



KEYNOTE

African Theological Education: *Retrospect and Prospect — A Francophone Perspective*¹

Yacouba SANON

ORCID: 0000-0002-2982-6231

Université de l'Alliance Chrétienne d'Abidjan (UACA), Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
ysanon@gmail.com

Abstract

Christian Theological Education in Francophone Africa began with the arrival of Western missionaries over 100 years ago. From a non-formal format, it developed throughout the years to reach university level. This presentation examines the stages of this development of Theological Education and addresses some of the challenges facing Theological Education in Francophone Africa. It is the belief of the writer of this paper Theological Education plays an essential part in the strengthening of Christianity in this region and its future lies not in the proliferation of theological institutions but in the join efforts of all the actors to empower the church in Francophone Africa.

Résumé

L'enseignement théologique chrétien en Afrique francophone a commencé avec l'arrivée des missionnaires occidentaux il y a plus de 100 ans. D'un format non formel, il s'est développé au fil des ans pour atteindre le niveau universitaire. Cette présentation examine les étapes de ce développement et aborde certains des défis auxquels l'enseignement théologique est confronté en Afrique francophone. L'auteur de cet article est convaincu que la formation théologique joue un rôle essentiel dans l'enracinement du christianisme dans cette région et que son avenir ne réside pas dans la prolifération des institutions théologiques, mais dans les efforts conjoints de tous les acteurs pour renforcer l'Église en Afrique francophone.

¹ This was the third keynote address delivered at the inaugural General Assembly of the Association of Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA, founded in 1976), held 25–29 September 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya.

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Resumo

A educação teológica cristã na África francófona começou com a chegada dos missionários ocidentais há mais de 100 anos. De um formato não formal, desenvolveu-se ao longo dos anos até atingir o nível universitário. Esta apresentação examina as etapas deste desenvolvimento da Educação Teológica e aborda alguns dos desafios que a Educação Teológica enfrenta na África Francófona. É convicção do autor deste documento que a Educação Teológica desempenha um papel essencial no fortalecimento do Cristianismo nesta região e que o seu futuro não reside na proliferação de instituições teológicas, mas na união de esforços de todos os actores para capacitar a igreja na África Francófona.

Keywords

Theological Education, Non-formal and Formal Theological Education, Francophone Africa, Missions, Missionaries

Mots-clés

Enseignement théologique, enseignement théologique non formel et formel, Afrique francophone, Associations, Missions, Missionnaires

Palavras-chave

Educação Teológica, Educação Teológica Não Formal e Formal, África Francófona, Missões, Missionários

Introduction

Discussing theological education in Francophone Africa is a complex task, given the vastness of the continent and the diversity of its regions and the plurality of experiences. The region called Francophone Africa (FA) comprises former French colonies where French is the official language and the language in which formal education is carried out. There are eleven countries officially recognized as Francophone. Eight of these are in West Africa: **Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo**. Three are in Central Africa: **Congo** (the Republic of the Congo or Congo-Brazzaville), **Gabon**, and the **DRC** (Democratic Republic of the Congo). Thirteen other countries where French is one among other official languages (or is otherwise widely spoken as a second language) include: **Burundi, Cameroun, Central African Republic, Comoros, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Morocco, Mauritania, Rwanda, Chad, Tunisia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles**.² The

² “88 États et gouvernements.” The population of these 26 countries out of the 54 countries in Africa (i.e., nearly half) was estimated at 442 million in 2020 out of a total

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encounter between Christianity and the different countries of FA took place at different times; the educational systems inherited from the different colonial empires or imposed by them were also different. Though it is possible to isolate common features related to history, culture, religion, and education, the reality is that Africa is not a monolithic entity, and FA is no exception. The diversity in theological education is reflected in the variety of theological institutions and theological initiatives across the region.

Theological Education (TE) in Francophone Africa, initiated by Western missionaries, has developed over the last 100 years from non-formal theological education to university-level theological education. How did this development take place? How did we get to where we are today? What are some of the challenges facing Theological Education in Francophone Africa today? How can these challenges be met? These are the questions this paper seeks to answer.

In recent years, the number of TE providers and agencies have considerably increased in FA. There is a momentum in theological education. Churches, Theological Education Institutions, and their partners have become aware of the central role that theological education plays in the rooting and growth of Christianity in their region and have decided to join hands to transcend their individual weaknesses by gathering together in regional associations.³ It is argued that the future of theological education in Francophone Africa lies in part in strengthening these associations that are seeking to empower Theological Education Institutions in areas such as curriculum development and governance issues, encourage teacher exchange and research, and oversee accreditation and faculty promotion. In this presentation I will focus on Protestant and Evangelical Theological Institutions whose history and contributions are less known.

I have identified three phases in the development of theological education in FA, beginning from the early 1900s to the present day. The first stage is the infancy of theological education, followed by a period of formalization, and the present state is proprietorship in theological education. Let me start with a brief historical survey that shows the chronology of the arrival of missionaries in this part of Africa (See Table 1).⁴

African population of 1.3 billion (i.e., 33.0% of the African population) and is projected to reach between 845 and 891 million in 2050 (i.e., 34.0% to 34.8% of the African population); “Afrique Francophone.” Africa’s population is estimated at 1,452 billion in 2023; “Population of continents.”

³ E.g., ASTHEOL, CITAF and RUPA; see section 2, “Opportunities,” below.

⁴ While Christianity has been present in Africa since the first five centuries of the Christian era and during the first wave of the evangelization of the continent in the 15th century, the main focus of my study is on the missionary movements of the second half of the 19th century to the present day. For a history of Christianity in Africa, see

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A Brief Historical Overview

1. During the second half of the 19th century, Western missionaries were established on the coastal territories under French, British, or German rule in the Guinea Gulf.
2. The Christianization of Africa, on the Protestant side, was achieved through a great diversity of missionary organizations.
3. Anglo-Saxon missionary societies dominate the scene. Among eighteen missionary societies I have identified, only two originated from France.

These missionaries were Methodists, Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Assemblies of God, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, etc. The diversity of Mission agencies matched the diversity of doctrinal positions.⁵ Needless to say that the churches which grew out of the missionaries' work were in turn characterised by a great doctrinal diversity, reflecting the doctrinal diversity within Protestantism.

In French West Africa (FWA),⁶ Mission agencies realized that they needed to coordinate their efforts in order to be more efficient. They set up the *Fédération Protestante de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* ('Protestant Council of French West Africa') in April 1945.⁷ In 1950 this became the *Fédération Protestante d'AOF*, then the *Fédération Évangélique de l'Ouest Africain* in June 1959. For the first time, African representatives would be allowed to participate in the council alongside Western missionaries. In June 1960, the Federation broke up. It was swept along by the political changes in the French colonies. It was dissolved after the French West African territories voted overwhelmingly in favour of the 1958 referendum to join the Franco-African Community. The Protestant Federation thus disappeared with the dissolution of the FWA. In its place, national Federations of Missions and Churches came into being.⁸

I conclude from this brief historical survey by pointing out that the unity of the Missionary Agencies was short-lived, swept away by the political circumstances of the time. It was unable to adapt to the socio-political changes

especially Jean Koulagna, *Le christianisme dans l'histoire de l'Afrique*, and also Mark Shaw and Wanjiru M. Gitau, *The Kingdom of God in Africa*.

⁵ The Ivorian historian Célestin Kouassi makes a similar observation on eight Protestant missions in French West Africa (from 1842 to 1924) whose activities he analyzed; *Tous un comme nous : Diversité et unité d'action du Protestantisme en Afrique Occidentale Française (1895–1960)*, 40.

⁶ *Afrique Occidentale Française* ('French West Africa'): Such was the name given to all the French colonies in West Africa.

⁷ Several meetings and discussions were held, beginning in Dabou, Côte d'Ivoire October 1943; Kouassi, *Tous un comme nous*, 66–84.

⁸ Kouassi, *Tous un comme nous*, 104–119.

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of its time. A readjustment of the Federation's missions with a view to tackling common challenges such as "Christian literature, radio broadcasting, work in national languages . . . the organisation of youth, the training of pastors . . ." could have saved it. As I turn to the history of Theological education in Francophone Africa, an important lesson we can learn from the story of the Fellowship of Mission Agencies in West Africa in the first half of the 20th century is that we must learn to adapt or we will perish.

1. The Infancy of Theological Education in Francophone Africa: Informal and Non-Formal TE, From the late 1800s to the early 1900s

Christian theological in Francophone Africa started with the missionaries who first preached the Gospel to the peoples in that region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This statement is not to say that theological endeavours began on the continent only around that time. Indeed, the vitality of African Christianity and the vigour of its scholarship are widely attested.¹⁰ But within the scope of the current exploration, it was around and shortly after the time of the Berlin Conference (November 1884 to February 1885) which enacted the Scramble for Africa that many Protestant missions first set foot on the continent. Christian theological education in French colonies developed from the time the missionaries began their endeavours. Usually, after establishing a Mission station, the missionaries would work to convert — or sometimes to merely proselytize¹¹ — the 'natives', beginning with their domestic workers (cooks and other helpers).

Andrew Scheaffer and Elie Sanon note that the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) used mission stations as bases from which they went out to evangelise in the surrounding areas.¹² This strategy was also used by other missionaries such as the Assemblies of God.¹³ But while some history of missions

⁹ Kouassi, *Tous un comme nous*, 115. According to Kouassi, the Federation's General Delegate, Georges Mabilie, encouraged the institution to move in this direction, but he was not followed.

¹⁰ Names such as Origen, Tertullian, Athanasius, Augustine, and many others come to mind. See Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity*.

¹¹ On the crucial distinction between *proselytization* and *conversion*, see Andrew F. Walls, "Converts or Proselytes? The Crisis over Conversion in the Early Church," and Joshua Robert Barron, "Conversion or Proselytization? Being Maasai, Becoming Christian."

¹² André Schaeffer and Elie Sanon, *Une mission, une Église, une vision, une histoire : Histoire de l'Église de l'Alliance Chrétienne au Burkina Faso*, 25.

¹³ *Église des Assemblées de Dieu, Soixante quinzième anniversaire des Assemblées de Dieu du Burkina Faso*, 6.

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textbooks focus on the work of missionaries, in actual historical fact the transmission of the gospel from Africans to Africans was a cooperative effort between the missionary and the locals. The role played by Africans in the spread of the gospel on the continent is attested by many. African agency was paramount in the growth of Christianity in Africa. The ‘natives’, as they were called, worked side by side with the missionaries — and sometimes on their own far beyond missionary reach — to proclaim the Good News to their families, villages, and often beyond their own borders. The contribution of these Africans in the growth of Christianity is widely documented and attested by scholars such as Lamin Sanneh, Kwame Bediako, and Tite Tiénou, to name only a few.¹⁴

Among the converts, some were selected to receive further training. These students were taught to read and write, received accelerated training, and were sent out into the field. Eventually, some of them will become pastors and or evangelists. This strategy was widespread among other Mission societies such as the Assemblies of God in Burkina Faso.¹⁵ The first type of theological training offered by the missionaries to their household staff was **informal** or **non-formal**. As it is understood today, these are types of training or education characterized by flexibility and adaptability. There is no rigid curriculum and no diploma or degree earned at the end. In all cases, the teaching resources used by the missionaries were usually limited to the Bible and to material they translated and adapted into national languages and French. In terms of results, one of the main characteristics of the products of these Mission-Station-Based Bible schools was their devotion to the Lord and their zeal for evangelisation.

Needless to say that the missionaries who were sent to Africa belonged to theological traditions which they brought with them. As a logical consequence of their allegiance to their sending organization they taught new believers according to their theological and liturgical traditions and organized the new founded churches according to their ecclesiastical structures. The theology they taught was developed in their original cultural contexts. Inspired or influenced by the *tabula rase* ideology, many pioneer missionaries considered Africans as clean slate on which the history of salvation was to be written. For most Mission agencies and their workers, the urgent task was the salvation of the souls. This explains why they focused more on evangelization and church planting than on

¹⁴ E.g., see Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*; Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*; and Tite Tiénou, “The Great Commission in Africa.”

Before the arrival of the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries in Côte d’Ivoire, Ghanaian Methodists had established Methodist Assemblies in Aboisso, Côte d’Ivoire between 1868 and 1923; “Notre histoire.” The Liberian prophet William Wadé Harris (1860–1929), a Methodist/Episcopalian, brought the Gospel to thousands along the coast from Liberia to Côte d’Ivoire.

¹⁵ *Église des Assemblées de Dieu, Soixante quinzième anniversaire*, 6–7.

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social work. To be fair, missionaries were not indifferent to the needs of the people. In some cases they put in place relief services to meet those needs through health centres and schools.

It is important to note that most missionaries of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were trained ministers and received further preparation before embarking on their missionary work, most of them did not consider higher theological education as a necessity or a priority. At most, they themselves were holders of Master of Divinity degrees. Confronted with the realities on the ground, some missionaries went on to deepen their knowledge of African cultures, either through personal research or by attending seminars. Over the years, commendable efforts have been made to adapt certain aspects of culture to the Gospel, such as songs, music, etc. Although often superficial, these contextualisation models were small steps in the right direction. Confronted with the realities on the ground, some missionaries will go on to pursue their studies and focus on some specific issues encountered on the mission fields: e.g., polygamy, witchcraft, etc.

In the particular case of French West Africa, a 1944 conference on education in French West Africa granted permission to Protestant missions to open catechism schools where learners would be taught in French.¹⁶ These schools would eventually serve as a breeding ground for the recruitment of the first French-speaking African pastors. Gradually, Mission agencies and churches would move from non-formal theological education to a more formal format with the opening of Bible schools. As for Seminaries, we will have to wait several years later before we see the first ones open.

2. The Formalization of Theological Education in Francophone Africa: Formal Theological Education: From the 1930s to the 1980s

The numerical growth of the Church and the need for Christian leaders led to the opening of the first Bible training centres for Christian leaders. Traditionally, Bible schools have always been the basis for training pastors and evangelists in Francophone Africa. The vast majority of church leaders are the product of these schools. In practice, each denomination has one or more Bible schools. Given the low level of literacy, the first Bible schools offered theological education in local languages. Later, with the increase in the number of people educated in French, theological education was offered in French. Each Bible school will characteristically follow the curriculum and the doctrinal line of the

¹⁶ Kouassi notes that the creation of schools was a recommendation of the Dabou 1943 conference which laid the foundations for the federation of missions; *Tous un comme nous*, 71. The colonial administration gave the permission to Mission Agencies to open schools in 1944 at a conference in Dakar, Senegal.

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founding mission of the denomination to which the Bible school belongs to. Unsurprisingly, the curriculum was mostly a “copy-paste” of that of the Bible schools approved by the sending Mission agencies. Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the establishment of a few Bible schools in West Africa.

Observations and Analysis

1. Theological Education in local languages is still a very important part of theological education in FA. The first heads of these Bible schools and most of their teachers were missionaries.
2. There were two Levels corresponding to students’ formal education in French. Students with middle school education were put in Level 1 and students who reached high school were put in Level 2.
3. Due to lack of sufficient personnel, some schools keep levels 2 and 3 on the same campus.
4. Today, most teachers in the majority of these schools are nationals. They received their theological education from Seminaries across Africa and sometimes in the West. The leadership of most schools is in the hands of nationals.
5. To this day, the curriculum is still much like the one inherited from the missionaries.
6. Many of these schools and others are offering Bachelor’s Degrees in Theology.
7. Two Bible schools were founded as the result of an inter-church cooperation between the several churches.
 - a. IBACY was founded by churches and C&MA missions of Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea, in cooperation with the UEESO church and Mission Biblique; the conservative Baptists of Côte d’Ivoire; the WEC church of Côte d’Ivoire.¹⁷
 - b. IPH was founded by the WEC churches: EPE of Burkina Faso, AEECI of Côte d’Ivoire, and churches of Ghana, Guinée, Sénégal, and the DRC.¹⁸

¹⁷ IBACY is the *Institute Biblique de l’Alliance Chrétienne de Yamoussoukro* (‘Biblical Institute of the Christian Alliance in Yamoussoukro’); Yamoussoukro is the capital of Côte d’Ivoire. UEESO is *l’Union des Églises Évangéliques Services et Œuvres* (‘the Union of Evangelical Churches Services and Works’); WEC is Worldwide Evangelisation for Christ.

¹⁸ IPH is *Institut Pastoral Hébron* in Bouaflé, Côte d’Ivoire; EPE is *Église Protestante Évangélique* (‘Evangelical Protestant Church’); AEECI is *l’Alliance de l’Église Évangélique Charismatique Internationale* (‘the International Charismatic Evangelical Church Alliance’).

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The theological task of missionaries was to translate the message of the Gospel into the new host culture. This was a daunting undertaking. Their lack familiarity with most customs led many to uncritically deem numerous aspects of African cultures as demonic or immoral and reject them. In spite of this failing, missionaries did an excellent job in most places in translating the Word of God into local languages.

Theological Education in most Bible schools before nationals took the leadership of these schools was the reflection of Theological Education as seen and done in the sending Institutions of the missionaries. As mentioned before, the curricula remained almost identical: Doctrine, Ecclesiology, Old and New Testament, Church History, Preaching, Pastoral Theology, Christology, apologetics, etc. While these subjects are important across cultures, the issue is that they are too often taught from Western perspectives. Many teachers continue to follow the old script, debating questions that are debated in the West, maybe with a touch of local flavour. There hasn't been a breakthrough regarding the curriculum. Not yet. Another major area that has not undergone much change has to do with textbooks. Bible school libraries often lack adequate resources. The resources that do exist are often outdated and most of them deal either with outdated issues or are irrelevant to African Christians. Timid changes are perceptible in Bible schools where younger teachers have received their training in Seminaries on African soil at the feet of teachers eager to put the African context and realities at the heart of their theological enterprise. This leads me to my third point.

3. The Halls of Higher Theological Education: Since 1969

Historical Overview

The history of Protestant and Evangelical seminaries and universities dates back to the eve of the formal independence of most African states. The wait lasted more than 100 years before the first seminary opened. In West Africa, the first Protestant missionaries set their feet on the continent were the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS). They arrived in Benin in 1842. In Central Africa, the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) dropped their suitcases in the DRC in 1848 and in Cameroun in 1878 (see Table 1). The first Christian University opened in 1959 in the DRC; it had a theology department. Over the last thirty years, a large number of seminaries have been opened both in West and Central Africa. This proliferation of seminaries is an interesting development in the landscape of theological education in Francophone Africa. Just a few years ago, only the so-called historic churches, that is, churches founded by Western missionaries, valued such training. Many charismatic and African Initiated Churches were rather reluctant and suspicious of theology in

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general and higher theological education to be more specific. Today all that has changed.

Francophone African theologians have been in charge of theological education for quite some years now. They are aware of their responsibilities and most of them are taking it seriously. According to data gathered through the Network of Francophone African Theologians (RTAF: *Réseau des Théologiens Africains Francophone*), which was established in September 2021 and operates through a WhatsApp group, there are approximately 60–80 Protestant/Evangelical Seminaries throughout Francophone Africa. They are owned and run by churches or by private individuals. More than a 100 people in the network claim the title of Doctor (PhD) in areas such as systematic theology, philosophy, church history, biblical studies, intercultural studies, theology and development, missiology, apologetics, Egyptology, patristic studies, liturgy, linguistic and Bible Translation, urban theology, political theology, migration, leadership, pastoral and practical theology, etc.¹⁹

While in West Africa the trigger for this movement seems to have been the creation of the *Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de l'Alliance Chrétienne* (FATEAC: 'Christian Alliance Faculty of Evangelical Theology') in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in 1993, in Central Africa the tradition of seminaries and Christian universities dates back to 1959 with the creation of the *Université Protestante du Congo* (UPC: 'Protestant University of the Congo') in Kinshasa, DRC, though the enthusiasm of recent years has been greater. On the Evangelical side, the *Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui* (FATEB), known to English speakers as Bangui Evangelical School of Theology (BEST), can be rightly considered as the firstborn of Evangelical theological schools in Africa. This school was founded in 1977 in Central African Republic (CAR) under the impetus of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), the forefather of the current Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA).²⁰ Even so, traditionally, it is the DRC, and to some extent Cameroon, that have led the way in the field of theology, across all Christian traditions including Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Evangelicals. Given the growing number of Christians in Francophone Africa and the mushrooming of African-initiated churches and ministries, these collective or individual initiatives are to be welcomed. These seminaries seek to respond to specific concerns such as urban missiology, African spirituality, etc. In a word, the reasons given by the promoters are the search for relevance, i.e., bringing theology into line with contemporary African realities.

¹⁹ RTAF administrators, WhatsApp, 6 September 2023.

²⁰ For the history of FATEB, see Jack Robinson, "Early History of Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui (FATEB): FATEB's Precursors, Founding, and First Five Years, 1966–1982."

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However, this multiplicity of Bible schools and seminaries in the Francophone space presents a number of dangers: the race for diplomas, cheap training of ministers, the fragmentation and dispersion of human resources, competition between seminaries and Bible schools, etc. It's a well-known fact that poorly trained ministers mean poorly fed Christians. On the other hand, well trained and committed ministers can lead Christians to maturity and oversee healthy churches. Credible associations and reliable organisations are essential to harness forces and capitalise on the available resources in Francophone Africa. If anything, the initiatives taken in the past couple of decades demonstrate that French African theologians are laying claim of the ownership on theological education in their region. However, there are many challenges to overcome.

4. The Challenges and Opportunities in Theological Education in Francophone Africa

Collaboration is the key word for the future of Theological Education in FA. Those involved in Theological Education in FA cannot afford the luxury of working in isolation. First, let's look at three major challenges facing theological education and theological educators in FA: Textbooks, curriculum, and isolation.

A. Challenges

The first challenge is the inadequacy of textbooks. It is a general fact that on the library shelves of most Bible Institutes and Evangelical seminaries in Francophone Africa, the vast majority of books are outdated and deal with subjects that are not always of interest African researchers. In many cases, the issues tackled are also far removed from the African realities experienced by ordinary African believers. Several colleagues have expressed their frustration with this situation. Sadly, for lack of appropriate resources, some Francophone teachers and researchers find themselves doing theology by proxy, discussing and debating issues that are not always relevant to African Christians.

The second challenge has to do with irrelevant curricula. A professor in an Evangelical university in Cameroun expresses his frustrations as follow:

The problem in our theological schools and seminaries in Africa is the slavish reproduction of knowledge. Instead of working to get students to produce theological knowledge, we teach them Western theological knowledge. And they get degrees up to doctorate level by showing that they have a perfect mastery of the theories that come from the West. This is why those we select to produce new knowledge only produce on the basis of the way in which they have

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been formed, shaped, or deformed by the reception (and not the construction) of previous knowledge.

Our schools of theology are founded on elitism in a pedagogical perspective of transmitting knowledge. This is the misfortune of African theologians, who are mired in “theological thrift” (a concept so dear to Jean-Marc Éla, whose memory we regret).²¹

This is quite a harsh judgment. However, the same frustration had been expressed before by others. For instance, at the colloquium marking the twentieth anniversary of the Alliance Seminary in Abidjan (FATEAC), Ahoga Augustin, a Beninese scholar observed:

We have imported everything from Western education structures. The classical or traditional cryptic literary approach remains our only approach in an oral culture context. We have been so deeply programmed that it never occurs to us to look for other approaches. Even when Western faculties innovate, we remain clinging to what we have received.²²

Another harsh criticism. Ten years earlier, Tharcisse Gatwa from Cameroon had also called for curriculum reform in theological education in Francophone Africa.²³

Although this frustration reflects the general situation in many cases, the reality today is more nuanced. Seminaries are more and more aware that the curricula inherited from Western seminaries are not suitable to the need of the Church in Africa. They are increasingly listening to the communities they serve, with a view to regularly revising their curricula. Some have already introduced subjects that would rarely be found in Western seminaries: African Traditional Religions, African Church History, etc. Courses on Anthropology, Ethnicity, and many more are tackled from African perspectives. It remains unfortunate, however, that such improvements done in one seminary are ignored in others. This brings us to the third challenge.

²¹ Albert Tedzogang, remarks in the RTAF forum, 15 September 2023; my translation. Prof. Tedzogang teaches at *l'Institut Universitaire Évangélique du Cameroun* (IUEC : ‘Evangelical University Institute of Cameroon’) in the *Faculté de Théologie et des Sciences des Religions de Ndoungue* (FTSRN: ‘Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in Ndoungue’). Jean-Marc Éla (1936–2008), the well-known Cameroonian theologian, wrote on the dangers of “theological thrift” and the need for African theologians to rethink their faith in light of Africa’s contemporary realities. See Jean-Marc Éla, *Repenser la théologie africaine : le Dieu qui libère*.

²² Quoted in Rubin Pohor and Issiaka Coulibaly, *Christianisme authentique en Afrique contemporaine. Actes du Colloque International de la FATEAC*, 32.

²³ Tharcisse Gatwa, “Theological Education in Africa: What Prospects for Sharing Knowledge?”

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A *third challenge* is isolation in Theological Education. Unless theological institutions come together and join human and academic resources Francophone Africans theological contribution to the global theological discourse will continue to lag behind. Many Theological Educations lack the appropriate resources and personnel to sustain a robust theological training with the highest academic standards. Individualism and self-promotion often tend to get in the way of genuine collaboration. We must learn to be together and work together. Concerned theological educators have paved the way for us to follow.

B. Opportunities

Having identified some challenges, let's look now at some opportunities. Efforts are already underway to overcome these challenges and should be encouraged. I will briefly mention three major players in Theological Education in Francophone Africa.²⁴ These are associations or networks of theological schools in Central and West Africa:

- *L'Association des Institutions d'Enseignement Théologiques d'Afrique Centrale* (ASTHEOL; 'The Association of Theological Teaching Institutions of Central Africa');
- *Le Conseil des Institutions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophones* (CITAF; 'The Council of Theological Institutions of French-speaking Africa');
- *Le Réseau des Universités Protestantes d'Afrique* (RUPA; 'The Network of Protestant Universities in Africa').

ASTHEOL

The Association of Theological Teaching Institutions of Central and West Africa (ASTHEOL: *Association des Institutions de Formation Théologique d'Afrique Centrale et Occidentale*) has existed since the 1970s.²⁵ It has two branches and operates mainly under the aegis of the Conference of Theological Institutions of Africa (CITA). ASTHEOL-Centre has its headquarters in Kinshasa, DRC. ASTHEOL-Centre and West has its headquarters in Yaoundé in Cameroon and brings together theological institutions in Congo-Brazzaville,

²⁴ More recently, ACTEA — the Association of Christian Theological Education in Africa, or *Association pour l'Éducation Théologique Chrétienne en Afrique* for francophone regions and *Associação para a Educação Teológica Cristã na África* for lusophone regions — has been more active in Francophone Africa, and has recently set up a Francophone Regional office in Kinshasa. But as this is a relatively recent effort, ACTEA's involvement in francophone Africa is beyond the scope of this presentation.

²⁵ ASTHEOL lacks an online presence.

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Gabon, Cameroon, Chad, Togo, Benin, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Burkina Faso, among others. Sadly, this oldest theological association (more than 50 years old) is struggling and unable to move forward.

CITAF

The *Conseil des Institutions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophone* ('Council of Theological Institutions in Francophone Africa'), based in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, was set up in Lomé, Togo in 2005, after several years of reflection and discussion.²⁶ It was born of the conviction that from now on the Biblical and Theological Institutions (IBT) of Francophone Africa must fully assume their destiny.²⁷ Thus, from the beginning, the sense of ownership was very strong among the founding members of this Council.

CITAF is a platform/network of Bible schools, institutes, seminaries, and universities of theology, set up to serve as a permanent framework for consultation, collaboration, research, academic excellence, accreditation and monitoring of biblical and theological institutions (IBT) in Francophone countries in Africa.²⁸ CITAF works in Francophone Africa, most of which is sub-Saharan (**West Africa**: Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Togo); **Central Africa** (Cameroon, Gabon, Chad, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo); **East Africa** (Burundi), **North Africa** (Morocco) and **Madagascar**. CITAF currently has around 200 member institutions.

Common Minimum Programme (PMC)

Programme Minimum Commun (PMC: 'Common Minimum Programme') is CITAF's accreditation standard. It forms the core of CITAF and guarantees its solidity, effectiveness and vitality. It is an unprecedented tool in the field of theological education in Francophone Africa. It should be noted that the PMC places all IBTs at the same level of education in order to facilitate bridges between students and schools. Abel Ndjeraréou writes the following regarding the PMC:

The publication of this second edition of the *Programme Minimum Commun* (PMC) is to maintain the Momentum of the value of fraternal communion, of the will to serve our Master together, and of the vision of an ever better future in theological formation and

²⁶ Discussions were held in Bangui, Central African Republic, 18–19 July 1994, 11–13 September 1997, 10–12 September 1998, and 19–20 July 2001; and also in Bouaké, Côte d'Ivoire, 23–28 August 1999; and in Lomé, Togo, 25–29 July 2005. CITAF's website is <https://citafafrique.org/>

²⁷ Abel Ndjeraréou and Célestin Kouassi, *Conseil des Institutions Théologiques d'Afrique Francophone. CITAF : Une vision, une valeur, une volonté*, 12–13.

²⁸ Rubin Pohor, Coordinator, CITAF. Address to the RTAF, 13 September 2023.

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education. Of the several historical anchor points for the regrouping of Francophones for targeted actions, I place this Momentum in that of 1980 in Chapoulie where Professor Tite Tiénou issued this challenge: “The hour of active solidarity has struck!” The materialisation of this ‘active solidarity’ was the birth of CITAF for the development of the branch of biblical and theological formation throughout the Francophone movement.²⁹

Theological Diploma

CITAF organises the annual *Bac théologique* (‘Theological Baccalaureate’) at continental (Francophone) level to enable level III IBT students to get a theological diploma (High School/Secondary School Diploma) in order to pursue a theological degree in a Seminary.

Teacher mobility / Assistance and mutual aid between IBTs

Within CITAF there is a system of mutual assistance between IBTs (strong IBTs support weak IBTs by sending them teachers or hosting their students for the third year of their degree programme).

The High Academic Authority (HAA)

CITAF has introduced peer evaluation by the High Academic Authority (HAA), chaired by Professor Tite Tiénou, based on the same principles as CAMES (the continental board for higher education in Francophone Africa), for academic advancement.

The School of Governance (EDG)

CITAF has set up a School of Governance (EDG: *École de la Gouvernance*) which organises seminars on governance in partnership with organizations providing technical support such as *Tearfund* (strategic planning, roles of boards of directors, Integral Mission) and *Initiative Francophone* (translation, colloquia on contextualisation), and the training of academic directors with the assistance of *ICETE* (International Council for Evangelical Theological Education), and *Institut National Démocratique* in Côte d’Ivoire for the supervision and observation of elections, etc.

The CITAF Journal and CITAF Publications

CITAF has a publishing body, *Les Éditions du CITAF* (‘CITAF Publications’), and a journal, *La Revue de Formation et d’Actualités Théologiques* (‘The Journal of Theological Training and News’) or *REFAT Mag*, managed by its Technical Commission in charge of coordination of academic research. *Les Éditions du CITAF* publishes books, teachers’ research work, course booklets, the proceedings of EDG conferences, symposia with partners, and so on.

²⁹ Ndjéraréou and Célestin Kouassi, *Conseil des Institutions Théologiques*, 7.

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Overall, CITAF is doing very well and finding innovating ways to foster theological education in Francophone Africa.

RUPA

The Network of Protestant Universities in Africa (RUPA: *Réseau des Universités Protestantes d'Afrique*) was created in June 2011 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.³⁰ It brings together eleven Protestant universities in Central and West Africa. The impetus for the creation of this network came from the observation that “these universities were suffering from a problem of academic, administrative and financial governance, a lack of strategic planning and a shortage of resources necessary for their full development.”³¹

RUPA’s overall objective is to promote a proactive policy of cooperation between higher education and university institutions, with a priority focus on modernising the training on offer. To this end, it operates in the following areas: academic, technological, and human training of students, their integration into the world of work; training teachers and researchers, training in university governance; boosting research to create knowledge, facilitating mobility of members of the university community, and stabilising human resources.³² Truth be told, RUPA is also struggling.

These three major players have been on the forefront of theological education in Francophone Africa: for more than half a century for ASTHEOL, fifteen years for CITAF, and ten years for RUPA. Their good intentions must be encouraged and supported.

RTAF

A new initiative in the Francophone theological landscape deserves further mention here. The Network of Francophone African Theologians (RTAF: *Réseau des Théologiens Africains Francophones*) is an initiative begun by Prof Fohle Lygunda li-M in September 2021³³ with support from TearFund. According to its chart, the network exists for mutual encouragement of its

³⁰ RUPA’s website is www.npua-rupa.org

³¹ RUPA, “Création,” Historique, Network of Protestant Universities in Africa – Réseau des Universités Protestantes d’Afrique.
<https://www.npua-rupa.org/pages/creation.html>

³² RUPA, “Création.”

³³ Prof. Lygunda li-M also simultaneously founded RTAF’s anglophone sister-group, Network & Engagement on Theological Reflections in Africa (NETRA), which likewise makes use of the WhatsApp platform. In November 2023, after this keynote address was delivered in September 2023, RTAF became ATAF: *l’Association des Théologiens d’Afrique Francophone* (‘the Association of Francophone African Theologians’).

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members. It pursues *innovation* by “encouraging innovative theological reflection,” focuses on *recycling* by “encouraging capacity-building activities,” and promotes *networking* by encouraging connections and sharing information about opportunities.³⁴ The group has roughly 550 members among which are full time professors, Associate and assistant professors, pastors, theology students and friends of theology. The heart and lungs of the RTAF is the quest for a theology that is relevant to Africans.

In this quest, the RTAF and the associations mentioned above, as well as other associations, in particular CITAF, echo the 1980 call made by the leaders of Francophone African churches at their consultation in Chapoulie, Abidjan. These leaders came from various places: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, DRC, Chad. At the opening of this consultation, Professor Tiénoú declared: “The time for active solidarity has come... The more we know about each other, the better we will be able to act towards each other.”³⁵ During this and the next two consultations that followed, these leaders from Francophone Africa expressed their concerns about the lack of well-trained pastors, evangelists, and teachers, and the need to have more Bible schools and seminaries. They urged church leaders to pay special attention to the training of ‘African teachers’. While acknowledging that this is a long-term project, they pleaded for inter-African solidarity in order to make it possible.³⁶ Though RTAF is fairly a new organization, it already has a number of concrete achievements to its credit, including public conferences and, in particular, its most recent academic workshops held on 11–13 September 2023. RTAF is another sign that things are moving in Francophone Africa and there’s hope.

Other Major Players

Other major players in the area of theological education include *Initiative Francophone*, Overseas Council, Langham Partnership, ScholarLeaders, Tyndale House Foundation, Local Leaders International, and the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA), among others. *Initiative Francophone* provides expertise in Bible Translation, encourages African churches to think about their problems in terms of African values, and works to promote African languages. Langham Partnership, ScholarLeaders, and Tyndale House Foundation have established a partnership between key seminaries and universities in Francophone Africa: *Université Shalom de Bunia* (USB: ‘Shalom University of Bunia’, in Bunia, DRC), *Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de Bangui* (FATEB: ‘Bangui Evangelical School of Theology’, in Bangui, Central African Republic) and *Faculté de Théologie Évangélique de*

³⁴ According to its group description on the WhatsApp platform.

³⁵ Abel Ndjéararéou, *Comme sous l’arbre à palabre : Un livre de souvenir et d’avenir*, 17,

³⁶ Ndjéararéou, *Comme sous l’arbre à palabre*, 26–38.

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l'Alliance Chrétienne (FATEAC: 'Christian Alliance Evangelical Theological Seminary'; in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire) in what is called *Engagement pour l'Afrique* ('Commitment to Africa').³⁷ Within this partnership, the emphasis has been on "building up Doctoral-Level Theological Education and Research-Culture," "developing a collaborative culture between the three libraries, providing information and training in various tools and on-line resources and to assisting staff in attaining the highest professional skills and credentials possible so as to support a solid Research Culture together," and organizing joint "colloquia and publications," and providing and enhancing "a reliable internet infrastructure at the highest level possible."³⁸

Starting a few years ago, Overseas Council International organises what they call Virtual Institute for Excellence (IVE). The theme in 2023 was "Partnership in theological education in Francophone Africa." The workshop revolved around Informal, non-Formal, and Formal Theological Education in Francophone Africa. Similarly, Local Leaders International has been active in supporting Francophone theological Institutions enhance their online programmes by providing training to their representatives.

Langham Partnership is also active through LivresHippo, a Langham Literature imprint in collaboration with a consortium of several publishing houses: *Centre de Publications Évangéliques* in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (CPE); *Presses Bibliques Africaines* in Cotonou, Benin (PBA); *Éditions CLÉ* in Yaoundé, Cameroon; *Excelsis Diffusions* in Charols, France; and CITAF. LivresHippo, the francophone counterpart of HippoBooks,³⁹ seeks to enable Francophone theologians and scholars to share their ideas on the global stage while writing for the Church in Africa. Its vision is to stimulate the spiritual and intellectual growth of the African church by developing books by African Christian authors that address African realities from an evangelical perspective. In line with this vision, LivresHippo produces biblically sound pastoral and academic resources

³⁷ The ebb and flow of progress in francophone theological education is demonstrated in the history of these three institutions, which have each experienced both thriving and struggle. E.g., USB has developed continually since its founding as a theological school in 1959, but due to war in the DRC has not operated continually and has had to relocate. Nonetheless, as of 2016, USB was one of only eleven universities in DRC authorized to offer doctoral programmes. FATEB, <https://fateb.net/>, was founded in Bangui in 1977 and for decades has been the premier Protestant institution of higher theological education in francophone Africa, but current instability in Central African Republic is forcing them to move most of their operations to what had been their extension campus in Yaoundé in neighbouring Cameroon.

³⁸ Personal archives from meetings and proceedings.

³⁹ HippoBooks is a joint imprint of Langham Literature, based in Carlisle, England, and of ACTS (African Christian Textbooks) based in Bukuru, Nigeria.

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adapted to the African context and written by African authors and scholars, living on the continent or in the diaspora.

Given the relatively youth of Evangelical Seminaries, given the vitality of Evangelical movements and especially charismatic and revivalist churches, given the openness and enthusiasm of many churches for theological education, it is urgent to strengthen the associations that are striving to ensure the quality of theological education in Francophone Africa.

5. Conclusion: The Future of Theological Education in Francophone Africa

As I conclude, I stand by what our elders have previously said more than forty years ago when they first convened in Chapoulie, Abidjan in 1980 and issued the call for active solidarity. Indeed, the future of Theological Education in Francophone Africa lies in *inter-African* and *inter-church* collaboration. Seminaries and Christian universities in Francophone Africa must break away from the isolationism they have inherited from their founding missions. Additionally, mainline churches and theological Institutions need to be more welcoming of African Initiated Churches, a segment of the Church that is growing fast. In many cases, these churches are the popular face of Christianity today in our region. The major players already operating in the field have each their own expertise which they offer to Seminaries and Universities. The missions they have set themselves are aimed at finding answers to the challenges that we mentioned here, namely contextualising curricula, training and keeping track of teachers' careers, facilitating teacher mobility, stimulating scientific research through the production and publication of knowledge, computerizing and connecting libraries, improving governance in Seminaries and Universities, etc.

If Francophone African theologians and researchers are not to miss out on the realities of African Christians and the needs of the Church in Francophone Africa, they would be wise not to fall into the trap of rigid specialisation, so dear to the West. Doctoral studies in our Seminaries should emphasise *interdisciplinarity* while recognising the place of specialities. African Francophone theologians can no longer afford the luxury of ignoring the rich anthropological and sociological data made available to them by their African colleagues in these sciences. Contextualization starts with knowing our context and knowing it right. It goes without saying that in a digitalised world, distance learning and the use of new technologies in theological education in Francophone Africa are key factors that must be taken into account. Finally, in order for Francophone theological education to be relevant, African Francophone theologians must have the courage to break away from the pattern of thought inherited from the West and dare to propose their own agenda that

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considers of the realities of Christians and the needs of the Church in Africa. When they do so, the following chapter in the history of Theological Education in Francophone Africa might be titled: The Flourishing of Theological Education in Francophone Africa.

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