

Theological Education in Africa

An important goal of theological education is that church workers are able to assist people in manifold situations on the basis of the promises of the gospel, to convey faith and hope for the present and the future. Therefore, theological education in Africa can only succeed when it is strongly rooted in God's word and also gets involved in the mode of living of African churches. The main point is now to view the many contrast, which determine life on the continent: For example the wonderful landscapes and natural forces as well as the atmosphere of the slums around the large cities filled with refuse. Theological education is confronted with the experience of the strong and protective community of clans as well as the situation of uprooted people in the large cities who organize themselves in criminal gangs. With the bible in the hand and both feet on the ground, theological education has to ponder the African cheerfulness and sociability as well as the unrestrained killing of those who do not belong to one's own tribe. The fight for the naked survival, against diseases and social-political injustice as well as the uninhibited joy to celebrate. All this belongs to the context of theological education in Africa.

Focal points of theological education have been developed in the context of the western world. When we want to include African students in the philosophical and hermeneutic discussions of Europe and America, then they enjoy listening with interest for they long for the education, the knowledge that goes beyond their own culture. But in the end, they turn over the pages of the introduction into the bible commentaries in order to get to the exegesis of the biblical texts and to the question what meaning the biblical message has in their African context. Readily, they sit at the feet of their theological teachers in order to listen to their lectures but the real learning takes place during the following powwow. This is so for example in the committed discussion, in how far the story of creation is correctly interpreted when nature is considered non-divine and is demonstrating the eternal difference between the creator and the creation. And in view of their experiences with the magical world, their self-evident treatment of invisible powers, they cannot grasp of course the historical-critical questions for the miracles of Jesus.

For sure much has changed: The fast intrusion of western civilization has destroyed the traditional ways of explaining the world. Their social structures are dissolving. African peoples and churches are wrestling for a new identity. This is mirrored by African students of theology who are deeply fascinated by universal theological designs as for example the statement of *Heilsgeschichte* by Oskar Cullmann. They long for a new unity and wholeness. Specifically in the encounter of western knowledge and African mode of living in theological education, a new African identity can grow which combines both.

Combining is the strength of African theology. The typical western quarrels between a Christianity influenced by charismatic ideas and churches moved by social questions are rather foreign to them. The charismatic prayer as well as the appointment with the governor in order to discuss social-political questions - all that comprises their Christian obedience. It is a question of "réconstruction" and the rebuilding of an aggrieved society, oppressed by racial, social and political injustice. Therefore it belongs to the daily life at the theological seminary to pray together as well as to work on the fields together with the specialists for agriculture. Theological training consists in researching the bible just as in taking part in health courses (AIDS!).

The challenges of the African societies are so complex that in theological education there has to be a greater emphasis on formation of the personality than in transferring knowledge. In the process of learning, there seems to be still the old patriarchal pattern of obedience and submission predominant. They learn from the example of the patriarch who gives counsel and orders, which have to be followed. While respecting the African traditions, this old learning pattern has to be interrupted so that the future workers in the churches and congregations can experience already in the educational discussion processes the miracle of common teaching and learning. This strengthens the democratic consciousness, wakens creative forces, and initiates processes in order to bridge the gap between pre-enlightenment and modern society. Already from the behavior of the teachers in education, they can learn how to deal with power and authority so that others are encouraged and supported.

Therefore, women should be included increasingly into the theological education for they carry the burden of daily life. Hopefully, the times are over when highly educated western pastor could speak and act over the heads of their congregation while their uneducated wives on their side did not know how to answer something useful to the many looking for counsel. Theological education deals with the humans as whole in their social context (Ibadan declaration). Part of this all-comprising entity are man and woman. When a society or church is ready to educated female pastors, the African churches have to decide by themselves in each case. As European partner churches we will bring up this issue again and again diplomatically.

A further, typical Black-African problem is the co-existence and opposition of different ethnic groups. Each person understands him or herself in the context of his or her own tribe. If one is dealing with the formation of personalities as goal of theological education, then one has to take into account African tribal thinking. How is it possible that different ethnic groups jointly shoulder the future? In the national theological school, young Africans from all possible tribes of their country come together. In the communal life on the campus, they meet and learn to respect each other. Presupposition for this process is a leadership or maybe even leadership-team, which can integrate the different currents and forces. Here international co-workers can play an important role for they are exempt from the ethnic struggle for competency.

Even if many African churches have educated their own theological teachers, the use of missionaries or international co-workers in the area of theological education makes sense and is wanted by many of the African churches. A non-national teacher is important for the theological school because through his presence and his emphasis the horizon of students studying bible and theology is ecumenically widened. (Such an ecumenical widening of the horizon would not be bad for European theological schools either.) It is expected that the international teacher voices his opinion in regard to different subjects on the basis of his cultural understanding and is willing to get involved in the powwow with students and co-workers. And he is also expected to gain practical experience by facing challenging situations together with his students in the congregations and in society. In this way, theology remains alive when it gets involved in reality.

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