

Towards a Contextualised Theological Education for Integral Missions in Contemporary Africa

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Abstract

When African people found answers to most of their life questions in the contextualised gospel, global Christianity experienced phenomenal growth from four million, in 1900 A.D., to 300 million, in 2000 A.D. Today, the context has changed considerably due to different factors like unemployment and economic instability, socio-cultural and political challenges, wars and insecurity, corruption and bad governance, and various degrees of environmental challenges. For the Church in contemporary Africa to fulfil and sustain its transformative mission of bringing *shalom* to its hurting world, its theological education (TE) curriculum must be adequate and possess sharp edges to equip its ministers for integrating the gospel proclamation into all facets of the African life and amid the changing and challenging contexts. Such ministerial formation will help the leaders live and guide other believers in bridging the lacuna between the Christian faith and public life in some quarters. In exploring steps towards a contextualised T.E. curriculum that achieves this goal, the writer posited that the contemporary challenges have made some conventional missionary strategies obsolete. Emphasising integral missional strategy, he highlighted five characteristics of such curriculum – purpose-driven and Pentecostal; public-engaging and inclusive; context-relevant and reproducible; culturally communicative; and comprehensive modelled. Consequently, he suggested that church pastors, as local theological educators, must create awareness on individual Christian integral missional role in *Missio*

Dei, equipping their members accordingly. He also recommended that theological educators in the seminary must emphasise this paradigm for the clergy they train to be local theological educators.

Introduction

Most scholars recognise the contribution of the African Churches to global Christianity. The contextualised Christianity in Africa led to a phenomenal growth of global Christianity from four million, in 1900 A.D., to 300 million, in 2000 A.D. (Shaw, 2000, pp. 37-38; Ogunewu, 2015, p. 18). Though the foreign missionaries had made a considerable impact on the continent by 1950, what affected the whole of Christian life in Africa developed later in line with the independent churches that became a common religious phenomenon in many parts of Africa (Hastings, 2008, p. 67; Ogunewu & Ayegboyin, 2017, p. 4). This significant growth and impact are a simple reminder of the centrality of contextualisation for transformative Christian missions. A critical part of the gospel contextualisation in Africa is the view of religion as an ontological phenomenon. It is not a weekly affair; every aspect of Africans' daily lives has religious or spiritual meaning (Mbiti, 1969, pp. 3, 15, 231-232).

This African view of religion agrees with the concept of integral missions, and it needs sustenance through the appropriate ministerial formation programme. Therefore, this paper explores the direction toward achieving a contextualised TE curriculum for integral missions in contemporary Africa. The writer argues that the contemporary challenges have made some conventional missionary strategies obsolete. Consequently, there must be a corresponding paradigm shift in the ministerial formation for the new strategies. Emphasising integral missional strategy, he highlights five characteristics of TE curriculum for integral missions – purpose-driven and Pentecostal; public-engaging and inclusive; context-relevant and reproducible; culturally communicative; and comprehensive modelled.

Perspectives on Contemporary African Missions

Discussions on contemporary Christian missions in Africa are linked with the emergence of the African Independent Churches (AICs) in

their three categories. The first, called Nativist or Ethiopian churches by some Church historians, seceded from the Western mission bodies because of the missions' failure to resolve the twin issue of autonomy and indigenisation of the African Church (Ayegboyin, 2011, p. 166; Oshun, 2016, p. 21; Mbiti, 1982, p. 1; Barrett, 2000, p. 43). The African Indigenous Churches, African Initiated Churches or African Instituted Churches are in the second category. They are locally founded by Africans, independent of Western missions, to deal with issues pertinent to African people's experience. Thus, their emphasis on spirituality, especially prayer, for solving all existential problems of man reflects their response to the perceived failure of the mission churches (Ayegboyin, 2011, p. 166; Ogunewu & Ayegboyin, 2017, p. 6). The third category constitutes the contemporary independent Pentecostal churches that resulted from various Pentecostal movements. The churches in this category got their inspiration from Western Pentecostalism and function according to their patterns (Ayegboyin, *Aladura Spirituality: Authentic African Initiative in Christian Missions*, 2011, p. 165).

Arguably, the phenomenon characterising churches in the three categories now cuts across all other denominations, including their charismatic manifestation in mainline Protestant mission and Roman Catholic churches. They are pragmatic in contextualising Christianity in African cultural and existential experience. They emphasise the Holy Spirit and his operations while stressing interpretation of Christianity to the African people's felt needs, experiences and worldview (Ayegboyin & Ishola, 2013, pp. 5-21; (Ayegboyin, 2011, pp. 167-169). They present a form of Christianity that readily responds to the deeply rooted fears of African people. Thomas Oduro affirms that they "are noted for their theological creativity and innovations. They easily blend and integrate African culture and tradition with that of Christian doctrine" (Oduro, 2011, p. 82). TE should also reflect such creativity and innovations for sustainable transformation.

Though contemporary global Church is facing fresh challenges, they are more intense for Africa. For instance, some churches in Africa could not operate during the lockdown seasons of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. While their West counterparts resorted in virtual

mode, they could not do the same because such technology is either totally or partially unavailable. When available, it could be too costly for the context of poverty of most Africans (Akano, 2020, p. 139). Similarly, it is becoming difficult for the church to operate its mission amid increasing insecurity. These include Islamic religious terrorism, fundamentalism and militancy, cultism, kidnapping, and an increased crime rate (Ogunewu, 2019, p. 171). The following Nigeria's experience illustrates the fact:

There was a sudden upsurge in cases of kidnappings, ritual killings, banditry, terrorism, rape, and other forms of criminality, cutting through all the nooks and corners of our nation. The recent case of the orchestrated murder of Deborah Samuel, a student of Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, by some thirsty elements under the guise of religion, is one case too many (Belo, 2022).

The Church that should bring *shalom* to the chaotic world is itself confronted by these challenges. This situation raises legitimate fears about the church's mission, especially using conventional strategy, in such a difficult time. Thus, a church that will engage the contemporary complex world must be integral in its mission because it agrees with both the ontological nature and the contemporary challenges of religion in Africa.

Integral Missions in Contemporary Africa

The mission of the church is to bring *shalom* to the world. *Shalom* refers to spiritual, physical, psychological and social peace that consists of a three-phase mediatorial priestly role – bearing witness to call people to salvation, nurture of the believers, and bringing healing of hearts, souls, bodies and societies. It is in response to the Lord's mandate to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20), and church planting has remained the strategy for realising this purpose (Moreau *et al.*, 2004, pp. 86-87). Therefore, the missionary's task is to ensure that their activities lead to the continuous making of disciples. This kingdomising mission is the transformative essence of the Church on earth.

Agreeably, Yusuf Turaki asserts that the church's role is priestly, pastoral, and prophetic. The priestly function includes standing in the

gap through prayers as instructed in 1 Timothy 2:1-3. Pastoral function refers to its teaching, counselling and giving of divine direction to society through the persuasive ministry of the Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19-20; Rom. 13:1, 7; 1 Pet. 2:13). In the prophetic function, though often costly under tyrannical leadership, the church serves as the voice for the voiceless to confront the injustices of the society as individuals and as an organised state (2 Sam. 12:1-14; Dan. 4:20-27; 5:17-28; Acts 5:29) (Turaki, 2006, p. 1371). This is the transformative ministry of the church in any society.

John Stott submits that the Christians have the inseparable task of witness (*martyria*) and service (*diakonia*) in the ever-changing, complex and pluralistic world. They are to achieve this by being continually relevant in the face of changing life issues in their context (Stott, 2006, pp. 7-47). Thus, their unique witness of the claim of Christ and the accompanying service must be relevant to their ministry's context. The inseparable nature of these tasks raises two critical issues. The first is the holistic nature of Christian missions. For the Africans, the physical must accompany the spiritual. The second issue is contextualisation. The service function must be relevant to context of life, experiences and existential challenges of the people. Thus, Christian missions must be integral.

Integral mission is the task of bringing the whole of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ and includes the affirmation that there is no biblical dichotomy between evangelistic and social responsibility in bringing Christ's peace to the poor and oppressed" (Lausanne Movement, 2021). In addition to emphasising the inseparability of the two main functions of Christian missions, points out their mutual imperativeness. When a Christian or group undertakes a direct proclamation or witness function, they often will simultaneously have some corresponding demonstration or service functions with it, and vice-versa. The implication is that service, or demonstration, is not a strategy or means of fulfilling the Christian missions, it is an integral part of it (Waweru, 2015, pp. 13-18). It recognises every believer as a minister in their right (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). Thus, integral mission is a transformative mission that focuses on total person in

every aspect of human endeavour in ways relevant to their total context. It brings biblical changes to persons and their contexts.

In sum, integral mission emphasises the natures of the missions of the church – proactively engaging, holistic and contextualised. To be engaging means that it does not isolate itself from its society. It engages with the daily activities of the society with gospel imperatives. The holistic nature focuses on meeting the existential needs of the individuals and society alongside reaching out to their souls. The contextualised nature makes it sensitive to the changing dynamics of the context of ministry. Thus, integral missions is both a nature and a strategy of missions. To experience transformative missions in this regard, there must be corresponding curriculum to that effect. However, because of the changing dynamics of the world, theology for transformative missions in Africa is not static. Therefore, the curriculum for a corresponding theological education is bound to be an open-ended affair, yet with some guidelines (Botman, 2013, p. xx). Hence, the next section focuses on a drive towards such curriculum.

Theological Education Curriculum for Integral Missions

It is undisputable that “theological education is central to the life of a living and growing Church. The ministry and service of any Church is a reflection of the quality of theological education given both to its leaders and members” (Karamaga, 2013, p. xviii). Theological education (TE) is simply about learning in theological knowledge. However, this paper broadly captures theological education from Walls’ (2013) perspective based on the Old Testament:

Addressed to Israel as a whole, the Torah was understood as instrument of education. Paul called it the *paidagogos*, the slave entrusted with the formation of God’s children. It hardly comes as a surprise then that, in the New Testament *didache*, teaching (i.e. theological education) is also for the Church as a whole. It is one of the special gifts the Holy Spirit bestows on some for the benefit of all. Such concentrated and extensive bodies of teaching as the Epistles to the Romans and to the Hebrews were not given as lectures to Divinity students; they were written to be read in churches. Our concern, therefore, is

theological education, not simply education for the ministry. We are interested in how the whole Church receives the divine *paideia*, not just how some of its practitioners are trained (Walls, 2013, p. 3).

Thus, every local church becomes a theological centre for training practitioners from different walks of life on how to integrate the mission of the church in their various public spaces – in business, schools, politics, and other market places. Assuredly, the local church is God's primary agent for holistic transformation of the society (Handley, 2013, p. 75). It also makes the church pastor the lead theological educator for their congregation. Thus, they equip saints to minister in both religious and non-religious public spaces. Such description of TE is consistent with the concept of integral mission discussed above.

Historically, TE was the basis for church operation amid the persecution of Roman Empire. It was the tool for both the edification of the believers and reaching out to inquirers of the faith. When it got to the Syriac world, it adapted the Jewish style of scriptural interpretation for the purpose of raising quality disciples. This style spread to other parts where Christianity spread, including the West, where contemporary Africa Christianity traces its origin. There are two distinct levels of this TE. The first level focuses on equipping the whole community of faith to Christianise their public spaces. The task here belongs to the church pastor. The second level is the education of the clergy. The better informed they are, the better they are able to perform their function in the first level. It is in this regard that "the most assiduous of early Protestant missionaries were the Moravian Brethren, who had developed a Protestant form of the dedicated community" (Walls, 2013, p. 9). They practised integral missions.

The primary resource book for any Christian theology, especially the evangelical tradition, is the Bible. Therefore, a foundational requirement for the associated TE is biblical soundness. Further, this paper identifies ten other features, amongst others, that any contextualised theological education curriculum must satisfy to bring a sustainable transformation through integral Christian missions:

1. Purpose-Driven and Pentecostally Inclined Curriculum

The purpose of Christian missions is to bring *shalom* to the world (Moreau, Corwin, & McGee, 2004, p. 13). The Great Commission mandate to disciple nations is the task of individual Christians and churches to participate in the *Missio Dei* (Shaw, Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning, 2014). Because of the difficulty that missional bodies find in transiting from church-centred to kingdom-centred missions, the resulting TE curriculum has been church planting focused. While church planting remains a viable strategy for fulfilling the Kingdom mandate to disciple nations, it remains only a means to achieving the purpose of missions (Logan, 2013, p. 81). In the New Testament, church planting existed as a means for TE, using the local church as a TE centre – Colossians 1:28; Matthew 28:19-20 (Shaw, 2014).

The implication is that the disciple-making, which is the core mandate of the Great Commission, can take place at any location as the *shaloming* purpose is not restricted to the church, but the public spaces of life. Thus, the TE that will lead the Church in achieving this purpose must target this kingdomisation purpose, even when it is not built around conventional church planting. The curriculum will be effective for equipping both church-based and marketplace ministers who would bring transformation to both religious and non-religious domains. Such curriculum must challenge and guide the church, create avenue and support for the church to approach church planting accordingly (Shaw, 2014).

Closely associated with the purpose is the spiritual nature of mission. Doubtlessly, the message of Acts 1:8 shows the importance of Pentecostal power in missions. *Missio Dei* is God's programme of reclaiming the enemy-occupied territory from the Devil. Scriptures like 1 John 3:6; 1 John 5:19; and 2 Corinthians 4:4 reflect this spiritual warfare dimension of the overall mission of God (Winter, 2007, p. 147). Agreeably, one of the factors responsible for Africa's leading role in world Christianity is "the formation and advancement of indigenous Pentecostal movements" (Ajani, 2008, p. 154). It made contextualisation of the gospel an African phenomenon. T.E. for integral missions in Africa must incorporate the elements of

Pentecostal experience as a way of dealing with the existential problems of the people.

2. *Public-Engaging and Inclusive Curriculum*

Integral missions focuses on the relationships of the Church, or its agencies, and the society. There are two basic extremes for the church to approach its relationship with its society – assimilation, isolation. In assimilation, the church, or an individual Christian, associates so much with the society that they tend to lose their identity. On the contrary, isolation makes the individual or church to distant themselves from the world, distorting the mission aspect of their identity. The third and the preferred option is engagement where the believer sanctifies the ongoing secular society (Dockery, 2008, pp. xiii-xiv, 3). A TE curriculum for integral mission must be designed to proactively engage the context of the student deliberately and intentionally. It would be alien to main issues and experiences of the society. These experiences must form the background for effective theologising.

A major implication of integral mission is that Christian missions is for both clergy and the laity. Thus, a TE curriculum that will serve transformative purpose in integral missions must incorporate formation platforms for all categories of ministers – clergy and laity, ‘full-time’ and bi-vocational, literate and illiterate, amongst others. For instance, it will target the clergy, or career ministers, for depth and support they may need to offer to the non-career ministers, according to Ephesians 4:12. As it targets the laity for ministry in various public spaces of the society (Walls, 2013, p. 9; (Akano, 2021, pp. 76, 88). Such training makes the trained pastor of any local church an effective theological educator of the local church and community. As the chief theological educator, they draw appropriate part of the curriculum to equip the laity adequately enough to minister in their respective public spaces.

3. *Context-Relevant and Easily Reproducible Curriculum*

Authentic theology is both an intellectual and a spiritual exercise dealing with questions of divine revelation and the holistic human condition as spirit soul and body, living in a physical environment.

Thus, the factors of revelation, experience, reason and tradition are critical for theologising. Therefore, TE should incorporate both the spiritual and intellectual aspects as integral parts of the curriculum (Kunhiyop, 2012, pp. 12, 19). The implication is that an engaging TE will not only focus on general and special self-revelation of God without considering existential challenges of people, including natural disasters and peculiar challenges in Africa. It would allow the application of the mind to blend these experiences in the light of the New Testament tradition.

The process of theological formulation, and the corresponding TE curriculum, must consider the social, religio-cultural, experiential context of the people as integral part. These factors lead to the establishment of the people's conceptual frameworks (Manus, 2003, pp. 34, 35). It must be a curriculum for public theology:

It does not only asks questions believers, theologians and the church ask but even deals with the aspirations and passions of the African continent, as reflected in the African Union's *Agenda 2063*. That agenda advocates far-reaching public policies to tackle the continent's darkest demons – bad governance, corruption, socioeconomic injustice, religious competition, tribal and ethnic conflicts and political domination (Kunhiyop, Foreword, 2020, p. xiii).

Thus, it would allow different learners to adapt, adopt, and apply the principles of the T.E. to their respective situations relevantly. When it is easily applicable, the local church theological educator can reproduce it for their marketplace theological educators, and so on.

While a TE for integral missions must speak directly to the context, it does so in the context of the global community. A healthy church is not an isolated body of believers whose theology is only relevant to its local context without having anything to do with the global community. Both the church and its theology, and hence its T.E., must be 'glocal' in nature, exhibiting its locality and catholicity in such a globalising world. Such TE curriculum simultaneously considers the interweaving influences, dynamics, and interrelatedness of the global and local community. Glocality affirms the diversity in

unity of the global (Van Engen, 2006, pp. 158-160, 165). Thus, while focusing at the immediate context, such curriculum must not make the integral missionary a novice in the global community.

1. Culturally Communicative Curriculum

Communication remains a critical issue in Christian missions. It has always required professional creativity and imaginativeness for linking the gospel with the contextual situations and various elements in the cultural *milieu* (Manus, 2003, pp. 45-46). Therefore, the TE curriculum has the task of investigating the various aspects of the culture of the people in the emerging church and how to use them during contextualisation. Of particular importance is the world of orality. Lovejoy (2012, p. 29) reports that about 80% of the world population are oral communicators either due to illiteracy or inadequate reading comprehension. For such people, conventional literacy-based learning approach becomes a challenge. Also, “While most of the pastors can read and write, their preferred and optimal learning style is oral, auditory, and sensory, rather than literary. This is pertinent because most of the educational and leadership formation models coming from the West are based on readings, writing assignments, and a one-way, lecture-based pedagogy” (Handley, 2013, pp. 75-76). Thus, if they will catch the essence of TE for transformation in their domain, it must be in “the familiar heart expressions of communication, native to our culture, to tell us how to be” (Logan, 2013, p. 80).

Some societies use folklores, music, proverbs, folktales, traditional poem amongst other media at home, at work, during relaxation and times of festival and rites of passage for enculturation. This is the basis for the success story of Bruce Olson among the Motilone Indians (Olson, 2004). For instance the Yoruba cultural elements like *ijala* and *iremoje*, each being useful for different mood of occasion to convey societal values to the younger generation (Adediji, 2012, p. 175). *Ijala* is a conversational chant that hunters use during events like coronations, hunters’ festivals and wedding, mostly to reflect self-praise and autobiography of the artists, their colleagues, kings and other important persons as well as their lineages and communities. They use it to teach societal values, discuss happenings and critique individuals or groups Alabi (2007, 13-17, 22). They

usually use *Iremoje* at hunter's funeral (africanpoem.net). T.E. can set these cultural elements to teach theological themes and Kingdom values at similar occasions they associate these elements.

2. *Comprehensive Modelled Curriculum*

The nature of integral mission requires different categories of people, contexts, and modes of learning. Consequently, its TE will require an integral curriculum consisting elements that help people of different learning forms, modes, styles, and approaches to learn. This is because learners in any theological education centre would always likely to be a mix of different forms, modes, styles and approaches. There are three major forms of learning – formal, informal, and non-formal. While formal learning is usually associated with the regimented class approach, and though there is always a challenge about differentiating between non-formal and informal, suffice it to say that all the categories would be required for a comprehensive integral mission TE curriculum (Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for integrative Learning*, 2014).

Happenings in contemporary world have caused a paradigm shift from on-site face-to-face learning mode to a virtual mode. The 2020 global lockdown experience for curbing COVID-19 made this more profound. In some cases, the learner or facilitator of TE may not need to travel to meet at a specific location before embarking on teaching-learning process. However, while it has enhanced learning in context, other learners still find it difficult to learn through virtual mode for different reason. Thus, TE for integral missions requires a curriculum with blended mode to cater to both categories.

Another area of integration relates to preferred styles of learning. Shaw (2014) enumerates David Kolb's learning models as comprising four types of learners – divergent, assimilative, convergent, and accommodative. A divergent learner prefers learning through concrete experience and reflective observation while a convergent learner does so through abstract conception and active experimentation. Also, while an assimilative learner prefers learning through abstract conception and reflective observation, an accommodative learner does so through concrete experience and active experimentation. Though a group of people may fall to one category predominantly, learners

everywhere are usually a mix of the four. Therefore, a curriculum with elements of each of these preferred styles will lead to the desired goal of transformation.

Consequently, an effective TE for an integral mission requires a curriculum that incorporates different styles so that each style applies to different learners at different stages of the learning process. Kolb's theory consider learning as a multidimensional approach that links theory and practice through a continuous four-stage cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation. It posits that an individual's experience plays a critical role in their holistic learning. Therefore, the curriculum should help the learner make sense of their experience through critical reflection, which serves as the feedback that reinforces their learning (Shaw, 2021, pp. 132, 133).

Conclusion

Given the African view of religion as ontological phenomenon, and the impact of contextualisation that resulted in a landscape growth of the global Church from 4 to 300 million within a century, this paper explored the direction toward achieving a contextualised theological education curriculum for integral missions in contemporary Africa. Such curriculum, which must be purpose-driven and Pentecostal, public-engaging and inclusive, context-relevant and reproducible, culturally communicative, and comprehensively modelled, will equip lay and clergy ministers of the Church in contemporary Africa to fulfil and sustain its transformative mission of bringing *shalom* to its hurting world. The study emphasised that, as God's primary agent for holistic transformation of the society, every local church is a theological centre for training laity practitioners from different walks of life as theological institutions serve to equip the clergy for effectiveness as local theological educators. They equip all saints for the works of ministry in private and public domains of African lives, and amid the changing and challenging contexts, which include the recent pandemic and insecurity situations.

Consequently, the following recommendations are worthy of note:

1. Theological educators, including church pastors, must create awareness of individual Christian's responsibilities in Church mission as part of *Missio Dei*. They also need to understand this from integral missions perspective that their public space involvement has proclamative imperative.
2. Church pastors, as local theological educators, must engage in systematic teaching of the Word of God in context relevant way. Such relevant teaching series will equip their members with adequate understanding of biblical principles of life to engage their public spaces, based on their various walks of life.
3. Theological educators at the seminaries, Bible schools, pastoral schools, and at the local church levels must constantly create rooms for feedback from their respective students. Such feedbacks will guide in the continuous adjustments of the curriculum to sustain its relevance to their context.

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