new emphasize on a concrete „plan of action“ could be felt seven years later when in Kempton Park, South Africa, a major conference of African representatives of theological education and stakeholders from Africa, Europe and North America took place which came together to „reflect together and critically evaluate theological education and ecumenical formation in Africa and to formulate together strategies for action“.

The initiative was part of the so-called „Journey of Hope“, which took a crucial step with the Harare Covenant of Africans both from the continent and the Diaspora at the WCC 8th (Jubilee) Assembly held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in December 1998 and which called for “a new vision of life for our people in Africa and for the rest of the world.”

In the consultation several programs of WCC were involved in planning and organizing, the WCC Education and Ecumenical Formation Programme, the Africa Desk of WCC and the Council-wide Framework on Special Focus on Africa. The major goal was to initiate a critical evaluation of the theological education and ecumenical formation as part of the interactive process to embark on the Journey of Hope of African Churches and people to make a difference on the continent in the 21st century.

There is an impressive and comprehensive list of commitments made which is part of the plan for action (reprinted below). Among them four commitments probably have made a tangible impact on the period following after 2002:

- a) the commitment to support and assist the establishment of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians which since then has greatly encouraged the participation of women in theological education and research and made their voices more heard;
- b) the commitment „to take on board, concerns of our communities such as violence, HIV/AIDS and other killer diseases, gender issues, NEPAD and ecumenism“ amongst which mainly all issues relating to HIV/AIDS have become a major issue in the ETE based initiative for HIV/AIDS mainstreaming of theological education in Africa which is now carried forward by EHAIA.
- c) and the commitment to „addressing concerns of people with disabilities ( who are physically challenged), such as incorporating sign languages subjects in our Theological curriculum“ a call which has been answered vigorously by EDAN network in cooperation also with ETE/WCC
- d) finally the commitment to „supporting and encouraging the networking of all TEE institutions in Africa in their efforts to sharing materials and standardizing their qualifications“. This recommendation to some extent was answered by the first All African TEE conference which was held one year later as *All Africa TEE Conference, August 23-29, 2003 in Ankrah Conference Centre, Mukono Uganda* and which led to the formation of the All African Network for Theological Education by Extension which is also now led by Dr. Kangwa Mbuluki.

It should be mentioned explicitly that much of what has been achieved in these years following and pre-ceding the Journey of Hope – Action plan for theological education in Africa was due to the committed work of Nyambura Njoroge, Program Coordinator of ETE until early 2007 and now in charge of the EHAIA program of WCC.<sup>16</sup>

Again the question remains: Who monitored the ongoing implementation of these plans and what were the proper channels and instrument effecting change and transformation in the institutions of theological education during this period?

## **VI. Maputo 2008: The future of African Ecumenism – challenges for the formation of a new generation of African Church Leaders**

The last station in this brief review of initiatives and major conferences related to theological education in Africa from the perspective of PTE/ETE program in WCC is referring to the AACC Assembly last year in Maputo. During the AACC Assembly in Mozambique, Maputo, a major new initiative was launched supported by various ecumenical partners amongst which ETE/WCC was a major part: Due to the sustained efforts by a committed team and the new regional consultant for African theological education (since 2008) from ETE, Dr. Tharcisse Gatwa, an African Theological Institute was held which brought together some 100 theological students from a wider variety of Christian churches in Africa. This was a visible expression already of a fresh concern for theological education in the new mandate period of AACC. The report of the African Theological Institute revealed an enormous interest and enthusiasm of African theological students to be brought together into ecumenical dialogue on a continental level and to meet with former leaders of the ecumenical movement in Africa.<sup>17</sup>

For the Post-Maputo working era of AACC it was made clear that whilst in recent years AACC has functioned without theological department, the General Secretary after Maputo underlined the fact that theology must be the foundation of every program and activities undertaken by AACC. The 2009-2013 AACC program as presented to a Nairobi meeting with ecumenical partners therefore outlines a plan of action which will be carried out under the supervision of the General Secretary in six major departments: *Empowering and Capacity Building; Theology and Interfaith relations; Peace, Healing and Reconciliation; Finance/Administration and resource Development; The Lome*

<sup>16</sup> See some of the publications of Nyambura Njoroge:

2000 *Kiama kia Ngo: An African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation*. Accra, Ghana: Asempa Publishers.

2001 eds. with Dube, Musa W. *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publishers.

Or also some recent articles of N. Njoroge:

2005 "An Ecumenical Commitment: Transforming Theological Education in Mission" pp. 248-262. In *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 94, No. 373, April.

2005 "The Dreams and Dilemmas of Ecumenical Theological Institutions in Africa" pp. 33-55. In *African Challenge: All Africa Journal of Theology*, Vol. 1, March.

2005 "A New Way of Facilitation Leadership: Lessons from African Women Theologians" pp. 29-46. In *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 1, January.

2004 "The Disease that Speaks Multiple Languages and Thrives on Other Pandemics" pp. 3-21 in *Journal of Constructive Theology*, Volume 10:2, December.

2001 *Ecumenical Review*, (Guest editor). *Transforming Ecumenism in Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* Volume 53, No. 3. Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, July.

<sup>17</sup> Tharcisse Gatwa, Report of African Theological Institute, January 2009

*Regional Office; the Addis/AU Liaison Office.* During an international partners meeting of AACC in Nairobi in April 2009 Dr Karamaga said in introducing the central role of the *Theology and Interfaith Relations* department, that it will be expected to meet four challenges:

- the Search for Unity of a divided continent and of divided Christian community;
- the restoration of human dignity and image of God to many people of this continent who have lost hope, dignity and confidence in themselves and in the institutions;
- the engagement in a pilgrim for peace and harmony and in particular, for AACC, to articulate the spiritual basis of peace as a gift from Jesus;
- to focus on the ecumenical formation of young generations of theologians and leaders for churches and ecumenical movement.

The new AACC theological vision therefore is to promote contextual theology based on emerging issues in each sub-region of the continent, facilitate theological movement to enable a better future and well being of the members.

Clearly, what is sought is to organize the “theological intelligence” of the continent for new initiatives in mission and evangelism to emerge including contextual theology and ecumenical movement that will edify Christian thought locally and worldly. It is an engagement intended to make the kingdom of God- justice, peace and joy- available to all and to worship the God of life, life in its fullness.

**Specific objectives** were added to enhance the overall objective. These include: developing African theological literature; revitalizing African associations of theological schools; initiating a mechanism for financial self-reliance of the associations of theological schools; initiating centers for theological reflection to inform every intervention, action and engagement of the church; organizing theological publications accessible to both theological institutions and communities; developing theological library; organizing electronic communication as tools of networking and training for young theologians; promoting interfaith dialogue; revisiting ways of worship, and seeking ways sermons and exhortations can promote holistic well being of the people; providing space for young theologians for short term engagement and exposure to ecumenical experience through AACC; working with an advisory group comprising representatives of networking organizations.

To achieve the above goals the following activities will be carried out by the theological department:

- to organize a master continental plan for theological education;
- to elaborate a plan of joint writers process for handbooks in theological, social sciences and ecumenism;
- to accompany the network of young theologians initiated during the 9<sup>th</sup> assembly;
- to fund raise for a theological education fund in Africa in cooperation with partners and establish a global fund for theological education in Africa with the priority for theological studies at Master and Ph.D. Degrees.
- to assist in developing curricula on thematic areas of new challenges (ethnicity, ecumenism, missiology, bioethics, HIV/AIDS; Climate change). To assist in developing quality teaching methodologies in theological education.
- building up African theological digital library resources in cooperation with among others: Globethics.net, Princeton and Yale.
- To organize encounters between young theologians to strengthen the sense of belonging and solidarity among them. To produce a periodical on Cutting Edge theological issues accessible to leaders and ministers.
- To provide space at AACC for ongoing theological reflection among elder ecumenists and young theologians.

- To organize encounters and interactions to bring about healthy collaboration between Christian and Islamic theologians.<sup>18</sup>

## **VII. Crucial Questions at the end: How to organize an effective process of transformation and quality improvement for theological education on the Africa continent?**

It has become clear that there are both enormous challenges for the future of African theological education, but also there are vast materials for forming a proper agenda for transformation and quality improvement and some key recommendations at hand for the promotion of ecumenical theological education in this context. But do we also have appropriate instruments for transformation, tools for strategizing, and proper mechanisms for networking which would allow mere recommendations and visions to be translated into an effective, inclusive and participatory process of real transformation in theological education in Africa?

Theological education in Africa and ecumenical cooperation in theological education still have major historical and contextual challenges to cope with resulting from the specific landscape of African Christianity like

### **a) the ambivalent heritage of the 19th century evangelical missions era in Africa:**

The very fact that much of the Church in Africa was born out of the missionary movement that characterized the history of the Church in Europe and America in the 19th century still has a profound impact on the ecumenical situation of African Christianity. The evangelical awakening which shaped the renewal of Christianity in Europe in 18th and 19th century has left its deep marks also on African Christianity, the zeal to propagate Christianity to all nations, the focussing on the individual conversion, the interest to promote education and a personal piety and a predominant lack of attention to social and political dimensions of the Gospel.<sup>19</sup> Europe transplanted a divided church onto Africa and made Africa a battlefield of Protestants over against Catholics, fundamentalists and liberals. It remained one of the most weakening factors of the missionary movement that it not only transplanted Western Christianity, but also unbroken Western denominationalism onto Africa – because African people were split up even more than they were split up already. Hostility between different mission agencies was transferred also to the different believers. Thus the departure of newly won converts to rival missions was often viewed with the same sense of loss and failure as that occasioned by the backsliding of local Christians into paganism. The few examples of missionary organizations which were already ecumenical in practice and orientation (like LMS and British and Foreign Bible Society) did not outweigh the general trend of denominational fragmentation which continues to leave its marks on theological education until today.

### **b) the historical conflicts between Protestant and Catholic missions in Africa:**

In African mission history rivalry and conflicts were most severe and bitterly distorted by mistrust, hatred and open aggression between Protestants and Catholics in many places. Catholic evangelization saw paganism, slavery, human sacrifice, Protestantism and Islam as root evils to be uprooted. Protestant mission on the other hand considered Catholicism or what they called “Popism” at that period as worse than Muslims. There are deplorable stories of hatred and open aggressions reported from late 19th century mission work in Uganda where Protestants and

---

<sup>18</sup> Tharcisse Gatwa, AACC CONSULTATION WITH PARTNERS. Nairobi 1-3 March 2009. A REPORT for WCC/ETE, p. 3

<sup>19</sup> James Amanze, Ecumenism in Africa, p....

Catholics turned into two warring groups each viewing itself as the only true church of Jesus Christ and leading to a great civil war which only was ended with a British Protectorat over the country in 1904 and a peaceable division into spheres of Protestant and Roman Catholic influence. As a consequence the denominational divide was continued into the formation of different political parties which reflected the Catholic-Protestant divide, the Uganda Peoples Congress which is Protestants (nicknamed United Protestants of Canterbury), and the Democratic Party which was Catholic (nicknamed Dini ya Papa, religion of the Pope). Thus the most important thing and greatest move forward for African ecumenism was the impact of Vatican II which enabled Anglican and Catholic Churches in Sudan to develop the Sudanese Council of Churches, later followed by similar National Councils in Namibia, Uganda (1963 Formation of Joint Christian Council), Swaziland, Liberia and Lesotho. But the consequences for joint cooperation in theological education between Protestant and Catholic Churches are not yet fully drawn and the scope which is offered by the Ecumenical Directory or the 1996 declaration of the Joint Working Group between WCC and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican on “Ecumenical Learning in Theological Education” is not always known and realized.

**c) the emergence of African Independent Churches (AICs):**

It is widely known that due to the colonial history and the interrelation between colonial and mission history many of the historic protestant churches for some still look foreign to African culture and oppressive to the realities of African life and communities. The emergence of African Instituted Churches represents a response to this foreignness aiming at liberation from colonial domination and providing a place to really feel home as African Christians. Particularly in South Africa where before independence black people had no means of political action or other outlet of expression, save through the church, the formation of African Independent Churches was a form of political action against oppressive forces. The more European missionaries had kept Africans in subordination the more this has led to the formation of African Instituted churches which asserted their autonomy from European ecclesiastical and political control. But the historic alliance between Christian mission, health care and (higher) education which has marked Protestantism doesn't take the same shape in the life and mission of AICs. The majority of AIC-leaders are without formal theological education. There are other forms of theological learning and expression. But the question is how to develop new forms of theological education which are attractive and accessible to members of AICs.

**d) the emergence of Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches:**

Though there is some area of overlapping the emergence and continuous growth of charismatic movements and Pentecostal churches in Africa in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a phenomenon which has some impact not only on the composition of the theological student community (a sizable number now coming from charismatic renewal and Pentecostal churches) but also on the content of the theological curriculum which should be in some correspondence to the background of students and their religious experiences.

**e) the realities of massive migration and the emergence of African Diaspora churches:**

No other continent than Africa has so many refugees and migrants which are either forced or decide voluntarily to leave one's own home country and to seek theological education in a different context and culture than one's own. How are the impacts of migration on theological education in Africa reflected sociologically, methodologically and theologically? What are the repercussions of African Diaspora churches and the Diaspora community of theological educators on theological education on the African continent?

We would to end this short survey with some eight open questions on how to organize an effective process of transformation for theological education in Africa - which hopefully can be enriched and amended by further proposals in the discussion following this SAMS section of the Joint Conference in Stellenbosch University later in 2009:

- 1) What are the proper agents of change in theological education in Africa? What are the proper partners to be involved in a consolidated process towards renewal of theological education in Africa in order to have a long lasting impact and not just a mere repetition of verbal recommendations?
- 2) What kind of role can and should regional associations of theological education play in the process towards renewal of theological education in Africa (in the area of improving ecumenical cooperation, quality standards and common curriculum planning)? What is it that can make African associations of theological schools more viable, stable and effective?
- 3) What efforts can be made to develop regional or national master plans for the future of theological education in Africa? What role does strategic, future-oriented and common planning have for the future of African theological education in different national and regional contexts?
- 4) What is the role of the different regional systems and institutions of theological education in Africa over against each other in terms of support, cooperation, exchange of students, teachers and curriculum plans and free-place arrangements? (for instance the role of theological education institutions in South Africa for other African countries)
- 5) What expectations do churches, universities, academic communities have over against the future of theological education in Africa? How do churches assess and articulate their needs for theological education in Africa and for which model of theological education preferences are given in a given context for what kind of reasons (Bible Schools; de-centralized TEE programs; church-related theological seminaries; privately funded Christian universities; publicly funded state universities).
- 6) What role can African women theologians networks play to provide encouragement, support and further incentives for younger women theologians particularly in church settings where there still is no sufficient representation and participation of women in church leadership and theological education?
- 7) As African Christianity is predominantly young in age which models can be explored to facilitate inter-generational learning in theological education and the creation of a new generation of young Christian leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- 8) And finally: Which models, mechanism and suitable channels can be envisaged for financial viability of theological education in Africa? Should the proposal for a major African Ministerial Formation Fund be taken up and/or reformulated under the conditions of today? Could there be something like a African Theological Education Fund located in AACC into which major ecumenical partners would be contributing in order to allow for more multi-lateral sharing and interdenominational support for theological education for fast growing Christianity in the African continent?

To close this brief and tentative survey: In a period of weakening global ecumenical structures and programmes (WCC) ETE is committed to provide help and assistance to AACC to explore building up a reliable and strong ETE Africa program in a joint effort with key theological education institutions, functioning associations of theological schools and with key stakeholders which share an awareness of the urgency and strategic needs for strengthening theological education in Africa.

