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Seismic Shifts in Global Theological Education and Implications for Theological Institutions in Africa

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Abstract

Theological Education (TE) has undergone rapid shifts in recent years. The current uncertainties and insecurities surrounding it are unsettling yet inspiring various innovative solutions to meet the needs of the church and society. It is no longer guaranteed that a seminary would flourish. In fact, seminaries are barely surviving. Consequently, we are forced to ask, is TE in exile or on a pilgrimage? Is it dying or reviving? These are pertinent questions, especially considering the realities facing institutions post-COVID. Although traditional TE is essential and, I believe, is here to stay, alternative forms of training (non-traditional programmes), are gaining popularity. TE is morphing into something non-traditional, un-ordinary, and flexible. These new ways of doing TE provide exciting opportunities for the church to meet its needs for trained personnel and are accessible, cost-effective, and flexible. What should Africa's theological institutions do to prepare for a vibrant TE able to serve the church for the transformation of society? I employ an analytical and descriptive methodology to argue that TE is undergoing rapid shifts, and it is essential for theological educators and institutions to be innovative to keep up with the changes so that they can fulfill God's mission.

Seismic Shifts in TE

TE has been experiencing rapid shifts for at least three decades (Banks, 1999, pp. 4-8; Larsen, 1995, pp. 1-34; Werner, 2010, p. 164). In his article published in *Christianity Today* (October, 2022)

titled, "The Future Is Campus-Free," Matt Ayars, President of Wesley Biblical Seminary in the USA, observes that TE is undergoing "seismic shift[s]" (Ayars, 2022, p.33) and Pam Derringer believes we are experiencing a "distance-education boom" (Derringer, 2010, p. 42). What are the implications of this "distance-education boom" to traditional TE?

Traditional institutions, now facing, declining enrolments and severe financial challenges, have had to consider how to do TE afresh without compromising quality. There is no other way of staying alive in light of the new changes. Several seminaries in the USA, for example, have gone out of business. Some have lost their accreditation. Many more have downsized. Others have had to merge with other seminaries to survive. Education centres, distance-learning programmes, in-service training offered in partnership with churches, and many other forms of alternative education are gaining traction.

According to the Barna Group (2017, p. 5) report produced in partnership with the Association for Biblical Higher Education, there are nine trends that are shaping the future of TE today. These include:

- Demographic. Increasing diversity of students – ethnic (non-white), gender (female), and age (older non-traditional).
- Social. Education is now "a halfway house: halfway between adolescence and adulthood."
- Economic. College is less affordable and accessible today.
- Vocational. A culture of freelancing and multi-careering is a reality today.
- Institutional. Access to information is widely available; "People get the information they want, when they want, for the price they want to pay."
- Legal. Institutions are at risk of legal tussles because of laws pertaining to human rights and sexuality.
- Digital. "Education now takes place in 'digital Babylon,' an always-on, hyperlinked, immersive culture where Christians must learn to live and thrive as exiles."
- Moral. Shifting moral values from society to individual interests.

- Spiritual. The religiously unaffiliated are the fastest growing group in the USA.
- David Kinnaman (2017, pp. 40-44), President of Barna Group, discusses the implications of the Barna Group and ABHE research findings.
- Students' growing diversity. There is a need to reimagine TE in light of the shifting demographics.
- More career-mindedness. TE must address how to help students with career development and better job prospects. Students are not focusing on spiritual formation as older generations were.
- Less ministry-mindedness. College-bound Christians are not seeking full-time ministry.
- Ministry-minded students heading elsewhere. Many potential Bible college students are seeking careers outside the church – in the marketplace, church planting, and ministry-training schools.
- Pressure on the pastorate. There is an aging population of pastors that are not being replaced or allowing themselves to be replaced by younger pastors. The typical pastor in the USA is now 54 years old.
- Bible colleges vs. Christian colleges. The difference between Bible College education and education received from other Christian higher-education institutions is not apparent to many college-bound Christians.

As the Barna and ABHE report shows, TE has indeed undergone rapid shifts in recent years. This is not a reality limited to the West. It is true in other parts of the world as Simon Debge (2014, p. 247) succinctly captures the situation in Ghana: "The future of theological education … in Ghana is under siege! Indeed, for any concerned observer, the question again and again would be: "*Quo Vadimus!"* (What is the way forward)?"

Degbe (2014, p.247) then makes a valid suggestion relevant to this article:

> Whereas the problem of numbers and money may persist, that of the rest may be pointing to some new trends and directions

> that need to be embraced in order to rediscover the new mission strategy in the ministry of training and equipping the church and proclaiming the living way to the dying world.

Degbe's suggestion to embrace "some new trends" is valid. What are these new trends? I will present three trends below.

Three Major Shifts

The modes of programme delivery of TE have been shifting over the years. We observe three significant movements: mandatory residency, low residency, no residency. We shall examine each of these models briefly.

Mandatory Residency

Many theological colleges in Africa offered mandatory residency programmes focusing on the vocational and ministerial formation of students. Students were expected to live on campus for several weeks. For example, the AIC Missionary College in Eldoret, where I served as Deputy Principal, required married missionary students to study together on campus full-time. The school changed this policy because it was unrealistic. Like the AIC Missionary College, many schools have slowly shifted from mandatory residency requirements to other forms of training. Students may now reside on campus or off campus. Married students may choose to enrol together or not. Schools are valuing decentralizing education even though some have not implemented it.

The most significant value of residency programmes is that it offers students opportunities to study on campus in person, enjoy each other's company, and participate in spiritual formation and other community programmes such as chapels. Residency programmes also provide hands-on ministry experience for students, some younger and need coaching. It is because of these reasons that many schools in Africa still believe that pastors should be trained in actual schools with classrooms, libraries, and boarding facilities, and by teachers who are present physically.

Indeed, it is essential to provide opportunities for the physical training of pastors. However, having a residential campus does not guarantee a

healthy community. In fact, many residential institutions are "fellowship-deficient" and "dysfunctional" (Ayars, 2022, p. 33). This has led to an increasing interest in more innovative, creative, and mission-minded models that take education out of the comfort of campus to different locations, including online. These alternatives are popular because the rigid full-residency modes of delivery are expensive to operate and are no longer sustainable. Matt Ayars (2022, p. 32) writes, "With a shrinking market and increasing costs, the long-standing model for TE is becoming unsustainable, especially for schools without denominational backing or a sizable endowment." Emmanuel Bellon agrees, "If institutions are to achieve financial sustainability, then the residential model must evolve into something that is equally effective but less expensive to operate" (Bellon, 2017, p. 185). Other equally effective and affordable alternatives are offered away from campus settings.

Low-Residency

Low-residency training involves periodic in-person gatherings as teachers and learners are geographically separated during part or all of the learning process. There are many forms of low-residency modes of learning. These include correspondence studies, modular training, and hybrid (blended) online learning. Many institutions offered various forms of correspondence studies in the past. Students would receive class notes by post. They would study them over a duration of time. Some institutions asked students close by to visit the campus for exams. Some would mail the exams to students. However, correspondence studies are no longer popular partly because of the duration it takes students to complete courses. New technologies have also replaced postal services that were slow and unreliable. Courier services are prohibitively expensive for theological institutions intending to send course notes, exams, and other materials to students, so it is not an option. Further, institutions have embraced low-residency extension sites where they conduct training in the evenings or on weekends. Bi-vocational students find this model helpful because of time constraints and other commitments. Hybrid (blended) learning, an instructional model that combines in-person instruction with periods of online or other modes of distance learning, is often preferred over residential modes.

No-Residency

No residency programmes are offered exclusively without in-person physical interaction between instructors and students. There are many forms of no-residency programmes. These include various forms of non-formal learning, informal learning, and online learning (web-based instructional models). These forms of learning attempt to eliminate or at least reduce educational barriers such as time, distance, age, place, pace, space, etc. In these formats, students learn from the comfort of their homes and communities. The internet has opened opportunities for e-learning, although because of the challenge of intermittent electricity and poor internet accessibility, Africa's institutions are reluctant to embrace fully online education.

Apart from the South African Theological Seminary (SATS), there are not many established fully online seminaries in Africa. Many churches and institutions prefer hybrid (blended) learning because of the value they see in face-to-face interactions and the misgivings they have about spiritual formation via technology, the supposedly disembodied nature of online learning, and the potential of online learning to foster individualism. Online education is gaining traction despite these misgivings and might even replace traditional TE if the words of Kevin Smith (2021, p. 150), President of SATS, are accurate; "e-learning will become the dominant form of TE in Africa because it is more effective and efficient than traditional modalities." Mark Nichols (2011, p. 5) agrees, "Online theological distance education (OTDE) is emerging as a major form of TE." Ayars (2022, p. 33) affirms, "Online seminary education is here to stay, and it is a win."

Advocates of e-learning argue that e-learning is deeper through online means because "each student must contribute to every topic, and as students think through written posts with probably greater care than most verbal interactions in a face-to-face classroom, the quality of their interactions is generally deeper, and therefore, more formative of good pastoral attitudes and praxis" (K. G. Smith, 2021, pp. 152-153) and because of the intentionality required especially the partnership between online schools and practitioners and churches, spiritual formation is possible via online technology (Jung, 2015, p. 15).

The rapid acceleration of internet access and the widespread use of smartphones have expanded opportunities in e-learning. However, many theological institutions in Africa do not have access to the Internet. Only 28 percent of Sub-Saharan Africa's population can access the Internet, and millions have no access to mobile broadband coverage (Ramji, 2022, p. 24). Despite the challenge of internet accessibility, Africa's digital opportunities continue to expand rapidly. According to Catherine Muraga (2023, p. 5), the Managing Director of Microsoft Africa Development Centre, "Africa is the world's last and largest untapped market, a significant consumer of digital infrastructure and technologies, and home to a growing young population." Consequently, "having the right digital skills can help individuals and businesses stay competitive and successful" (Muraga, 2023, p. 5). Individuals and businesses are not the only ones that need to embrace technology. Theological institutions, too, must re-align with current technological shifts, or it is going to be left behind. Technology is an excellent resource for TE; institutions must leverage it for training and the advancement of the gospel.

The new wave of artificial intelligence, for example, raises serious ethical and theological questions. John Lennox discusses some of these concerns in *2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity*. He notes that the most significant ethical question is, "How can an ethical dimension be built into an algorithm that is itself devoid of heart, soul, and mind?" (Lennox, 2020, p. 24). The Asilomar AI Principles developed and endorsed by key stakeholders at a meeting held in Asilomar, California, in 2017, attempt to set critical ethical principles governing the development of AI (Lennox, 2020, pp. 76-78). However, we know that we live in a broken world driven by profits and other interests, and it might be imprudent to expect too much from tech corporations. Theologians, educators, ethicists, and practitioners should continue to advocate for the proper use of AI and must be "involved in getting to grips with the ethical questions that are increasingly being thrown up by both actual and hypothetical technological developments" (Lennox, 2020, p. 225). They should also be aware of ways such tools are influencing education so that they can build the capacity to handle such changes.

The influence of technology on TE is no longer hypothetical. The Microsoft-backed OpenAI tool, ChatGPT (Generative Pretrained Transformer), released in November 2022, is affecting education in significant ways. Using prompts, one can instruct the AI computer to carry out different tasks like answering questions. ChatGPT can write academic essays in seconds. It can answer any question asked. Even before the world got used to it, OpenAI launched ChatGPT 4.0, a tool able to accomplish complicated tasks like turning texts into video. With such kinds of tools available to students, African theological educators must be innovative. They cannot compete with technology but must utilize it to enhance learning and teaching. Theological educators are exploring ways of harnessing ChatGPT for TE (Soon, 2023).

Nicholas Letting, the Chief Executive Officer at Kenya Accountants and Secretaries National Examinations Board (KASNEB), reiterates that a competency-based curriculum (CBC) offers better possibilities for the education required to prepare African students for the future. Through CBC, institutions examine skills and competencies required for specific jobs and then develop a curriculum that offers those competencies. Prof. Letting affirms, "Teachers of the future will need to be well-grounded in soft skills especially in digital technology, ethics, and integrity, [and] have emotional intelligence and exercise collaborative, mentorship and leadership skills" (Letting, 2023, p. 17). He adds, "The universities of the future must be different from those of yesteryears in that they must adopt virtual tools and borderless learning territories" (Letting, 2023, p. 17).

Exile or Pilgrimage?

Alternative forms of TE are prompting exciting questions, for example:

- What are the implications of current shifts to non-traditional education to the institution's mission and vision?
- What needs to change, and what should be retained? Why?
- If students now prefer to study part-time, do colleges still need facilities? What are the proper ways of stewardship of underutilized facilities?

- What investments need to be made considering the changes happening in education?
- What should institutions do to ensure faculty and students are genuinely ready for online education?
- What educational philosophies and ideals need to change in the light of the current shift?
- How should we form students for life and ministry using non-traditional means?
- What should institutions do to get their non-traditional programmes accredited? Is accreditation even possible (or desirable) for these forms of TE?

I attended the Triennial General Assembly of the Asia Theological Association (ATA) held from September 26th to 30th 2022 in Penang, Malaysia. The conference's theme was "The Digital Turn in Theological Education: Impact, Challenges, and Opportunities." The participants addressed one critical question: "Shall the digital turn in theological education lead to a new kind of theological education, or is it just an upgrade of the old?"

Rei Lemuel Crizaldo's presentation on digital ecclesiology was fascinating and relevant to this article. Crizaldo serves as Theological Commission Coordinator for the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). He presented about the shift to the digital space during the COVID-19 pandemic by churches around the world and its implications on theological training of pastors globally. He asked, "What do you feel about the online church?" For him, three images depict how Christians feel about the digital church. The images are "Exile," "Exodus," and "Easter."

- Exile: "Is the online church a tragic captivity of God's people that we have to endure but hopefully leave behind soon?"
- Exodus: "Is the massive move to online spaces the happy liberation God's people in need?"
- Easter: "Is online church a moment wherein the frail and beaten body of the church of old being raised to a new life?"

The exile motif is a viable way of understanding the Church and TE today. Lee Beach (2015, p. 20) argues in *The Church in Exile* that "the motif of exile offers one of the most provocative and potentially fruitful ways for the church to define itself in this particular historical epoch." Exile prompts theological creativity, new practices, and articulations of faith (Beach, 2015, p. 25; Brueggemann, 1997, p. 3), albeit not without challenges. African theological educators must learn to do theology and TE in exile, such as in unfriendly political environments, unstable governments, cities, and villages ravaged by poverty, and institutions struggling to survive. For many, online education is not an option because of poor access to the internet and unreliable electricity.

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher (2003, p. 8) writes in *A Biblical Theology of Exile* that "diasporic theology challenges the virtual capitulation to the normative status of nationalism as the only viable context for Christian theology and Christian social existence." Following this, we may ask, "Is traditional TE the only viable means of educating pastors?" Obviously, not. God uses different ways to prepare people for works of service at the church and outside the church, including in virtual environments. There is also a theological basis for authentic presence in a virtual environment. Such theology is rooted in the incarnation of Christ, where he took on an authentic body. Following in the footsteps of Christ, we must become human a new in every new context, including virtual contexts. It is in this more profound knowledge and formation that TE should aim.

Moses Audi (2014, pp. 6-8), President of Baptist Theological Seminary, Kaduna, Nigeria, provides another helpful outlook in his book, *The Church as a Pilgrim Community*. Audi notes that pilgrim consciousness is essential not only for the mission of the Church but for theological institutions that need to develop theological programmes that speak to the realities of pilgrims (nomads, displaced persons, and refugees). TE is not only serving pilgrims, but it is also on a pilgrimage discovering itself in the context of new challenges in the world. It is constantly reinventing itself to stay relevant and alive to God's mission. In that regard, TE is a restless sojourner sustained by the hope of finding rest in a God-defined 'home' (J. K. A. Smith, 2019, p. 11). This "restless sojourning" should be done in collabora-

tion with others and must always involve a "return to our people, becoming their companions in life and their travelling partners" (Éla, 1988, p. 182). As discussed below, TE has often left the actual beneficiaries of TE behind because of the irrelevant and un-contextual curriculum. We need to go back 'home' to the people by serving them through an adequately crafted TE curriculum.

TE is discovering a new home in new models of training men and women for ministry, whether in the local church, para-church organizations, or in the marketplace. But many Christians are still hesitant about new models of training. They have mixed feelings about them. Some feel like they are in exile. They feel isolated, disrupted, and alone in the wilderness. They don't know how to respond to the rapid shifts in TE. Others see the rapid shifts as an exodus, a movement from the past, a pilgrimage to a glorious future full of possibilities amid contemporary challenges such as declining enrolments, sustainability, irrelevant curriculum, accreditation, and the need to form prophets that speak truth to power. I will briefly focus on these possibilities below.

Quo Vadimus: What is the Way Forward?

Sustainability

Emmanuel Bellon (2017, p. xiv) provides a broad definition of sustainability in regard to theological institutions. "For theological institutions, financial sustainability is the ability to fully meet operating costs while effectively fulfilling its organizational mission with an emergency financial reserve that ensures operations for at least one year, while maintaining an institutional capacity that attracts funding for capital projects." With this broad-based definition, sustainability is more extensive than finances. It is about an institution's mission, capacity, and future prospects. With this in mind, it is clear that theological institutions in Africa do not meet this criterion. Bellon (2017, p. 3) graphically writes, "The carcasses of struggling institutions littering every corner of the continent bear witness to [endemic financial challenges]." Is there a way out? Bellon (2017, p. 3) writes, "These ailing institutions are still hopeful that somehow a contextually relevant remedy will emerge to set them on a path to financial sustainability." The challenge before us is to

embrace contextually relevant remedies to financial challenges. Are seminaries ready to explore these viable models? What are these models?

Some theological institutions have transitioned to university status in the hope that they will attract more students and thus make more money. Some reputable Christian universities in Kenya, for example, started as Bible schools. These include Africa International University (formerly Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology), St Paul's University (formerly St Paul's United Theological College), Scott Christian University (formerly Scott Theological College), Kenya Highlands University (formerly Kenya Highlands Bible College), and others. Similarly, some theological institutions have been integrated into state-funded universities as departments of religious studies, for example, at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Nguru (2014, pp. 57-58) summarizes the challenges associated with transitioning to university status among Kenya's seminaries:

> It was clear from this survey that while the leaders of these new universities expressed positive hopes for a more comprehensive educational ministry to their societies, most of them felt that they had been pressured in this new direction. Their church constituencies and sometimes their national accreditors had pushed them to broaden their curricula to university status. They also felt compelled by the chronic problems of sustainability experienced by small theological schools continent-wide … It was clear from this study, and from the conversation … that these leaders were quite anxious about how they would withstand the various pressures to secularize: from the government, from the student body, and from the curriculum itself. How could they remain a Christian community of learning while teaching predominantly non-religious topics to students whose own faith commitments were less certain, and in a political environment that was less favourable to sustaining Christian purpose in institutions? That was the greatest question of the hour for these leaders.

Two significant challenges face theological studies departments within multidisciplinary Liberal Arts institutions in Africa. The first is neglect by the broader university because of the perceived non-profit

nature of theology departments. Simon Degbe (2014, pp. 240, 245) correctly captures this reality in his article on Christian institutions in Ghana. He notes that departments of theology are often seen as "cashless cows," which are "cash-consuming and unprofitable to run" compared to "bread-basket" departments e.g., Business, Law, Technology, etc. Consequently, theology departments are "neglected, poorly resourced, ill-equipped and their very identity, mission and survival threatened." Eventually, unless properly stewarded and supported, the broader university swallows the theological education vision and mission (Degbe, 2014, p. 244).

There is a real danger of mission drift, seductive liberal ethos, and secularistic bents (e.g., the temptation to move education away from the influence of faith) facing Liberal Arts institutions in Africa (Carpenter, 2014, p. 3; Kintu, 2019, pp. 159-186; Mulatu, 2017, pp. 190-201). Mission drift is not unique to universities, of course; it is a danger facing many faith-based organizations (Greer *et al*, 2014). Joel Carpenter captures the reality of mission drift in a conversation he had with a founder of a Christian university: "We wanted to honour the Lord in higher education … and we wanted to serve the needs of our people. But today, he went on, most of the professors are part-time, and not Christian. Some of us wish that we could become a Christian university once again … What can we do?" (Carpenter, 2014, p. 3).

Despite the overwhelming challenges faced by Liberal Arts universities in Africa that were previously seminaries, they continue to serve as salt and light in very complex environments. Take, for example, the Université Shalom de Bunia (USB) in the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a region torn apart by conflict. USB was previously known as the Theological School of Northern Congo (ETCN). It transitioned in 2007 to a Christian university. It now offers environmental studies, medicine, administration and management, agriculture, development studies, and theology. George Atido, who serves as Vice Chancellor, notes that USB has slowly been exerting its prophetic voice in a country devastated by war.

The Development Faculty worked the last seven years to help pygmies make a transition from essentially indentured servitude to

timber barons to become sustainable farmers who also take care of the environment. The Faculty has initiated informal reforestation programmes that encourage pygmies to take care of nature as they draw their daily bread from it. As a result, 90 hectares (222 acres) of forest has been legally secured for a pygmy band as their own and 17 pygmy households have successfully embarked on farming and reforestation using tropical species. This experience is now being replicated from 2 to 9 other villages and the total secured forest area has increased from 90 hectares to 1110 hectares (approximately 2741.7 acres) (G. Atido, personal communication, May 2, 2023).

The issue of sustainability of TE is here to stay. Theological institutions should enhance sustainability. They should leverage philanthropy from alumni, local churches, donor agencies, Africans, and African churches in the diaspora. However, African Churches must not depend on Western philanthropy. They must prioritize investing in their TE colleges and universities.

It has been noted that many institutions in Africa operate like orphans. They do not have stakeholder support. Stakeholders expect that the schools will produce top-notch ministers, yet they do not support the education of those ministers. Executive leaders are serving in very stressful environments, and some of them are experiencing medical conditions that are stress related. I have personally observed Executive leaders attending conferences and sleeping during sessions. I asked one of them what was happening, and tearfully she said that the meeting was the only place for her to rest. She was not longing to go back to her school because, at home, staff members had not been paid; facilities were falling apart because of deferred maintenance; on-campus students lived in squalid conditions, and there were no funds for anything.

We do not have a lot of examples to point to. However, the Nigerian Baptist Convention and the Cameroon Baptist Convention provide positive examples of intentional support of theological institutions. The two conventions submit regular subventions to their seminaries mainly to support the payment of salaries. Other conventions and church councils have a lot to learn from the two West African Baptist conventions on deliberate support of TE.

Curriculum

Theological institutions need to audit and review the TE curriculum to make sure that it is relevant, contextual, balanced, and properly integrated (Nihinlola, 2014, pp. 28-30). The curriculum must address contemporary issues affecting the church and society in Africa. Professor Zamani Kafang (2009, p. 38) wonders what TE says about contemporary African questions:

> What does the Bible say about youth, political prisoners, religious riots, Christianity and culture? What is it in the African culture that the church can use without harm or compromise? How should the church relate to the state, especially dictatorial government? Should traditional, and church marriages, be practiced by Christians? What really constitutes salvation? Should women, who remarried, while their husbands are alive, be accepted by the church and women's fellowship, and should women be ordained? How should Nigerian theologians and pastors respond to the issue of 'secret society'?

Sadly, many theological institutions operate as if they are training ministers for the Church in America or Europe. African institutions are still suffering from a colonial hangover. Schools work with "a *colonized* theological curriculum" (Ross, 2022, p. 23) without "local ingredients that can make it adequate for its local audience" (Awoniyi, 2014, p. 425). Textbooks, reference materials, online resources, and even illustrations are still heavily borrowed from the West. African resources are rarely used as primary textbooks. Why do we fail to do our theology "under the mango tree" (Nihinlola, 2013) and brew it "in an African pot?" (Orobator, 2011), yet we have what we need to do it? It is because of this grave neglect of African realities that TE is seldom making an impact on society. Sunday Odunayo Oke puts it so clearly.

Theologically, we have been spoon-fed by the West (Americans and Europeans) all along. Our theology is book theology; that is, what we read in books written by white theologians, or what we are told by American/Europeans, are accepted uncritically and given out undigested in preaching or teaching. What this reveals is the sad fact that Nigerian Christians have not yet began to do their thinking and to

grapple spiritually, morally, and intellectually with questions relating to the Christian faith. The Church in Nigeria has not produced theologians whose thinking bears the distinctive stamp of indigenous originality; and this, to say the least, is a signal mark of failure so far.

Theological graduates struggle to make an impact in their communities because the curricula and teaching methods that were employed did not adequately address contextual realities, challenges, and needs of African communities. Contemporary issues such as poverty, corruption, extremism, tribal conflicts, the health crisis, and moral decadence, among others, rarely feature in the curriculum. This Eurocentric approach can undermine the development of indigenous faith, failing to ground it on the African mind and cultural fabric. It produces a faith that is shallow and heavily dependent on outsiders.

Today's curriculum content and pedagogy need to reflect the new shifts in education. It needs to meet the needs of a diverse audience as Robert Banks (1999, p. 4) observes, "While TE caters to a wide audience, and the number of lay participants is increasing, so far this has had little impact on its content and pedagogy." We also need to develop curricula that meet the needs of "older, less mobile, and more part-time" students (Banks, 1999, p. 4). Jean-Marc Éla, in his book *My Faith as an African* (1988), urges African churches to innovate and explore new directions in TE for the whole church. "We need to *imagine* new solutions that do not simply copy former models, which are too marked by the historical characteristics of a particular period of Christian life" (Éla, 1988, p. 63). He concludes that the future of the Church in Africa depends on "declericalized" ministries – "making full use of the diaconal and priestly potential of the Christian laity" (Éla, 1988, p. 63).

We cannot achieve Éla's vision if we are not willing to employ a different ways of doing TE. This calls for courageous innovation, questioning, being questioned, and experimenting with the guidance of the Spirit in order to make full use of God-given resources available to the Church (Éla, 1988, pp. 63-64). One way TE can achieve this bold proposal that Éla suggested is to submit to external review by accreditors. To this, we turn below.

Accreditation

Theological institutions in Africa still struggle with the recognition of their programmes. Some governments do not accredit theological programmes. In some countries like Ghana, Rwanda, Congo Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, theological institutions cannot operate without government accreditation. Because of such requirements, many theological institutions transitioned to Liberal Arts institutions. In countries like Nigeria where the government does not accredit theological programmes, seminaries are forced to seek affiliation with accredited universities. The challenges discussed above followed them. In Kenya, the Commission for University Education (CUE), accredits only Bachelors' degrees and above. Many mid-level Bible schools do not meet the stringent CUE requirements and are thus left behind. They operate without any form of recognition of their programmes. Some seminaries have sought accreditation from Western-based accrediting entities, majority of which have no legal mandate to accredit schools.

The Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA), formerly, Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa, has been providing reputable accreditation for theological programmes since 1976 when it was formed. ACTEA accreditation (for formal TE) is fundamentally programmatic but also incorporates essential aspects of ACTEA Standards that may relate more to the institution as an organization than to the individual academic programmes. Hence, ACTEA Standards do not distinguish programmatic from institutional standards but categorize the essential standards for assessment under five components of administration, teaching staff, facilities, educational programmes, and students. However, not many schools have taken advantage of ACTEA accreditation. ACTEA accreditation focuses on five critical areas of an institution's health.

1) *Administration* – including governance of the institution, compilation of student outcome-based institutional objectives and mission statement, institutional stability concerning personnel and finances, organizational review policies and practices.

2) *Teaching staff* – including academic, professional, and character qualifications of faculty, Africanization, and faculty welfare policies.
3) *Facilities* – including the suitability of the site, well-managed library with sufficient contemporary resources, adequacy of office equipment and furnishings.
4) *Educational programmes* – including a quality curriculum that is contextual, balanced, and relevant, recognized admission standards, and globally accepted graduation requirements and programme length.
5) *Students* – including quality of community life, spiritual formation activities, students' policies and services, and regular assessment of student fees.

ACTEA's mission is to strengthen TE through accreditation, scholarship (research), and support services in order to serve the church and transform society. ACTEA's role as a hub for TE in Africa engages not only theological educators and their institutions but also church leaders, para-church agencies, and even global partners. Associate Membership provides an opportunity for a wide variety of institutions to join the ACTEA community. Thus, theology departments in Liberal Arts universities, already undergoing a lot of challenges as discussed above, would find a home in ACTEA where they can participate in capacity-enhancing programmes and be part of a continental fellowship of institutions that share the same ethos and ecclesial mission.

The International Council for Global Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) is a pacesetter in global standards for various forms of TE, including alternative forms of TE. ICETE is currently guiding conversations on non-formal TE, Competency-Based Theological Education (CBTE), and Micro-Credentials (MC). ACTEA is an active participant in this process. The ICETE's CBTE consultation in Rome from 6-9 September 2023 hopes to generate global standards on CBTE and MC. ACTEA hopes to have contextually relevant standards for alternative forms of TE.

Forming Prophetic Witnesses

TE should form ministers for the transformation of society. This is what I call the formation of prophetic witnesses. This is a missional issue for theological institutions. It is not something extra that they do. It is the very core of proper TE. It is about faithfulness to God's mission. TE appropriately done should produce men and women able to engage society in transformation. TE is privileged and positioned to form a certain kind of people. Privilege demands accountability. Dominique Gilliard writes about privilege in his *Subversive Witness.* He asserts that privilege, including "educational privilege," is "a unique opportunity for us to bear witness to who and whose we are," including strategically leveraging "our access, influence, and resources to subvert the status quo and advance the kingdom" (Gilliard, 2021, pp. xxiii, 14). Writing about Christian higher education in Nigeria, Olusayo Oladejo (2014, p. 298) agrees that Christian education correctly done should produce witnesses able "to play in the process of transforming current situations in the continent."

Critical questions emerge when we think about TE which serves the church and transforms society. For example, What does TE have to do with the cries of villagers and poor urban dwellers sleeping hungry because of empty granaries, as Jean-Marc Éla (1988, p.92) wondered in *My Faith as an African*? What hope does TE have for and give to the majority impoverished by disasters, hunger, and exploitation in Africa? What kind of TE enables a robust engagement with the realities of a complex world? What is God calling theological institutions to be and to do in the world? How will TE stay faithful to God's mission? What does it mean for theological institutions to be sent as Jesus into the world (John 20:21)? Does TE make a difference? What difference does it make in local communities? What is the prophetic witness of a specific theological institution in a specific context?

Andrew Wingate (1999, p.107) helps us understand the importance of the prophetic role of TE. He writes,

> The question of the *difference* made by TE can be seen as a double question: does it make a difference to those who

> undertake theological training? And does it make a difference to the church which receives them? Perhaps a prior question has to do with whether it is intended to make a difference. Some may consider that the role of education is to consolidate what people are and to prepare them to maintain a church which is happy to be where it is and has no desire for pastors who will "make a difference" by disturbing the status quo. Students preparing for such a church are often ready to learn their craft in a way that enables them effectively to preserve what is there.

But TE does or should make a difference. TE has resulted in a fundamental transformation of communities. It has also produced men and women who have not been simply satisfied with the status quo but have gone ahead to question, reimagine, innovate, and produce discernible changes in their communities. Graduates of many theological institutions have improved their knowledge of scripture and theology; they have honed their skills in ministry and have been transformed in Christlikeness. They have consequently made a difference. TE has changed them, their churches, and their communities. If TE does not make a difference, it is not worth pursuing. Then it is essential for stakeholders to go back to the drawing board and ask themselves why they exist.

The prophetic witness of a theological institution is an outcome of the institution's faithfulness to God's mission. A school must understand its mission clearly. It must clarify its mission in a specific context. Otherwise, it becomes irrelevant. I have written elsewhere (Tarus, 2023, p. 11-12),

TE is not merely an academic discipline. It is a trans-formational discipline working to strengthen and accompany the church in its mission for the transformation of God's good but fallen world. It is a TE of salt and light, a prophetic TE able to facilitate a different way of life. It is a TE that produces hopeful possibilities and the necessary commitments to realize those possibilities. It is a TE of hope in a world of hopelessness; a voice for justice and reconciliation in a world of injustice and conflict; a TE that witnesses the Lord's presence on earth. It is a TE with the courage to speak. But it cannot speak unless it understands the message and those to speak to. It

understands God's message clearly spelled in scripture (it has the resources and the personnel to exegete the Word) and context (it also has the resources and personnel to exegete the world). This exegesis of the world must be done in partnership with other disciplines – political science, sociology, anthropology, and others.

Discussing the implications of Jesus' sending of his disciples in John 20:21, "As the Father sent me, so I send you," Lesslie Newbigin reminds us, "This must determine the way we think about and carry out the mission; it must be founded and modelled upon his. We are not authorized to do it in any other way" (Newbigin, 1987, p. 1). Consequently, the mission of God is the reason for TE. It is the fuel that fans into flame what we do. The Church serves in God's mission, and it is TE that strengthens and accompanies it in that mission. God's mission is grand and calls for a grand vision. It calls for courage and boldness to reimagine, innovate, and act in new ways with faithfulness to the evangelical faith.

Martin Accad, President of Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, observes that the traditional TE that limited training to vocational service of ordination is no longer relevant, especially for regions where Christianity is the minority. In such contexts, TE is about preparing people for prophetic ministry. "In seminaries that are conscious of their 'prophetic' role, whether in the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] or outside of it, TE consists in a process of 'deconstruction,' 'paradigm shifting,' and the 'reconstruction' of an alternative consciousness" (Accad, 2019). A TE that is alive to the context will need to deconstruct, shift, and reconstruct itself so that it can provide a robust education able to serve the needs of society and the church. Stakeholders like churches, Boards, and funders need to support TE so that they are able to have adequately developed and relevant accredited programmes, institutional facilities to support the programmes, well-equipped libraries, well-trained and resourced faculty, robust executives, and engaged boards.

Conclusion

TE is undergoing rapid shifts globally. Africa's institutions have felt the waves of seismic shifts at home. What is the way forward for Africa's theological institutions? Are they to close shop and move to

something else? This article has shown that even though there are myriads of challenges facing TE today, there are opportunities to sustain TE in Africa. These opportunities need institutions to think outside the box. They must be willing to be courageous to innovate, question, submit to being questioned, and experiment with the guidance of the Spirit in order to make full use of God-given resources available to the Church. Theological institutions are on a pilgrimage to find a home in alternative ways of training ministers for the harvest field. This does not mean that they need to abandon traditional TE. These two forms of doing TE can mutually coexist. We just need to be willing to understand the times and know what to do (1 Chronicles 12:32).

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