

Article

Christian Education, Quo Vadis?

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Abstract: Christian education is very important. It can help to bring a holistic liberation and development of people. A good education can be a key to a good life. Our reflection is on Christian education; *quo vadis*, meaning where are you going? Chapter one will be a general introduction. Chapter two will focus on a brief historical survey of Christian education. It will reflect, among others, on the way Christian education was brought to Africa from Europe. In some places, it was regarded as a colonial tool. The analysis of the state of Christian education will be in chapter three. It will, among other things, evaluate the merits and demerits of Christian education in Africa in its current form. Chapter four will focus on the future of Christian education in Africa. It will contain our suggestions to improve Christian education in Africa. It will provide some propositions not only on how to bring about the decolonisation of Christian education but also its Africanisation. There should be a deconstruction of colonial Christian education and the reconstruction of an Africanised Christian education. The suggestions will be associated with the contextualization, decontextualization, and recontextualization of Christian education in Africa. Through, inter alia, its proper Christian education, Africa should be able to “think globally but act locally”. The last chapter will be the general conclusion.

Keywords: Christian education; decolonisation; Africanisation; deconstruction; decontextualization; recontextualization; reconstruction; ubuntu



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1. Introduction

The theme of Christian education is very important. A good education can be a key to a good life. Our article is entitled “Christian Education, *Quo Vadis*”? We will reflect on the “Christian education “where are you going” (*quo vadis*)? In order to propose a good and fruitful future for Christian education, especially in Africa, we will necessarily evaluate its past and present situation. We will use the method of See–Judge–Act (cf. [Cardijn 1956](#), pp. 61–76; [Boff 1984](#), pp. 2–12; [Boff 1987](#), pp. 4–20; [Heitink 1999](#), pp. 220–21; [Osmer 2008](#); [Root 2009](#), p. 66; [Gobbo 2016](#), pp. 8–11; [Brigham 2018](#)). The plan of this article follows the method of See–Judge–Act. This method will guide our systematic and systemic critical evaluation of Christian education in Africa.

In chapter two, we will outline the state of the question of Christian education by focusing on a brief historical survey of Christian education. It will reflect, among others, on the way Christian education was brought to Africa from Europe. In some places, it was regarded as a tool used by colonialists. The analysis of the state of Christian education will be in chapter three. This chapter will, among other things, evaluate the importance and limitation of Christian education in Africa. Chapter four will contain our suggestions to improve Christian education in the future, especially in Africa. We will propose different means and ways to improve Christian education at different levels and for different people from different walks of life. This chapter will suggest a deconstruction of a colonial Christian education and the reconstruction of an Africanised Christian education. In other words, the colonial “set” of Christian education has to be “upset” in order to be “reset” as an authentic African Christian education. In brief, the suggestions will be associated with the contextualization, decontextualization, and recontextualization of Christian education

in Africa. The present and the future of Africa depend, among other things, on education. Though the world has become a village, Africa has its own role to play in the “global village”. A proper African Christian education can be a powerful tool to bring about an original African contribution based on the African values of *Ubuntu* to Africa and to the world at large. Through, among others, its proper Christian education, Africa should be able to “think globally but act locally”.

What is Christian education? Etymologically speaking, the word “education” is closer to the word “pedagogy”. The word “education” comes from the Latin word “*educere*” which means to “lead out”. Etymologically speaking, the word “education” is closer to the word “pedagogy”. The word “pedagogy” comes from two Greek words “*paidos*” for a “child” and “*agogein*” to “lead” or “*agogos*” for a “leader.” It is a gentle empowering of both theoretical and practical knowledge. The concept of education has evolved throughout history. There are several interesting definitions of education. Education is associated with the transmission of knowledge, skills and character traits (Chazan 2022, pp. 13–21). In fact, one cannot have a dichotomy between education and culture. William G. Pollard holds that “The idea of education is intimately involved in culture” (Pollard 1960, p. 1). In other words, the context is also important in Christian education. John Dewey writes that education is “the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race. Formal education plays only a small part in our participation in and formation by the social consciousness of the race. Far more formative is the influence which arises simply from living within our social context” (Groome 1980, p. 107). Several thinkers such as Vos, Pannikar, Turner, Searcy, Huffard, Dickson, etc. define Christian education in terms of education that is based on the principle of cosmotheandric relations. It is education that is based on the unifying principle of the Christian view of God, human beings, and the universe (Panikkar 1993, pp. 1–3; Turner 1980, pp. 698–705; Searcy et al. 2001, pp. 215–42). Agnosticism or atheism in Christian education is a *contradictio in terminis*.

What are the contents, nature, practice, and scope of Christian education? It is also important to highlight that there are different points of view among different people and countries about the nature, contents, and practice of Christian education. The scope of Christian education is wide, with different points of view. The Catholic Church, through *Gravissimum Educationis* and its social teachings, has its point of view of Christian education, which might be slightly different from those of other Churches (Goldburg 2020, pp. 31–62; Burrige 2020, pp. 98–112). In this article, we will follow a “both-and” approach and not an “either-or” approach as regards the way of approaching Christian education. On the one hand, we will try to include and not exclude the points of view of both the Catholic Church and other Churches. On the other hand, we will also include also the points of view of Africa and other parts of the world. We will not limit Christian education only to high education but also to other levels, including adult education.

There is an African proverb that says, “If you don’t know where you are going, at least know where you are coming from”. Diop maintains that “Intellectuals should study the past not for their pleasure but to learn useful lessons” (Diop 1996, p. 137). We will not create a dichotomy between the past and present on the one hand and the future on the other. In fact, our retrospective understanding of Christian education will help us in our prospective suggestion of a good African Christian education. Imagination is very important for the future of Christian education. Groome (1980, p. 186) writes “But intending the future requires imagination; otherwise, the future will be little more than repetition of the past. . . it must be a creative and shaping activity that gives intentionality to the future as it arises out of the present and the past”.

2. A Brief Historical Context of Christian Education

2.1. Christian Education in the Biblical Context

In the Catholic Church, Christian education is synonymous with catechesis. The word catechesis comes from the Greek word “*katechesis*”, which originally could have meant to create an echo, and is translated as “teaching” or “instruction”. In the Bible, the word

“teach” and other words which are in the same semantic field like “teacher” are found about 109 times. The word “instruct” and other words which are found in the same semantic field like “instructor” are found about 81 times. In *sensu stricto*, catechesis or Christian education is associated with the teaching of the Christian faith using the Bible as the main book.

Jesus is at the heart of Christian education. He was the educator par excellence. His life cannot be dissociated from his teaching (Pazmino 2001, pp. 111–16; Robertson 2007, pp. 1–17). However, the focal point of his teaching was during his public ministry. His teachings were associated with his works of charity and mercy. Bertone maintains that “Jesus Christ is the central figure in the early Christian movement and is the central character in Christian education today. . . The primary sources of information for Jesus’s life and teaching are the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John”. (Bertone 2015, p. 659). Jesus chose the simple and humble yet faithful and obedient fishermen to carry on with the Christian education, which was centred on announcing the Kingdom of God. Ellen G. White Estate maintains that “Jesus did not despise education. . . The humble men chosen by Christ were with Him for three years, subject to the refining influence of the Majesty of Heaven. Christ was the greatest educator the world ever knew” (White 1923, pp. 47–48). After the biblical pillar (*locus theologicus*), let us now highlight the pillar of the Christian Apostolic Tradition (*Traditio Apostolica*).

2.2. Christian Education in the Context of Christian Tradition

As catechesis and Christian education moved from the Hebrew and Greek cultures, there developed a wider view of Christian education. Perselis argues that “In Greece, Christianity dates back to as early as when the mission of the apostle Paul was inaugurated on the continent of Europe. Since then, Christianity has been established and reinforced as the predominant religion of this part of Europe, where the Byzantine Empire flourished from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries” (Perselis 2015, p. 558). Furthermore, “The criteria for selection and formation of the content of Christian religious education in schools have always been influenced by Greek theological scholarly work, which is produced within the existing faculties of theology in the Universities of Athens and Thessaloniki” (Perselis 2015, p. 558). Moreover, the Greek language has been very influential in Christian education. Perselis holds that “Greek, a language of the Indo-European family, is perhaps the most important language for the study of Christian education. Greek is the language of the New Testament, many of the earliest Church Fathers, and the Septuagint (the scriptures for the apostles), as well as the language of the cultural milieu most important for the writing and articulation of the New Testament and the early Church” (Perselis 2015, p. 559).

How did Christian education begin in the Christian tradition? Egypt in Africa is associated with the beginning of Christian education: “The fore history of the school includes the name of Clement of Alexandria. . . But the proper history of the School of Alexandria, as the first officially “Church-related” school, begins with Origen, the gigantic intellect who towers over the third century and indeed over the whole of Christian antiquity” (Murray 1960, p. 152). In 203 CE, at the age of eighteen, Origen was asked by Dementrius, Bishop of Alexandria to be in charge of the diocesan catechesis (Murray 1960, p. 152). As our focus is the outline of Christian education in Africa, let us now highlight the way Christian education was spread in Africa and other continents during the colonial era.

2.3. Christian Education in the Colonial Context among the Continents

It is important to mention, even when it is about “Christian education”, some thinkers prefer the more inclusive expression of “religious education” rather than “Christian education”. They find that religious education includes people of other religious beliefs. In brief, European Christian education was introduced to other continents like America, Asia, and Africa. Concerning the history of Christian education in North America, Devitt writes, “The history of religious education in the schools of the USA is quite complex. Before American Independence in 1776, most public (state) schools were religious in origin and in operation. In keeping with the general ethos of the land, the religion in question was some

form of Protestantism" (Devitt 1991, p. 11). Both Protestant Churches and the Catholic Church have contributed to Christian education.

Many missionaries contributed to the education, among others, of Afro-American girls (Thomas and Jackson 2007, pp. 357–59). Now let us consider a brief note on colonial education in Asia.

In Asia, Hong Kong was a British colony for many years. In 1997 Hong Kong moved from being a British colony to being a part of the colony of China and, in 2014, it acquired its political independence. Hong Kong, just like African countries, is after liberating itself from the colonial context through education. Hong Kong is looking to re-establish its sovereignty through a new education system. The curricula of schools and universities are being worked out in order to achieve this noble end (Morris and Chan 1997, p. 247). In India, colonial education segregated women. Let us highlight Christian education in Africa.

Many scholars maintain that "Recent studies have confirmed that missionaries disseminated education neither for its own sake nor to enable Africans to challenge colonial rule (Ajayi 1965; Ayandele 1966; Ekechi 1972; Foster 1965; Heyman 1972; King 1971; Wright 1971)" (Berman 1974, p. 527). During colonial times, Christian education was used as a tool of colonialism. How was education in Africa before the coming of colonial education? François Lumbala Kabasele maintains that, before the introduction of Christian education or even colonial education in traditional Africa, there were instances of education like the family, age groups, camps of initiation, and in areas of work. This education was based on symbols and not books. Knowledge was transmitted orally. This education was based on memory. This education was communitarian. It was associated with life (Kabasele 1995, pp. 12–13).

Different models of Christian education were introduced to Africa. Twumasi-Ankrah mentions two models of Christian education which were introduced in Ghana:

(1) Informal education, in which "unlettered" people are taught functional literacy and are thereby enabled to read the scripture in their mother tongue or in English, and (2) formal education, in which Christian students are able to study and practice their faith without hindrance at church-related schools and universities (Twumasi-Ankrah 2015, p. 542).

Nowadays, many African countries insist that Christian education and education, in general, should include holistic liberation. Christian education should help to transform the lives of people spiritually and materially. Economic liberation, among others, should be an important aspect of Christian education and education in general. At present, Nigerian education is associated first and foremost with economic development: "What is the general attitude toward education in Nigeria? I think it can be looked at from various angles. First of all, education strives to develop manpower for national economic development" (Aminu 1990, p. 583). However, Nigeria, like other African countries, continues to suffer from its colonial legacy: "The colonial legacy of patently artificial borders drawn for the convenience of European conference tables bequeathed to many newly independent African nations a motley mix of people, each with their own separate ethnic loyalties and traditions" (Davis and Kalu-Nwivu 2001, p. 1).

In South Africa, missionaries were involved in education with good intentions. However, the colonial power had the upper hand in controlling education and maintaining the apartheid policy. The black population was disfavoured and discriminated against. The languages used were mainly English and Afrikaans. By 1910, the use of English was still predominant in institutions run by missionaries. The vernacular languages were used mainly in religious education and nonexamination subjects (Hartshorne 1992, pp. 72–73). In 1972 the vernacular languages were made compulsory for religious education. The Ministry of Education decided that English and Afrikaans are to be used alternatively at postprimary levels (Hartshorne 1992, p. 200). Limited funding was set aside for the black population. The syllabus did not take into account their cultural context. In 1953 the colonial government withdrew all government subsidies from the missionary schools. Catholic missionaries and Seventh Day Adventists tried to keep their schools. Missionary societies mainly paid for secondary schooling for Black people in South Africa (Christie

1991, p. 47; Brain 1990, p. 165). It is commonly agreed that, in South Africa, “education” was the “keystone of apartheid” (Johnson 1982, p. 214). Michael Cross, after his assessment of the history of education in South Africa, agrees with the position of Walton R. Johnson Cross (1986, pp. 185–200). Following different religions in the country, South Africa, and many African countries, are insisting more and more on religious education rather than Christian education. Chidester writes, “As Minister Pandor 2005 explained: “Our educational policy recognizes the difference between religious, theological, or confessional interests, and the educational objectives of Religion Education” (Chidester 2006, p. 62). There are other thinkers who have the same position (Kumar 2006, pp. 273–74; McDonald 2015, p. 202; Lavin 1965, pp. 428–429; Gearon 2014, pp. 52–53). Let us now proceed to a brief critical evaluation of Christian education. We will limit ourselves to its positive contribution to holistic liberation and its limitation of being manipulated as a colonial tool.

3. A Critical Evaluation of Christian Education

3.1. Holistic Human Liberation as the “Ipsissima Intentio” of the Christian Education

The “very intention” of Christian education is to provide holistic human liberation. Ghiloni holds that “The field of Christian education has made conceptual strides toward addressing the dualisms between “head knowledge” and “heart knowledge” that holistic education addresses” (Ghiloni 2015, p. 596). In the same way, Darcy-Berube maintains that Christian education should go beyond instruction and sacramentalisation. It is “A holistic vision of religious education would require much greater emphasis on the contemplative dimension of Christian education” (Darcy-Berube 1995, p. 71). Groome outlines three purposes for Christian education: building the Kingdom of God, spreading the Christian faith, and for human freedom (Groome 1980, pp. 35–97).

In some places, Christian education was provided through integrated education. In Europe

Integrated education. . . is that which seeks to provide an excellent education for young people in a school populace mainly drawn from the Protestant and Catholic traditions. Integrated schools are essentially Christian in character . . . the Christian ethos of an integrated school is often dependent on the commitment of the principal and staff members (Jennings 2015, p. 640).

It is important to highlight that in many places in Africa, missionaries had good intentions to liberate people through education. The intention of the missionaries was good, though, in many places, missionaries were manipulated by colonialists who had evil intentions. Frankema writes, “The impact of British educational policies and investments on the supply of schooling in Britain should not be overstated. Until 1940, mission schools, mainly run by African converts, provided the bulk of education at extremely low cost” (Frankema 2012, p. 335). Holistic liberation is brought about by Christian education in light of God’s creation and in light of God’s ongoing activity in human life. Therefore, a Christian education that excludes God is a pseudo-Christian education, it is *contradictio in terminis*. Let us briefly discuss the way Christian education was manipulated during the era of colonialism.

3.2. The Manipulated Christian Education during Colonialism and Neocolonialism

There are many concerns about religious education in general and Christian education in particular. In some places in Africa Christian education is associated with colonialism. In Kenya, as in many parts of Africa, Christian education was introduced by missionaries during colonialism. “In 1884, Ludwig Krapf, a Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary, arrived in Mombasa. Following the construction of the Mombasa-Uganda railway line, several more groups of missionaries arrived. Christian education was dominated by the teaching of literacy skills, Bible reading, and basic religious instruction” (Mbogo 2015, p. 674). According to several scholars and the research that was done on 17 African countries (Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and

Zimbabwe), Protestant Churches have done and are doing more on Christian education than the Catholic Church (Gallego and Woodberry 2008).

In South Africa, colonial education was used to disfavour the African population. Msila maintains that

The Bantu Education system for black South Africans had been a means of restricting the development of the learners by distorting school knowledge and to ensure control over the intellect of the learners and teachers, and propagating state propaganda. Black South Africans were contained in a permanent state of political and economic subordination (Msila 2016a, p. 58).

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017, p. 51) identifies four challenges of higher education in Africa:

Four core challenges constitutive of the struggle for an African university are highlighted: the imperative of securing Africa as a legitimate epistemic base from which Africans view and understand the world; the task of moving the centre through shifting the geography and biography of knowledge in a context where what appears as global knowledge still cascades from a hegemonic centre (Europe and North America); the necessity of rethinking thinking itself as part of launching epistemic disobedience to Eurocentric thinking; and the painstaking de-colonial process of learning to unlearn in order to relearn, which calls on African intellectuals and academics to openly acknowledge their factory faults and miseducation, cascading from their very production by problematic 'Western-styled' universities, including those located in Africa, so as to embark on decolonial self-re-education.

To these challenges, we can add that of lack of political will. Politicians and their respective political parties have a great role to play in improving education at all levels. Their political decisions are very determinant. A good example is in South Africa. The National Party ruled South Africa from 1948 up to 1994. The ANC has been in power since 1994 up to now:

What has also to be borne in mind is that decisions about curriculum in the context of negotiations are political decisions. Consequently, the task of charting the course of curriculum reconstruction must focus on the policies of the ANC and the National Party as the dominant political actors (Davies 1994, p. 255).

Davies adds, "Given their totally dichotomous ideologies, a policy clash was to be expected. Critical attention also needs to be given to the responses of the universities themselves to change" (Davies 1994, p. 255). Other challenges can be at the level of beneficiaries, durability, and financial challenges.

Are the education models which are found in Africa appropriate for the betterment of the continent? Just as there is a cry from the GATE, "Global Associates for the Transformational Education", there should be a cry from the AATE "African Associates for Transformational Education". GATE affirms that the "current theological education inadequately equips pastors to meet the needs of the church, address the problems of culture, or communicate relevantly with the emerging generation" (Enlow 2015, p. 543). What applies to education, in general, is likely to apply also to Christian education in particular.

It has been noticed over many years that, in Africa, Christian education, which was influenced by colonialism, is in crisis. It needs to be improved so that it can be meaningful in a given context. James Michael Lee writes

With an intensity mounting over the years, religious education in general and religious instruction, in particular, are increasingly facing an identity crisis. What is religious instruction?... This identity crisis is significant because a field of endeavour like religious instruction needs to be delimited within some kind of parameters is necessary if it is to achieve any sort of focused outcome or results" (Lee 1971, p. 94).

Now, let us propose some suggestions to improve Christian education in Africa.

4. Some Suggestions to Improve Christian Education in Africa

There are many suggestions made to improve Christian education in Africa. First, I would like to suggest “who” should improve Christian education and then “what” is to be improved in the domain of Christian education in particular and education in general in Africa.

4.1. People to Improve Christian Education in Africa

Those involved in improving Christian education in Africa include every Christian and people of goodwill, the Church, and society. By people of goodwill, we mean people who, regardless of their religious ideologies, live and act according to their good conscience for the betterment of all human beings.

4.1.1. Every Christian and People of Good Will Are Concerned with Christian Education

The 2 October 2000 was the opening day of our theological studies at the Missionary Institute London (MIL). During his keynote address, Dr. Larry Nemer, the President of MIL, told us, “Don’t let studies interfere with your education”. His statement was interesting in two ways. Firstly, he wanted to tell us that the education we are going to acquire during the four years of our stay in London could be wider than our theological studies. Secondly, there is an implicit insistence on learner-based education. Each one of us has an important role to play in his or her acquisition of education.

It is important to awaken in people’s consciousness that they are the author of their proper Christian education or education in general. The Brazilian pedagogue, Paul Freire was personally conscious of the way education had freed him. He empowered many people, especially adults from poor backgrounds, with a method of education that was centred on awakening people’s conscience in order to help them to be free from, among others, oppression. He held that “Dialogics—the essence of education as the practice of freedom. . . the investigation of “generative themes” and its methodology; the awakening of critical consciousness through the investigation of “generative themes”; and the various stages of the investigation” (Freire 2000, p. 8). His noble work is continued, among others, by the Freire Institute. Individual efforts in Christian education are to be supported by the efforts of both the Church and society.

4.1.2. The Church Has an Important Role to Improve Christian Education

What should the Church do to improve the Christian education? As education becomes more and more secular, the Church can ensure that in its program of education, and even in the government’s program of education, there is God’s curriculum. However, God’s curriculum should be understood as a metaphor. Benson, in his article “*God’s Curriculum: Reimagining Education as Journey Towards Shalom*”, writes about the purpose of education:

Despite their differences, secular and religious schools alike are often busy with the mechanics of delivering their prescribed curricula. Relatively little attention is given to metaphysics, discerning the end towards which they labour. . . ‘God’s Curriculum’ helps us reimagine Christian education as a transformative pilgrimage. . . towards the promised garden city of peace (Benson 2018, p. 17).

It is important to highlight that in God’s curriculum, the human being has his or her place, which can lead to human flourishing: “This educational vision may be translated into a public school setting, *shalom* reframed as holistic flourishing that embraces and yet transcends the merely material world of human concern” (Benson 2018, p. 30). The Church in Africa should network with African states in order to improve Christian education and education at large.

4.1.3. African Society Is Invited to Improve Religious Education

Christians are not dissociated from society. In fact, Christians are in all the different positions in society and government, from educators to policymakers, such as members of the parliaments, ministers, and even presidents. Apart from Christians, there are many

people of goodwill who, if properly motivated, can improve Christian education and education at large at the level of society.

Reducing the cost of education while maintaining a good quality of education, is very important. Okeke suggests that it is important that, in order to improve African higher education in general and Christian education in particular, there should be a collaboration among African countries in many aspects like fees, curricula, etc. He writes that “until differential policy regimes within African tertiary institutions are included on the agenda of various efforts toward the harmonization of African higher education, the journey towards true Africanised, decolonized and all-inclusive education curricula for Africans may remain a mirage” (Okeke 2010, p. 39).

In order to improve Christian education in Africa, it is important to identify the different forms and areas of past and present colonialism in order to bring perennial changes to Africa. Ali Mazrui holds that, to attain African nationalism, it is important to critically examine the continuous colonial education in Africa: “But any fruitful analysis of nationalism must take into account the totality of the colonial phenomenon, not just one portion of it; and it must study not simply the impact of the colonial rule upon, but its mutual and continual inter- action with, African societies” (Mohan 1968, p. 392).

It is important to work on the curricula of Christian education so that they are truly African and they can contribute to African flourishing. In the book “*Africanising the Curriculum*”, Sesanti insists on the importance of ensuring that Africanisation becomes a cultural revolution. He gives an example of Malekgapuru William Makgoba who was the first African deputy vice-chancellor at Wits University in 1994. Makgoba wanted to bring changes to the curriculum. Despite resistance, he was determined to bring about a cultural revolution:

Makgoba was fiercely determined that ‘it was about time African values and systems were taken seriously into our academic activities’ because ‘Africans in particular do not come to university to escape or erase the Africanness, but to confirm and articulate their roots (Sesanti 2016, p. 216).

It is important also to Africanise not only some disciplines but all cultural and even religious, political, and socioeconomic disciplines. Along the same line, the Society of African Culture maintains that it is important to Africanise the disciplines of African culture. It maintains that civilization is a cultural heritage. It is important to take into account African humanism and spirituality in Africanisation. African linguists, people of literature and philosophers, historians, theologians, natural scientists, politicians, and economists are invited to imagine how best Africanisation can take place (Société Africaine de Culture 1974, pp. 91–93). All African thinkers from different disciplines are invited to join in the noble task of the imagination and reimagining for the best Africanisation possible. Though the task is difficult, where there is a will, there is a way.

There is also a positive note that in recent years the government of South Africa is trying its best to bring multidimensional transformation through religious and public education. It is correct to examine “South Africa’s policy for religion and public education as an index for understanding post-apartheid efforts in redefining the state as a constitutional, cultural, and transformative state” (Chidester 2006, p. 61).

It is important to develop and use African languages in learning. Some initiatives are being made in this line in South Africa: “The calls made around the year 2010 to South African universities’ faculties of education to train more foundation phase teachers in indigenous languages are a realisation of the transformation lag with regard to the learning of African languages” (Msila 2016b, p. 195). What should be done improve Christian education in Africa and other colonized continents?

4.2. Actions Done to Improve Christian Education in Africa

4.2.1. A Paradigm Shift from “Colonising” Christian Education to “Decolonising” Christian Education

Though African countries received political independence over fifty years ago, their education systems, both religious and public, remain colonial ones. There is a need to move from the colonial education system to an authentically African-decolonized Christian education. Higgs correctly maintains that “Education in Africa in the 21st century has to operate in both a post-colonial and globalising context. But, the curriculum in postcolonial Africa is still, to a large extent, confronted by the legacy of colonial education that remained in place decades after political decolonization (Higgs 2016, p. 1). In many African countries, colonial education before independence and African education after independence are a tautology. African education is like a pasted copy of colonial education. Colonial education is reflected in African education today: “Despite the advent of decolonisation, African education systems mirror colonial education paradigms inherited from former colonial education systems, and as a result, the voices of African indigenous populations are negated” (Higgs 2016, p. 1). There is the urgency to decolonizing education in Africa; it seems to be controversial to speak of “colonizing” Christian education. However, it is important to remember that, in many parts of Africa, education in general, and even Christian education in particular, was used as a tool to perpetuate colonialism. In all the colonized African countries, the role of education was not for the development of Africa. Education was used as a tool to ensure colonization and neocolonisation. It is correct to affirm that “All of the colonial powers created systems of education that aimed to create “new” Africans totally saturated by colonial education” (Assié-Lumumba 2016, p. 14). During the colonial time, there were two kinds of education:

- (1) schools for chiefs’ sons targeted as future African leaders who, unlike those who led anti-colonial resistance movements, would support colonial rule; and
- (2) schools for a relatively small number of boys from lower classes, trained for subaltern positions as clerical, technical, and manual workers (Assié-Lumumba 2016, pp. 15–16).

Consciously or unconsciously, some missionaries contributed to this “colonizing” education. This was the case even in the British and Belgian colonies, where missionaries played a central role in setting up, managing, and ensuring the expansion of European-type schools in the colonised societies (Assié-Lumumba 2016, p. 16). In the same way, Willem Saayman writes

Western civilisation was, for most missionaries, so obviously superior to African civilisation, they introduced the Western school system without giving much thought to intercultural implications. This resulted in a clash between African and Western concepts of education. This was one of the causes of the upheaval in Black education in South Africa. . . (Saayman 1991, p. 29).

In many places in Africa, in the beginning, there was an imposition of colonial education. Colonial education was neither a tool of liberation nor of decolonization:

Colonial education that was forced on Africans was a reflection of the colonial dynamics and imperative of total control. . . It was the case in administered and settler colonies, including the apartheid regime in South Africa, that adopted the Bantu Education Act at a time when the decolonisation movement was intensified (Assié-Lumumba 2016, p. 16).

However, later on, colonial power made Africans desire European education so that they may have some of the advantages which whites were having. The Africans who were educated by this European education continued the process of colonization “The European-educated Africans were inadvertently but “by choice” promoting expanded and deeper colonisation of the mind through education that was entrenched by the time African colonies won independence in the 1950s, and with accelerated pace in the 1960s. Europe” (Assié-Lumumba 2016, pp. 20–21).

From the beginning of independence, many African countries wanted to “decolonize” the education left by the colonialists in order to advance as free countries: “For instance, Guinea, Mali, Tanzania, and Algeria wanted to use education as an instrument for a more global undertaking of social transformation or even revolution” (Assié-Lumumba 2016, p. 21). In fact, this is true for Africa as a whole: “The independent nations of Africa now face the task of re-evaluating and reshaping those institutions imposed on them by the former colonial powers. The educational institutions these emerging nations inherited are not linked to the realities of present-day African needs” (Urch 1971, p. 249). Let us briefly reflect on the move toward the decontextualisation of the colonial education context and the recontextualisation of Christian education.

4.2.2. A Shift from the Context of Decontextualisation of Colonial Education to the Recontextualisation of African Education in Africa

In this section, we limit ourselves to the paradigm shift from decontextualization to recontextualization. Mera and Morcom argue also for another paradigm shift from recontextualization to transcontextualisation (Mera and Morcom 2009, p. 3).

Before the colonial invasion, Africa had its educational system. The context of African education ensured the transmission of cultural values and knowledge from one generation to the next. It was not transferred through teaching in a classroom of a school. It is correct to maintain that

Pre-colonial Africa was neither an educationally nor a technologically unsophisticated continent. While education was an integral part of the culture, issues of language identification and standardization. . . today were insignificant. Children learned community knowledge and history by asking questions instead of being taught in a hegemonic alien language (Babaci-Wilhite et al. 2012, p. 619).

African education was integral. In some places, some aspects of education were more developed than in other places. Omolewa correctly affirms that “Traditional African education is an integral part of the culture and history of a local community, which is stored in various forms and transmitted through various modes. Such modes include language, music, dance, oral tradition, proverbs, myths, stories, culture, and religion” (Omolewa 2007, p. 594). Furthermore, he adds “Traditional African education, which is passed from one generation to another, is usually by word of mouth and cultural rituals, and has to some extent been the basis for sustainable development in agriculture, food preparation, health care, conservation, and other sectors for many centuries” (Omolewa 2007, p. 594). Concerning African education

Abdou Moumouni has written in some detail on ‘traditional’ education. In his book, *L’Education en Afrique*, divides traditional education in Africa into four stages: first childhood (0–6 years), second childhood (6–10 years), third childhood (10–15 years) and puberty crisis/entry into adolescence (15–16 years) (White 1996, p. 10).

It is a sad reality that colonialization in Africa was associated with the destruction of African culture and civilization (White 1996, p. 10). The history of Africa before colonialization was despised and, in some places, even destroyed. Some Western writers went as far as saying that African history is either unknowable or does not exist. This is a sad ignorance. Coquery-Vidrovitch writes

This relative absence of African history in France prior to independence explains why historians who began specializing in African studies read works primarily by scholars of other disciplines, chiefly those of anthropologists, geographers, sociologists, linguists, and political scientists in early 1960s there were still fewer economists specialized on Africa than historians” (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2006, p. 108).

It is important to decontextualize colonial education in order to recontextualize African education based on its authentic cultural values. Especially in South Africa where there is a

great danger of “the legacy of colonial racism”, there is an imperative to decontextualize colonial Christian education and to recontextualize authentic African Christian education (Bassil 2005, pp. 27–28).

Taking seriously the context is not an option in teaching and learning activities. Any education which does not take seriously into account the context of the place it might be associated with is a pseudo-education. Colonial education in Africa was basically an implantation of the education of colonisers in view of continuing colonialism and neocolonialism (Bude 1983, p. 342). Kay and Nystrom hold that

In the literature on colonialism two basic characteristics predominate: first, the relationship between colonialism and education is thought to be a simple one in which the official and non-official colonial agents dictated what education would be like; and secondly, the African point of view is almost totally ignored” (Kay and Nystrom 1971, p. 240).

Many people found that colonial education was not beneficial for Africans. Edward Coleson writes “Certainly some Africans are aware that there may be other results of an educational program as, for instance, the native chief who suggested that if all the people became educated, they would all sit down and starve to death. Another realistic individual pointed out that the most important result of a greatly expanded educational program might be simply a swollen budget” (Coleson 1955, p. 169). There is a need for decontextualization of colonial education. Tim de Jong et al. write “*De-contextualisation of learning activities*: often learners have been confronted with course information without a real application context and there was often a gap in transferring knowledge to performance that could not be filled instantly by the learners” (De Jong et al. 2008, p. 42).

Kumalo agrees with Bongani Alison Mazibuko (1932–1997) who insists on the need to “contextualise Christian education in the African context.” He also warned against a Christian education that, in fact, aims at domestication and called for an approach that brings about liberation and transformation (Kumalo 2005, pp. 105–6). Marcel writes in the same line. He maintains that the process of contextualization in education designates all the interactive relations between the teachers and the students and the context of action at present. The concept of contextualization is concerned with three levels which are interdependent: the theoretical, methodological, and empirical levels (Marcel 2002, p. 104).

African intellectuals in all domains are invited to embark on the normal task of contextualization and recontextualization of Christian education in Africa. Education is the best tool to reconstruct African history which was lost, among others, through colonization: “As such, we consider historical contextualisation a skill in which knowledge of the historical context plays an important role. Historical contextualization is seen by many scholars as a competency essential to thinking and reasoning historically” (Huijgen and Holthuis 2018, p. 30). It is also important to highlight that the reconstruction of the African historical context is not an easy task. A historical context is a long process which involves, among others, finding responses to these questions from any historical source:

Where was the source made? When was the source made? Who made the source? Why the source was made? Which historical phenomenon do you relate to the source? Which historical persons or concepts do you relate to the source? Which political structures do you relate to the source? Which political structures do you relate to the source? Which social-cultural structures do you relate to the source? (Huijgen and Holthuis 2015, p. 53).

Let us consider another paradigm shift to improve Christian education in Africa.

4.2.3. A Qualitative Jump from exclusive “Africanness (Negritude)” to Inclusive “African Humanness (Ubuntu)” and Flourishing

Before embarking on Africanisation, it is important to weigh the pros and cons of the task. Kamwendo is correct in his approach. He writes “Africanisation of curricula is a concept that invites a number of critical questions such as: what? (definition), why? (rationale), how? (process), and so forth. This is a concept that has bred a number of

definitions, meanings, connotations and implications. . ." (Kamwendo 2016, p. 17). What is Africanisation? There are many definitions of Africanisation. In this reflection, we favour this definition: "Simply put, Africanisation is a trademark, symbolising the uniqueness of the African people's values, experiences, challenges and pathways, powered by research (knowledge) and geared towards a united and better Africa" (Potokri 2016, p. 158).

It is important to highlight that the Africanisation of Christian education is not a simple task. In fact, there are some white people who have claimed that it is an absurd and impossible task. James Moulder maintains that the Africanisation of universities in Africa is absurd. He writes, "The first thing that should be noted about the idea of 'Africanising' our universities is that it is an absurd idea. Nobody has ever contemplated the Anglicisation of Oxford and Cambridge, or the Americanisation of Harvard and Yale, and nobody ever will; these ideas make no sense" (Moulder 1988, p. 2). Furthermore, he adds, "But in South Africa, the idea of 'Africanising' our universities does make sense; and therefore, paradoxically, it is an absurd idea" (Moulder 1988, p. 2). Mahmood Mamdani was faced with a lot of opposition, especially from the white faculty, when trying to Africanise the best university in Africa, the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 1998 (Kamola 2011, p. 149). However, Ogunnubi and Shawa hold that there are some visible fruits of the Africanisation of universities in South Africa, especially the role these universities play in higher education in Africa. They write, "The role that South Africa's higher education plays as a sophisticated tool of influence in Africa's development is becoming increasingly critical to the transformation of the continent, thus strengthening its status as an important regional and global actor" (Ogunnubi and Shawa 2017, p. 81).

Adams, basing himself on other countries like Mozambique, maintains that this noble yet difficult task of Africanising African universities is possible (Adams 1975, pp. 51–54).

Maybe it is important to make a distinction between "Africanness" (*negritude*) and "being African". However, it is also debatable about being an African. Who is an African? Is it based on the colour of the skin? Is it based on being born in Africa? Is it based on being patriotic about Africa? Is it about living the African values of *ubuntu*? Bengu and Weisse write

The deputy president Mbeki made a speech on the 8th of May. . . theme of his speech was that he was African. And all the other parties joined him, Mr. De Klerk also declared: I am also an African and with African roots. . . leader of the Pan African Congress stood up and said: All these parties are copying us, we are the ones who have claimed to be Africans (Bengu and Weisse 1998, p. 209).

If De Klerk can claim to be an African, can this be understood in line with Miller's concept of "Africanising apartheid" (Miller 2015, p. 449)? When reflecting on the Africanisation of education, it is important to be aware of the reality of globalization. Chikoko holds, "In the quest to Africanise higher education curricula, we must be conscious of the influence of globalization" (Chikoko 2016, p. 76). One cannot ignore the influence of globalization in Africa and other parts of the world. The influence of globalization is in all domains, including education. It is correct to hold that

The post-colonial university, one which accepts its local, national and international duties and responsibilities. . . for the post-colonial university is concerned overwhelmingly with cultural diversity, with interdisciplinarity. . . to raid the global store of knowledge in the search for workable solutions to local and national problems (Wright 1992, p. 29).

It is important to see the interconnectedness of African humanness (*ubuntu*) and African integral flourishing. They are not opposing realities. When they are properly understood, they can be mutually inclusive and enriching. In a similar way, Kleinig and Evans insist on the interconnectedness of "Human Flourishing, Human Dignity, and Human Rights" (Kleinig and Evans 2013, p. 539).

In promoting African humanness (*ubuntu*) and African flourishing, women should not be excluded. On the contrary, the liberation of women in Africa and their wellbeing

should be a top priority. Sesanti, in his article “Decolonized and Afrocentric Education: For Centering African Women in Remembering, Re-Membering, and the African Renaissance” writes, “for the African Renaissance project to succeed, a decolonized and Afrocentric education, which would enable Africans to rediscover traditional African education, which regarded human dignity—both women’s and men’s, especially women’s—as an inalienable right, is a prerequisite” (Sesanti 2019, p. 432).

Ubuntu is associated with good human relations in Africa. Ubuntu, being a relational African concept or rather a reality, can be related to “*Cognatus ergo sum*” (I am known, therefore I am) or even to “*Amo et amor ergo sum*” (I love and I am loved, therefore I am). Mudimbe, in his book *Liberty in African and Western Thought*, has a similar view (Mudimbe 1988, p. 4). Murobe sees also *ubuntu* in terms of relations (Murobe 2000, pp. 43–67) and Wiredu associates *ubuntu* with African culture and morality (Wiredu 1998, pp. 306–16). R. J. Khoza, in his book, *Attuned Leadership: African Humanism as Compass*, maintains that the concept and the reality of ubuntu are to be associated with a Zulu proverb of *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (which means a person is a person through others). My personhood depends on my relationship with others (Chikoko 2016, p. 71). However, for LaCugna (1993, p. 290, Rm 1), authentic personhood is neither “autonomy” (egocentric) nor “heteronomy” (other centred) but “Theonomy” (theocentric).

In spite of the great appreciation of *ubuntu*, there are a few people who argue against *ubuntu*. David A. McDonald writes, “The philosophy and language of *ubuntu* has been taken up and appropriated by market ideologies in post-apartheid South Africa. The literature on *ubuntu* capitalism’ offers the most obvious illustration of this, but there are more subtle ways in which *ubuntu* theory and language have been (re)introduced to post-apartheid South Africa to support and reinforce neoliberal policymaking” (McDonald 2010, p. 139).

Christian education should insist on what will enhance the wellbeing of Africa from spiritual and human points of view. Education should help people to be able to develop and flourish. Hamilton and Asiedu write

There has been a general consensus among education policy-makers in Africa that a greater emphasis must be placed on vocational-technical education. Yet, there is a growing gap between policy and practice which is further compounded by the perceptions of African youth as to the importance and value of vocational-technical education (Hamilton and Asiedu 1987, p. 338).

Furthermore, they hold “The well-being of a nation, its standard of living, and its potential for economic and industrial development depend on a large pool of expertly trained middle-level technicians, craftsmen, and other specialists” (Hamilton and Asiedu 1987, p. 338).

Christian education, just like education in general in Africa, should, among others, should focus on the holistic liberation of people in Africa: economically, socially, politically, culturally, and religiously. There should be an emphasis on the human flourishing of all people in Africa regardless of their social strata. To promote African flourishing, there should be a joint effort of educators, policymakers, and all people in Africa (Henrekson 2014, pp. 511–13; Schaefer et al. 2015, pp. 394–95). There should be a lot of imagination in order to ensure African holistic flourishing (Cuomo 1999, pp. 101–6). Along the same line, Rabinow maintains that, in order to prosper, ameliorate, or flourish, imagination and reconstruction are important (Rabinow 2009, pp. 301–5). What is the proper attitude to African flourishing? Africans should believe in their destiny. Despair and fatalism are the worst enemies of African flourishing. Christian education should be a sign of hope to people in Africa who are affected by the colonial legacy. Without hope, it is difficult to advance towards African holistic flourishing. Nullens insists on the importance of hope in human flourishing (Nullens 2018, pp. 225–26).

Just like *ubuntu*, not everyone will agree that Christian education in Africa should promote African holistic flourishing. However, we believe that decolonized and recontextualized Christian education can promote African humanness (*ubuntu*) and human flourishing.

5. Conclusions

We have reflected on the important theme of “*Christian Education Quo Vadis?*” In our reflection, we have emphasised Africa without necessarily excluding other continents. In our systematic and systemic critical evaluation of Christian education in Africa, we have been guided by the method of See–Judge–Act.

After the general introduction, in the second chapter, we have reflected briefly on the historical survey of Christian education. We highlighted the biblical context of Christian education and its context in the Christian Tradition. We have not ignored the reflection of Christian education in the colonial context in Africa and other continents. Our third section was a critical evaluation of Christian education. We have discussed the importance of Christian education under the title “holistic human liberation as the *“ipsissima intentio”* of the Christian education”. The limitation of Christian education was discussed under “The manipulated Christian education during colonialism and neo-colonialism”. The suggestions to improve Christian education are found in the fourth chapter. First, we have suggested the people involved in improving Christian education. Then, we have proposed what is to be done to improve Christian education. Every Christian and person of goodwill, the Church, and society should work together to improve Christian education and education at large. Furthermore, we have suggested three paradigm shifts: (1) a paradigm shift from “colonising” Christian education to “decolonising” Christian education; (2) a shift from the context of decontextualization of colonial education to the recontextualisation of African education in Africa; (3) a qualitative jump from exclusive “Africanness (*negritude*)” to inclusive “African humanness (*ubuntu*)” and flourishing. We believe that, if all factors remain constant (Lt. *ceteris paribus*), these suggestions can improve Christian education in Africa and other parts of the world.

Have we exhausted the reflection of “*Christian education, quo vadis?*” Certainly not! Unfortunately, other factors are never constant. There should be, among others, good African leadership. There should be ongoing imagination and reimagination to improve Christian education (Waghid et al. 2023). Networking with people of goodwill in Africa and the world is also important.

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