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“LISTENING AND OBEYING GOD IN DAYS LIKE THESE”

**THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON THEOLOGICAL EDUACTION AND THE NEED OF AN AFRICAN MODEL**

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* My objective with this short presentation is just to raise some questions to reflect on the need of developing an African theological education model suitable to equip African church leadership to be relevant in its context.
* My reflections are based on issues raised by Dr Dewi Hughes asking the question: Is the Northen Model of Theological Education a Good Model? in a consultation about: “the role of theological institutions as a Church Mandate” held in Brackenhurst – Nairobi in 2003, where our school took part.

He said that:

* “The flow of globalization is still very much from the North to the South in the area of theological education. The South is still trying hard to copy the North in the context of theological education…..
* “Although the center of gravity of the church has moved to the South it is difficult to see evidence that this is the case regarding theological education. We ready hardly books by Southern theologians in the North and there is some evidence that even Southern Christians are reluctant to read the work of their own theologians.” Having saying that went on point out some weaknesses of the Northen System of Theological Education. I think we need to be aware of those weaknesses. They may be not the only ones, so, we can expand the list…I am sharing with you only those that I have found very relevant to our reality.

**Some weaknesses of the Northen system of theological education:**

* **Professionalization of the Ministry:**

A Theological Education that confers a social status (I remember a story of a graduated who arrived from abroad and said to his church: “I am a PhD now and need 4x4, a big house and a huge salary, the church was unable satisfy his requirement…). In the professionalization, ministry is seen as a job and a way to a middle class lifestyle and a high social status. This is a great danger in countries where church grows fast and is in a context of poverty and deprivation. A professional view of ministry also gives the message that the church/congregation cannot function without the qualified professional. It needs an expert, who because of his/her qualifications has a superior status. This kind of a leader is unable to be servant leader who humble himself to serve the vulnerable.

* **Academic and Irrelevant:**

The risk of a theological education being solely academic is that the outcomes are arguments, thinking and discussions with no relation to the needs of the flock. In Angola, for instance, you find that big issues like witchcraft, poverty, etc are not addressed by most the historical denominations as a result of the Western theological training of their leaders. The Western Theology is highly influenced by the scientific presuppositions which deny the existence of realities that cannot be observed or proved by experimental methods. Therefore, do not believe in demons possession, so, there is no room for teaching deliverance and casting out demons in Western Theology. Some Professors even, especially in the Universities, do not even pray in classrooms. They produce leaders to maintain churches as monuments not as movement for mission. They do not teach how to listen and obey God in the students’ daily life. Members of churches that do not deal with spiritual issues like witchcraft they will seek solutions of their problems from prophets, apostles, patriarchs, man of God, whatever they call themselves, with no formal theological training that lead them to all sort of syncretism and prosperity gospel. Some even go to consult witchdoctors. So, a balance between devotion and academic excellence is desperately needed in theological education in Africa in order to equip Christian leaders to relevantly engage with the specific problems of Africa. Africans have an integrated worldview where physical and spiritual realities belong altogether. It is in this pattern of thinking where our problems arise.

* **Specialization/Fragmentation:**

The specialization in the field of theological studies led to the fragmentation of theological subjects in spite of its integration. One have to study deeply a specific subject, know more and more about less and less.

The danger of specialization is the loss of coherence – thus, the loss of any conception of what Christian Theology is all about as a whole. Understanding the message of the Bible and obeying it should be a priority in Theological Schools in Africa before any specialization.

* **Northern Theological Education is dominated by Anglo – American Culture and Language**

Like Latin or Greek in the Roman world in the Early Church, English is the lingua franca of theological education from the Western. Most the resources are in English – Don’t we need to develop theological resources in African Languages?

Theological education is crucial in equipping the church for its mission mandate, but it has to be a theological education which is biblical and relevant to African context. It needs to be a theological education that helps graduates to listen from God and for God and obey God. This a big challenge for all of us called for missions in Africa.

Let us not be satisfied with the Western Theological Education System. I am not saying that it is useless (It has many positive aspects, I mean we are product of it but I am not here to share the positive aspect of Western theological education) we can use a starting point for doing theology in our own context in order to relevantly respond to African issues.