

# Contextualization of Christian Theological Formation in Ghana: Nature, Challenges, and Prospects

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## Abstract

Like in many African countries, Christians in Ghana bought into the concept of the contextualization of Christian theological formation – decades ago. Contextualization is generally accepted as teaching essential Christian disciplines with an active engagement of the religious and cultural environment, and the introduction of non-traditional disciplines such as the African indigenous religions and Islam curriculum of the theological institutes. Through one-on-one interviews with a cross-section of students and lecturers (formators) from both public and private theological institutions in Ghana, the author concludes that the process of the contextualization of disciplines still has a long way to go. This essay argues that, though the contextualization project is bedeviled by some challenges such as strong reservations about contextualization, the need to bow to the universal denominational agenda, and the difficulty of synchronizing theological objectives with proper teaching and learning methodologies, contextualization is essential for effective evangelization and promotion of interreligious dialogue in Ghana.

**Keywords:** Christianity, theology, education, contextualization, indigenization, curriculum formulation

## Introduction

Christianity was introduced to Ghanaians by the mission churches. These churches included the Roman Catholics, the Anglicans, the Methodists, the

Presbyterians, and the Evangelical Presbyterians. In their effort to further entrench Christianity in the country, these churches also established schools and seminaries for the training of local catechists and native ministers (Buah 1998:132). For example, both the Presbyterian Church and the Roman Catholic Church established a Training College at Akropong (in 1848) and Amisano (near Elmina in 1924), respectively. Later, the Roman Catholic Church established two full-fledged major seminaries (St Victor's Seminary at Tamale and St Peter's Seminary at Cape Coast) in 1957 for the training of indigenous priests. Before then, three protestant denominations – the Methodist Church of Ghana, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church established the Trinity College (now Trinity Theological Seminary) in Kumasi in 1942, which later moved to Accra. Almost all of these institutions are still functioning (Debrunner 1967:17).

The theological formation in these institutes had two broad objectives: First, to maintain Christian orthodoxy and second, to develop a contextualized theology for the church in Africa. The theological formation at the early stages of these seminaries and theological institutions in Ghana remained traditional<sup>1</sup> in order to sustain orthodoxy which was confessional in nature (Allen 1960:35). It was solely modelled on the Western theological colleges. The curricula, modules, and course outlines that developed by tradition and accretion, summarized and reinforced the objective of the theological formation then: To inculcate fundamental beliefs of Christianity, specifically in students of theology (Sarbah 2014b:15).

In furtherance of this objective, core courses in theological and ecclesiastical disciplines such as Fundamental Theology, Biblical Theology, Scripture, Christology, Ecclesiology, Pneumatology, Church History, and Church Governance were offered. Other courses included Patristic Theology, Scholastic Theology, Reformation, History of Christian Missions, Sacramental Theology, Homiletics, Christian Ethics, Pastoral Studies, and Liturgical Studies. Certainly, the main objective for the introduction of these disciplines was to instill fundamental Christian beliefs in the students of theology (Mugambi 2002:22). In other words, the traditional formation, which evolved largely out of the European religious worldview, presented the Christian tradition, couched in European culture, to their trainees as 'unique, reasonable, and thus

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<sup>1</sup> 'Traditional' is used in this essay to refer to the disciplines which expound Christian values and teaching.

the only religious tradition worthy of belief' (Westermann 1937:94). The overemphasis on traditional theological education also means that the second objective of making the education relevant to indigenous contexts was relegated to the background. Theological institutes in Africa were also established to enable centers for scholarship in developing contextual African theology. These centers were meant to offer opportunities for Africans who have trained elsewhere to reflect further on pressing theological/ethical concerns in Africa today. They were to be well-resourced and well-staffed institutions for specialist theological contextual education (Pobee & Kudadjie 1990:4).

The past three decades or so have therefore witnessed attempts by Christian churches in Ghana to contextualize theological formation. It is significant to note that a relevant theological formation must be sensitive to the diverse human conditions which form the context of the mission. It is an attempt to take the African context seriously in the formation of church leaders. In other words, a relevant theological formation calls for contextualization. Contextualization has broadly been explained in two varied ways: 1) As indigenization in the sense of translation and inculturation, and 2) as the socio-economic transformation of society. For the purpose of this essay, contextualization is understood in the sense of the indigenization of the whole structure of theological formation. This contextualized formation of the Christian theological institutions in Ghana was grounded on the premise that evangelism is achievable and successful in context, and therefore, evangelization in Ghana should not be different. It is also based on the fact that the structure of the theological institutes has to emerge from the situational context of the practitioners. It ought not be a mere duplication of what worked in any other contexts. This may also call for a critical review of the curricula of our institutions for theological training (Bediako 1995:34).

It must be noted that we do not assume that theological formation in Africa only takes place in institutes of theology. We agree with Joseph Galgalo that the learning and teaching of theology as an academic discipline do occur at both informal and formal levels. The informal mode of transmission which has been both oral and written, is still relevant. Thus, theological formation has not always been the 'exclusive privilege of seminaries, theological institutions or universities, but is a task carried out by the faithful who share their faith experiences in whatever forum available to them' (Galgalo 1998:6). This takes place in forms of revival fellowships, women's groups, youth groups, choir practices, as well as occasional and retreat centers. This

essay focuses and discusses the efforts of theological seminaries and universities towards the contextualization project and the challenges thus encountered. It also attempts to indicate the prospects of the contextualization project in the midst of mounting challenges.

This essay, which spanned over two academic years, took place in renowned theological institutions (private and public) in Ghana. The private institutions are the Catholic and Protestant Seminaries. The Catholic seminaries include St Peter's Regional Seminary (Cape Coast), St Paul's Seminary (Sowutuom), St Victor's Seminary (Tamale), and St Gregory Seminary (Pakoso). The Protestant seminaries are the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Church (Akropong Akwapim), Trinity Theological Seminary (Legon), and St Nicholas' Seminary (Cape Coast). Public universities, particularly the University of Ghana and the University of Cape Coast were also involved in the study. Primary data were sourced from interviews organized for 71 respondents: 21 lecturers and formators, and 50 students. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and later analyzed qualitatively by means of content analysis. Secondary information was obtained from bulletins and brochures, curricula, programs, and course outlines of these institutions, which were also critically studied for this work.

## **Nature of Contextualization**

Contextualization in the sense of indigenization is an effort to re-express the Christian message with African idioms and conceptual tools (Martey 1995:65). Discussing the nature of contextualization adopted in Ghana by the theological institutes, is critical in this study. According to the Oxford dictionary, the term 'nature' could generally be described as the structure put in place by an institution or organization to generate the desired climate. 'Nature' is often referred to as structure on which the organization is based. In the context of Christian theological formation, the nature or structure refers to the organizational design of the institution (both in the arenas of curriculum development and pedagogical strategies) which is expected to generate a certain learning environment or climate. The structure of an organization produces what is referred to as the climate. The concept of 'climate' here refers to the relations in any situation as these are effectively experienced by the people in their situation. In relation to the theological formation, the theologi-

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cal climate would refer to the theological structure, perception, images or theological thinking, attitude or even behavior which not only exist at the institutions, but are also inculcated in the individual student. This theological climate in the institutes of formation ought to be compatible with the general mission of the churches, serving the needs of their members. However, a study of literature on theological programs reveals that this much needed association does not always exist, rendering it possible to have an institutional climate in the theological institutions, which is significantly discontinuous and incompatible with the real objectives of the local church and so irrelevant to the particular context (Maitland 1993:29).

Consequently, the primary objective of the formulation of a new structure of theological institutes in the spirit of contextualization in Ghana was to enable the seminaries and theological institutes to focus on their calling of training ecclesiastical leaders and practitioners. It was also to make them more effective at living out their ministry in the particular context of Ghana, increasing the fulfilment and inner satisfaction of people who would share their ministry. No wonder, the structure that eventually emerged for the formation aimed at contextual, experiential, and transformational learning that was to transform theology students spiritually, intellectually, and technically for an effective, mature, and responsible ministry in church communities (Bergevin 1967:163). The contextualization of theological training represents the beginning of a new theological trend towards a search for an authentically relevant African perspective on Christian faith (Martey 1995:65). Following recent social and cultural changes in Ghana and other parts of the world, the institutional identity of the churches and of their forms of ministry have been challenged and called into question in a more fundamental way. This is the context in which the question of the viability of theological education and ministry have arisen (Raiser 1997:55).

A cursory glance at the theological programs of the Trinity Theological Seminary and the Catholic seminaries, and even the state universities reveals that the adopted, contextualized formation involved two main aspects. Just like the traditional formation, contextualized formation highlighted the importance of the traditional theological disciplines (Congar 1964:45) such as Sacred Scriptures, Dogmatic Theology, Moral Theology, Spirituality, and Fundamental Theology, by offering them core statuses (St Peter's Regional Seminary Bulletin 1994:18). Non-traditional disciplines have been introduced in the programs of theological institutes in recognition of the pluralism of

their society and cultures. This involves the introduction of the study of other religions which are deemed relevant to the Ghanaian context in the curricula of the institutes such as the African Indigenous Religions, Introduction to Islam, Missiology, Comparative Religion, Oriental Religions, History, and Models of Intra and Interreligious Relations. Later additions to the non-traditional disciplines include courses which are society and culture related such as Sociology of Religions, Introduction to Cultures and Societies of Africa, and Psychology of Religions.

However, unlike traditional training, the programs of contextualized formation went a step further to demand, in the course outlines, that these major courses be taught with due engagement with the socio-religious and cultural environment of Ghana. For instance, course descriptions required lecturers to include in their courses, outlines and references from books and papers written by indigenous authors. Lecturers were also required to cite relevant examples from the environment their students are used to in their delivery of lectures. Thus, essential and traditional disciplines of Christian theology education are expected to be expatiated, particularly, at lectures in a non-traditional way. This actually means that in contextualized formation, theology is no longer a discipline that merely reflects a solely confessional understanding of a particular (Christian) religion's doctrinal, ethical, and ritual position regarding religious truth (Flood 1999:45). Theology would rather assume universal dimensions, taking cognizance of denominational and religious pluralities prevailing in Ghana. In view of this, theology is not to be expatiated to give undue pre-eminence or superiority to a particular group's articulation of religious truth (Mugambi 2002:161).

Attempts to contextualize Christian theological formation in Ghana, despite monumental progress made so far in institutions like St Peter's Regional Seminary, Trinity Theological Seminary, St Nicholas' Anglican Seminary, and Akrofi-Christaller Institute, are still bedeviled with challenges. Seminaries still have a long way to go in duly recognizing the pluralism of their society and cultures and having them deeply reflected in their curricula. Furthermore, one would have thought that the process of contextualization would be faster, following the exit of European/foreign missionaries and formators – the supposed great hurdle of 'inappropriate' human agents for contextualization, thus removed. It was a general assumption that the meaningful contextualization of Christian theological formation in Ghana could

only be achieved or effected through the instrumentality of native or indigenous missionaries or formators.

## **Challenges to Contextualization**

### *Close-minded Educators and Students*

One major challenge to the contextualization of theological formation in Ghana has been divided opinions on its importance. While one group consider the project as highly significant, which must be pursued with every strength, another group finds it a dangerous process which ought to be implemented with caution. There are those (practitioners, formators, theology educators, and students) who still strongly believe that the preservation of authentic tradition in which the valuable deposit of faith is embedded, should be the primary concern of Christian formation grounds (Bosch 2004:421). They include those who view every deviation from what their group declare to be orthodox faith in terms of heterodoxy, even heresy (Bosch 2004:421). For instance, a formator at the St Peter's Seminary argues that non-traditional programs such as intercultural and religious studies are not needed in the theological institutions. This position goes contrary to the contextualization project which recommends the inculcation of spiritual riches of other religions into Christian formation. In Biblical Studies, the message of the Bible would have to be disseminated in a language which addresses the needs and world view of theology students.

The Akrofi-Christaller Institute has developed and mounted a Master's degree of Theology with a Bible translation and interpretation option, designed to provide biblical experts for translation agencies, theological institutions, and churches in Africa. The program has been uniquely efficient in relating biblical and theological scholarship to the needs of the African church in the wider world. In view of this, the Bible would not be used as a standard for judging the truthfulness of other religions, especially indigenous religions, but as a source in the search for mutual understanding, enlightenment, and cooperation (Ossom-Batsa 2007:92, 93; Ekem 2005:116; Bediako 2003:34). In the same way, Pastoral Theology, in contextualized formation as adopted by the Anglican St Nicholas' Seminary and Catholic St Victor's and St Gregory Seminaries, is no longer expected to pursue a solely denomina-

tional agenda. Rather, Pastoral Theology is to be interpreted in the broader perspective of the Theology of Religions, seeking to find adequate Christian responses to the revitalization of and the challenges emanating from other religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and African indigenous religions in the country. Ogbu Kalu and others have even suggested what they call a 're-writing and teaching of Church history'. They call for a truer account of the history of the African church which will focus not only on the work of the missionaries, but also highlight the local response to the gospel (Kalu 1980:56). Thus, the history of the African church must be taught from the point of view of the local dynamics which have shaped the events. African Church History, as a discipline, must be core and be given the prominence it deserves in theological formation. Even though all formators, and in particular students appear to accept in principle the contextualization of essential disciplines such as Scriptures, Pastoral Theology, and Church History, they are still skeptical of the project which to them could erode all the gains achieved in the evangelization effort. Again, this difficult but essential project calls for trained formators, open-minded students, and the availability of essential literature. Although books by African scholars themselves are now available in their numbers, it is depressing to note that many theology educators continue to consider books written by non-African scholars as the core required books for students. This is to say that when the works of African scholars are included in lecturers' required lists, they often occupy the periphery. This, obviously, could be attempts to ensure that the contextualization of theological formation by many (formators of seminaries and even students) proceed slowly, if not at all.

### ***Thwarting Full Implementation***

The problem of formators and students with such an orthodox mentality about Christian faith and formation is that they often do everything in their power to thwart the full or effective implementation of contextualization in the formation grounds. It is difficult to understand why, despite the growing influence of Islam and the negative impact of African indigenous religions on Christianity on the African continent, formators and students still cannot appreciate the need to engage these other religions. They are still either reluctant or make little effort to inculcate, for example, the Islamic religious culture in their theological deliberations, expressions, and interpretation of an African social reality (Mazrui 1985:144).



Nevertheless, the argument that students trained in a standard Western theological and biblical formation would plant and grow indigenous, contextualized churches, is not tenable. This is because many a time these theological institutions, such as St Nicholas Theological Seminary (Cape Coast), St Peter's Seminary (Pedu), St Victor's Seminary (Tamale), Trinity Theological Seminary in Legon, and other sister institutions have often produced theologians, missionaries, pastors, and practitioners, some of whom have a lack of fruitful confluence on the two worldviews in which they find themselves: One is European because of its traditional formation, while the other is African because of its indigenous cultural background. Their theological formation should come out with structures to harmonize and synchronize the two worldviews for them (Sarbah 2014a:228). Otherwise, they remain religious experts and church practitioners who have not only become disoriented by the practical day-to-day living problems and challenges of their own environment but also, more importantly, adopt a misguided and false attitude towards their own co-religionists as well as adherents of other religions, many of whom are their relatives (Allen 1960:383). In other words, the graduates of a traditional formation often find themselves in a confused state, especially when they eventually realize on the pastoral field that the grassroots do not actually need their 'un-adulterated stances' and their theological education offered to them. In fact, it is just the opposite that the grassroots want.

Nevertheless, there are others who have come to believe that the contextualization project has already begun at the grassroots level, and that the theological formation cannot drag its feet any longer. In fact, any further delay, they contend, can spell a near disaster for Christianity in Ghana. The contextualization of theological formation is badly needed not only to institutionalize the unavoidable process, but also to formally guide or give a certain direction to, or even take charge of the rather complex indigenization process of Christianity which is already taking place at the grassroots. Just as innovations in industries and commerce are often driven by the research of institutes of higher learning, so any serious or meaningful contextualization of religious beliefs and rituals should begin to be led by the theological institutes.

### ***Weak Institutional Contextualization***

The failure to contextualize the theological institutions or impel them to take leadership of the contextualization project is probably a major reason why we will continue to have weak churches, whose members are not able to recon-

cile the ideals of their religious traditions and the realities or challenges of their environment, and so turn to non-Christian syncretistic explanations or follow non-biblical lifestyles, and engage in magical rituals of healers and prophets. This is because a non-contextualized Christianity seldom engages people at the level of their deepest needs and aspirations and so ends up with what Jesuit Jaime Bulatao in the Philippines calls a ‘split-level’ Christianity (Bulatao 1966:67). Thus, it is a lack of formal or institutionalized contextualization which is bad news for Christianity, since it is the reason for reversions to former ‘heathen’ practices by the second and third generations of Christians in Ghana. It also contributes to the worrisome situations in which some people, mostly nominal Christians, endeavor to openly live in two worlds – the Christian community and fetishism (Sarbah 2014b:8). These reversions and relapses, often attributed mainly to ‘spiritual dissatisfaction’, could perhaps, in part be due to the direct consequences of the traditional theological formation and its attendant missionary strategies which, by strict disciplines in orthodoxy in a rather unaccommodating and uncompromising manner, seek to change human perceptions and religious behavior in favor of Christianity.

### ***Confessional Preference***

Furthermore, with the exception of the Departments of Religion of state universities, all other theological formation centers are still confessional institutions with denominational agendas. Thus, the challenge we face in trying to move the theological formation toward a more contextualized approach in Ghana, is that the leadership of these institutions are accountable to boards of trustees whose historical theological positions (Protestant and Roman Catholic) are still central to their formation. The Trinity Theological Seminary, for instance, is governed by a governing council, consisting of 30 members from the sponsoring protestant churches (Asamoah Gyadu 2013:381; cf. 380-385). Archbishops and bishops of the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Cape Coast and Accra constitute the governing council of St Peter’s Regional Seminary (St Peter’s Regional Seminary Bulletin 1994:13). The council is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the seminary’s formation program in line with the universal Catholic seminary formation. It convenes at least once a year and submits an annual report on the seminary to the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples of the Catholic Church in Rome. Although these board of trustees often give room for formators to use their ingenuity in

the management of the institutes, one cannot rule out the fact that the main function of these trustees is to ensure that the denominational or confessional agenda is faithfully conducted. In other words, these governing bodies or trustees by the nature of their job often are more concerned with their universal identity than the critical issues of contextualization. Their lack of adequate appreciation of contextualization stems from a certain need to protect and ensure harmony in their global religious enterprises.

Furthermore, the institutions also have funding agencies, usually their mother churches that continue to have a significant level of influence on what goes on in the formation in line with their mission statements for the theological formation worldwide. Many of these bodies of trustees largely appear to be mainly interested in extending their denominations across the face of the globe, sincerely believing that it is the best way to win the world for Christ. They are also often much more concerned with preserving universal denominational unity and identity than meeting the aspirations and needs of their culturally diverse, worldwide membership. Accordingly, the Archbishop of an Anglican diocese of Botswana, Walter Makhulu, has stated to the effect that religious departments of state universities are often more geared to meet the needs of teachers of religious education than churches' pastoral theology needs (Makhulu 1990:5). This is to say that theological institutes are more suited for the training of church men and women. However, it is surprising to note that quite a significant number of church leaders (religious and lay) in Ghana opt to accept a second degree at state institutions such as the University of Ghana, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana, and the University of Cape Coast, which offers them the chance to explore deeper into the contextualization project. These state institutions, unlike the confessional theological institutes, are freer from external interference from sponsors. To ensure independence and self-reliance in church planting and sustenance, many people have suggested the need to have an authentic, contextual, theological education which is the product of funding from local churches (Engel 1990:133).

### ***Inadequate Place for Non-traditional Disciplines***

Administrators and formators of various theological institutions in Ghana, repeatedly raised the issue of time constraints as a major problem for contextualization. The current time-tables of all the schools across the denominational and non-denominational spectrum are already full. Not only are there

too many traditional courses or disciplines to cover throughout the three or four years of theological formation, but there are also too many topics to be treated per semester in each discipline. Further, students often spend a great deal of time developing basic skills in languages such as Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, since they often enter these programs with limited prior knowledge of these languages. Some of these institutions such as the St Victor's Seminary, St Peter's Seminary, The Trinity Theological Seminary, and St Nicholas' Seminary already have in place language as well as church management and administrative departments.

The introduction of non-traditional disciplines to offer programs of theological institutes in recognition of the pluralism of their society and cultures, have also encountered a time-constraint challenge. The rationale for the introduction of these non-traditional disciplines is to initiate students into secular courses as well as theology and religions other than their own (Mugambi 2002:159). There are two aspects of these non-traditional courses which are deemed significant enough for the socio-religious context. The first aspect involves the introduction of the study of other religions, which is deemed relevant to the Ghanaian context in the curricula of institutes such as the African Indigenous Religions, Introduction to Islam, Missiology, Comparative Religion, Oriental Religions, and the History and Models of Intra and Interreligious Relations. Later additions to the non-traditional disciplines include courses which are society and culture related such as Sociology of Religions, Introduction to Cultures and Societies of Africa, and Psychology of Religions. As a result, eight or more disciplines are needed to be mounted in theological institutes. Some theological formation centers find these courses too many for the seminaries who are already facing the difficulty to find places for their traditional disciplines.

To ensure that these non-traditional disciplines are not introduced just for the sake of it, the course outlines demand of lecturers to critically expound and orient them towards relatively chosen themes – theological, historical, and anthropological perspectives – which are relevant to the cultural and religious context of Ghana (Pope Paul VI: 1966 – *Ecclesiae sanctae*, nos. 157-162). In this way, it is believed, the spiritual and moral values of these other religions in the country would be explored for the benefit of Christianity (Sanneh 1983:227-241). With the exception of the Trinity Theological Seminary which is fully accredited to grant its own certificates, all other seminaries are affiliated to state universities such as the University of Ghana,

University of Cape Coast, and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. The state universities offer the requisite supervision to the affiliated theological institutions in the field of program designs, inspection of educational facilities, moderation of pre-examination questions and the post-examination of answer papers. Certificates of External Diploma and Bachelor of Arts degrees are issued by the state institutions to graduates of theological institutes in acknowledgment of the need for the worldwide recognition of the validity of seminary academic records and the openness of the modern seminary to other scientific fields that are not strictly theological (St Peter's Regional Seminary Bulletin 1994-1998 1994).

### ***Difficulty in Developing Appropriate Curricula and Course Outlines***

The responsibility of creating appropriate curricula calls for research, critical social analysis, dialogue, advocacy, and action for which the theological training centers do not have adequate time and resources. The question is: Where can one fit in courses such as Interfaith Dialogue, Contemporary Theology, or Inter-contextual Theology when there is already not enough time for traditional courses? This lack of space, time, and resources presents a significant challenge to implementing a meaningful interreligious educational agenda in the contemporary theological formation/curricula for proper contextualization in a religiously pluralistic country like Ghana.

Obviously, the challenge of time constraints calls for a deliberate restructuring of the curricula and even the course outlines, not only to avoid the overlapping of disciplines, but also to ensure due focus on relevant topics for the contextualization of the course outlines. For instance, in St Peter's Regional Seminary, the following disciplines could be merged: Pastoral Theology and Missiology; Comparative Religion and Inter-religious Dialogue; and some of the traditional disciplines such as Patristic Theology and Scholastic Theology. Course outlines of formation houses could spend less time on the history of both the traditional and non-traditional disciplines to make time or room for effective contextualization.

Furthermore, the restructuring of curricula and syllabi to include non-traditional courses will not be enough, if they remain peripheral and optional/elective as some of them are in these institutes. This is because the intended purpose of mounting these non-traditional disciplines will not be achieved with only sections of students having access to the courses. Thus, the courses must also form part of the 'core' of the curricula and their perspectives must

influence the whole of teaching. Currently, Religious Departments in state universities like the University of Ghana have made the study of world religions and contextualization an integral and required part of the theological curriculum. For this reason, theological institutions affiliated to the state institutions are mandated to mount some non-traditional disciplines, particularly Comparative Religion and African Indigenous Religions as 'core courses'. However, the general student attitude to core non-traditional courses is still negative, suggesting that for the most part, they are deemed to form an ancillary part of the theological curricula, a peripheral area of study which students may interpret as not so vital for their formation. Again, in some theological schools, courses which treat the religious traditions of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or indigenous native traditions and religions are taught only in the contexts of programs of study on Missiology and Pastoral Ministry or Theology. Thus, the disciplines or courses are often not regarded as integral and essential to Christian theological study in preparation for ministry.

### ***Synchronizing Objectives of Theological Institutions with Teaching and Learning***

Another challenge to contextualizing theological training in Ghana is the difficulty in synchronizing formation objectives with actual teaching and learning. The real purpose of theological education is not merely to have the instructor or formator perform certain activities, but most importantly to bring about significant changes in the students' attitude and patterns of behavior. This actually means that the contextualization of theological education in Ghana is expected to induce in students a certain desired outcome which makes them meaningful and effective religious and theological players in their social contexts. In view of this, any statements of objectives of the curricula of theological formation should be statements of changes, expected to take place in the students (Tyler 1949:44).

In light of the abovementioned, the development of theological curricula for contextualization must involve five essential elements in line with the objectives of the institutions. First, the curricula must identify what kind of learning is needed in contextualization. Second, it must decide on the type of training a student needs to fulfil these learning needs. Third, they must plan the training carefully, so that contextualized learning is most likely to take place. Fourth, they have to deliver the training so that contextualized learning actually does take place. In this case, the training in contextualized

theological formation will have to consistently find answers to questions such as: Who teaches what courses? What is the framework within which the various courses are taught? What opportunities are provided to encounter students who consider non-Christian religions as living faith options and to which they have given their total commitment? Fifth, there is the need for a proper evaluation of the training so that there is evidence that contextualized learning has taken place (cf. Sarbah 2010).

In the end, the only evidence for successful, effective contextualized learning in theology is the cultivation in students of an informed awareness of essentials of other religions and the capacity to relate theologically and existentially to them. Overlooking any one of these elements in the contextualization of theological formation would be a big setback. This notwithstanding, attempts to change theological education by revising its mandated objectives for effective teaching and learning have often failed in the institutes. This is probably due to the fact that touted curriculum innovations, clearly spelt out in the objectives for the theological institutes are not always executed in classrooms in an extensive or effective manner that would sustain such improvement.

## **Prospects of Contextualization**

### ***Effective Evangelization***

The contextualization of a Christian theological formation actually promotes evangelization in Ghana today. The knowledge that theology students acquire from their study in contextualized traditional and non-traditional courses, places them in a good enough standing to eschew what could be described as a ‘wholesale’ condemnatory and unaccommodating traditional approach for the adoption of the *Areopagus* approach for effective evangelization. The *Areopagus* approach is a model of proclamation which introduces an audience to the gospel, using what they are already familiar with, or essential features of their environment (Barret 1974:69-77). It was first used by the apostle Paul when he visited Athens (Ac 17:22-31). At Athens, Paul saw an altar with an inscription dedicated to the ‘unknown god’ and when invited to speak to the Athenian elite at the *Areopagus*, he gave a wonderful speech. Paul intended to meet the Athenians on their ground, and even though he was greatly dis-

tressed by many idols, he did not indicate it. He did not call them ‘fools’ in their faces, or mention that they have ‘exchanged’ the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal people, birds, animals, and reptiles (Rm 1:22-23). Paul was polite; he did not say ‘your worthless idols’, but used a neutral expression: Objects of worship. He was neither judgmental nor self-righteous. Paul took the time to look around and get the ‘feel’ of the Athenian culture and religious beliefs, including the altar to the unknown god. It is also possible that Paul was familiar with the history of the Cretan poet, Epimenides which was closely linked with the altar to the unknown god, for in Romans 1:28 he quoted a verse from Epimenides’ poetry and in his letter to Titus. He quoted him again and even acknowledged him as no less than a prophet (Tit 1:12-13). Paul’s prior knowledge of Epimenides and his role in the lifting of the plague centuries earlier was a good ‘opener’ for him in his evangelistic work. He used what the people already knew and gradually led them to what they needed to know, i.e., effectively, the living God.

The Areopagus experience is all the more needed in contemporary Ghana when the traditional models of evangelization seem not to be so effective. Despite their enormous strengths, the traditional models of evangelization are loud in their weakness. In Ghana, Christian evangelizing endeavors, based largely on the traditional/institutional models, eventually ‘win’ Christians back, and hardly members of other religions. According to research conducted by this author in 2010, almost 97 percent of new converts in any Christian church in Ghana were already Christians (cf. Sarbah 2010:206). They were only converts from other Christian churches. Various reasons are given to explain this phenomenon. However, this author found out, among others, that the methods/approaches of evangelization, which are essentially traditional, are rendering the Christian message unappealing to members of other religious traditions and appeal only to members of the Christian tradition. The traditional model adopts a monologue by someone with a self-righteous approach which appears condemnatory and acts as a turn off to non-Christians. Christian missionaries put up an attitude of know-it-all, having all the right answers and solutions, and do all the talking to the world and members of other religions, telling them what they need to do. The theologian or Christian missionary needs to adopt a listening attitude, for which contextualized education would have prepared them. Thus, evangelization would be give and take, a real encounter, and effective communication.



***Promoting Peaceful Co-existence***

The contextualization of a theological formation will advance the course of interreligious dialogue in Ghana. David Owusu-Ansah and Emmanuel Akyeampong conclude that, in the case of Ghana, it was rather ‘the indigenous cosmology that laid the foundation for religious ecumenism’ (Owusu-Ansah & Akyeampong 2019). Theology students, with adequate knowledge of an indigenous worldview, are better placed to engage actively with other religions in the context of peaceful co-existence. The former Catholic Archbishop Sarpong of Kumasi reiterates that the minister in Africa must be able to dialogue, must be able to live in peace and collaborative encounter with all men and women in charity, irrespective of their religious affiliations (Sarpong 1990:13). The Ghanaian environment, like all sub-Saharan African countries, has always been pluralistic, both culturally and religiously. The 2010 population census indicates that 60 percent of Ghanaians are Christian, 17 percent are Muslim and 23 percent are adherents of African traditional religions and others (Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, etc.). The diversity or plurality in Ghana is not only evident at the level of religion, but is also denominational.

Given the character of the multi-faith context today, a theological formation cannot but teach Christian theology, as a dialogical theology means not only to prepare, but also to impel and encourage students to actively engage meaningfully in the exiting plurality. According to Thomas Thangaraj, Christian theological dialogue is one theology which would be shot through and shaped by interfaith dialogue, a theology which is self-consciously dialogical in content (Thangaraj 1985:39). This dialogical theology will find appropriate and fruitful answers to questions which are considered fundamental to religious plurality such as, what kind of inter-religious cooperation do Christians want their theological viewpoint to promote? Should Christian theology foster a religious harmony among religions or hinder interreligious dialogue? In other words, unlike the traditional approach which tended to develop and largely highlight Christian exclusivism and negative attitudes in theology students, the conceptualized approach would challenge the theological worldview of students for a positive and inclusive understanding of other religions.

## **Conclusion**

The traditional approaches to a theological formation, adopted by the early missionaries had a dual effect on the missionary enterprise. On the one hand, it delayed what we would call the formal (institutional or structural) contextualization, and on the other hand usher in the informal (grassroots) contextualization with negative consequences on Christianity and evangelization in Ghana. This delay made the Christian theological institutions at best passive in the process of contextualization. It is clear, then, that the contextualization of Christianity in Ghana will take place with or without the involvement of the theological institutions. However, it behoves the theological institutions to be involved in the inevitable process to ensure appropriate and relevant contextualization to take place. Christians, therefore, have to adopt a firm stand and resist every attempt at de-contextualized theological formation and missions or even a non- or under-contextualized approach. The Christian theological institutions are to play a leading role in the process of contextualization and direct it towards an effective formation and proper evangelization.

As noted above, contextualization will deal with a theological education process which has tended to be largely discontinuous with the practice of ministry, by equipping students with appropriate tools for effective evangelization in the contemporary Ghana. It would also pay attention to questions posed by other faith traditions such as Islam and Ghanaian indigenous religions, their spiritual experiences, and moral values. The spiritual values and moral virtues inherent in these other religions and cultures were hardly given consideration in the traditional theological formation. Despite its enormous prospects, the contextualization of a theological formation in Ghana is not without challenges.

Discussions on the contextualization of a Christian theological formation in Ghana have been centering on what the theological institutes and Christian community will lose and not what it stands to gain from the enterprise all together. There is a growing suspicion that the Christian church will lose her authentic theology and its real identity, and misplace its core values as it attempts to contextualize (Bediako 1992:256-258). However, no strong and true religion on earth has lost its core values and identity in appropriate contextualization. Rather, the core values are always left intact if not grounded in the process. As it spread through the Greco-Roman world of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE, Christian theology contextualized, perfected, and strengthened.

ened itself. Christianity never failed to take in/on board what was relevant in the old order. Thus, the Christian community has a lot to gain in a conscious contextualization of theological formation.

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