

Article

From Crossroads to Holistic Impact: Charting a Praxical Course for Transforming Theological Education in Africa

Barnabé Anzuruni Msabah ^{1,2}¹ Theology and Network Engagement, Tearfund, Nairobi 00100, Kenya; barnabe.anzuruni@tearfund.org² Department of Practical Theology and Missiology, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch 7600, South Africa

Abstract: Theological education in Africa is currently at a crossroads and requires a thorough re-evaluation. The framework for teaching and learning introduced by missionaries during colonial times, which often prioritized Western perspectives and ignored indigenous African contexts, does not adequately address the complex issues and needs of African communities today. As a result, the impact of theological practice lacks both relevance and sustainability within grassroots communities. There is therefore a need for a theological framework that is more relevant, contextual, and responsive to the realities and aspirations of African people in the present context. This article advocates for the decolonization of theological education for a praxical approach rooted in lived experiences. It is essential to firmly anchor theological reflection and action in African traditions in order to effectively address contextual issues. This calls for action beyond academic reform towards meeting the pressing needs of the population. This article sheds light on the inadequacies of the colonial framework within theological education, serving as crucial indicators for holistic and sustainable transformation within the field. Case studies drawn from theological institutions, and local churches from selected countries in East, Central and Southern Africa provide nuanced insights into the importance of this transformative process.

Keywords: decolonization; theological education; community transformation; holistic impact



Citation: Msabah, Barnabé Anzuruni. 2024. From Crossroads to Holistic Impact: Charting a Praxical Course for Transforming Theological Education in Africa. *Religions* 15: 614. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15050614>

Academic Editors: Roberto Cipriani, Marilyn Naidoo and Anthony G. Reddie

Received: 1 December 2023

Revised: 17 April 2024

Accepted: 13 May 2024

Published: 16 May 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Theological education in Africa stands at a crossroads, necessitating reassessment and restructuring (Conradie 2021, p. 206). Historically, theological institutions played a crucial role in Africa by providing education and training for clergy, theologians, and missionaries. These institutions were instrumental in spreading Christianity across the continent, contributing to its growth and establishment in various communities. While theological institutions in Africa have been essential for the spread of Christianity, they have also been shaped by colonial influences, which continue to impact the way theology is taught and understood on the continent. This influence has had lasting effects. Tiquet (2020, pp. 86–87) labels this as “education through labor”, referencing the colonial practice of educating Africans in exchange for work, rationalized as part of the “civilizing mission” (Tiquet 2020, p. 87).

The colonial authorities favored Eurocentric theological perspectives over African cultural traditions. In “*The Unpopular Missionary*”, Dodge (1964, p. 17) sheds light on collaborations between churches and colonial powers, causing tensions between missionaries and African Christians. Dodge finds a complex relationship among early missionaries, seeing that some advocated for African liberation while others aligned with colonial authorities. Nganyu (2023, pp. 7–8) underscores the pervasive Western influence on colonial-era theological education and suggests restructuring curricula to counter these influences and foster contextually relevant learning. The CCT model emerges as a potent tool for addressing societal issues within their cultural context.

Decolonization of theological education holds significant importance, as [McCarroll \(2019, p. 8\)](#) underscores through the lens of the theology of the cross. McCarroll emphasizes the primacy of lived experiences, particularly existential struggles, as the basis for theological reflection, highlighting the necessity for new frameworks aligned with this perspective. Similarly, [Graham \(2011, p. iii\)](#) observes the imperative for theological institutions to adapt to the evolving needs of the church, signaling the need to reassess traditional approaches. [Ward \(2017, p. 576\)](#) cautions against oversimplifying decolonization as merely “peeling away layers” to uncover an essence, acknowledging the complexity of cultures with intertwined elements like languages and histories. He warns that decolonization attempts can inadvertently perpetuate new forms of “cultural and social colonialisms” because “tabula rasas are never as clean as we might wish they could be” ([Ward 2017, p. 575](#)). In spite of Ward’s skepticism about decolonization, he advocates for diversity over cultural homogenization, and criticizes the reduction of cultures to a single reality as a “colonial fantasy” ([Ward 2017, p. 576](#)) rooted in the desire for control and dominance.

2. Definitional Contexts for Key Concepts

2.1. Decolonization

The struggle to decolonize theology has historical roots, dating back to pioneers like [Wa Said \(1971, p. 501\)](#), who equated colonial theology with white theology and a theology of the bourgeoisie. [Wa Said \(1971, pp. 502–3\)](#) stressed the importance of understanding colonialism to grasp the struggle for its decolonization and so, for him, colonialism is akin to slavery. He finds decolonization as a means to eliminate the inhumanity and sin of colonialism, aiming to liberate both the colonized and the “thingified” ([Wa Said 1971, p. 503](#)), which aligns with the mission of Jesus as outlined in Luke 4:18–19. The reference to decolonization in this study aligns with Wa Said’s definitional context of dismantling colonial legacies in society, particularly in theological education, by challenging and transforming inherited systems of power, privilege, and oppression, in order to liberate “thingified” Africans, to use [Wa Said’s \(1971\)](#) term, and prioritize their perspectives and voices.

2.2. Theological Education

[Mugambi \(2013, p. 119\)](#) argues that theological education provides a link between education and theological expression, assuming that the education of individuals is linked to the exploration and articulation of theological ideas and concepts. In this study, the term “theological education”, refers to academic study, training programs, and learning experiences focused on religion, theology, and related disciplines. Although the study focuses primarily on the formal and academic aspects of theological education, it is important to recognize that informal and non-formal dimensions are also integral to theological education.

2.3. Church and Community Transformation

The Church and Community Transformation (CCT) approach was developed by Tearfund as a holistic framework for empowering churches and communities to tackle systemic injustices and foster social change. It emphasizes the interplay between spirituality, social justice, and community development to address poverty and inequality collaboratively. Grounded in integral mission theology, CCT aims to restore relationships with God, self, others, and the environment. By prioritizing contextual relevance and community engagement, CCT offers a promising path for decolonizing theological education and promoting sustainable development locally.

2.4. Eurocentrism

Eurocentrism is used in this study to describe a worldview, ideology, or approach that is centred or biased towards European culture, values, perspectives, or norms. This often leads to the exclusion or marginalization of other cultures, histories, or points of view. A Eurocentric approach reflects a tendency to view European experiences and achievements as superior or more significant compared to those of other regions or peoples. It

is important to note that Eurocentrism does not refer to the cultural values, perspectives, or norms of Europe as a continent, but rather the prioritization or validation of the experiences, achievements, and perspectives of people of European descent over those of other communities.

Lastly, in this paper, “contextuality” or “contextual” is mainly used instead of “contextualization” or “contextualized”. This differentiation is important and requires a nuanced definition to enhance clarity and understanding.

2.5. Contextuality vs. Contextualization

Within the framework of this study, *contextuality* refers to theology’s inherent quality of being birthed, rooted in, shaped by, and responsive to the specific cultural, social, and historical context in which it is practiced. Contextual theology therefore recognizes that theology cannot be separated from its environment; rather, it authentically expresses local spirituality and lived experiences. Contextuality serves as a foundational principle that guides efforts in theological education and ministerial training (Pobee 2013, pp. 19–20).

Contextualization, on the other hand, is the deliberate process of adapting theological beliefs and practices to a different sociocultural context for relevance. While contextualization makes theological perspectives accessible to other contexts, it dilutes the authenticity of the original context, and hinders the development of contextual frameworks by the local population. Mburu (2021, pp. 86–87) notes that many African theological students heavily rely on Eurocentric resources due to their predominant availability. While valuable, these resources impose Western assumptions on students through a contextualized process, which further complicates students’ contextual understanding.

3. Historical Legacies of Colonialism

3.1. Western Theological Paradigms

Colonialism imposed Eurocentric theological frameworks, sidelining African spiritual traditions and knowledge systems. As missionaries represented the religious arm of colonial powers, one of their roles was to prioritize Eurocentric perspectives. As a result, theological education programs based on the colonial framework often lack the contextual richness necessary to engage with the diverse realities of African contexts. This creates a disconnect between theological education and lived experiences. Chabata (2021, p. 165) advocates for an “existential learning model” that integrates students’ daily experiences into teaching to foster active engagement with their environment and community. Theological education’s emphasis on spiritual formation over practical living perpetuates what Chabata (2021, p. 166) terms “Thessalonian Syndrome”, akin to neglecting productive living in anticipation of Christ’s return, as seen in Thessalonica. This emphasizes the need for theological institutions to overhaul both their deontological ethics and methodological practices in order to align the program more effectively with societal needs. Therefore, to decolonize theological education, we must prioritize contextuality, authenticity, and empowerment.

3.2. Linguistic Imperialism

Colonial imposition of European languages and cultures in theological education led to the adoption of languages like English, French, or Portuguese as the medium of instruction in many institutions, alienating students from their cultural and linguistic roots. The prioritization of Western perspectives still marginalizes African theological expressions. This stems from colonial legacies, where European languages symbolized civilization, while local languages were deemed primitive. Agyekum (n.d., p. 101) defines linguistic imperialism as the gradual displacement of native languages and the imposition of a dominant language by those holding power. Teaching Christianity in foreign languages has led to African students being disconnected from their cultural heritage and identity as Mugambi (2013, p. 117) posits. This occurs when Christianity is taught in a manner incongruent with local beliefs and practices. Therefore, bias towards European languages

reinforces the false belief that proficiency in a European language is equal to intelligence and intellectual superiority.

3.3. Eurocentric Curricula

African educational curricula have long prioritized European and North American cultural values over indigenous heritage (Mugambi 2013, p. 118). This dominance underscores the imperative to restore African cultural and religious heritage within educational systems. During colonialism, theological education favored Eurocentric biases, marginalizing African traditions while perpetuating inequalities and dependence on Western thought (Mugambi 2013). Today, Western theological texts overshadow African contributions, and this hinders the integration of African perspectives into the academic discourse. Theological institutions should prioritize African traditions and perspectives if we are to decolonize the curriculum.

3.4. Dependency and Control

Many theological institutions in Africa face limited resources, particularly in terms of funding, infrastructure and staffing (Dominiak 2022, p. 5). The limitation is a legacy of the colonial era, when educational institutions were controlled by colonial authorities and missionaries. This has perpetuated the reliance on Eurocentric theological thinking, hindering the development of local knowledge and leadership. Kombo (2013, p. 105) emphasizes the need to break away from colonial influences and establish theological frameworks rooted in local perspectives. Historically, African theologians and clergy received training in seminaries established by missionaries, which hindered the development of authentic African theological discourse. External funding, often from Western donors or missionaries, further compromises institutional autonomy (Mugambi 2013, p. 117). Today, the colonial-era curriculum framework still influences theological education, with many institutions relying on the curricula established by missionaries (Mugambi 2013). This is why Miller (2011, p. 52) stresses that theological education safeguards churches from compromising beliefs to societal pressures. Sadly, external control over funding and program approval has hindered reform efforts, perpetuating Eurocentric perspectives in theological institutions despite decolonization efforts (Edwards 2013, p. 150).

3.5. Divide and Rule Tactics

Colonial powers utilized divide-and-rule strategies within theological education institutions to exploit and foment conflict among African ethnic and religious groups, hindering unity and self-determination (Meier zu Selhausen 2019, p. 8). This approach entrenched divisions and unequal power dynamics, which still persists in present-day theological education. Divide and rule tactics aimed to exploit and incite conflict between different ethnic or religious groups within the African population in order to maintain colonial control and prevent solidarity among Africans resisting oppression, even within theological circles. To confront this legacy, theological institutions must foster solidarity, collaboration and respect, giving African theologians the means to reclaim indigenous traditions. Through transformative teaching methods and decolonized curricula, theological education can empower Africans to reclaim agency and cultural heritage (Tarus 2021, p. 73).

4. Church and Community Transformation in Theological Education

4.1. The Quest for Transformative Theological Training

In September 2022, a significant gathering took place at St Paul's University in Limuru, Kenya. Church leaders, theological educators, and community transformation practitioners from Angola, DRC, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe came together for a transformative project with the goal of reshaping theological education in the region. For JC, this event marked the culmination of a 26-year journey that began with a commitment to addressing Africa's socio-economic challenges through the church. After completing 14 years of theological studies, JC's focus shifted

when he realized the lack of practical community development training in theological programs. As a result, JC actively pursued programs that aimed to equip church leaders for effective community service. In 2016, JC was introduced to CCT and found resonance with its approach. His subsequent experiences in various African theological institutions, particularly in Tanzania, Angola, and Malawi, provided compelling evidence of how CCT has transformed ministerial training.

In an effort to expand the scope of CCT training, JC and his colleagues organized workshops from December 2021 to March 2022. These workshops involved 160 participants from 70 institutions across seven countries. The aim of these workshops was to scale up and adapt CCT methodologies for inclusion within theological education, acknowledging the significance of customized and context-specific approaches. To achieve this goal, country-specific task teams and working groups were established in each of the seven countries.

JC's journey exemplifies the deficiencies of a framework firmly entrenched in the colonial context. It encapsulates the ineffectiveness of theological education in equipping individuals, such as JC, to adequately tackle the urgent needs within their communities. The colonial framework governing theological education, which placed greater emphasis on doctrinal teaching and learning rather than practical, community-centric approaches, played a role in perpetuating this disconnect. JC's decision to pursue non-theological studies in community development underscored the limitations of theological education in effectively addressing real-world obstacles.

In September 2022, I invited JC to a gathering at St. Paul's University in Kenya, where twenty-three leaders, including church leaders, theology educators, and TEE specialists, convened to discuss scaling up CCT in theological education. This marked a milestone in JC's quest for a transforming, transformed theological education. Subsequent workshops involved collaborative efforts to develop a framework for integrating CCT in theological education.

To counter Eurocentric biases and narrow pedagogical approaches, a transformative, people-centred curriculum is essential. This curriculum must engage with diverse African realities and aspirations, fostering critical reflection, ethical discernment, and practical skills for transformative ministry and service. Ukpong (2013, p. 530) underscores the need to prioritize African voices, experiences, and values in theological education to ensure relevance and empowerment. There is a growing demand for theological education that addresses people's needs, perspectives, and experiences, which CCT prioritizes through its holistic approach by integrating academic, practical, social, and cultural dimensions.

4.2. Applying CCT Principles to the Process of Decolonization

The six principles of CCT are the guiding values or core elements defining what constitutes a CCT initiative. Adherence to these principles ensures that the initiative remains true to the foundational concepts and goals of CCT, which include community engagement, holistic development, empowerment, and social justice.

Principle #1—CCT is driven by a biblical theology of integral mission and dependence on God. The first principle emphasizes the need for a CCT initiative to be grounded in integral mission and reliance on God. Theological colleges can reclaim indigenous perspectives by integrating contextual viewpoints and incorporating African hermeneutics and liberation theology into the curriculum to foster a theology rooted in the African context.

Principle #2—CCT intentionally seeks to restore all broken relationships. This principle addresses all broken relationships, including our relationships with God, self, others, and the environment. The principle challenges the Eurocentric focus on individualism, thus empowering students to engage in holistic ministries that address colonial legacies. This involves restoring broken relationships, starting with our broken relationship with God and, through fieldwork and community initiatives, applying biblical principles to challenge colonial structures and promote transformation.

Principle #3—CCT facilitates Bible reflection to bring about mindset, values, and behavior change. The third CCT principle highlights the transformative power of consistent Bible

study and theological reflection in shaping mindsets, values, and behaviors. Here, the college would integrate participatory Bible study methods, encouraging critical analysis within students' sociocultural context. Through group discussions, students explore how colonial interpretations distort biblical truths.

Principle #4—*CCT mobilizes the church to become an agent of holistic change in the community.* The fourth CCT principle highlights the church's role in holistic community transformation, and advocates for active engagement in advocacy and social change. Under this principle, theological colleges equip students with skills to mobilize churches in addressing systemic injustices and fostering community development. Through practical ministry placements, students collaborate with local churches and community organizations to tackle grassroots-level social issues. This enables them to mobilize churches for collective action and initiate sustainable development projects benefiting marginalized communities.

Principle #5—*CCT relies on inclusive, participatory, and contextual processes to foster ownership and sustainable change.* This principle advocates for inclusive, participatory, and context-driven approaches. Theological colleges empower students to dismantle colonial power structures and champion grassroots-led initiatives for societal change. Through collaborative research projects involving students, faculty, and community members, students learn to value diverse perspectives and indigenous knowledge. Engaging in community-driven, church-led transformation efforts fosters a sense of ownership within the church and the community, promoting sustainable change from within.

Principle #6—*CCT promotes the celebration and mobilization of local resources, the agency of individuals, and the unlocking of community potential.* The final CCT principle focuses on celebrating and mobilizing local resources to empower individuals and communities, thus challenging the dependency mindset. Under this principle, theological colleges offer programs that encourage students to engage in community-driven, church-led initiatives, using indigenous knowledge and skills. Through asset-mapping exercises, students identify local strengths to address social challenges and promote sustainable development. When we celebrate available resources, it fosters a sense of agency and empowerment within the community and church members, thus countering colonial mindsets of dependency.

4.3. Holistic Well-Being from a CCT Perspective

Within the CCT framework, poverty extends beyond the lack of material things to encompass deep relational fractures. The root cause of poverty is identified as spiritual brokenness, followed by distorted self-perception, unjust social structures, and exploitative environmental practices. Essentially, poverty permeates every facet of human existence. Therefore, to effectively address poverty and alleviate its effects, a holistic approach grounded in biblical principles is essential. The holistic view of poverty requires holistic solutions that are community-driven and church-led. The impact of CCT initiatives is seen in the overall well-being and transformation of individuals and communities across nine key domains of human well-being.

Domain #1—*Living Faith:* This domain highlights gratitude, humility, and trust in God's guidance for purpose and direction. Achieving a living faith means believing in God as the supreme being. It also means reclaiming marginalized traditional practices, rituals, and worldviews, and celebrating diverse expressions of a faith that is truly alive within the local context. Through culturally contextual interpretations of Scripture, here students engage with stories of liberation, resilience, and communal solidarity to build a vibrant faith that permeates all aspects of life and restores relationship with God, community, and the whole of creation.

Domain #2—*Emotional and Mental Well-being:* This domain promotes practices for emotional regulation, stress management, and nurturing harmonious relationships. Transformation in this context means recognizing God's concern for inner struggles and joys, and being empowered to overcome challenges with grace and spiritual resilience, leading to peace and wholeness.

Domain #3—*Physical Health*: This domain prioritizes holistic health, going beyond the physical to include balanced nutrition, exercise, and preventive care, which aligns with honoring God’s design for our bodies. It also acknowledges the sanctity of human bodies and the interconnectedness of physical, mental, and spiritual health. Integrating community health courses into theological education presents a shift towards holistic well-being and community empowerment. Here, transformation entails integrating African traditions of community care and coping mechanisms into the curriculum, which involves assessing students’ progress in developing emotional intelligence and empathy. This is a shift towards relational and communal approaches to mental and emotional well-being, moving away from individualistic care models.

Domain #4—*Capabilities*: This domain celebrates human creativity and potential, and encourages the development and utilization of individual capabilities in service to God and others. Here, a transformed person uses their talents and abilities to serve God and humanity, contributing to community enrichment and the advancement of God’s Kingdom. Decolonizing theological education through CCT involves empowering students to recognize and nurture their inherent talents, while adopting a participatory pedagogy that values students’ diverse experiences and abilities. Through interactive learning and experiential projects, students discern their vocational callings and roles within the body of Christ as they become agents of positive change, leveraging their abilities for the common good.

Domain #5—*Material Assets and Resources*: This domain emphasizes responsible stewardship and equitable distribution of resources. Here, material wealth is not as an end, but a means to advance God’s Kingdom and alleviate poverty. The transformation process in this domain entails challenging colonial notions of scarcity and promoting an abundant Africa with the principles of stewardship and mutual support. Theological colleges in this case would need to integrate teachings on economic justice and redistribution of wealth to address inequalities and foster sustainable development. Through initiatives like savings associations and microenterprise programs, students would be able to utilize available local resources to uplift others. Adopting a theology of abundance rooted in biblical principles, rather than that of scarcity, would challenge the colonial exploitative system and promote socio-economic autonomy.

Domain #6—*Care of the Environment*: This domain highlights environmental stewardship, urging individuals to adopt sustainable practices that honor God’s creation and safeguard biodiversity. By valuing and protecting the environment, believers express respect for God’s grandeur and fulfill their role as custodians of creation. To decolonize theological education, colleges should incorporate ecological ethics and sustainable development teachings. This allows students to engage in church-led and community-driven initiatives and advocacy, thus learning to tackle environmental degradation and foster sustainable livelihoods. Transformation in this domain is a renewed commitment to ecological justice and the well-being of our planet.

Domain #7—*Participation and Influence*: This domain emphasizes the transformative power of community engagement, exhorting believers to be salt and light in promoting justice, compassion and reconciliation. In theological education, through community engagement and mentorship, students are given opportunities to collaborate with local organizations in order to enable them to advocate for equity and dignity. They identify injustices through participatory research and community engagement, thus promoting policy reforms and framing a theology of solidarity and resilience.

Domain #8—*Social Connections*: This domain underscores the importance of nurturing genuine relationships, including friendships, family ties, and communal bonds. To decolonize theological education, theological colleges facilitate opportunities for students to cultivate authentic relationships and establish networks of solidarity. Measuring transformation within the context of this domain is to assess how students bridge cultural divides and foster inclusive communities that embrace diversity.

Domain #9—*Personal Relationships*: This domain emphasizes nurturing loving relationships characterized by grace, humility, and forgiveness to promote healing and restoration.

Theological colleges prioritize the development of healthy personal relationships based on love and forgiveness. Through peer mentoring and spiritual formation, students cultivate empathy and compassion, fostering genuine connections across cultural barriers. Transformation in this domain involves embracing and practicing a theology of grace, and offering hope and healing to those affected by colonial legacies.

5. Key Methodological Considerations

5.1. Research Design and Approach

According to Kothari (2004, p. 31), research design is a “conceptual structure within which research is conducted”. In the same way, Marczyk et al. (2005, p. 47) find that research design is the blueprint that guides the entire research process, delineating the path from the formulation of research questions to the interpretation of findings. That is to say, a well-crafted research design ensures that the study is methodologically sound, enabling researchers to draw valid conclusions and contribute meaningfully to the body of knowledge in their field. This study was designed to triangulate qualitative and quantitative methods, as required in a mixed-methods approach. The study was also designed to be participatory in nature.

5.2. Participants

The selection process used a combination of probability and non-probability techniques. Some participants were chosen based on both random and purposive sampling methods, ensuring a diverse representation of perspectives and experiences. Other participants were selected through the snowball method, having been referred by community members or church leaders. As Sheppard (2020) notes, sampling is crucial when dealing with heterogeneous units of analysis, which was the case for this study.

5.3. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected via interviews, focus groups, consultations, workshops, and surveys conducted from September 2022 to March 2023. Qualitative case studies focused on individual CCT experiences, while questionnaires and interviews gathered demographic data and perceptions on CCT. The interviews explored understanding, engagement, effects, and challenges, while the focus groups discussed teaching, curriculum, and approaches. Participants shared experiences and aspirations regarding CCT in theological education.

Data analysis encompassed statistical analysis, visualization, and interpretation, involving scientific techniques like averages, percentages, or correlations to summarize and decipher numerical data. Graphical representations such as charts or graphs were created to understand patterns or trends. Coding and categorization identified recurring themes, patterns, and relationships. These themes were organized into coherent narratives reflecting the participants’ experiences.

6. Results

At the gathering hosted in September 2022 at St. Paul’s University in Kenya, and in subsequent consultations and workshops until January 2023, delegates established CCT as their preferred strategy for holistic transformation in the church and in the community through theological education. They developed a framework with pathways to facilitate the teaching, learning, and application of CCT in theological institutions.

The first pathway is a *standardized* CCT program, which requires the design of a new, stand-alone curriculum. The second pathway is an *integrated* CCT program, which involves the inclusion of a CCT course unit into an existing program of study. The third pathway is a *mainstreamed* program, which focuses solely on streamlining the CCT content within the existing educational structure or courses. Finally, a technical or *professional* program involves facilitating the learning of CCT outside of regular academic hours. This can include using online or extension programs for wider access, studying on weekends, or

during breaks such as mid-term or school holidays like summer or winter schools. Teaching CCT as a short course is also part of this pathway.

6.1. Gaps in the Colonial Framework for Theological Education

As Mugambi (2013, p. 123) points out, the colonial framework of theological education in Africa has significant gaps. It erodes the rich religious diversity of the continent. I conducted surveys with church leaders, theology educators, and community members, and they too highlighted gaps in theology programs and stressed the need to prioritize practical skills for ministry and community engagement. Institutions often fail to tailor education to specific needs and cultural contexts, hindering its relevance. Limited resources and faculty training impede research and critical thinking. Minimal interaction with local communities separates academic learning from real-world ministry experiences while intellectual development overshadows spiritual, emotional, and relational growth, which are essential for ministry preparation.

6.2. Selected CCT Case Studies

6.2.1. The Case of Malawi

The adoption of CCT in Malawi is a significant step. A task team developed an action plan, leading to the establishment of the Theological Engagement Working Group (TEWG). The TEWG focused on creating course outlines, resulting in a specialized “Church and Community Development” course. Progress includes training programs for staff and varied enrollment rates across institutions. Achievements like training facilitators, engaging with multiple colleges, and creating a CCT module demonstrate substantial progress.

6.2.2. The Case of Kenya

In Kenya, St. Paul’s University and its ten affiliated colleges are leading efforts to teach CCT as a practical theology course. To facilitate this process, 11 lecturers have been trained to review theology programs and develop monitoring tools. Since 2020, the integration of CCT has expanded to encompass 24 Anglican dioceses, involving 20 lecturers and 309 theology students. St. Andrew’s College of Theology and Development in Kabare is focusing on CCT in its strategic plan and plans to design a new curriculum for a “Diploma in Transformative Mission”. These institutions are systematically transitioning their programs to adopt CCT.

6.2.3. The Case of South Africa

The Diocese of Port Elizabeth is leading the integration of CCT into the educational programs of the College of the Transfiguration, embracing it as a framework for holistic transformation. This collaboration between Tearfund, CAPA, and the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) marks a significant achievement in fostering holistic community transformation and equipping future leaders with tools for lasting change. The unanimous endorsement of CCT by the ACSA Synod of Bishops extends to all theological colleges in South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, eSwatini, Namibia, and St. Helena.

6.3. Pathways for Teaching CCT in Theological Education

At the gathering, four CCT education streams in theological colleges were established. Termed “pathways”, they represent avenues for theology students to be trained in the CCT model of holistic transformation. These pathways were refined and discussed in subsequent meetings with stakeholders. The *standardized* pathway involves the development of a distinct and comprehensive curriculum specifically tailored for CCT. This curriculum is designed as a separate and stand-alone program solely dedicated to CCT, encompassing all necessary coursework, assignments, and assessments. Upon successful completion of the program, participants are awarded an academic certificate befitting their level of education, specifically recognizing their proficiency in CCT. In essence, the standardized

pathway offers a focused and intensive study of CCT, culminating in a formal certification of expertise in this field.

The *integrated* pathway entails incorporating one or more specific course units or modules into an existing academic program. This integration ensures that the content covered in the course is recognized and recorded on the graduate's official academic transcript upon completion, thus allowing students to receive credit for their study of CCT within the context of their overall academic studies. The *mainstreamed* pathway requires that instructors incorporate CCT principles into the existing program, without the need to develop new courses. This means that instead of creating separate courses dedicated solely to CCT, instructors teach CCT principles and practices as content of their existing courses. This approach allows for a seamless streamlining of CCT concepts within the broader program of theological education, ensuring that students are exposed to these principles without significant restructuring of the overall educational program.

The *professional* or technical pathway provides short training courses that are conducted outside of the regular academic calendar, typically scheduled during holidays or weekends. This allows individuals to pursue additional training or acquire specific skills without interrupting their regular academic studies or professional commitments. It is designed to be flexible and accessible, accommodating the busy schedules of participants who may not be able to attend traditional classroom sessions during the regular academic term.

Delegates overwhelmingly preferred the standardized pathway for teaching CCT, reflecting its importance in addressing the challenges of theological education. The session on CCT pathways was highly relevant to 66.7% of participants, providing practical advice for curriculum design and teaching methods. The evaluation of CCT teaching pathways showed unanimous agreement (100%) among respondents, which indicates the effectiveness of curriculum development initiatives. In the practical session for designing a CCT program, 66.7% of delegates rated it a 5, indicating significant satisfaction, with 22.2% rating it a 4, aligning positively with their expectations. Only 11.1% gave a lower rating, suggesting a slight mismatch in expectations. Participants highly valued the practical knowledge and skills on integrating CCT into their roles as theological educators. The session on "Integrating CCT into Theological Education" resonated with 55.6% of participants, fostering a better understanding of the relationship between theological education and community transformation.

6.4. Using the CCT Approach in Practical Ministry and Teaching

Several participants (respondents 1, 6, and 9) are engaged in program development, with the intention of either designing a curriculum for CCT or integrating CCT ideas into existing structures. This emphasizes the immediate integration of CCT into theological education. Respondent 2 aims to share knowledge with colleagues, promoting awareness of CCT and actively involving students. Respondent 3 intends to take a leadership role in curriculum development, indicating a proactive stance. Respondent 4 acknowledges the challenges ahead, recognizing the continued efforts required for full integration.

Respondent 5 aims to apply acquired knowledge in curriculum development for holistic impact. Respondent 7 presents a strategic plan for accreditation by the National Council for Higher Education, reflecting a long-term vision. Respondent 8 intends to expand his knowledge by engaging with church and community leaders. Respondent 9 focuses on contextualizing the program for cultural relevance. These responses collectively demonstrate a commitment to applying CCT principles in theological education and practical ministry, recognizing the ongoing nature of this work and the need for context-specific adaptation.

The results reveal participants' commitment to integrating CCT into theological education and practical ministry. Some focus on curriculum development, aiming to design new programmes or courses, others aim to share their knowledge and lead the curriculum development process. Despite acknowledging some challenges, respondents expressed commitment to applying CCT ideas for holistic impact.

Respondents view movement building and advocacy as integral to the CCT model. This includes organizing events or campaigns for community-centred transformation, and supporting causes or policies in order to influence decision-makers and raise awareness of social justice issues.

7. Discussion

The CCT model employs storytelling to showcase successes, following community engagement sessions. The stories offer local examples, foster trust, and demonstrate community impact. Naidoo (2019, p. 2) emphasizes the significance of storytelling within church environments as safe and nurturing spaces for individuals to share their personal narratives. In many African cultures, storytelling is deeply rooted in tradition and serves as a means of passing down wisdom, cultural heritage, and spiritual teachings from one generation to another.

Incorporating storytelling into theological education allows churches to create spaces for sharing personal experiences, struggles, and triumphs, fostering a sense of belonging and unity among community members. In line with Reddie's (1998) position, storytelling is not confined to verbal narration alone; it encompasses a wide array of expressive forms deeply embedded within African cultures. In CCT, these include role-playing, where individuals act out narratives to convey messages or teachings, and celebrations and festivals, which serve as communal gatherings to commemorate important events and convey cultural and spiritual significance. Folktales and proverbs are also integral components of storytelling, often used to impart moral lessons, cultural values, and spiritual insights. This approach not only enriches theological scholarship, but also promotes cultural authenticity, allowing African communities to reclaim their voices and narratives in the educational process.

Shaw (2023) characterizes the colonial legacy in Africa as an "Educational Split Personality", which juxtaposes colonial structures against traditional African ways of life. In a teacher training session at a southern African theological college, Shaw referenced Richard Nisbett's research on cognitive models, igniting a discussion on the relevance of Eurocentric educational methods in Africa. Professors unanimously identified more with East Asian thought, prompting questions about the relevance of Western approaches. One black professor likened their situation to schizophrenia, navigating between African values and detached academic structures. This "dual existence" hinders one's ability to engage meaningfully in the context of their ministry.

Shaw's (2023) anecdote points at the discrepancy between colonial-inspired aspirations of theological institutions and the realities of local ministry in Africa. CCT addresses this "theological schizophrenia" by promoting culturally relevant theological education, prioritizing contextuality, integrating community practices into teaching and learning methods, and emphasizing hands-on learning experiences. This shift bridges the gap between traditional life and formal education, preparing students for impactful ministry rooted in community relevance.

Kombo (2013, p. 105) advocates for a radical rethinking of African theology, urging a departure from the past and a deeper engagement with current African realities. This resonates with discussions about decolonizing theological education to cultivate a contextual theology reflecting authentic expressions of African faith. This transformative shift goes beyond theory, as it stresses the need for theology to drive holistic transformation in individuals and communities within their own context. Embracing African expressions of faith makes theological education more relevant and effective.

Bellon (2021) highlights the crucial role of theological education in Africa, emphasizing its impact on church health and societal development. For Bellon, theological education needs to transcend traditional religious teaching on doctrines and advocate for a more holistic and pragmatic approach. He further suggests that theological education should address pressing societal needs, and engage communities beyond academic and religious confines. Mugambi (2013, p. 119) links education and theological expression to highlight

the impact of colonialism on traditional systems. This resonates with CCT as a tool for decolonizing theological education, moving away from colonial structures to incorporate local perspectives and prioritize lived experiences (Mugambi 2013, p. 125).

Advocating the alignment of theological education with God's holistic mission beyond the church, Amanze (2013, p. 225) echoes De Gruchy (2010, p. 44) against colonialism's dehumanization. Supporting a practical theological education akin to CCT, Amanze (2013, p. 223) critiques colonial methods and warns against narrow visions unsuitable for Africa's diverse needs. Conversely, CCT promotes a holistic mission that resonates with God's inclusive vision, as noted by Naidoo (2013, p. 757), who stresses holistic transformation and spiritual maturity in future leaders.

8. Conclusions

Decolonizing theological education entails shifting away from merely receiving doctrine passively to actively tackling real-world challenges. This empowers clergy and leaders to address societal issues beyond doctrinal boundaries. Embracing praxical approaches like CCT becomes paramount, enabling meaningful change within both educational institutions and broader communities. Charting this transformative course allows theological education in Africa to break free from colonial legacies and promote holistic development and empowerment. This shift is not just theoretical; it requires committed action. In navigating the landscape of theological education in Africa, the trajectory from "crossroads to holistic impact" becomes increasingly apparent. By charting a praxical course, transformative strides are made towards a more contextual, relevant, and impactful educational paradigm. As theological education continues to evolve, embracing this praxical approach becomes not only a necessity but a beacon of hope for meaningful change within African communities and beyond.

This article emphasizes prioritizing locally authentic and contextually relevant African perspectives for holistic impact. It suggests strategies for a people-centred approach and advocates for the use of CCT as a holistic decolonization approach. This is a call to not only move away from indoctrination but also design theological programs that are shaped by contextual factors and grounded in engaged praxis. Differently put, instead of simply imparting doctrinal or fixed beliefs, there is a need to encourage critical thinking and questioning within theological education. This shift aims to foster independent thought and inquiry rather than passive acceptance of borrowed, foreign perspectives. It highlights the significance of tailoring theological programs to the specific cultural, social, and environmental contexts of African communities. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of praxis, where theoretical knowledge is applied and tested in real-world situations. This approach ensures that theological education is not detached from the realities of the communities it serves but actively contributes to their holistic development.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review was waived due to the study's low risk nature, involving non-sensitive data.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Due to institutional restrictions and privacy considerations, access to the primary data used in this study is not available for public release. Requests for data access can be made to the corresponding author but may be subject to approval by the relevant institutional review board and data governance committee.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

References

- Agyekum, Kofi. n.d. Linguistic imperialism and language decolonisation in Africa through documentation and preservation. In *African Linguistics on the Prairie: Selected Papers from the 45th Annual Conference on African Linguistics*. Edited by Jason Kandybowicz, Travis Major, Harold Torrence and Philip T. Duncan. Berlin: Language Science Press, pp. 87–104. [CrossRef]
- Amanze, James. 2013. Theological education in Southern Africa. In *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*. Edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner. Oxford: Regnum, pp. 223–33.
- Bellon, Emmanuel. 2021. Theological Education and Sustainability in Relation to the African Union's Agenda 2063. In *The Future of Theological Education in Africa for Sustainable Growth of the Church and Society*. Nairobi: All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in Collaboration with Theological Networks and Institutions in Africa, November. Available online: https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=417115753228167 (accessed on 10 March 2024).
- Chabata, Lovejoy. 2021. Theological education and sustainable development in Zimbabwe: Towards a transformative praxis in doing theology. In *A Critical Engagement with Theological Education in Africa: A South African Perspective*. Edited by Johannes J. Knoetze and Alfred R. Brunson. Reformed Theology in Africa Series; Cape Town: Aosis, vol. 7, pp. 163–90.
- Conradie, Sas. 2021. Church and community transformation and the implications for theological education in Africa: An NGO perspective. In *A Critical Engagement with Theological Education in Africa: A South African Perspective*. Edited by Johannes J. Knoetze and Alfred R. Brunson. Reformed Theology in Africa Series; Cape Town: Aosis, vol. 7, pp. 205–20.
- De Gruchy, Steve. 2010. Theological education and missional practice: A vital dialogue. In *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*. Edited by Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang and Joshva Raja. Oxford: Regnum, pp. 42–50.
- Dodge, Ralph E. 1964. *The Unpopular Missionary*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., p. 17.
- Dominiak, Paul. 2022. Decolonizing Theological Education: Learning from Latinx, Womanist, and Asian Voices for Transformative Pedagogy. *Reviews in Religion & Theology* 29: 1.
- Edwards, Kirsten T. 2013. Christianity as anti-colonial resistance? Womanist theology, Black liberation theology, and the Black church as sites for pedagogical decolonization. *Souls* 15: 146–62. [CrossRef]
- Graham, Stephen R. 2011. Editor's introduction. In *Theological Education*. Edited by Daniel O. Aleshire, Stephen R. Graham, Eliza Smith Brown and Linda D. Trostle. Pittsburgh: ATS, vol. 46, pp. iii–iv.
- Kombo, James. 2013. The past and presence of Christian theology in African universities. In *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*. Edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner. Oxford: Regnum, pp. 100–7.
- Kothari, Chakravanti Rajagopalachari. 2004. *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques*. New Delhi: New Age.
- Marczyk, Geoffrey, David DeMatteo, and David Festinger. 2005. *Essentials of Research Design and Methodology*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 47–48.
- Mburu, Elizabeth. 2021. The importance of African hermeneutics in African theological education. In *A Critical Engagement with Theological Education in Africa: A South African Perspective*. Edited by Johannes J. Knoetze and Alfred R. Brunson. Reformed Theology in Africa Series; Cape Town: Aosis Books, vol. 7, pp. 85–101.
- McCarroll, Pamela. 2019. Keeping It Real: Decolonizing Christian Inter-Religious Practice as an Exercise in a Practical Theology of the Cross. *Religions* 10: 203. [CrossRef]
- Meier zu Selhausen, Felix. 2019. *Missions, Education and Conversion in Colonial Africa*. African Economic History Working Paper Series, No. 48/2019; Sussex: African Economic History Network (AEHN).
- Miller, Glenn T. 2011. Does A Secular Age Need the Seminary? Considerations on Alternative Forms of Ministerial Preparation. In *Theological Education*. Edited by Daniel O. Aleshire, Stephen R. Graham, Eliza Smith Brown and Linda D. Trostle. Pittsburgh: ATS, vol. 46, pp. 47–59.
- Mugambi, Jesse N. K. 2013. The future of theological education in Africa and the challenges it faces. In *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*. Edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner. Oxford: Regnum, pp. 117–25.
- Naidoo, Marilyn. 2013. Spiritual formation in theological education. In *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*. Edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner. Oxford: Regnum, pp. 755–70.
- Naidoo, Marilyn. 2019. 'So, what's your story?—The role of storytelling in nurturing inclusive congregational identity'. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75: 1–7. [CrossRef]
- Nganyu, Gideon Ngi. 2023. Decolonization Agenda at the Seminary Level: Emancipating Theological Education in Africa. *International Journal of Theology & Religious Studies* 3: 17–36.
- Pobee, John S. 2013. Good news turned by natives hands, turned by native hatchet and tendered with native earth: A history of the theological education in Africa. In *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*. Edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner. Oxford: Regnum, pp. 13–27.
- Reddie, Anthony. 1998. The oral tradition of African-Caribbean people as a resource for Black Christian formation. *British Journal of Theological Education* 10: 16–25. [CrossRef]
- Shaw, Perry. 2023. Educational "Split Personality" in Africa. A Social Media Publication. Available online: https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid027s1FR8L7bVgxBkVuFppM48cQvYjsXHgpnARJRgWfmTCAV9DEgMRw6o9kF1eFSEE4l&id=10001419559608&mibextid=Nif5oz (accessed on 29 November 2023).
- Sheppard, Valerie. 2020. *Research Methods for the Social Sciences: An Introduction*. Vancouver: Creative Commons, pp. 1–417.

- Tarus, David. 2021. Excellence and renewal of theological education in Africa: The case of ACTEA. In *A Critical Engagement with Theological Education in Africa: A South African Perspective*. Edited by Johannes J. Knoetze and Alfred R. Brunsdon. Reformed Theology in Africa Series; Cape Town: Aosis Books, vol. 7, pp. 53–65.
- Tiquet, Romain. 2020. Education through Labor: From the deuxième portion du contingent to the Youth Civic Service in West Africa (Senegal/Mali, 1920s–1960s). In *Education and Development in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa: Policies, Paradigms, and Entanglements, 1890s–1980s*. Edited by Damiano Matasci, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and Hugo Gonçalves Dores. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 83–103.
- Ukpong, Justin. 2013. Inculturation theology in Africa: Historical and hermeneutical developments. In *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*. Edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Dietrich Werner. Oxford: Regnum, pp. 530–42.
- Wa Said, Dibinga. 1971. An African Theology of Decolonization. *Harvard Theological Review* 64: 501–24. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Ward, Graham. 2017. Decolonizing theology. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 3: 561–84. [[CrossRef](#)]

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.