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# Ecumenical Formation in the Service of a Renewed Church

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However important theology, formation, education, ministry, ecclesiology and ecumenism are, it is ecumenism that gives them perspective. They foster the development of the ecumenical imperative and a praxis founded in scripture, as well as the formation of persons to work in the service of ecumenism.

## **Envisioning**

In some circles, especially in the World Council of Churches (WCC), envisioning is often understood as being “prophetic”. My aim is rather to *forthtell*, to articulate what we should or could be doing, so as to be viably church, faithful to the ecumenical imperative. Forthtelling engages with the contemporary reality of the context and lessons of history.

Envisioning can also become ingenuous invention that does not exactly respond to the local contextual reality. For the vision to move peoples to live the ecumenical imperative, it must also be emotionally satisfying so that it challenges people to action. It should take seriously the language and idiom of the field of action. In the case of Africa, it may mean acquainting the people with the basic facts of ecumenism precisely because ecumenical formation has been minimal.

## **Memory**

As we embark on this exercise, we need memory, not just to recall the past, but to make present and real the insights and teachings of history, experience and scripture (Luke 22:19). Memory and memorial are key to the central Christian rite of the eucharist; they are at the heart of the Jewish feast of Pesah (Passover), Sabbath, Yom Kippur, and the celebration of the holocaust. Six months of living in Israel have reminded me forcefully of the crucial importance of memory for the life of the nation of Israel. I learn from this that theological and ministerial formation should aim at making the memory of our being as church a dynamic reality. As the philosopher

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George Santayana puts it, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (*Life of Reason*).

### Experience

Experience is one of the cornerstones of religion<sup>1</sup> and therefore must be taken seriously: it should teach us much about ecumenism's successes and failures. In Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi, Namibia and South Africa, there has been massive killing, genocide, fratricide and ethnic cleansing in which churches and Christians were accomplices. The Christian sense of mutual accountability to God the Creator of all and to one another in the *una sancta* has therefore failed. The achievements of the Faith and Order movement, the International Missionary Council, the Life and Work movement, the World Council of Christian Education, bilateral and multilateral ecumenism, and so on, must never be treated as *passé*; they must be *engaged* with a view to refocusing, redirecting, re-envisioning ecumenism. Members of WCC assemblies and its central committee, and even staff, have sometimes been found wanting in their knowledge and memory of the ecumenical movement. Critical engagement with such knowledge will be conducive to viable memory. We are concerned with how programmes *build upon* the past – memories and experiences – so that ecumenism may become not only real but vibrant, viable and relevant.

This paper focuses on the educational stream of the ecumenical movement. While recognizing that the WCC is only "a privileged arm" of the movement, we shall draw on experience gained by the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, near Geneva; the Christian education tradition of the WCC; and the Theological Education Fund and its subsequent incarnations. The material is necessarily highly selective.

### Africa

At the WCC's eighth assembly in 1998, 222 out of the total church membership of 336 were third-world churches. Of these 222, 89 were African. To date, the inclusion of Africa in the movement has seemed rather cosmetic, barely taking seriously the implications and consequences of bringing in a people with different histology and culture. Here is a challenge for a genuine incarnation of the gospel in Africa, for Africa to be brought into the ecumenical dialogue, for a determined commitment to an African ideal.<sup>2</sup>

Ecumenism, properly understood, is a perspective of a movement and not primarily the institutionalized church. It is a *renewal* movement composed of diverse groups with a common "ideology" (i.e. ecumenism) for common action.

By definition and necessity a movement has political impact and implications because it affects the allocation of power and influence.<sup>3</sup> Those who accuse the ecumenical movement of politicizing faith fail to appreciate the nature of the situation. The ecumenical movement's selective support of the struggle against racism in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), apartheid in South Africa and colonialism in South West Africa (now Namibia) was consistent with the movement character of ecumenism. Similarly, the movement's emphasis on theology by the people, which seemingly challenges the hegemony of the clergy, or on the participation of youth and women, thereby challenging the *status quo* in churches, reveals its character as a movement.<sup>4</sup>

This insight has implications for theology and ministry. Theology cannot be only reflection, transmitting a body of information, absorbing facts and figures, and main-

taining church structures. Theology is also *participation* in or *doing* the word of God. If that participation looks like political activity, so be it. The life of Moses, the 8th-century prophets (Amos 4, 5:7-27; Hosea 4:1-3, 6:4-11), and Jesus himself challenging the powers-that-be, injustice and violence, demonstrates that theology and ministry must not only be study but also involve doing the word.

In 1995 a regional consultation on ecumenical theological education at Kuruman, South Africa, stated: "When the church focuses on the needs of the world, its pains and suffering, denominationalism becomes relativized and ecumenical commitment is strengthened."<sup>5</sup> This confirms that theology, indeed ecumenical formation, is above all doing the word: it is the encounter between revelation and social reality. It is viable only when it has an incarnational model: the publication on the global consultation on viability had as a sub-title, "ecumenical imperative, catalyst of renewal".

### **Church is mission**

Once we accept that Africa and Asia, Latin America and the Pacific have become the heartlands of the Christian church and mission,<sup>6</sup> then we can believe that the African churches mean it when they claim mission to be their burden. Mission is not a task of being church, it defines the church; it is the reason for the church's existence and being. It is the *whole* mission of God through the *whole* church in the *whole* world. The church is only a messenger of God.

Further, this mission has three components: proclamation, making disciples (also termed evangelism), and obedience to the will of God or living the socio-ethical imperative of the gospel (cf. Matt. 28:19-20). Any attempt to separate the three or set them against each other would prove inadequate. Each of them must be undertaken with ecumenical vision.

Christianity has always been universal in principle, and has gradually become more so in reality. But because the centre of gravity of world Christianity was in the North Atlantic, the principle was clouded, especially when the church became mixed up with colonialism and other ideologies of power. However, as today the heartlands of Christianity are demonstrably in the South, especially Africa, it is only now that it is becoming universal in practice.<sup>7</sup> The models shaped under Northern dominance need to be revised, and theological education and ministerial formation should be among the first areas to be addressed.

### **The inextricability of mission and ecumenism**

While we applaud the sense of mission of the African churches, that mission consciousness was mediated by denominational missionary societies, for example the Church Missionary Society or the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society. Consequently, the Christian groups resulting from these efforts have been trapped in denominationalism. Partly through the practice of comity, labels like "Protestant", "Roman Catholic" or "Orthodox" inspire little, if any, sense of identification among churches in Africa. People belong to a denomination not because of any theological-doctrinal convictions, but because they happen to have been born or grown up in areas where that denomination operated. In the family, the prototypical community, members of different denominations will do things together without any sense of denominational difference. And yet in the church they are prevented from sharing eucharistic fellowship. Denominationalism is proving contrary to the *sensus communis* characteristic of African epistemology and ontology, and to the heart of ecumenism, communion.

Down the ages people have formed socio-political units aimed at securing basic needs and guaranteeing security. They have understood that daily survival and security may not be guaranteed without organized, established social frameworks; individual security is best protected collectively, hence the emergence of institutions such as the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization of African Unity, etc. So it is no surprise that similar groupings are found in the world of religion – the World Council of Churches, the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA), the Fellowship of Christian Councils in West Africa (FECCIWA), and the national councils of churches; in short, ecumenism.

Such collectives in the religious realm are not simply copying secular developments; it is a biblical imperative (John 17:21-23; Eph. 1:10-11, 4:3-4). Mission and ecumenism are inextricably involved. Proclamation and evangelism should have an ecumenical perspective (1 Cor. 1:10-16, 3:1-4:7); in other words, students in formation should be helped to deal with questions like the following: How does an ecumenical perspective on proclamation look in practice? What does evangelism with a vision of ecumenism look like? How does obedience to the socio-ethical imperatives of the gospel with an ecumenical hermeneutic look in practice? In such ways ecumenical consciousness will be inculcated, strengthened and renewed.

**What is the ecumenical vision and consciousness?**

For some, ecumenism is the vision of the unity of the church, i.e. ecclesial ecumenism. Every country in Africa has replicated the denominationalism of the North Atlantic, with Roman Catholic and Protestants as the main bodies, and with the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa in some areas. Lately African Initiatives in Christianity have also become a dynamic feature. The groupings are found in various ratios, which introduces different dynamics. Random examples should suffice.<sup>8</sup>

Country	R. C.	Protestant	AIC	Unaffiliated	Others
Gambia	2.6%	1.5%			0.6%
Ghana	12.8%	20.3%	14.8%		
Guinea	1.3%	1.3%	1.8%		
Guinea-Bissau	8.1%	1.1%	2.9%		
Ivory Coast	14.5%	5.6%	10.8%		

The various denominations go about their business separately and relate more to the overseas “mother churches” than to other churches next door. Paul’s questions, “Is Christ divided or have I, Paul, been crucified for you? Have you been baptized in the name of Paul?” should be addressed by students and congregations. If they are, then the issue of *common witness* – “a call to adopt responsible relationships in mission and to renounce proselytism”<sup>9</sup> – must inevitably be faced.

For others, myself included, the unity of the church cannot be the sole *raison d’être* of ecumenism; it includes ultimately the unity and renewal of the world. In other words, the ecumenical vision is rooted in the insight of the first affirmation of Christian belief, in God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and the vision of a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1). Important as the unity of the church is, it cannot be the

ultimate goal of ecumenism; it is only a stage, equipping the church to be a more efficient and viable agent for “uniting everything in heaven and on earth” (Eph. 1:9-10). Thus issues of economics and politics are *as well* matters of faith.<sup>10</sup>

Raiser<sup>11</sup> points to seven characteristics in a renewed ecumenism: (1) Ecumenism is the call to the *whole* church to bring the *whole* gospel to the *whole* world. (2) Ecumenism involves the whole church in the daily lives of people; it is as much concerned with human and societal matters as with ecclesial matters. (3) The ecumenical vision incorporates *communion* and is dedicated to expressing *communion*. (4) Such a vision *empowers* people to take their lives in their own hands. (5) Ecumenism opts for and engages in *dialogue* and *solidarity*. (6) Ecumenism is committed to and endeavours to live a *culture of sharing and caring* for life. (7) The vocation and dedication of ecumenism is also *peace-building, conflict-resolution and mediation*.

The first of these points draws attention to the holistic character of ecumenism. Holism is about the interpenetration of sacred and secular, matter and spirit, individual and community; the antithesis of the dualism so prevalent in our mission and theology. Second, it is about everything and not only some things. Thus even economics becomes an issue of faith. As the Cameroonian Roman Catholic theologian Jean-Marc Ela puts it, “A theologian must stay within earshot of what is happening within the community so that community life can become the subject of meditation and prayer. In the end a theologian is perhaps simply a witness and a travelling companion, alert for signs of God and willing to get dirty in the precarious conditions of village life. Reflection crystallizes only if it is confirmed to specific questions.”<sup>12</sup> Third, we are required to be in life together; no one is an onlooker or a passenger. Therefore, the formation process should mean, *inter alia*, empowering peoples and institutions to claim everything for God. The test of viable ecumenical formation is whether it empowers people to live the ecumenical vision, which is not a single agenda, like the unity of the church, but a complex, involved and multi-dimensional vocation. In pursuing its mission holistically, the church must take care to distinguish itself from humanitarian non-governmental organizations. The church undertakes socio-economic activity only because it endeavours to obey the socio-ethical imperatives of the gospel which is also mission.

### **Ecclesial ecumenism**

Already in the New Testament divisions were manifest in the church (cf. 1 Cor. 1: 3). In the early church there were divisions between Latin and Greek churches; 1054 saw the drastic schism between the church of the East and that of the West; in the 16th century came further splits in the Latin church. In Africa people say this history of division suggests ecumenism is unrealistic. Consequently, African churches regurgitate received models of church inherited from the so-called “mother churches”: they are yet to be convinced of ecumenism. But sticking to past models without questioning is a recipe for unimaginative, passive thinking and cannot lift the veil over the future. It excludes transformation and envisioning.

The 20th century saw many steps towards ecumenical awakening: the world missionary conference in Edinburgh, Scotland; the development of the Life and Work and Faith and Order movements, and of course the emergence of the WCC; the encyclical of the ecumenical patriarchate; the Malines Conversations; the Second Vatican Council; and bilateral and multilateral discussions.

This raises two points. First, the awakening led to discussions between churches, often at leadership level. How can this reach the pews? For ecumenism should be the vocation of every congregation and every Christian: but who are, and should be, enabled to be the mediators of such formation?

Second, in the 20th century it has been the churches of the North which devised models of church and ecumenism according to their own contexts, models which do not always make sense to the South. Churches of the North, and especially the West, tend to absolutize the formation of theology, the concept of Christ, ministry, the statement of ecumenism, and ministerial formation. The rise of contextualization is the reminder that those Northern statements can no longer be taken as normative. The fact that there is a translation of the gospel and scriptures into various cultures means Christ is greater than any one interpretation can realize. Christ grows through the work of mission and translation. Can we then continue to think of the current model of *una sancta* as normative ecclesial ecumenism?

The ecumenical movement has rediscovered *koinonia* as a basic ecclesiology.<sup>13</sup> That Greek word basically means participation (cf. Acts 2:42-44) and conjures up ideas of community, communion, fellowship, solidarity, partnership, cooperation, joint ownership. In other words, ecumenism is not only an intellectual, theological challenge but also a call to commitment to those ideas. This again emphasizes that no member of the body of Christ is merely an onlooker; the church includes both clergy and laity, men and women, old and young, North and South. Theological and ministerial formation programmes should focus on *koinonia* and equip people to live lives of *konini*. How is this seen in Africa?

A radio broadcast on 11 September 1962 by Pope John XXIII was summed up as *lumen Christi, lumen ecclesiae, lumen gentium*, i.e. "the light of Christ is the light of the church and the church is the light of the nations". The vocation of the church is not to close in on itself; rather, it is inextricably related with humanity and the world. The world may try to find its own solutions to the problems which hold it in anguish: poverty, hunger, injustice and war. The church must be the church of all, particularly the poor, seeking not mere existence for humankind. It is in this regard that Pope John XXIII introduced a key word, *convivenza*, "life together", to describe the way in which Christians should work with all others: a real coordination and integration, a fraternity of love.

### **The particular African context**

The 20th-century ecumenical vision developed at a time when the North Atlantic was the heartland of Christianity, so the structures conformed to North Atlantic usage – Christendom, Enlightenment culture, etc. Now, the heartland has moved to the South, especially Africa, and that is where the ecumenism of the 21st century will be shaped.<sup>14</sup> This puts a serious burden on Africa. African churches must therefore live up to the privilege and responsibility of being the more vibrant part of the church. Africa has received much from the ecumenical church based in the North; what contribution can this new centre of world Christianity make in turn? Theological and ministerial formation must address this – and the churches of the North must be humble enough to receive the results of this reshaping and revisioning of the ecumenical enterprise.

### **THE AICS**

The explosion of Christianity in the developing nations owes much to the dynamism of African Initiatives in Christianity.<sup>15</sup> These are predominantly grassroots

movements appealing especially, though not exclusively, to the disadvantaged and underprivileged. Historic churches can no longer dismiss them because, as Roman Catholic Archbishop John Onaiyekan of Abuja, Nigeria, observes, “these churches are getting most of their members from us”.<sup>16</sup> This seepage of membership and the apparent success of the AICs suggests that the Christendom model of the historic churches does not satisfy African Christians.

Also, AICs are fissiparous. The model of church adopted does not of itself guarantee ecumenical consciousness. The necessary element is spirituality, that quality of obedience to the will of God.

The story of the AICs is helpful in another way: they are largely non-literate. The vernacular is their medium of communication and being. Ritual and bearing testimony to their experience and belief are powerful means of socializing people in the faith. Even in the seminaries, the context is largely oral. It is a challenge for theological and ministerial formation to take this on board, and develop oral structures: oral liturgy, narrative theology and witness, reconciliatory and participant community, inclusion of visions and dreams in worship, and an understanding of the relationship between body and mind, as demonstrated in healing by prayer and liturgical drama.

Current theological education and ministerial formation in Africa is based on the Enlightenment model: rationality, fact, objectivity and theory. Theology is viewed as an aggregate of disciplines, and in the process it is too often narrowed down to systematic theology,<sup>17</sup> with the result that, as in Asia, “the seminary has become the cemetery”, i.e. students are not excited by the activities in the seminary and sometimes lose their faith, or at least its vibrancy. This situation demands a new paradigm.

In the process of the WCC study on the viability of theological education, it was suggested that Pentecost may be the paradigm to renew ministry and formation programmes and therefore for renewed epistemology and ontology.<sup>18</sup> For the Pentecost paradigm offers “a deconstructive burning fire, which cleanses ethnically all particulars yet values each particular tongue. In the corresponding implosion of tongues there is a reuniting of the particulars in the embrace of holy fusion.”<sup>19</sup> In this paradigm knowledge is not so much information as dynamic relation to God with love as its character and motivation. Two points may be highlighted here.

*Theological education and ministerial formation* is for all God’s people, and not just the theologically educated. The ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* has helped us to rediscover our oneness in the body of Christ by virtue of baptism, which consecrates each of us for mission.<sup>20</sup> Theological and ministerial formation is a process which empowers people to name their world.<sup>21</sup>

Such formation offers “a frightening and amazing journey of coming to know one who is characterized as ‘holy’ and ‘Spirit’. Utilizing Johannine imagery, theological imagery under the tutelage of the Paraclete Teacher may be best understood as ‘discerning reflection by the eschatological missionary community upon the living reality of God with us’.”<sup>22</sup>

#### ECUMENISM AND PLURALISM

The present models of ecumenism have been structured against a background of Christendom confused further by the violent crusades. In Africa the old ideology of Christendom is out of place because of the reality of religious pluralism. Again, random examples will suffice:

<i>Country</i>	<i>African Trad. Rel.</i>	<i>Christians</i>	<i>Muslims</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>No religion</i>
Gambia	7.5 %	4.1 %	87.5 %	1.4 %	
Ghana	21.8 %	57.7 %	20.1 %	0.4 %	
Guinea	28 %	4.4 %	67.4 %	0.2 %	
Guinea-Bissau	45.5 %	11.1 %	41.6 %	0.2 %	1.6 %
Ivory Coast	10.8 %	31.7 %	30.6 %	0.6 %	

Religion can also be used as a matter of political expediency. For example, though in Gabon in the early 1970s Christians constituted 90.8 percent of the population, African Traditional Religions 3 percent, and Muslims 4.7 percent, President Albert-Bernard Bongo converted to Islam, changed his first name to Omar, and led the nation to the Islamic conference the same year. In other words, religious pluralism makes churches vulnerable to political expediency, not to mention tensions, strife and persecution. Nigeria is under constant threat to its security and peace precisely because of religious pluralism.

Part of the difficulty is that Islam, too, since the Caliphate, has been accommodated to the ideology of power and the horrendous memory of the crusades. So Islam and Christianity encounter each other not only as sister religions from the same root, namely Judaism, but also as rival powers. Eradicating the ideology of power, especially in Africa, is a precondition for envisioning a new church.

#### *Departments of religious studies*

How do theological education and ministerial formation fit into this picture? There is need to recover a wider understanding of theology as knowledge of God grounded in the covenantal love of God seeking to embrace all God's creation and uniting humanity in God's love. Knowledge of God then is measured not so much by the amount of information or doctrine we absorb, but by how we live in response to God. The Life and Work movement's slogan "doctrine divides, service unites" is a rich perspective for theologizing in a plural context.

For a healthy perspective on religious pluralism, we must learn to encounter the religions not as rival institutions and doctrines, but as attracting human persons also created by the same God but who nevertheless have different faith commitments, and engaging them and their insights with humility and respect. The notion of the humanity of the other must never be lost.<sup>23</sup>

These principles undergird the departments of religious studies in Africa. Unfortunately they are not welcome in seminaries, principally because the latter see their function as producing staff for religious institutions. Such a perspective cannot make for creativity. It is as if Ecclesiastes 1:9 is their motto: "What has happened before will happen again; what has been done before will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun." The seminaries need courage, forethought, imagination and insight to move away from age-old ways of being.

The other advantage of departments of religious studies is that they embrace the (major) religions of the context, thus fostering dialogue between persons of different religious persuasions, which makes for mutual respect, understanding and peace.

Doing theology in a context of pluralism also focuses the most critical issue of Christian theology and mission: the uniqueness of Christ. I opt for "uniqueness" of Christ rather than "finality" and "absoluteness" precisely because of certain philo-



sophical implications of the latter which may be imperialistic. But even if we were to say that theology fosters mission, Africans need to be shown why they should make a commitment to Jesus rather than to their traditional gods and ancestors or Mohammed or Buddha. Further, pluralism is possible where freedom of thought and speech are encouraged.

So it should be no surprise that the first *Festschrift* in black Africa was on *Religion in a Pluralistic Society*, cited earlier in this essay. But doing theology should not only be an academic exercise in institutions; it should also mean discovering the human face of God in all these religions. Asking the right questions is essential for the task.

#### *Joint theological colleges*

With regard to denominational pluralism, the Theological Education Fund promoted interdenominational colleges across the whole of Africa. The rationale was that if persons of different denominational commitment trained together and socialized together, the veil of suspicion about the different and the unfamiliar would be broken, and a better understanding and appreciation of the other person and other viewpoints would be generated.

Alas! that vision seemed to peter out in the 1980s because of denominationalism and power struggles. Experience in the WCC's ecumenical theological education programme and in efforts to establish interdenominational colleges has taught me that putting different denominational institutions together on one campus does not necessarily make for ecumenical commitment and consciousness. We have yet to discover the *glue* that will make them engage, stick to one another and develop a sense of unity in diversity.

This matter is not unrelated to finance and North Atlantic captivity, and the relation of African denominations to the so-called "mother churches". Will the mother churches leave the daughter churches the necessary "space" for them to develop and structure their ecumenical vocation as is necessary?

#### *Denominational universities*

A current phenomenon of Africa is the move towards establishing denominational universities, e.g., in Zimbabwe, Ghana, Kenya, Zaire and Nigeria.

Nations are as yet unable to absorb the products of the existing universities, with the result that new graduates soon go abroad, adding to the already serious brain-drain. Are the churches basing their vision on a scientific study of the human-resource needs of the nation? Is this the most judicious use of scarce resources of the church? Have they looked at the long-term economic viability of the project?

Unfortunately, there is every indication that the phenomenon is propelled by denominational rivalry. At the end of my address on the subject to the joint Anglican diocesan council, the first question was, "Will it not be a disgrace and humiliation if an AIC has established a university and we have not?" This comment and many others betray weak ecumenical consciousness and commitment. There have been many occasions to remind churches of the Lund principle: "Should not our churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other churches and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?"<sup>24</sup> Can we honestly say denominational affiliation makes a difference in the teaching of chemistry or

the humanities? Today we are the wiser than Roman Catholics, who were not supposed to be biblical scholars, are among some of the leading scholars.

Given the array of challenges facing the churches, including financial ones, establishing denominational universities is not a priority, unless it is tied to the human-resource needs of nations. It is a task to socialize churches in the ecumenical memory. On the other hand, taking that principle seriously would be an argument for Christian (as against denominational) universities provided their *Christian particularity* is clearly defined. In this regard spirituality is the critical factor.

#### *Associations of theological schools*

On the African continent, associations of theological schools have been the most ecumenical institutions. There, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and AICs come together to reflect on issues of theological and ministerial formation, and carry out projects together. These associations live the spirit of the words on the icon of Andrew, patron saint of the Eastern Orthodox church, and Peter, patron saint of the church of Rome, "Theological dialogue only bears fruit when carried out in a spirit of fraternal charity." In other words, processes of theological-ministerial and ecumenical formation should aim at creating a spirit of fraternal charity and do what it takes to foster that. Associations of theological schools must be encouraged and supported.

However, as time passes the associations must not continue to do business as usual. Discerning mechanisms for creating a spirit and atmosphere of fraternal charity between, among and within students, schools, churches, religions and society ought to be a priority in each context.

Commitment to honest fraternal charity means facing up to differences, difficulties and stumbling blocks; for example, sacramental theology and church order. Between Anglicans and Roman Catholics stands Leo XIII's *Apostolic Curae* (dated 13 September 1896) which declared Anglican orders "utterly null" and therefore invalid by virtue of form and intention. The theological schools must engage such differences with honesty and integrity, and bring out the prejudices of students and congregations in order to achieve renewal and transformation.

#### **Spirituality and formation**

In order to be renewed and transformed, structures need spirituality. By this is understood integrity and order beyond humanity's control, a transcendent yet immediate reality which challenged humanity to the pursuit of development and perfection. "At the root of spirituality is a religious experience."<sup>25</sup> Under the umbrella of post-modernism there is increasing recognition of the importance of spirituality for identity and of the fact that experience can be an authentic source of divine revelation.<sup>26</sup> Thus by highlighting spirituality we make a bid for religious experience that transforms convictions, patterns of thought, emotion and behaviour in the light of God's word. Spirituality is as much concerned with nature and environment, justice and righteousness, peace, reconciliation and liberation as with praying and church life and structures.<sup>27</sup>

Of course, spirituality involves a life of prayer and worship. Ecumenism is impossible without spirituality, attentiveness to the Spirit. Ecumenical formation without a spirituality meaningful in the African context is impossible.

Again, *metanoia*, renewal and service are characteristic of transformation and, therefore, of spirituality. The global consultation on viability of theological education

in Oslo in 1996 opened with a worship service at which Gunnar Stålsett, now bishop of Oslo, had some pointed insights to make: "This church is central in the life of our theological seminary... It is here that visions are shared for a viable and vibrant ministry in our generation. And at this altar... these words [eucharist words] rally us for *metanoia*, renewal and service... This sanctuary is a strong reminder of the context of our work, and suggests areas of common service."<sup>28</sup>

Spirituality is found not only in the sanctuary but also in every area of our daily life and work together, as well as in mutual accountability for the wholeness of the world before the one Creator God.

In short, envisioning and transforming church, ecumenism and ministry is at once a matter of theology and education, theology and praxis, and all these are undergirded by holistic spirituality.

### Women

One of the great sons of Africa, James Kwegyin Aggrey, popularly known as "Aggrey of Africa" and noted for aphorisms, once said, "Educate a man and you educate an individual; educate a woman and you educate a family, the clan, the nation." Women constitute at least one half of national populations and churches: they are a vital, potent and strategic force for the education and formation of contemporary and succeeding generations. This recognition has not come without resistance in a hitherto male-dominated world and culture. Religious institutions have been bastions of resistance, even when they claim to be progressive and liberal. Nevertheless, there is a growing recognition of the important role of women in society and church.

In Africa women were traditionally consigned to the house, and particularly to raising children and cooking. Consequently, the education of women to a high level was discouraged. Today change is palpable, manifest by the increasing numbers of women in medicine, engineering, theology and many other fields.

Since 1989 the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians has been a significant ecumenical theological community. The Circle is based on the conviction that women's perspectives are a necessary component in the development of African Christianity, theology and ethics. It has become a forum for sharing critically the impact of African religions and cultures, Christianity and Islam on the lives of women and, therefore, on at least half of the community. Here is a real source of *relevant* theology and religion drawing upon women's experiences.<sup>29</sup>

African woman theologian Nyambura Njoroge says:

The entry of African women theologians into the discourse has challenged the male-articulated scholarship as being gender specific and, therefore, ignoring and rejecting women's experiences and perspectives on African reality. Women contend that ethics constructed by male scholars do not go deep enough to confront and dismantle both Christian and African traditional values, attitude, beliefs and structures which are life-threatening to women. To a large extent, African theology and liberation theology have been uncritical of cultural values that appropriate sexism in the church and society. It appears as though the men assumed that to attack Western imposed values and structures will be enough to transform the African communities.<sup>30</sup>

The agenda of the Circle is not just reactive but creative and constructive. The Circle welcomes adherents of various religions in its membership, and attempts to live the ecumenical principles of inclusiveness, to make connections, to follow a participatory life-

style of living in community and making a collective journey (in contrast to the individualism marking the Enlightenment cultural heritage). When women are silent, the society, community, church are starved of the experience and memory of one half of its being.

Now many publications by women<sup>31</sup> are on the market and ecumenical formation will not be on target unless religious communities come to grips with these voices. If we seek to envision a new church in Africa in which women are more than one half – and the vibrant, energetic part – then the mission-ecumenism agenda which defines church should seriously engage African women's theology. The self-designation of "circle" is already a hint at the model of church offered. "A church in the round" makes it easy for all to be visible and participate, which is not only typical of African ways of family gathering, but also is more faithful to the church as *koinonia*.

Mercy Oduyoye has stated, "The future church is one that ensures that women's liberative theology becomes an integral part of the church's contribution made visible in the church and the academy."<sup>32</sup>

### Youth

Demographic statistics indicate that in Africa the population of youth and children far outstrips adults, in the country as in the church. By culture and theology, youth are often treated as the church of the future and the future of the society. For the present youth may be seen but not heard.

While this mentality exists, youth have become increasingly important. In the struggle for independence, Kwame Nkrumah's force was the *mbrantie*, the youth. Today, in the many conflicts plaguing Africa, the child soldier is recruited to prosecute horrendous wars – in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola. Elsewhere in the world, youth and students have been in the forefront of the struggle against dictatorship, for example the overthrow of President Suharto of Indonesia, the challenge to the rule of Arap Moi in Kenya and of Mugabe in Zimbabwe. In fact, the youth refuse to be faceless and demand that their presence be recognized. And in seminaries, universities and schools the youth are there in numbers constituting a ready forum for formation in ecumenism.

There is much more work to be done in connection with youth. The ecumenical forum needs to address critically issues of differences between them and not just affirm them in their prejudices, work for reconciliation and together face up to the challenges the world poses to faith and religious institutions such as the wars in Africa, poverty, unrest, sexism, ageism.

Over the years I have felt that, in motivating students in some areas, we were sending them to churches that were not ready for them because they were too preoccupied with maintaining the received structures of church and theological education. The students became casualties in a church structure dominated by the "old men" whose maturity, knowledgeability and wisdom were assumed. The church is not made up only of the old, neither is it made up only of the youth; it is composed of both. The question is how polarities become, not poles of violent disagreement and disengagement, but poles of attraction. That is the basic ecumenical agenda.

### Publishing

The fact that Africa is characterized by an oral culture has led several Africans in theology and ministry to be unenthusiastic about publishing. While I appreciate the

value of oral cultures, I would argue that in the new times of communications revolution, publishing is important and necessary in a global village and in an age of ecumenism, if no group's identity is to be overlooked.

In the past Africa and Africans were written about by others, outsiders who usually read the African scene and story through their own spectacles. For ecumenical engagement to be authentic, each story, each identity, each spirituality should be visible at the table, in the discussion. It is important for publications from the African region to be offered to the *oikoumene*, otherwise the ecumenical prism will suffer in its wholeness.

As in all other things, the centres of publication were in the North. Today an important criterion for publishing is not just quality but saleability. Besides, if African issues are published in the North, the cost is prohibitive for Africans because of the foreign-exchange factor. So making available reasonably priced books with an African perspective is an important part of formation. Some will be translations of books generated elsewhere but into the African idiom.

Deliberately this paper has not offered a blueprint or a model but has identified pieces of the prism of theological and ministerial formation. Viability comes from struggling together and revisiting legacies afresh and with a sense of urgency.

## NOTES

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