

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA IN FOCUS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE AFRICAN CHURCH AS IT MOVES TO THE FUTURE

DICKSON NKONGE KAGEMA

Chuka University, Kenya, Stellenbosch University, South Africa
dicknkonge@gmail.com; dnkonge@chuka.ac.ke

The future of the African Church looks bright with its tremendous numerical growth, but careful assessment shows that it is failing to match numerical growth with the development of its personnel. Using the Anglican Church of Kenya as an example, this study shows that the African Church is in crisis due to the lack of enough qualified personnel to lead it. If the Church in Africa is thinking about its future it must think of the theological education through which its leaders are equipped. The African Church currently has a feeble theological education system, characterized by unviable theological institutions, irrelevant curricula, low enrollment, and unqualified theological tutors among other challenges. For the African Church to take the right path as it moves to the future, it must revitalize its theological education system so as to prepare a sufficient number of well-equipped leaders to match the rapidly changing African society.

One indisputable fact is that the Church in tropical Africa is numerically growing, which makes Dickson Nkonge contend that it is becoming the centre of global Christianity.¹ Jurgens Hendriks states that one success story in Africa, especially after the colonial period, is the growth of the Christian Church.² This view is supported by other scholars, among them P. Jenkins, who asserts that the Christian world's centre of gravity is currently shifting southwards to Africa, Asia and Latin America.³ This is not a new phenomenon.

In early 1980s, David Barrett predicted that by the beginning of the twenty-first century, there would be more than 351 million Christians in Africa, implying that African Christians will have grown from 9% to over 48%.⁴ Today, there are more than 541 mil-

lion Christians in Africa,⁵ who, according to the Catholic World News, constitute over 50% of Africa's population.⁶ In the last fifteen years alone the Church in Africa has seen a 51% increase, which works out on average at around 33,000 people becoming Christians each day.⁷ Africans now represent 20% of the world's Christian population and current trends suggest that within a few decades Africa will outstrip Europe and America to become the continent with the world's largest number of Christians.⁸

In many African countries, Christianity is the religion followed by the majority of the people. For example, in Kenya Christians constitute 81.3% of the population, in Uganda 84%, and in Nigeria 50.5%.⁹ Thus as attested by J. S. Mbiti, D. Barrett, P. Jenkins, L. Sanney and H. Hendriks among others, the African Church is experiencing a remarkable numerical growth.¹⁰ The question we need to ask ourselves is, 'Given this rapid growth, what is the future of the African Church? Is numerical growth an indication that the African Church has a bright future?' While the future may be determined by many factors, I want to focus on the critical issue of personnel development as the key to the success of the Church in Africa.

William Yu considers human resource development as a priority for the success of any organization.¹¹ Jack Wiley also affirms that an organisation's success depends on having good managers.¹² Nkonge regards the Church as an organisation which like any other requires good leaders and managers for its success.¹³ Therefore, concern for the future of the Church can not fail to look at the quality of Church leaders leading that Church. In this regard, theological education through which Church leaders are prepared is the key to understanding the nature and the future of the church in Africa. With the aim of understanding the general situation of the continent, this article looks at the particular case of the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), the largest protestant denomination in Kenya, in the hope that the study of the ACK will give us a picture of what is happening across Africa as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on the theological education in the ACK so as to understand how personnel development is being conducted in the African Church. It is based on research conducted in the five ACK Provincial theological colleges where the ACK trains its leaders, namely St. Andrews, Kabare; Berea in Nakuru; Bishop Hannington, Mombasa; St. Philip's, Maseno and St. Paul's, Kapsabet. I designed questionnaires that were filled by the Principals of all five ACK colleges. These were distributed in September 2016 and were returned by the end of that year. The main areas covered by the questionnaires included the history of the colleges, student enrollment and their entry points, the number and academic qualifications of the teaching staff/lecturers, the number and qualifications of the non-teaching staff, the financial situation of the colleges, the number of students sponsored by each ACK diocese or any other denomination, the college's physical facilities, the college's projects, and the curriculum.¹⁴ During the month of November 2016, I visited the five theological colleges to verify the information given by the Principals and also had interviews with the lecturers and students. In every college I interviewed at least three lecturers and ten students.

Random sampling was employed to select the respondents. The main areas of focus with the respondents were their qualifications, their feelings about the terms and conditions of service, the viability of the theological colleges and the curriculum. To gain more light on the theological training in the ACK, church leaders, including seven bishops, nineteen clergy and thirty-eight lay leaders (including parish executives and evangelists) were purposely selected from different parts of the country and interviewed orally. The respondents for this study thus totalled 129.

AN ONGOING CHALLENGE IN THE AFRICAN CHURCH

While assessing the situation of the Church in Africa in the pre-independence era, that is, in the 1950s, a missionary scholar, Roland Oliver found that while the African Church was growing at a tremendous rate, it had failed to attract the African elite into its leadership. Africans who had completed their training in the mis-

sionary schools preferred to work for the colonial government as administrators rather than in the Church. This was in contrast to the initial years of colonialism in Africa where the elite Africans became either chiefs or church leaders. With the development of primary and secondary education, and the widening of secular opportunities, the churches had begun to be outpaced in the competition for the best-educated Africans.¹⁵ The situation even became more worrying with the beginnings of higher education, when most of the best-educated Africans opted for secular jobs while the African Church only attracted those with low academic standards.¹⁶ Oliver's conclusion is telling as we reflect on the future Church in Africa. He said that, 'A Church led by peasant priests risks disintegrating at the centre while expanding at the circumference'.¹⁷ In other words, the Church was gaining roots in Africa and was attracting many followers, but if it lacked quality leadership, as was the case, then it was going nowhere. So what we need to ask ourselves is, 'Is the situation different today?'

Twenty years later, in 1970s John S. Mbiti raised a similar concern that the African Church was experiencing a tremendous numerical growth, yet not developing its leadership. He stated that 'The Church in East Africa and Africa as a whole has come into existence and has grown evangelically and not theologically'.¹⁸ To Mbiti, the evangelical growth also concerned numerical strength. The African Church had grown extensively in terms of sponsored schools, colleges, health centres and other physical facilities, but sadly the church that had produced majority of African leaders and thinkers had hardly any theologians or academically qualified church leaders. The African pastor remained the least educated person in society as opposed to the early centuries of Christianity in Africa when the church leader was the most educated.¹⁹ We need to examine whether the situation has changed.

In the 1980s, another African scholar, Jesse Mugambi raised a similar question, showing that the situation had not changed by then. He saw the African Church as having a real problem.²⁰ This was because while the secular post-independence elite needed clergy who could communicate effectively, this had not been so. The clergy still remained the least educated people in the society. Although

the success of the Church depends on the availability of well-trained leaders, churches in Africa lack adequately trained personnel to cope with the rapidly changing society.²¹ Mugambi went on to explain that the problem was being aggravated by the system of theological training itself where there was a lack of sufficient resources and indigenized conceptual tools, problems of analysis and synthesis, irrelevance of the training itself, and an uncontextualised curriculum which continued to negatively affect the development of church leaders in Africa.²²

These scholars were assessing the situation of the African Church in the later years of the twentieth century. We need to probe whether or not the situation has changed since then. There is no doubt, as Jenkins and several other scholars have affirmed, that the Church in Africa is numerically growing,²³ but the challenge is whether it is growing in terms of personnel development or what Professor Mbiti regards as 'theological growth'. These scholars present us with a challenge which we cannot fail to reflect on as we think about the African Church and its future.

If the future of any organization is determined by its ability to develop its leaders as Nkonge and others claim,²⁴ then it is right to agree with them that the future of the Church is largely determined by its system of theological education through which its personnel are developed.²⁵ Nkonge elucidates that theological education has remained the backbone of the Church from the time immemorial and it determines the route that the Church takes.²⁶ Also A. Chilver, addressing a different context, contends that future of the Church is largely determined by its theological education system. He remarks that 'As the theological colleges go, so the churches go . . . If theological colleges veer to the left with many doubts about the authority of the scripture, the Church in time will be so much affected . . .'²⁷ Therefore, if we have to assess the future of any Church we have to look at its theological education. This justifies our concern in this paper. Prof. Jurgens Hendriks in his inaugural lecture titled, 'The future of the Church and the Church of the future', suggested theology as a major determinant to the future of any church. He observed that 'theology belongs to the Church and grows from the seed of God's revelation and the work of the Holy Spirit.'²⁸ This

means that there is no way in which the Church can ignore theologising if she hopes to survive for long. The Church that is thinking of her future must also think of her theology. It is in line with this thinking that theological education becomes a necessary tool for determining the future of the Church. If we have to think of theology, then we need to start by looking at the system in which theologians and church leaders are prepared.

Jesse Mugambi singles out evangelization as the main factor determining the future of the Church and the Church of the future in Africa. He says that the Christian faith demands that its adherents should be involved in evangelism.²⁹ While this is true, we need effective evangelists to carry on task of evangelization. This again calls for the proper training of those involved in evangelization or mission work. What would be the future of the Church whose evangelists are not properly trained? Theological education must therefore be considered if we are thinking of evangelisation as we need evangelists who are well trained to take the Church into the future. If evangelists or pastors are poorly trained, their work will be shallow and this will greatly affect the future of the Church. In this study we shall use the example of the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) which in 2012 was the largest protestant denomination in Kenya according to Dr. Nkonge.³⁰

IS IT AN EXPANDING FLOCK WITHOUT SHEPHERDS?

J. Horgath, K. Gatimu and David Barrett give us a challenge which we can never fail to think about as African Christians if we are at all concerned with the future of our Church. They argue that the Church in Africa today presents us with a crisis which we cannot ignore as we move to the future. They note that:

Black Africa has a church which has grown extraordinarily fast. But from another viewpoint it is not so happy: this church has too few pastors equipped to tend it. It is this that presents us both with a challenge and an opportunity today in Africa. There are many sheep but few shepherds.³¹

An important question to ask ourselves is ‘What causes the Church in Africa to grow if pastors are not enough?’ The research

conducted by Nkonge in Kenya in 2010 showed that although the ACK is a rapidly growing denomination it does not have enough clergy to run it. A Church that had a membership of about 3,711,890, and was growing at the rate of 6.7% per annum, was served by only 1555 clergy. This translated to clergy per Christians' ratio of 1:2387.³² This indicates that one pastor cares for more than 2000 people. How practical and effective in terms of the service expected from the clergy can this be? In 2012, Nkonge conducted a similar study for the other mainline Churches in Kenya and the results were even worse. For example, in the Catholic Church the ratio of clergy to Christians was 1:6104, in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa it was 1:4625 and in the Methodist Church of Kenya it was 1:4656.³³ Interestingly, all these denominations are numerically growing at a rapid rate.³⁴ In our current study, I wanted to enquire from the bishops, clergy and lay Christian leaders if the situation has changed or not. 63 (98.4%), felt that nothing had changed while only 1 (1.56%) was of the view that there were enough pastors. Therefore lack of sufficient clergy to serve the growing population of Christians continues to be a major challenge facing African Church. So what causes this growth if there are not enough pastors?

The respondents were asked about this and the reasons they gave were as follows: Christians by birth- 49 (37.98%); evangelization done by lay/un-ordained church leaders- 43 (33.3%); rapid social change causing difficult situations that make people seek refuge in the Church- 17 (13.2%); love and unity among brethren- 10 (7.8%); religious freedom-8 (6.2%); and the inculturation of the Gospel in the local cultures - 2 (1.55%). Although it is ranked second, the contribution of lay people to the growth of the African Church in the absence of the clergy cannot be overemphasized. As M. Grundy emphasizes, the ministry of lay people since the Reformation has significantly contributed to what the Church is today.³⁵ There is a lot we can learn from the Catholic Church, which although it has few priests, places considerable emphasis on lay church leaders such as brothers, sisters and catechists who, unlike in the Protestant Churches, are trained people. For example in 2012, the Catholic Church in Kenya had only 1479 priests, but had also more than 7000 trained sisters, brothers, sisters and catechists.³⁶ This means that even though the priest may not be able to reach every-

one in his congregations, other trained personnel are there to continue the pastoral work. This is a noble idea worth emulation by all the Churches in Africa. The assumption that theological education is only for those seeking ordination is wrong. Theological education should be for all church leaders whether ordained or lay. This is what will ensure that the African church will survive even without enough clergy.

FACTS ABOUT THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Our study of theological education in the ACK revealed the following:

First, most of the African theological colleges/institutions where theological education takes place are unviable. This is evidenced by inadequate facilities, poor utilization of resources, low enrolment, and poor staffing (See appendices 1-4). For example, in the ACK the five colleges are scattered all over the country, and what is worrying is that the Church has failed to put its resources together so as to train its leaders effectively. The so called ‘provincial colleges’ are rather ‘tribal colleges’ stuck in each of the ACK’s region with little regard as to whether the facilities are adequate to further the effective training of church leaders. At the beginning of this century, Bishop Githiga’s Commission had recommended that the five colleges be amalgamated into one or two, so as to put resources together for the effective training of church leaders.³⁷ This recommendation was not implemented due to the cancer of tribalism which continues to wreck every sector of the country.³⁸ If the African Church wants to succeed she must think of how she can consolidate her resources. There would be nothing wrong with having two or three colleges or universities strategically placed, where African church leaders can be trained. What is the need of training our church leaders abroad when we can train them on our continent, and even do so more effectively?

Second, low student enrollment in the theological colleges continues to hamper the development of theological education in Africa (see appendix 2). Due to low enrollment, African theological colleges cannot sustain themselves financially and have to rely on donations from abroad for survival. As long as colleges are not able

to attract enough students for ministerial formation, Churches in Africa will continue to suffer due to lack of enough clergy. I enquired from the respondents after the causes why the African Church is unable attract many people to its ordained leadership. 76 (58.9 %) cited poor remuneration of the clergy by the Church as compared to the other sectors as the main reason, while 53 (41%) were of the view that the fees charged in the theological colleges are very high. Although these two issues have been raised elsewhere as some of the main hiccoughs to the development of the African Church,³⁹ little has been done by the African Church leadership to address them. The African Anglican bishops meeting in Nigeria in 2004 resolved to support their students in theological colleges fully and ensure that those who attained high education levels such as Masters degrees and Doctorates are retained in the Church, but so far this has not been implemented.⁴⁰ For example, in the ACK there are only three clergy with doctorates who are serving in the dioceses as full-time employees. The other challenge is that most of the students in the theological colleges have been left to finance their own education. Initially the dioceses or Churches sponsored their own students in the colleges or Universities. The problem now is that students or their guardians struggle to pay for their theological training but when they graduate, the church cannot pay them well. This being the case, the Church cannot control or retain them. Many of them keep moving from one place to another in search of greener pastures. Those trained abroad opt to remain and work there after the completion of their studies as the terms are better. This creates a leadership crisis in the Africa Church, where the Church is led by leaders who are not properly trained. Such a Church will continue struggling for a long time at least when it comes to the articulation of issues by the church leaders. The problem is aggravated by the fact that African society is rapidly changing with highly educated people in all fields. For example, African churches are full of Agriculturalists, business people, engineers, professors, doctors, teachers and so on. Mugambi says that it is very difficult for poorly trained clergy to communicate effectively to such Christians.⁴¹ The future of the Church in Africa will depend on its ability to retain its well trained personnel and also its willingness to support its students in the theological colleges.

Third, the Curriculum used to train church leaders in the African Church is un-indigenized and irrelevant (see appendix 5). It is designed using western models and therefore cannot meet the growing needs of the African society where students serve after graduation. Moses Njoroge observes that the curriculum used in the ACK colleges (and in fact in all African theological colleges) is so loyal to the traditional theological curriculum received from European and American missionaries that it is foreign and incomprehensible to the African students who are meant to lead the African Church after graduation.⁴² According to Joseph Galgalo the curriculum used to prepare leaders for the Church in Africa needs to be contextualized if we want to have a Church that will stand now and in future.⁴³ Mugambi asserts that as long as the curricula of African theological colleges and seminaries are imported from elsewhere, pastoral training will continue to be out of tune with the cultural and religious dynamics of African societies among whom the trainees are expected to work after graduation and this will continue to have a negative impact on African Church and society.⁴⁴ Professor Mugambi goes on to advise that:

Urgent transformation of the curriculum for theological education in Africa is a necessity, not an option. Curriculum development is a professional undertaking, which must begin from the context of the learners— from what they already know— then proceed towards helping them discern those texts and experiences that can provide relevant knowledge, skills, and expertise appropriate for each particular context. Jesus was exemplary in his pedagogical skills. He would illustrate all his teachings with parables, metaphors and idioms derived from the cultural experience of his audiences. At the beginning of this third millennium, a contextually relevant curriculum for theological education in Africa ought to effectively deal with at least two issues: How to prepare African pastors, priests, lay leaders, teachers and other personnel without alienating from their culture? How to prepare them to cope with the present split between Christian identity and practice as characterized in much of African Christianity today? ⁴⁵

The need for a contextualized curriculum must thus be prioritised if we want to have a Church in Africa that is contextually relevant. Unless appropriate theological training is given to the church leaders, the church will continue to suffer from the fact that Christianity in Africa will still be seen as a foreign religion. If we hope to

have a sound theological education system, hence a relevant African church, we should listen to Galgalo who asserts that:

A theological curriculum is the most important of all the factors in the teaching of theology. It should be given the attention it deserves by all stakeholders in theological training in Africa to ensure that clergy and all people of God in our Church are taught with a relevant and contextual curriculum, which addresses the pertinent issues affecting them in the contemporary world.⁴⁶

iv) There is evidence of lack of qualified theological educators or lecturers in the African theological colleges (see appendix 3). For example, in the ACK there is no full-time lecturer with a doctorate in any of the five theological colleges. Also although the minimum recommended academic qualification for a lecturer in the Provincial theological college is a Masters degree⁴⁷, some of the lecturers have only a Bachelor's degree. Theological educators play an important role in the preparation of church leaders and their quality largely determines the kind of leaders the Church gets from the theological colleges. It is thus possible for one to get concerned on the future of the African Church if those entrusted with task of preparing its leaders are not qualified. I wanted to enquire from the respondents why the ACK theological colleges fail to attract qualified teaching staff. All the 129 (100%) respondents cited poor remuneration as the main cause. This is an important issue for the African Church leadership to address as the church moves to the future. This may also contribute to the fact that there are few theologians in Africa. For instance, Mugambi sees the argument that the Christian world's centre of gravity is shifting towards Africa as advanced by Jenkins and other theologians as baseless because there are very few African theologians involved in scholarly work and publications.⁴⁸ For African theological colleges to get qualified lecturers they must be prepared to pay them well, otherwise the few available will not want to leave their well paying jobs elsewhere. The future of the African Church will largely depend on its ability to absorb and retain qualified theological educators.

OTHER THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION MODELS

Due to the many challenges facing residential training in Africa such as high cost of training, jobs, family commitments and others,⁴⁹ the Church in Africa should endeavour to use other methods of theological training. Let us discuss some of them below.

Theological Education by Extension (TEE)

As the word 'extension' implies, this is a type of theological education which 'extends', 'adapts,' and 'expands' training opportunities to a great number of people without taking them away from where they live, work and serve as church leaders. It is a contextualised training.⁵⁰ K.B. Mulholland refers to TEE as 'decentralised theological education'.⁵¹ This is because TEE is a field based approach for providing theological education. It is 'decentralized' in that traditionally, the provision of theological education was understood to be the preserve of seminaries and residential institutions. This meant that the learner had to relocate to where theological education was being offered. In the process, the learner's productive contribution to society was interrupted. On the other hand, in TEE, instead of the learner relocating to the seminary, the seminary goes to the student.⁵² TEE is thus the answer for key and mature church men and women who are serving with serious and disinterested motives in their churches, but who are not as effective as they might have been because they have not been able to go for residential training due to many commitments. With TEE, a much greater and wider variety of church leaders are reached because theological training is made more accessible.⁵³ It is also relatively cheap, especially when compared to the high cost of training in theological colleges.

TEE as a model of theological education in the ACK was adopted in 1975 in response to a situation in which the Church was unable to produce sufficient and qualified clergy to meet the needs of the rapidly growing membership.⁵⁴ By the 1980s, TEE in the ACK was very strong and was found in several dioceses.⁵⁵ The biggest challenge however was that the ACK relied mainly on donations, especially from the Episcopal Church of the USA (ECUSA), to support TEE. When the ACK fell out with ECUSA because of

the consecration of gay bishops and recognition of the same sex marriages by the latter, ECUSA withdrew its financial support. This saw the death of TEE in the ACK because many dioceses were unable to support it.⁵⁶ Carlile College was given the responsibility of managing TEE in the ACK, a task that Nkonge says has not been undertaken due to its poor leadership.⁵⁷ He goes on to recommend that the ACK leadership revive TEE as a matter of urgency,⁵⁸ a recommendation that is essential for the entire African Church as it moves to the future. TEE is the answer for lay training in the Church.⁵⁹ As we have already said, lay church ministry and leadership is a force to be reckoned with in Africa today, because the growth of the Church is largely attributable to the un-ordained men and women who are involved in its daily activities. As Nkonge informs us, the ministry of the laity has been re-discovered in Africa, where many people participate in various church activities in the spirit of the 'priesthood of all believers'.⁶⁰ Equipping these church leaders through theological education is important so that they can carry on their task effectively. Since many of them are professionals in other fields, they need an educational programme that can train and equip them for church ministry, while they are involved in that ministry, yet at the same time are continuing with their professions and private engagements.⁶¹ TEE is the most ideal theological education model to achieve this. The African Church must continually think of it, since its future largely depends on the proper equipping of church leaders (lay and clergy).

Distance Learning, E-Learning and Part-Time Learning

These models have become ideal methods of training in many of parts of Africa today. For example, several universities and colleges in Africa are employing these modes and since they are cheaper and more convenient, they have attracted many students, especially adults. Unfortunately none of the ACK provincial theological colleges is applying them, which suggests that other African theological institutions are also reluctant to make use of them. If we are thinking of the future of our Church we should think of these methods as they will make it possible for us train more church leaders at lower cost.

CONCLUSION

Any Church which is thinking of the future must think of its theological education system. This is because it is through theological education that its leaders will be equipped for mission and ministry. The Church in Africa may pride itself on being a numerically growing Church, but if it is not growing in terms of personnel and theological output, then this will have a seriously negative impact on its future.

ENDNOTES

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- ²¹ Mugambi, *Biblical Basis for Evangelization*, pp.1-4.
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- ²³ P. Jenkins. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of the Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002)
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