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## **Theological Education and Christian Formation**

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### **Abstract**

The paper argues that traditional forms of education - in the home, public/private schools, and even churches - have fallen short in providing the transformative education needed to address societal issues in Africa. In contrast, theological education rooted in biblical principles and a Christ-centered focus holds immense potential. A crucial aspect is that theological education goes beyond just imparting information or training clergy. Rather, it aims to foster a regenerated, Christ-like way of living among believers. By grounding education in sound biblical philosophy and effective, caring instruction, theological programs can help individuals develop the gifts, vision, and character required to lead the church and society forward. The paper emphasizes that theological education is significant not only for pastors and ministers, but for the broader church and African society as a whole. This type of education can cultivate much-needed spiritual growth, critical thinking skills, and a sense of purpose aligned with God's calling. Ultimately, it positions believers to be agents of positive change in their communities, in line with the goals outlined in Africa's Agenda 2063. The paper takes a straightforward approach in unpacking the various connotations and manifestations of Christian education, ultimately highlighting how theological education and Christ-centered formation can serve as remedies to societal ills and challenges facing the African continent. The goal is to make a compelling case for the transformative power of this educational

model. Does this help provide more depth and context around the key points addressed in the abstract? Let me know if you need any clarification or have additional questions.

### **Introduction**

Christian formation is the process of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ for the glory of God and for the sake of others (II Corinthians 3:17-18). The focus of spiritual formation is the Holy Spirit, who guides the ongoing journey towards union with God. The response is submission. This paper uses the teachings of Paul as template for the necessity of theological education that will lead to Christian formation in Africa as we are focusing of the Africa that God wants which is the African Union's Agenda 2063. The answer to the challenges that Africans are facing is theological education that leads to Christian formation; that is a changed life. Education that is Christian is a complete, that is, it contain all necessary or desired elements or skills that can transform Africans when it is applied.

### **The Concept of Theological Education:**

Theological education is the education that one receives in the discipline of theology. It may be defined as the discipline that aims at an appropriate understanding, interpretation, defense, and application of the Christian faith in the world.<sup>555</sup> It is not like secular education that aimed at head knowledge, it is not like religious knowledge that promotes the practice of a particular religion or religions, it is not scientific or technological education that has a specific format that can be proven and tested in the laboratory. Theological education aims at life transformation.

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<sup>555</sup> Sunday Bobai Agang. *The Need for Public Theology in Africa* (Carlisle, Cumbria: 2020),4

### **The Purpose of Theological Education:**

Theological education as the training of men and women with the purpose to know and serve God, has the potential to be the seedbed for the renewal of churches, their ministries, mission, commitment to Christian unity and the changing world to be habitable,<sup>556</sup> where the Christians are the salt and the light. The purpose of theological education is to cause the believers to shine as light and give good taste as salt in the fallen world especially the decadences in Africa's economic, education, politics, agriculture and even religious affairs.

According to Justo L. Gonzalez, Theological education has always been vital to the Church's life and mission; yet today it is in crisis, lacking focus, direction and competent hands to handle it with the resources available, which is a major challenge facing Africans. In the early Church era, there is no doubt that, to lead worship either public or private, one had to be able to read and interpret the Bible. In order to lead, it was necessary to know at least something about the history of Israel and the work of God in the Gospels, and interpret that history, making it relevant to daily living.<sup>557</sup> Quickly the Church developed schools for its teachers, whether lay or clergy. A catechetical system was organized through which candidates preparing for baptism were given a basic form of theological education. Hence to be a Christian meant persons knew what and why they believed. But over the years, theological education has come to mean education for clergy and church professionals.<sup>558</sup> According to Agang in his contribution in the

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<sup>556</sup> **Ellijah O. Otokola** *The Importance of Theological Education to the Changing World*

. Pages 99-111. Christ Apostolic Church Babajide, School of Prophets and Evangelists, Ilesha. Osun State, Nigeria. Email: [odun4jesus2015@gmail.com](mailto:odun4jesus2015@gmail.com)

<sup>557</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez *The History of Theological Education*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 55.

<sup>558</sup> **Ellijah O. Otokola** *The Importance of Theological Education to the Changing World* **Pages 99-111. Christ Apostolic Church Babajide, School of**

*African Public Theology*, “not only to pastors and church leaders but to every person who claim to follow Christ.<sup>559</sup>”

### **The Agenda of Christian Education:**

The goal of any school is to educate believers about life, the world, and their purpose in it. Christian education seeks to teach children about the world God created, how our faith is woven into each area of learning, and how to find purpose and meaning through God's Will for our life.

### **The Core Objective of CE:**

- To teach the Bible as God's inspired Word and to develop attitudes of love and respect toward it.
- To teach the basic doctrines of the Bible.
- To lead the people to a decision of confessing Christ as Savior and Lord.
- To develop a desire to know and obey the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

Theological education follows the pattern of Jesus because the teachings of Christ are character formation, for instance the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus taught, strange things happened, and we need to use his methods. The Bible as the revelation of God, anticipating and announcing the good news about Jesus, has always been the core of the Christian educational process that leads to life transformation

These core objectives are what sustain the growth in churches and society in Africa as we are projecting positive change in the lives of Africans by the year 2063. The focus of Agenda 2063 is that theological education would have transformed the lives of Christians that will influence the society for a better living. For

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<sup>559</sup> Sunday Bobai Agang. *The Need for Public Theology in Africa* (Carlisle, Cumbria: 2020),4

Christian Education to have effects that will transform lives, theological education needs to be well taught and well communicated. Since all other educations have failed to offer Africans the life God expects and the environment that is conducive for the people, the last hope is theological education that is rooted in the undiluted word of God.

### **Significance of Theological Education**

Theological education equips people to trust the Bible for themselves, to look to it for answers, and to use it in formal and informal settings. Sound Biblical understanding enables people to engage with confidence in discussion about the issues raised in their context.<sup>560</sup> A trained minister, thus, is understood to be one who has received some requisite level of theological education that includes both academic understanding and practical ministerial training. An untrained minister is one who is untrained and unskilled in the interpretation of Scriptures as well as has not been tested and proved in the area of ministry.<sup>561</sup> Now, while God can use anyone, the Scripture instructs us to seek those who are excellent in word and deed and are filled with faith and the Spirit. A trained theologian is one who has received a higher level of theological training necessary for authoritative critiques and judgments on theological trends and movements. An untrained interpreter who is unskilled and inexperienced in the Word will only lead to twisting and misinterpretation of the Word. An intellectual who lacks faith, and the Spirit may indulge in skeptic and anti-faith acts. Theological education contributes to the communication of faith, and therefore it helps to create an appealing understanding to the people who do not know Christ yet.

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<sup>560</sup> Elizabeth Richards. The importance of theological education to CMS and her missionaries. 2 Sep 2021.  
<https://moore.edu.au/resources/the-importance-of-theological-education-to-cms-and-her-missionaries/> Accessed in Dec 2021

<sup>561</sup> *Domenic Marbaniang* *Significance of Theological Education* **Century Hong** April 2016

Therefore, it helps create a pull to the non-Christians to help them seek and find faith in Jesus.

### **The Better Approach of Theological Education to Christian Formation**

One of the ways to obtain the Africa God wants to see is to change the orientation of Africans and perspective of viewing issues. This orientation can be worked on from two angles namely, leadership and discipleship. If theological education will lead to Christian formation, then it must have impact on the leadership and effective discipleship.

The failure of some African leaders comes from the African Christian leaders who failed to adequately educate and disciple the leaders. According to Maggie Madimbo, “Not everyone has the gift of leadership, and not all who call themselves leaders think beyond tomorrow. Our task as Christians is to encourage leaders who will look beyond the present, who will think and dream about African’s future and who can develop plans to fulfill the goal of Agenda 2063.”<sup>562</sup> The provision for this is only found in Theological education, more importantly because we are focusing on the future of Africa.

It is not an over statement that almost all Africans are tired of the current Africa we have. One may be tempted to ask why Africans migrate to the West and the west also introduces Lottery Visa. It is because their leaders have the interest of the citizen in mind, they make life conducive for their citizen and foreigner, though their leaders may not be godly, yet they are doing their best to make their countries habitable. Coming to Africa, one is tired of different problems daily. A case of happenings in Nigeria; the Boko haram, the banditry, kidnapping, which are fueled by some leaders because of their greed, wickedness and selfishness. Africans claim to be religious but far from spirituality. Africans have religion without

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<sup>562</sup> Maggie Madimbo Leadership in African Public Theology. 339

theological education that can lead to Christian formation. Even the so called African Christian leaders have disappointed the citizens. Cases have been reported of the atrocities committed by the church leaders in Africa, they model their lifestyle on power, position and wealth not on the humble example of Christ.

With the focus on Agenda 2063, there is a need to glean from the scripture the life of godly and ungodly leaders and communities, which are examples for our generation. The question is why do Christian leaders fail to carry out their duties as expected by Christ? They are to be examples for members to follow in combating the evil practices because they are also regarded as theological educators who know the truth, but the truth is not setting them free. Madimbo opined that, “If we want to be used by God to bring the change we need in Africa, then we should be willing to maintain our saltiness because we have been called to make a difference in our own way.”<sup>563</sup> Meaning that our theological education should lead to Christian formation.

### **Theological Education for Spiritual Growth**

The goal that theological education seeks to showcase is not so much about dry academic knowledge but about stewardship of the mysteries of God. This stewardship is not a mere job, but definitive of a disciple of Christ.<sup>564</sup> Theological knowledge involves personal obligation towards Christ having been transformed, in whom are hid all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God. Christians are called to be witnesses. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. Knowledge bereft of devotion and spiritual living is useless. It is not possible to educate one to be spiritual. The hunger and thirst for God lies at the foundation of theological education. One yearns to learn

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<sup>563</sup> Maggie Madimbo

<sup>564</sup> *Domenic Marbianq Significance of Theological Education Theological Education in 21st Century Hong Kong Baptist University April 2016*

in order to be able to serve well and pursue righteousness and peace. The Seminary should be a fellowship that discourages shallow Christian living and encourages deep communion of saints and the Holy Spirit in faith, prayer, exhortation, enthusiasm, serving, vision, and mission. It is not just an academic institution as we have today in African theological institutions. It is like the inner circle of Christ. It is a family. Spirituality cannot develop in a strict atmosphere of legalism and ritualism. It cannot exist in an environment of godless criticism and proud skepticism. The Seminary is a faith-community. A College may have professors, but a true Seminar has servants of God who have a clear call for the ministry of teaching. Discipline, as in a family, is an important aspect of formation. Chastisement for wrong and reward for good is integral to discipline. Jesus rebuked His disciples when they were wrong; but He also rejoices with them when He saw them in tune with God and encouraged them and prayed for them. Work should possess the enthusiasm of serving in the community. Study should be interactive and engaging. Corporate prayer and worship should be full of life and the overflowing of the Spirit in wisdom and power.<sup>565</sup>

Mutual respect and love in Christ must be the thread of relationship. The teachers and authority must exemplify desire to serve rather than demand respect and service. The environment should be free of all praise of humans, human institutions, culture, money; instead, it should be an environment of only grace, only faith, only Scripture, and promptness to serve. The Seminary doesn't make one a servant of God. The Seminary is a place where men and women called to serve God receive learning in the Scriptures that equips them for every good work. Therefore, a degree in theology is not merely an academic or professional degree but is meant to recognize that the person who has completed a course of study

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<sup>565</sup> *Domenic Marbaniang Significance of Theological Education Theological Education in 21st Century Hong Kong Baptist University April 2016*



has also exhibited sincerity, commitment, resolve, Christian character, servant-attitude, faith, Spirit-filled life, and ability to rightly divide and minister the word of truth. The student's goal, however, must be the approval of God rather than the approval of man (2Tim.2:15). The application of theological education is Christian Formation which Africans want to see in practical. It is not only in the pronouncement during the testimony as it is done in some places that; "I am saved, I love the Lord, I am born again," these are just mere expressions that are not reflected in the character of a Christian. The practical Christian life is the application of theological education that will earn us the Africa we want.

### **Conclusion**

The Africa we have is intensely intricate in the devaluation of Christian values and achieving the call of Christian formation has been significantly challenged. However, theological education has considerably served a critical role in the promotion of Christian gospel, teachings, and further faith. Through the teachings and the development of knowledge, it has enabled Christians to fulfill the call to Africa God wants. The theological perception of Christianity has attached critical significance on the segregation from the ordinary life of sins. It emphasizes the call to holiness as a requirement for all African Christians who are expected to emulate Christ because He is holy. The core challenges to fulfilling the call to Africa God want by the year 2063 are aggravated by theological education that is handled by Christian leadership in Africa. The Africans' problems include the current generation that is anchored on deception and wrong articulation of morals. However, the problems can be addressed by theological education by intensifying teachings and preaching the knowledge of God and gospel of Christ focusing on Christian faith and holiness that will enhance us the Africa God wants, an acceptable and a conducive environment that Africans want as we are focusing on agenda 2063.

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