



**"THE ROLE OF REFORMATION TRADITIONS / CHURCHES FOR (TRANSFORMATIVE) EDUCATION IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS".**

**IF YOU HAVE NO VOICE JUST SING: ENGENDERING THEOLOGICCAL EDUCATION IN Africa (St. Paul's University):<sup>1</sup>**

**Introduction.**

I appreciate the invitation to be part of this process and to share some of my reflections as I have journeyed with theological education being mentored by my sisters and brothers some in this room. I am glad to share the space with them. The topic Reformation, Education Transformation is timely, intriguing for what it brings to the fore

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<sup>1</sup> E Mombo and Heleen Joziassse, If you have no voice just sing, Handbook of Theological Education in Africa Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner (Editors)

including challenges and opportunities that are offered. It is historical, contextual and eschatological. Reformation Education and Transformation are interconnected and all have been significant in the growth of the church as I know it and especially for theological education. As a woman these are terms that have been good in regard to feeling that they have very inclusive but also terms that have contributed to the exclusion of women.

The reformation story in Europe is something that is studied by students of theology in the different disciplines. In the reformation the importance of education, literature, scriptures were central to each confessions or denominational tradition. ( Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Anabaptist, Mennonite, Quakers, etc ) all of which got their way to Africa through missionary and colonial movements and have reproduced more reforms through other church traditions like the African Independent Church.

Describing the religious scene of Africa Professor Ali Mazrui was coined the term "Africa's triple heritage", and made it popular through his series of lectures over the BBC.<sup>2</sup> The coinage was apt and correctly described Africans as impacted by a) the Indigenous Traditions, b) the Islamic ways and c) Western tendencies. For him Christianity was only part of what he called "Western tendencies." Similarly in the phrase "Islamic ways" he meant much more than Islam as a religion. He was referring to the total Arabic influence on Africa. Western tendencies referred to the total impact of the West on Africa. Indigenous traditions and encompassed African Traditional Religions.

On the growth of Christianity alone. Scholars of history like Elizabeth Isichei acknowledge the slow start of Christianity in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, a situation that changes in the twentieth century. When tremendous growth is witnessed and in this era of statistics other scholars like Walls, Jenkins, Bediako, Sanneh, have argued that the heartland of Christianity is no longer Europe or North America but Asia, Africa, and Latin

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<sup>2</sup> Ali Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, Boston: Little Brown, 1986.

America. While this is true of the growth of Christianity would it be the same for the growth of theology and theological education. How relevant will be the teaching of theology to the growth of Christianity?

The establishment of Christianity was within the establishment and growth of Colonialism after the Berlin conference of 1884, which created the physical boundaries and introduced the different European languages and ideologies in Africa. The introduction of different languages also introduced the different language and even the educational systems. The languages of French, Portuguese, and English have divided the continent into French English and Portuguese speaking. Writing about the rivalry between the missionaries and colonialists in Africa Eunice Kamara and Joseph Galgalo have made the following observations

Missionary settlements and the consequent foundation of missionary centers were structured along colonial administrative boundaries. Hence as each group of missionaries scrambled for 'converts' the map of Christian denominations converged with the map of colonial government and the map of ethnicity. Worse than the scramble for souls by the Church is the rivalry that accompanied this scramble. Different missions and Christian denominations colonized certain regions as their 'mission fields' sometimes barring 'other' missionaries from operating in the area  
**(Eunice Kamaara 2000)**

The identification of denominations with ethnic groups gave power to those who received missionary education. Missionary approach "divided African communities into religious groupings hitherto somewhat alien to African peoples". ..... it was unheard of, for example that members of the same family or clan could worship separately and conduct their religious affairs exclusive of one another."**( Joseph Galgalo 2012).**

The history of the missionary and colonial movement affected or had implications for theological education in regard to the relationships between seminary education and public education which then impacted the curriculum. Theological Education was largely run by the churches and still is in modern times. In order to discuss the subject of theological education I have chosen to use two reflections from graduates of St. Paul University former St. Paul's united theological college and earlier the Divinity school. The two women represented two traditions the Anglican and the Presbyterian traditions.

### **Reflection A**

I was admitted to the college as a refugee, running away from Uganda during the days of Id Amin. I was the only woman student among the over fifty men. The only women in the college were workers as secretaries, cooks and or cleaners. The other women were wives of men who were training with me and they had a separate class which I was not able to join as a single women.

'As a refugee, life at St Paul was not easy. Being the female student and worse still, unmarried! My male counterparts never wanted me to reason with them. They would say it was wrong for a woman to reason (they called it arguing) the way I did as it would make nobody marry me. They would say: "Men love women who only listen and accept things". My fellow theologians said taking me as a wife would mean marrying a fellow man. Some of them said I was rude while others said I was a difficult lady because I refused their sexual advances or proposals for marriage. I used to tell them openly that sex outside of marriage was not for me. Others thought I would get pregnant and I told them to wait and see. I was very lonely and I suffered from the cold of the place since I had come a hotter climate. When I finished my studies I faced other challenges because my church was not yet ordaining women for ministry. I was made an evangelist waiting for the decision of the church. During this time, I was advised to get married because then it would be easier for me to be ordained if the church passed it. I later got married but was again advised to get children because then I would be accepted as a full woman in society. I got children and was still not ordained as I was to raise the children. Later I was made a deaconess in the church and

continued to serve. It seems the challenges I faced at the university were a beginning of the many I would face in the society. The men I trained with rose the ranks of the church and became senior leaders including bishops, even those that had bad habits of harassing women.<sup>3</sup>

## **Reflection 2**

I was the second women to join the college. I came from a reformed tradition and found my sister of the Anglican tradition. The college was a male space and we both tried to create space for ourselves. We lived in the same house although I got married and moved to another house with my husband. After completing my studies I was ordained as a first woman in the Presbyterian Church and realized how ill prepared I was for the ministry to which I was ordained.

‘All classes were taught by expatriate staff except African Tradition Religion (ATR) and denominational studies, in my case Presbyterian tradition. In my view, both subjects were treated with less vitality! All lecturers were male. As a result, all our studies lacked rigorous scrutiny of the patriarchal-colonial-missionary-hierarchical theology, beliefs and practices in the churches and theological institutions (most then bible schools and pastoral institutes) in Kenya and Africa, since we had students from other African countries. Despite being located at the heartland of what was once known as “white highlands” with stretches of tea and pyrethrum plantations and the BATA shoe factory not far from the market where I shopped regularly, nothing prepared me for the ministry with people living in extreme poverty and indignity as a result of colonialism and oppressive government machinery in independent Kenya. Nor was I prepared to minister in the urban or the rural-urban cities, towns and slums of Kenya in the 1980s, yet all my six years in the parish were in Nairobi city, mostly what was known as African quarters in colonial Kenya. Never were we taught about violence in the family (extended African family and polygamous

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<sup>3</sup> St. Paul’s University Voice, October 2009 p32-33

marriages) Christian or otherwise, in the manse and in the church hierarchy in all my classes. Especially and in particular nothing was taught about emotional violence that is experienced by women in church and ecumenical ministry as well as in theological institutions, which are still very male dominated after 30 years of graduating women with theological education at least in Kenya.<sup>4</sup>

The narratives of the above two women raise issues that were can discuss for the whole time of the conference in the theme of reformation, education transformation. The issues that the women raise include the context in which theological education and the challenges within that context. The two reflections are from one college but the case could said of many of the colleges in Africa that have offered theological education. These two women were reflecting on their own theological education that was done after the transition from colonial to post-colonial context.

The backdrop of Theological Education was the ideologies of slavery, racism, colonialism and missionary movements, all of which were Eurocentric and posed challenges to the African church but at the same time created opportunities for its growth. The post colonial context has had its challenges and opportunities as well has been observed. Africa entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century under the yoke of globalization, and HIV and many other killer diseases, extreme poverty, violation of human rights and in culture of violence corruption, poor governance, and patriarchy and sexism in the church and society. For some parts of the continent, the HI virus became a mirror that brought to the service the deep weaknesses of Christianity that failed to deal with issues of power and authority in a patriarchal society that discriminated women and pushed women's agenda to the background of theological discourse. The HI virus helped the review of curriculums that were able to bring to the center some of the things that the two women reflections bring out.

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<sup>4</sup>Nyambura Njoroge interviewed 16/03/2011.

## **COLONIAL AND MISSIONARY THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION THE CASE OF St Paul's**

St. Paul's has a long-standing reputation, which is known and respected for providing high quality training of Theologians and Pastors for service in the Christian Churches. Approximately one hundred students graduate each year, many taking up positions of leadership within a relatively short time. Many of the leaders of Churches in various parts of Africa, such as Bishops, Moderators, General Secretaries and Archbishops have been trained at St. Paul's. The school has also a reputation of training women.

In 1875 the Church Missionary Society (CMS) founded a settlement for freed slaves at Freretown, near Mombasa. In 1888, the Divinity class started through which men would be ordained for ministry. The divinity class was separated from the other forms of education.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> July, 1903, the foundation St. Paul's Divinity School at Freretown, the first women admitted but she was called a bible woman, not training for ordained ministry.

In 1930 the CMS Divinity School moved from Frere Town to Limuru which was a white highlands and contested space between the settlers and the local people. The medium of instruction was in Kiswahili.

1932 a proposal for a United Theological School to train men from other denominations as well as Anglican and to hire African staff.

In 1949 it was decided that the denominations should work together for an experimental period of five years. Then the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) and the Methodist Church in Kenya joined and brought in their ministerial candidates.

In 1954 the transitional Union was accomplished when the three Churches formed a College Council to run the affairs of the College; and on the 1st January 1955, the CMS St. Paul's Divinity School became St. Paul's United Theological College. In 1973 the Reformed Church of East Africa formally joined the other three Churches as the fourth Participating Partner. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1993, the National Council of Churches of

Kenya in its corporate identity was admitted by the Governing Council as the fifth Participating Partner in the ownership of the College.<sup>5</sup>

### **What curriculum/ what accreditation/**

As an ecumenical institution, the questions of curriculum, language of instruction never ceased to be a challenge. In each stage of the institution's development. In the beginnings of the Divinity School, the language of instruction was Kiswahili. The aim of the college was to train leaders for the African church which was young but in a dynamic context. After the Second World War, the teachers began a discussion on introducing English as a medium of instruction and a critical approach to the study of theology. This would expose the students to begin to read theology and to the controversies in England which this far they were shield from. Introduction of English as a medium of instruction and introduction of a critical method of theology

### **Accreditation.**

The changing context of the 1960;s posed even a greater challenge for theological educators in terms of the curriculums and the accreditation of the curriculums. How could one view theological education or seminary education? Was this education equal to other forms of degrees offered in the country? The college had to move from inherited and in house curriculums to accepted and recognized curriculums by the accrediting bodies. First it was through the theological association The Association of Theological Institutions in East Africa ( ATIEA). This BD was not located in a university but it was modelled according to Eastern Africa University principles and practice including the following aspects: An agreed entry qualification for all students, agreed syllabus with mandatory and elective subjects; an agreed assessment of course work and examination and a grading system, a mandatory research paper in the final year and an academic board to determine the results for each student Those who worked on this degree ensured that it served the context in which the students were studied.

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<sup>5</sup> Material for the section on the United Theological College is drawn from ' St. Paul's as an ecumenical training institution', in Emily Onyango (ed.) *For God and Humanity: 100 Years of St. Paul's*, Zapf Chancery: Eldoret, pp. 61-76.



Among the things that were included in this syllabus for it to be contextual and relevant were, East African Church History; African Traditional Religion, and Africa Theology.

### **THE RELEVANCE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION.**

The issues the two reflections above and the brief story of St. Paul's raise are all in the areas of relevance. Over the period we have seen this being taken up in the projects of Indigenization, Inculturation, Contextualization, Reconstruction, and Savannah Theologies.<sup>6</sup> These theologies tried to deal with the issues of relevance in the study of theology. For each of the projects there those issues that were not raised or dealt with such as sexism and patriarchy in the church and its theological education. These issues were a bed rock on which many other forms of discrimination were rooted be they on race, gender, disability, those infected and or affected with the HI virus and other forms of abuse as those experienced in the reflections of the women. To deal with this challenges the embarked on the process of engendering theological education in order to make it relevant

### **Engendering theological education**

The process of engendering theological education includes a revision of the philosophy, theoretical framework and content of the curriculum, and its methods of delivery, which generally have turned dialogical in engaging people in dialogue with one another, their environment, context, faith, and praxis and in discerning what is normative and binding, and what is contextual and relative.

Engendering theological education challenges the traditional assumptions of what are normative – western theological model, African patriarchy, and male-centered theology, and proposes alternatives that are truly inclusive, affirming, relevant and fruitful for a meaningful life of faith.

Engendering theological education recognizes that theory does not always reflect any form of praxis and that constructive criticism and reflective interrogation are essential in theological inquiry and learning. Since theory often is abstracted from concrete

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<sup>6</sup> John S Pobee skenosis Christian faith in an African context gweru Zimbabwe mambo 1992

contextual situations, true objectivity is not always definite. Therefore engendered theological education stresses conceptuality, dialogue, openness, grace and willingness to learn and to discern God's will and truth in every context.

The task of engendering theological education was about opening the study of theology to all the people of God. There were two movements to the project of engendering theological Education in Africa which also impacted St. Paul's. These movements brought to light the plight of women in the churches. The first was the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998).

'In 1988 the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women was launched. It was aimed at empowering women to challenge oppressive structures in the global community, their churches and communities. To affirm - through shared leadership and decision making theology and spirituality - the decisive contributions of women in churches and communities; to give visibility to women's perspective and actions in the work and struggle for justice, peace and integrity of creation....to encourage the churches to take actions in solidarity with women.'<sup>7</sup>

A visit to St. Paul's during the decade for information on women and theological Education, revealed that the number of women doing theology was less than the number of men and the institution did not take cognizance of the presence of women, even the few that were there.

The second movement was the Circle of the Concerned African Women Theologians (Circle), which was launched a year after the 1988 Ecumenical Decade of the Churches and Women. The Circle was inaugurated at Trinity College Legon near Accra Ghana in

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<sup>7</sup> Letters: A Report of Visits to the Churches During the Ecumenical Decade- Churches in Solidarity with Women' Geneva: WCC, 1997.

1989. It is an ecumenical and interfaith body of African women theologians tracing their background to such organization as Ecumenical Association of Third world theologians (EATWOT), Ecumenical Association of African Theologians (EAAT), and Conference of African Theological Institutions. (CATI). However the Circle is different from the other ecumenical bodies whose membership is predominantly Christian. Members of the circle include women who belong to Christianity, Islam and indigenous African Religions.

The Circle was aimed at empowering women to study and write theology, which would impact the churches. The themes of the circle included re-reading the Bible, an objective critique of African culture, violence against women, interfaith issues and HI virus in as it infected and affected people in society. The brunt of the virus was borne by girls and women in society. The virus was a mirror into society in various ways: it brought to the fore the shallowness of the teaching of the Christiana faith when it came to gender relations, it brought to the fore the challenges the women faced in as far as cultural practices in the rights of passage including initiation marriage and widowhood rites, it also brought to the fore discussions around sex, sexualities which was taboo subject hence the hidden abuse that accompanied it. Between 2000 and 2013 the circle had produced substantial literature that discussed many of the issues that the HI virus had revealed.

### **Engendering theological education for the people of God**

Engendering theological education took different forms. First it was to encourage women to study theology which has been a preserve of men for two reasons including the use of the way scripture and what was described as African cultures. Second Theological Education was linked with ordination and churches that had not accepted to ordain women could not send women to study. For these reasons women remained on the periphery of church ministry, engaged in service roles rather than leadership roles. But with the engendering theological education theology was opened to the people of God and women and men could study theology not necessarily for ordination. The

separation of theological education from ordination opened up the gateway to women from a variety of backgrounds to study.

Before this it was difficult for female candidates to face training committees, and defend their call to ministry, as they were judged in accordance to their social location and or marital status. These affected women across the board in different ways. Those who were married had to justify their calling in regard to the position of their husbands and whether they had approval to study theology for ordination. Those who were single were equally disadvantaged because the boards feared they would be married off during their training thus the sending churches would lose out. Those who were single mothers did not have a chance because of the social stigma placed on them by the society in general but especially the church. The widows were not in any better situation because of the social stigma on them as well.

The underlying factors for all this was the fear of female sexuality within the patriarchal society, where women were perceived as morally weak and those who wield the power to lure men into sin. Bringing them to 'holy ground' or male space in the study of theology would contaminate the space.

In order to deal with the above it was important to unlink theological education from ordination. It took a while to deliberate on the change of policy at the college level, to open the gates to all the people of God to study theology. But when it was finally agreed, both women and men who would not have had a chance to study theology, managed to start their studies. Although the gates were opened for all to study theology, the women still faced the challenge of funding, as most of them had no resources to fund their studies.

The process of Engendering theological Education for the place I have worked has generated good results for the institutions but a challenge for the church. For the institution the process brought in women who had been barred from studying theology because of the status. Engendering theological education opened doors for persons with disability to study, and others who would not have managed the church processes

for theology. Engendering theological education has challenged other institutions to open up departments of theology together with those of religious studies especially for higher education. The downside to this was to the churches that had strict rules for ordination but were not able to pay for the ordination. There are those who have increased the number of women to ordination. There are those the discussions of ordination have intensified since women are able to discuss theologically with the powers in the churches.

In this reflection I have tried to show how the theme of Reformation Education and transformation are an ongoing process not trapped in the historical milieu in which they happened, The three are connected as reformation continues to be a stronghold of education and education a stronghold for transformation.

Thank You.

**Esther Mombo**

