Article

Lutheran Theological Education to Christian Education in (South) Africa: A Decolonial Conversion in the African Church

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Abstract: It can be debated whether a Lutheran identity is still relevant in the midst of ecumenical development in (South) Africa, with special reference to theological education and Christian education. The Lutheran Church is a unique body within the ecumenical family as it contributes to work on the mission of God. Theological education and Christian education are educational centres which aim to promote social justice towards community development. These two educational centres are branches of the Lutheran Church. Taking into account the fact that theological education and Christian education were introduced by European and American missionaries with various church traditions in (South) Africa as part of community development, the purpose of this article is to discuss the impact of Lutheran theological education and Christian education, to demonstrate their contribution in the church, and call for their decolonisation and contextualisation.

Keywords: Christian education; community development; ecumenical; Lutheran; higher education; indigenous training; doing theology

1. Introduction

African churches in the 21st century require well trained teachers for decolonised Christian educational programmes, appropriate teaching and learning materials, and qualitative learning facilities. This should be integrated with theological education that invests in equipping pastors and lay people with a decolonised theological curriculum. The point here is that theological training and Christian education should not end at the church premises, but even community members must be equipped. The place and importance of theological education and Christian education in Africa have contributed to the life and growth of the church. Yet, the African theological curriculum and Christian education are the results of colonial education systems, which disrupted existential and historical African education systems and cultural practices. Resane (2019, p. 7) provides a sense that this "Theological field of study have, over the years, reflected a distinct lack of engagement with the African continent". The purpose of this study was to reclaim the African education space, where Africans can enjoy the nature and understanding of theology from a rooted African perspective. Much of what exists of theological education and Christian education in Africa has been taken from colonial education instead of reflections upon African education. Pillay (2018, p. 184) states that South African educational institutions need to be Africanised. For centuries, these educational institutions draw teaching and learning practices from Europe and the USA without recognition and use of "the rich experiences and learning opportunities from the African continent" (Pillay 2018, p. 184). Methula (2017) radically states:

> The biggest challenge facing African universities after the juridical end of colonialism and apartheid is epistemic racism that excludes African histories, epistemologies, subjectivities, in knowledge construction, dissemination and production under the false pretext of universalisation, rationality and objectivity as understood in the canon of Western thought. (pp. 3–4)

Hegemonic colonial education is still alive in South African educational institutions, disrupting the "rich experiences and learning opportunities from the African continent". The African curriculum voice and reforms continue to be disrupted and oppressed to cater to hegemonic colonial education. (South) African universities do not directly address the question of colonialism and apartheid hegemonies in their educational systems. In the midst of a phenomenon of democracy, theological education discourse is taught at a university or any higher education institution experiencing the advent of colonisation and apartheid.

The debate surrounding decolonising the curriculum and education in Africa calls for theological curriculum and Christian education to be decolonised. Resane (2019, p. 7) states that the "Decolonisation of theology involves the fundamental rethinking and reframing of the curriculum emanating from and centring on South Africa and the continent in teaching, learning and research". This promotes indigenous African worldviews and takes seriously indigenous African cultural practices, which should be visible in theological education and Christian education. If indigenous African worldviews and cultural practices become alien to theological education and Christian education, this is not doing theology in Africa. For the advancement of theological education and Christian education in Africa, theology should be practised to meet the needs of the African context because of its unique difference. Balcomb (2013, p. 852) states that "Theology in Africa needs to be done with at least some level of consciousness that the African situation is different". Africans are certain about their African worldviews, thus, doing theology from their African worldviews is certain. The theological curriculum should be productive to reflect the indigenous African worldviews and cultural practices and, crucially, produce a Christian education curriculum that shapes the spirituality and wellbeing of the church. This should serve to restore the dignity and value of an African society. For the decolonisation of theological education and Christian education, there should be a search and process for relevant theological curriculum development.

The other aspect of the debate is that theological education is offered from a denominational background at a seminary or university. Theological institutions are called to offer a relevant ecumenical education as well (Pillay 2018, p. 185). The advocacy for seminaries and universities to offer ecumenical education is to promote changes in churches to be more ecumenical—this includes inter-religious in the current (South) African context. The focus is to provide solutions to society as an urgent call to action for decolonisation. Theological education and Christian education should inspire churches to advocate for change in society. Where churches are reasonably ecumenical, community development is well implemented to address inequalities in society. The task of theological education is to develop theological students' critical thinking, which will enable Christian education to be relevant and dynamic in churches. Theological education is not the end of teaching and learning, but research is integrated as well. Teaching and learning in (South) Africa can effectively enhance Christian education if theological education is indigenised. Theological education in higher education has made massive contributions in South Africa, Africa, and globally. Christian education has equally made greater contributions in the church. The church, through its clergy, is responsible for equipping its members with a Christian education curriculum that is socially centred. This article engages with four aspects: first, it discusses the current understanding of Lutheran theological education and Christian education; second, the historical development of theological education and Christian education in South Africa is discussed; third, the question, why there is a need for an integration of theological education and Christian education, which should be decolonised and contextualised for an African heritage, is explored; and lastly, the central role of theological education, ecumenism, and community development is discussed.

2. The Understanding of Lutheran Theological Education

Theological education is taught according to Lutheran theology. Nürnberger (2012, p. 106), states, "According to Lutheran theology there is only one article on which the Church stands

or falls and that is the liberating, transforming and empowering Gospel in juxtaposition to the inciting, accusing, and condemning law". Yet, the study of theology sounds good with the Lutheran ingredients of traditional teachings. It becomes a "bad" theology if it lacks context. "We need to study and do a theology with the aim of going deeper into the ocean of knowledge, but at the same time return to the desert as soon as possible to share with those in need" (Isaak 2013, p. 331). The point here is that a theology of theory alone is incomplete and not authentic to the wholeness of people, but this theology must be contextualised to be relevant to people. Theology and context are the keywords of theological education. In the 20th century, the Lutheran Church implemented theological training first at the seminary and later at a university. However, in the 21st century, Nürnberger (2012) states:

> For the future training of Lutheran Church workers: Common training for all Lutheran candidates, at the university level, in an atmosphere of ecumenical enrichment and cooperation, without losing our Lutheran identity, aiming at a diversified ministry, enabling the Lutheran churches to respond creatively to the crises in South African society. (p. 110)

Isaak (2013, p. 333) further states that "The future of studying and doing theologies in the life of the Lutheran churches in Africa will depend on developing appropriate Lutheran, contextual, ecumenical, and inter-religious engaged theological work and education". The realities of society call for the church to seriously engage with them. Lutheran theological education aims to transform aspects of societal life to better living conditions. This can be achieved when the theological curriculum is very contextual and ecumenical. Theological education has a prominent role in the life of the church and Christian education. Thus, church workers are trained not just to consume knowledge, but to engage contextually in the desert for a possible transformation of the needs of the people. Christian education is offered according to Lutheran Theology. Theological education and Christian education are carefully integrated and nurtured towards the church mission and community development.

3. Method

The study applies a qualitative approach, focusing on a deeper understanding of the historical contribution of Lutheran theological education and Christian education in the church and the call for their decolonisation and contextualization. The data collection of primary and secondary sources is used and critically analysed for their relevance to the study. The purpose of this data is to demonstrate that decolonising theological education and decolonising Christian education are essential to address the various challenges that continue to exist because of the Eurocentric curriculum in higher education and the church in the 21st century. In engaging with this complex Eurocentric curriculum, it is necessary to briefly start by reflecting and evaluating the impact of coloniality in higher education, and decoloniality as a liberative response.

4. Decolonisation or Decoloniality of Theological Education

The decolonisation or decoloniality of theological education should be implemented with what Matemba (2022, p. 142) states "Decoloniality as an epistemological and political movement advances decoloniality as a necessary liberatory language of the future for Africa". After 1994, decolonisation of the Eurocentric curriculum was expected to be the key priority in South African higher education. This transition was a moment for higher education "to contribute to fundamental transformation, social cohesion and addressing the difficult" apartheid epoch (Heleta 2018, p. 48). The "Decolonization of knowledge implies the end of reliance on imposed knowledge, theories and interpretations, and theorizing based on one's own past and present experiences and interpretation of the world" (Heleta 2018, p. 48). The curriculum in South African universities continues with irrelevant and unproductive Eurocentric knowledge and worldviews, and dismisses the African knowledges and worldviews (Heleta 2018, p. 48). The evidence is that colonial and apartheid curriculum in South Africa created white supremacy and dominance to oppress African people. "The current higher education curriculum still largely reflects the colonial

and apartheid worldviews and is disconnected from African realities, including the lived experiences of the majority of black South Africans" (Kgatle 2018, p. 4). This is a heavy curriculum that black students continue to carry to their (South) African communities as a tool of socioeconomic and political injustices. The higher education curriculum is not responsive to the deepening hostility of poverty, socioeconomic, and political challenges. The Eurocentric curriculum is recycled in South African universities and other higher learning institutions to economically benefit the white community and intensify inequality in the black community. The dawn of democracy in South Africa was expected to see higher education influencing black students with the values of socioeconomic, cultural, and political justice and the liberation of black communities. This means that the decolonisation of the Eurocentric curriculum is an ongoing process of transformation within South African universities and other learning institutions.

Decolonisation calls for the removal of the Eurocentric curriculum in (South) African universities and all higher learning institutions, this does not exclude basic education (primary education and secondary). Heleta (2018, p. 47) states that the "Decolonization of knowledge is crucial in order to rewrite histories, reassert the dignity of the oppressed and refocus the knowledge production and worldviews for the sake of the present and the future of the country and its people, as well as the rest of the African continent". This liberating agenda is initiated and promoted by South African universities' students "movement to dismantle the Eurocentric hegemony and decolonize higher education" in 2015 (Heleta 2018, p. 47). The decolonisation of knowledge within universities gives priority to the students whose education clashes with the culture and dominance of Eurocentric education. The decolonisation enterprise is necessary to make a colonial enterprise outdated in a (South) African context.

Theological education is not excluded from the package of Eurocentric curriculum. Naidoo (2024, p. 5) states theological education is "structural racism, which has not disappeared with apartheid". Thus, education remains unchanged in South Africa. "The privileged canons of theological knowledge need to be dismantled, and the focus should be on developing inclusive perspectives that recognise diversity as a manifestation of God's creativity, and as a theological virtue" (Naidoo 2024, p. 6). This means that decolonisation of theological education is necessary according to the African social realities, which gives meaning to the African context. Decolonisation of theological education embraces the gift of an indigenous theology rooted in the values of African realities. This is aligned with what Kgatle (2018, p. 7) states, "Theological education is, therefore, challenged to instil a sound, liberating and empowering theology of work to enable the poor to be productive citizens". This means that theological education has carefully analysed, understood, and followed the quality and relevant decolonisation approach of what is required of South African universities. Decolonising theological education is only relevant to Africans when African worldviews and realities are part of its curriculum. Matemba (2022) states:

> Decolonising theological education should involve a radical shift in the curriculum involving the use of multiple sources to 'hear' different voices ('knowledge democracy'), a process that informs knowledge we teach and methodologies we use to teach that material. There should be deliberate attempts to recentre African way of understanding and 'doing' theology but not at the expense at other equally valid knowledge claims. (p. 152)

Decolonising theological education is indeed more helpful when various African voices and realities are heard to develop the curriculum and teaching materials that are relevant to churches and inter-religious communities in Africa and African societies. This is a response to an interesting botho/ubuntu philosophy integrated in theological education in (South) Africa. Decolonising theological education is equal to decolonising religious education or Christian education. Gearon et al. (2021, p. 2) says that decolonising the religious education curriculum promotes the "equality of religions and cultures, and marked by the use of religion in education to enhance liberal, democratic, human rights-oriented goals". This drives societal models of equality in diverse societies for essential

teaching and learning religious discourse (Gearon et al. 2021, p. 3). This is how decolonising Christian education should be performed, and decolonising theological education should critically engage and assist with how Christian education is relevant to African societies.

5. A Brief Historical Perspective on Theological Education in South Africa

A historical perspective on theological education is given here to show the inception and development of theological education. Msomi (1988, p. 196) says that "For the latter part of the 19th century and the early 20th century, theological education in southern Africa was rudimentary. The focus was on training catechists and evangelists, not pastors". Missionaries viewed catechists as their helpers who served in mission stations and many Christian communities. Catechists lived in local villages and had a limited education, but effectively preached the gospel in their African communities (Msomi 1988, p. 196). The missionaries started to train local "Evangelists, Catechists, teachers and lay readers, who helped as much as possible with teaching, evangelical and pastoral work" (Gqubule 1977, p. ix). The training of African catechists, teachers, and evangelists was central in the establishment of many mission stations to congregations in South Africa and the African continent. The church ministry is heavily dependent on the theological education strategic plan. Theological education played an essential part in the preparation for ministry in the church. An extensive theological training of catechists and evangelists was required to facilitate a programme to develop an appropriate mission work.

The "Missionary Era" was the first face of theological education, which was dependent and centred around European and American missionary work. An initial missionary plan was to train catechists and various mission societies with their own training plans and procedures. This era was faced with challenges, for example, there "was no written literature available in the African languages" (Msomi 1988, pp. 196–97). Catechists were very special for the teaching ministry. Schools in Africa were cultivated out of the catechism class and its main players were catechists and teachers. Teachers become church ministers, while others served the state (Sundkler 1969, p. 3). Effective theological education programmes had to be developed to deepen and enhance the church ministry. Theological education was meant to train catechists and evangelists to serve Christian communities. Catechists and evangelists received a theological education that was not adequate for the level of a pastor. Catechists were trained with a theological education that is basically about Christian education. According to Pauw (1994, p. 14) people are trained "first as evangelists and subsequently as ordained pastors".

6. A Brief Historical Perspective of Christian Education in South Africa

Several reasons were the educational foundations for Christian education. The religious significance of religious education is visible in what is called Christian education. Komane (1994, p. 17) states that missionaries "provided the people with a preliminary religious education background by teaching them to read and write through the Bible". Missionaries have evangelized and taught black people through religious education, which has pioneered the planting and growth of Christianity in South Africa and some parts of the African continent. The Bible was an instrumental teaching material integrated into various missionary church traditions and doctrines.

African teachers taught Christian education for the development of the church ministry in Africa. They preached and taught Sunday schools on Sundays. They become important role players in the councils of the churches. They were "agents for religions education in schools and society generally" (Sundkler 1969, p. 3). Christian education became a successful teaching ministry in congregations. Christian education is not an end to teaching only church members, but community members as well. Many churches in the current context of the 21st century no longer allow community members to have their own meetings or any gatherings except when community members pay a fee to use a church building. Church buildings should be opened for all community members to be equipped with Christian education, which is relevant to community building and devel-

opment. This needs to be a generational habit to better the lives of people in community infrastructure and socioeconomic spheres. The church as a social movement should freely allow disadvantaged community members to have their gatherings at a church building.

According to Berglund (1969, p. 6), "If the church is to have a meaningful and relevant message to its people", it should survey the needs of the people. Naidoo (2015, p. 178) further states that "Within the South African context, universities and seminaries miss opportunities to prepare people for Christian social engagement through study that links theology and congregational life to the concerns and structures they will encounter". This is very central in Christian education to teach the people a curriculum that addresses their needs. The responsibility of the Christian education curriculum is to teach it in a specific setting. This means that the church is relevant to its theological context in service of communities. The Christian education curriculum must always be an education of constant change and adjustment called by a specific context. The Christian education curriculum must be rooted in theology and congregational life. This enables the church to preach and teach a meaningful and relevant message to society. Teaching theological education in higher education always requires a curriculum that emerges from the social context, which should be visibly taught in Christian education as well.

7. Towards an African Heritage as the Centre of Lutheran Theology and Theological Education

The realities of African heritage and contexts call for Lutheran theological education or theological education, in general, to unconditionally accept them. Musa (1969, p. 3) states that "Training for ministry in contemporary Africa must be indigenous". Indigenous training is necessitated by the realities of the social structure and cultural influence in Africa. Theological education is taught from a Christ-centred and intellectual theology perspective. "The African cultural heritage is valued as something to be proud of and appreciated" (Musa 1969, p. 3). The relevance of theological education in Africa requires indigenous training, which necessitates the church to be decolonised. Theological education was introduced from Western ideas and culture, which are closely relevant in Europe and America, while not addressing the African needs. Theological education is relevant to be taught in Western theological institutions to address Western realities. Theological education is indigenised because of the value of African cultural heritage, which is highly relevant and appealing to theological institutions and university faculties of theology in Africa.

Theological institutions in Africa must equip pastors "to interpret the Gospel in terms of the contemporary thinking and vocabulary of the people" (Musa 1969, p. 3). This reminds the church to understand that it operates in the political and socioeconomic environment. Theological institutions are required to offer a theological curriculum that is outside of theological studies or church concerns (Musa 1969, p. 4). Pastors ought to be trained to have a closer relationship with the people they serve. They need basic training in agriculture and finance. "The pastor needs to be trained for community leadership" (Mshana and Nyblade 1969, p. 8). The theological curriculum, offered by theological institutions, must address not only the spirituality of the people, but also the political and socioeconomic concerns and contexts of the people. Pastors, evangelists, and deacons must be equipped with an inclusive theological curriculum that addresses the concerns and contexts of the people in Africa. Thus, Lutheran heritage or other Western church heritage and traditions are required to be indigenised and decolonised by the rich African culture. Theological institutions must accept a change made by an indigenous training perspective for them to be flexible in the world of indigenisation and decolonisation.

An African heritage as the centre of Lutheran Theology and Christian education is equally important for equipping congregational members. This is applied within a context that pastors, deacons, and evangelists are trained with an indigenised theological curriculum. The indigenised Christian education and studies within the church should be taught from the African heritage, biblical, and theological perspectives to enrich congregants. This

is influenced by a changing context because of the time and place in which congregations live. Furthermore, congregants can gain a broad understanding of church ministry and a critical evaluation of the successes and implications of their various approaches to church ministry. Christian education should always be relevant and indigenous to congregational contexts and in continuity with Lutheran Theology.

8. Theological Education and Ecumenism

Theological education must be always taught from an ecumenical perspective. Essentially, theological education must always be ecumenical. According to Musa (1969, p. 4) "The ecumenical movement is when and where there are a number of denominations working together smoothly and in 'brotherly' cooperation". Theological education should positively include the teachings of other denominations. A Roman Catholic Church teacher should be allowed to teach at a Lutheran theological college. This will enable "students to be ecumenically minded" (Musa 1969, p. 4). Churches own their theological institutions and insist on mainly teaching their church traditional theology. They control theological curriculum in their own theological institutions. This limits pastors, evangelists, and deacons to effectively minister where the church members stay in various communities and belong to various churches, to inter-religious and non-church or non-inter-religious members. Churches are called to ensure that their theological institutions are ecumenical to motivate their students to be ecumenical. First, any church must be ecumenical and second, its theological institution will automatically embrace, teach, and live ecumenism.

According to Cochrane (1996a, p. 9), the Orthodox Church stands with Christian scriptures and tradition, which can be implemented in a context of dialogue with other faith communities and "with those of no faith it is necessary for contextualisation of theological education". Theological institutions have a great contextual task to work together with other faith communities and with those of no faith. This is where contextualisation of theological education has the potential to be in fruitful dialogue with other faith communities. Theological education is a necessary ecumenical education to be integrated and in dialogue with other inter-religious institutions for community engagement and for God's mission. Ecumenical studies at theological institutions and university faculties of theology should enable theological students to be more in dialogue with inter-religious communities. Ecumenical ministry should be a hope for unity in a country, inter-religious communities, and churches for community building and development. Thus, an ecumenical Christian education is offered within, and to advance a church-oriented education. It is very central for churches to collectively design an ecumenical Christian education curriculum and to be integrated into their existing and various church traditions' Christian education curriculums. This will advance the unity and learning of various church members. An ecumenical Christian education curriculum is conducive and enriching to the development of an ecumenical church, relevant to an African context and in continuity with the especial gifts of various church traditions.

9. The Practices of Christian Education and Community Development

Theological education should be visible and contextually relevant in teaching Christian education and for community development. A critical question arises: how can Christian education itself be a community development enterprise, informed by faith, theology, scripture study, and the practices of community engagement? African theological education and Christian education should encourage congregational education to promote quality life for (South) African citizens. Cochrane (1996b, p. 7) says "Beginning with context engages people's passions. There is here a pedagogical point to teaching and curricula which takes context seriously". The Christian education curriculum should be designed within the experiences of local communities to advance community development. This curriculum responds to the effects of human suffering such as poverty, unemployment and underpayment, or the improper infrastructure of housing, roads, and the health sector. The Christian education curriculum should be concerned with social justice to end human

suffering. This is fulfilled within an understanding that "The rule and will of God (reign of God) has to do with justice, truth, love, freedom, healing, peace and reconciliation and righteousness" (De Gruchy 1996, p. 11). The quality of Christian education must be taught to raise church and community members for the ministry of social justice. The Christian education curriculum should be designed to dismiss teaching and learning that disgraces the mission of God. The church must become a training camp for social justice in order to create a better and safer society. Democratic rule and stable government have not reached social justice in South Africa, Africa, and the whole world due to existing Gender Based-Violence (GBV), diseases, genocide, politics, and socioeconomic oppression and other forms of marginalization. This is a serious threat to humanity and the mission of God. Christian education and theological education should be concerned about these challenges.

Christian education, as another form of theology, should be community-centred rather than only a church-based phenomenon. Pobee (1989) says:

> Theology is not only a matter of knowledge, but also of wisdom. Special attention is also drawn to Africa's need to reflect more closely on the plural character of its society, and it is suggested that 'inclusiveness' ought to be a fundamental guiding principle. (p. 1)

Theology is not an end to teaching only theological students, but even non-theological students, congregational members, and even community members should be taught at open local congregations. This means that theology is a matter of inclusiveness and community development in service of the African communities who strongly live on the botho/ubuntu principle. The theological education task is to equip theological students and general students interested in theology for the task of congregational education offered through Christian education. Congregational members are theologically equipped to be committed to the task of community engagement and social development, especially to address the already changed and emerging 21st century and democratic challenges. It is the task of pastors to relevantly and ecumenically equip congregational members. This can be fulfilled through a commitment to African communities and the contextualisation of theological education and Christian education. The following highlighted aspects are essential for the implementation of theological education and training at the church:

(a) The theological training institutions and university faculties of theology should work together with the church to design a theological curriculum which fulfils the practices of community engagement.

(b) The Christian Education Committee is established and coordinated by pastors who are accountable to designing African and contextual theology study materials. This is a committee of pastors or clergy.

(c) Theology study materials cover the spiritual, political, and socio-economic wellbeing of congregational members and the clergy, and for social development.

(d) Christian Education Committees are established at local congregations and the pastor (s) are in-charge of the committees and Christian education laity educators who forms part of this committee.

(e) The Pastors' Christian Education Committee is responsible for equipping laity educators with the existing theology study materials, their role of teaching children, confirmation class, and the whole congregation.

(f) Congregational Christian Education Committees are responsible for inviting local community members, not necessarily to join the church, but essential to equip them to be agents of community engagement.

These proposals require a church that values the vocation or calling or station of Christian education ministry. The church must be ready and passionate to finance this theological curriculum enterprise. Church members who should serve in the Christian Education Committee are members who are called upon and passionate and, through Christian education training, are becoming Christian education experts and church agents of community engagement. Most local churches do not have an existing Christian education

curriculum and teaching materials to equip church members. The proposed suggestions will address this serious vacuum. A common existing teaching material is only a catechism. Churches are challenged to design theology study materials to equip the laity for community engagement.

10. Conclusions

Theological education and Christian education were discussed in this article from the decoloniality point of view to promote social justice in higher education and the church. The legacy of coloniality and its Eurocentric curriculum has been discussed. This article proposed the decolonisation of curriculum, which calls for decolonising the theological curriculum, which is very contextual and ecumenical, and decolonising the Christian education curriculum that is not only relevant for the church, but also for community building and development. Theological education and Christian education should be taught to enhance spiritual, political, and socioeconomic well-being, which are enshrined in democratic and human rights-oriented goals in service of the people.

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