Christian Theological Libraries in Africa

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Introduction

This chapter outlines the brief historical development of theological libraries in Africa, of predominantly Christian Evangelical background, the current state, and future trends. Included are libraries of theology departments, faculties or institutes of theology, and academic libraries whose collection includes significant holdings of resources relevant for theological and religious studies. Areas of focus include human resources, library collections, application of information and communication technology (ICT), and the role of library associations and other supporting organizations. The chapter highlights some challenges and opportunities faced by theological libraries and librarians on the continent and the anticipated trends.

History and Development

The development of theological libraries and librarianship in Africa has been historically uneven, showing huge differences pitting francophone against anglophone regions (Bowers 1989). This situation does not seem to have changed much. Even within a given region, there exist huge disparities in terms of the number and quality of information resources, trained library staff, physical library buildings, and use of technology, with the anglophone region having better-equipped libraries. These disparities are historical, depicting a direct

Image 1: Tony Wilmot Library of the Africa International University in Nairobi, Kenya. ©AIU

relationship with the activities of the white missionaries who introduced Christianity to the continent. Generally, theological schools and Christian universities in Africa were established by churches or Christian mission boards. They mostly began as centers to train church ministers. Eventually, they developed into theological schools and universities.

The Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA)[1] lists four accredited post-graduate institutions, fourteen post-secondary, seven candidate, and eleven affiliates as evangelical theological training institutions. However, the number of theological schools of various sizes is not registered with ACTEA and the number could run into hundreds. Others include Adventist institutions that have over twenty universities and colleges and over forty Catholic seminaries ranging from minor to major schools. Historically, Neill (1964) mentions Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, founded in 1827, as the oldest theological college in Africa. Among the first theological libraries in East Africa is Uganda Christian University in the Bishop Tucker Theological College, founded in 1913 to train the Church of Uganda leaders.

A survey was carried out in February 2019 that sought to establish the status of theological libraries in Africa (Mudave n.d.). The goal of the survey was representation of the population and not a high response rate. Contacts for the institutions were taken from the ACTEA directory and internet searches under

"theological institutions in Africa," "Catholic seminaries in Africa," and "Adventist colleges in Africa." A total of ninety schools formed the population. This included university, college, and seminary libraries across all denominations. A census approach was adopted with questionnaires sent to listed contacts of all the schools. The Lime survey tool was used to send the questionnaires and analyze the responses. Twenty addresses were invalid or the individuals had left the institutions being surveyed. Three follow-up reminder emails were sent but, at the end of the month, only sixteen librarians had responded to the questionnaires. Although the response rate was low, it met the goal of the survey as there were two responses from francophone countries and all regions were represented, except the north.

Most of the libraries surveyed (10 out of 16) were more than 30 years old. Despite the number of years that theological libraries have existed in Africa, their development has been very slow. It is worth noting that more than half of those surveyed (56.25%) existed in stand-alone purpose-built library buildings while the rest (43.75%) were attached to other buildings. Whereas space was a constraint in libraries that were part of other buildings, those purpose-built enjoyed not only space but also the ambiance that made them attractive to users.

Collection Development

In developing their collections, gifts play a substantial part in all theological libraries. The dwindling budgets imply fewer funds are available for the purchase of resources. However small, most libraries indicated that they spent the little they had on books. Without proper weeding policies, most libraries end up with collections they do not need. As of February 28, 2019, six libraries (37.5%) had over 30,000 volumes on theology or theology-related areas, followed by five libraries (31.25%) having between 10,000 and 20,000 volumes. Only three libraries had less than 10,000 volumes, with one having between 2,000 and 5,000 volumes. None had less than 2,000 volumes. It is therefore noteworthy that more than half of the libraries surveyed had more than 10,000 theology and theology-related volumes.

Most of the collections in theological libraries consist predominantly of books in English, with a few in French and local languages. Of the academic journal titles, only a few libraries in large schools subscribe to accredited print titles in theology. Due to the high cost of academic journals, most libraries have broken-run back issues that mostly were received as donations or on complimentary arrangements. The majority (10 out of 16) of schools surveyed had subscribed to electronic journal databases either directly or through consortia. Popular

databases included EbscoHost, Atlas, EBSCO Religion and Theology, JSTOR, and EBSCO Academic Search Elite. In general, access to relevant academic journals is a challenge for theological libraries.

In organizing their collections most libraries use the Dewey Decimal Classification System while the rest use the Library of Congress System. In some countries, the government determines the classification system through the accrediting agencies. For example, Kenyan universities are required by the Commission for University Education to use the Library of Congress classification system and the second edition of the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules before they are accredited.

It should be noted that the quality and quantity of theological library collections greatly depend on the lecturers who recommend books for purchase. Therefore, the level of training and exposure of the lecturers and, subsequently, the librarians becomes critical for collection development.

Automation and ICT Infrastructure

Uptake of automation and ICT infrastructure, which started at major African academic libraries in the 1990s, has been low compared to other world regions. In the survey conducted in 2019, most libraries (68.75%) were automated, with half of them being fully automated. However, it was observed that four libraries did not have automation software and did not respond to the question when asked whether they had computers in the library or not. However, most libraries, even those that were not automated, would typically have a stand-alone computer or two for the library staff.

Apart from one, all the respondents had an internet connection in their library–an indication that connectivity has greatly increased in recent years. However, fast, affordable and reliable access is still a challenge. The situation is fast-changing, with many countries now gaining broadband access and increased access through mobile phones. According to the 2019 report of the Miniwatts Marketing Group, the 58 African countries had an average internet penetration rate of 36% of their total population. In individual countries, 26 out of 58 countries had an internet penetration rate of above 30% of their populations. The total number of internet users rose from 4,534,400 in 2000 to 474,120,563 by March 30,2019 (Miniwatts Marketing Group 2019). Fiber optics have crisscrossed the continent and connected Africa to the rest of the world through undersea cables, giving hope for increased global data communication. This is a call to theological librarians to take advantage and prepare to serve users using the

internet and associated technologies because library services are needed beyond the walls of the library building.

Staffing

The total number of libraries sampled when writing this chapter was sixteen, and for such a number to have only 25 librarians indicates that most have only one or two staff members. Almost half of the staff (11) were permanently employed, while the rest were either on a short contract or volunteer terms. It is encouraging to note that no library reported lacking a trained librarian. Most librarians had a bachelor's degree, while the second-greatest number held diplomas (2-year certification below the bachelor's degree). There were also those with a master's degree, and two had doctoral degrees. A few more were trained at certificate levels. However, only two had done some (2-year) training that included aspects of theological librarianship, while the rest had done only general librarianship training. Even the term *theological librarianship* was new to almost all librarians, with only one aware of an available opportunity for training. These figures indicate that most theological libraries are understaffed, with some being run by librarians who have not been properly trained. It is common to find former students of theology running libraries in Africa, especially in small denominational libraries.

All basic library services are being offered in almost all theological libraries, including circulation of materials, cataloguing, current awareness, reference, SDI, interlibrary loan, and preservation services.

Information Literacy (IL)

Competent and lifelong learners are made. Information literacy (IL) is key to ensuring that lifelong learning skills are inculcated in students. Most libraries offer orientation sessions to all first-year students and follow with user education in various formats. Only one library had an IL course as a formal unit of instruction, with three having it as part of a credit unit. Librarians generally taught the IL component, even when it was part of another unit. The librarians taught and assessed the students, with their grades in the IL component counting for the overall score in the unit. The level of training of the librarians determines their understanding and involvement in information literacy initiatives. Therefore, libraries that lack adequately trained staff are not able to offer the programme effectively.

Library Associations and Other Supporting Organizations

Library associations are key to the professional exchange of ideas and development in the profession. In Africa, most libraries belong to one or more of the existing national, regional, or interest group library associations. They include the Christian Association of Librarians in Africa-Kenya (CALA-K), Malawi Library and Information Consortium, Kenya Library Association (KLA), and the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), among others. All of these associations organize workshops, conferences, and general meetings aimed at enhancing professionalism in librarianship and awareness of trends in the profession.

Christian Association of Librarians in Africa (CALA)

Among these, CALA has been on the forefront in championing theological librarianship for over fifteen years. The association started as a parallel meeting alongside the principals and academic deans of theological colleges in Kenya under the name Nairobi Fellowship of Theological Colleges (NFTC). In 2002 CALA reinvented itself into a professional association for theological librarians. With sponsorship from the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA), CALA held several training workshops in 2002 and 2003 for librarians that had no library training but were working in theological libraries. The attendees came from several African countries. Under the leadership of Phyllis Masso, CALA championed the automation of theological libraries, mostly in East Africa.

CALA currently organizes annual conferences every July and two general meetings focused on developing librarians and librarianship in theological institutions. The annual conferences are four-day events while general meetings are one-day events. Membership is open to individual librarians working in both Christian and secular institutions. The majority of the institutional membership comprises Christian universities and colleges. CALA exists to empower Christian librarians through professional development, scholarship, and spiritual encouragement for service in higher education and society in Africa. CALA hopes to be a continental association with chapters in each country. So far, the conferences and meetings have attracted attendance from Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi, South Africa, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zambia, and Burkina Faso. Apart from Kenya, the conferences have also been held in Uganda and Tanzania. The secretariat is at the International Leadership University in Nairobi, Kenya.

Image 2: Attendees of the 2017 meeting of CALA in Uganda. ©CALA

Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA)

Since its inception in 1976, ACTEA has played a key role in the development of theological libraries in Africa in several ways. First, it provided theological librarians a forum for exchange of information for personal and institutional development through *ACTEA Librarians eNews*. Unfortunately, this publication had its last issue in September 2006. Second, ACTEA sponsored one- and two-week library training workshops for librarians in Nairobi, Kenya in 2002. Third, ACTEA has established clear standards and guidelines for setting up and running libraries in theological institutions, which have played a key role in the development of theological libraries in Africa. Unfortunately, many institutions do not comply with the standards of ACTEA in stocking their libraries. However, institutions that are accredited by ACTEA have met the standards prescribed. The accreditation process of theological institutions by ACTEA has, to a great extent, enhanced the development of theological libraries in Africa. It was through ACTEA's library development programme that many theological schools in Africa were introduced to the Open Africa Programme that ensured free access to African journals in JSTOR.

Theological Book Network (TBN)

Founded in 2004, the Theological Book Network (TBN) continues to be one of the main suppliers for high-quality theological and related books for African theological libraries. They do this in close consultation with the receiving institutions to ensure only relevant resources are shipped. They also offer free access to several online digital resources to support theological training. Additionally, due to high internet costs and erratic electricity, TBN has provided hard drives loaded with theological resources under Creative Commons licenses for use while the receiving colleges work on establishing stable infrastructures.

Network for African Congregational Theology (NetAct)

The Network for African Congregational Theology (NetAct) was started in the year 2000 in Kenya and brings together theological institutions in the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition in sub-Saharan Africa. It was not until its general meeting in 2017 that the NetAct Information Portal was established, bringing together librarians in member institutions to work on providing needed information resources to students and faculty. To deliver this mandate, several librarians from member institutions have been trained and resources identified as a starting point for supporting theological education with electronic resources. More librarian training sessions are planned for different regions of Africa, including the francophone regions that were not in the initial plans. This initiative provides a much needed forum for the exchange of ideas and resources among theological librarians in Africa to address cutting-edge challenges.

Consortia

With the increasing costs of journal and eBook subscriptions, individual libraries are finding it difficult to provide all that their users need. This calls for a collaborative approach to achieving common objectives. Consortia are one key way that libraries are addressing the need. A case in point in Kenya is the Kenya Libraries and Information Services Consortium (KLISC), which most theological libraries are part of. For a comparatively small annual fee, member libraries can access key journal databases for theological studies, including the Atla Religion Database, Atla Serials, the Catholic Periodical and Literature Index, New Testament Abstracts, Old Testament Abstracts, the Religion and Philosophy Collection, and other leading multidisciplinary databases. In addition to the e-journals, the consortium also provides access to EBSCO eBooks and ProQuest Ebook Central where many theological books are available as full text.

In summary, library associations and related organizations have played a significant role in the development of theological libraries and librarianship in Africa. This includes, but is not limited to, the provision of opportunities for

knowledge sharing and benchmarking during conferences and workshops, as well as provision and sharing of resources and development of skills.

Challenges and Opportunities

Theological libraries of whatever size are alive to the fact that librarianship is changing and the need to adapt to these changing environments to remain relevant. Some of the forces of change are external while others are internal. Brenda Bailey-Hainer, in her address to theological librarians in Melbourne (2014), observed that, although theological and religious studies libraries had proved to be remarkably resilient over time, their future will be majorly shaped by trends in higher education, trends in theological education, and general trends in academic libraries. Africa is not exempted from the same challenges. For example, in the hope of achieving sustainability, theological colleges and universities in the last fifteen years in Kenya have opened new campuses without proper planning and have ended up shutting them after spending heavily on their establishment. Two classic examples in Kenya are the Catholic University of East Africa, which had to close two of her campuses, and the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, which had to close four campuses in a period of one year. Since librarians are rarely involved in the initial stages of such moves, there is always a strain when library services are finally required.

Online, Distance, and eLearning
The other trend in higher education that has affected theological education and cannot be avoided is the need to offer alternative delivery modes including online, distance, and eLearning to meet the needs of the church. Online and distance learning is an attempt to address the challenge of the high cost of residential training programs and the inadequacy of trained ministers for the church. Many churches cannot afford to have their pastors away on study leave because they often have no replacement. The library is expected to support the new modes of learning and finds itself inadequate, one reason being that librarians are never consulted during curriculum development processes. Librarians, therefore, are expected to be creative and flexible to respond to the changing nature of academic instruction and offer the needed library service.

Funding
Most theological libraries in Africa seem to have been affected in the last couple of years by decreased donor funding to theological institutions. Most institutions relied heavily on sponsorship from the West and now find it very difficult to

manage with the reducing support. With the additional declining student numbers for theological training, it is becoming increasingly difficult to rely on tuition fees from students to cover basic running costs. As Blessings Amina Akporhonor observed in a study on Nigerian libraries' funding (2005), libraries have very small budgets and often receive far less funding than the percentage that is usually earmarked for them. The high cost of information resources makes it even harder to find the needed titles in most libraries. This affects both the purchase of current information resources and the hiring of qualified librarians. The economies of many African countries have slumped, leaving buying of books a luxury and only possible when extremely necessary.

In addition to institutions' efforts to market theology to increase student numbers, libraries need to seek alternative funding streams. Suggested alternatives would include creatively using available space–for example, providing available space for meetings and symposia at a fee, charging an access fee for non-members of the institutional community, marketing the library and its resources to the communities and churches in the neighborhood as well as within the college to increase usage. Librarians can also learn to write proposals for external funding of specific projects and not merely wait for the mother institutions.

Staffing

As noted earlier, inadequate staffing is one of the perennial challenges facing theological libraries in Africa. In addition to staffing challenges, there is a shortage of opportunities for training in theological librarianship on the continent. Nonetheless, opportunities do exist. Most countries have library schools in one or more of their universities and tertiary institutions, offering training at the certificate, diploma, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. Leading countries include South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya, with each having more than fifteen library schools. Library staff is forced by circumstances to learn on the job to become theological librarians. This, however, is still a challenge since there is a lack of properly documented information resources on theological librarianship, and even what is available is not accessible to the librarians who need it. Many libraries have to do with student librarians on work-study or similar arrangements to address the inadequacy in staffing. However, there is a general concern that many theology students in Africa tend to be older and so struggle with trends in technology that they are not conversant with.

Training in theological librarianship needs to be emphasized from the top leadership of theological institutions and heads of theology departments. Librarians interested could be trained on an organized curriculum in theological librarianship, and especially in African theology.

Information Resources

W. P. Wahl (2013) observes that the lack of necessary resources to provide good training in African theological schools impedes the advancement of theological education. Good resources create an enabling environment for training and so affect its quality. Most libraries struggle to find resources published in Africa or about African theology. Christoph Stückelberger (2013) lamented over the "limited theological production from the Global South, except in disciplines such as ecumenism, missiology, and contextual theologies." Having scanned through several catalogues of African theological colleges, seminaries, and universities, one notices that they are stocked with books written for Western education systems. This is because most of them were acquired as gifts and donations, with the librarians and the institutions having no say in their acquisition.

In departments of theology in academic libraries, the collection for theology is usually small and grows more slowly, especially because it is managed by general librarians just like any other discipline in the university. This varies with the size of the mother institution and the size of the theology department, which ultimately determines the size of the library collection on theology. Many African scholars need to be encouraged to publish local content that is relevant to the African context. There are initiatives like the Langham Partnership that seeks to develop biblical resources by local authors that are relevant to their contexts by sponsoring authors to write in their local contexts.

Access to the internet is increasing in most libraries on the continent and this brings the opportunities available on the internet for access to free digital resources closer. To supplement print copies, libraries would be better placed if the librarians, with the assistance of the faculty, developed a pool of digital resources relevant to their specific colleges and curricula.

Collaborations and networking are some of the initiatives that would greatly increase access to resources. This includes interlibrary cooperation that would provide resources from one library to users of another that may not have the information they need, as well as professional networking, cooperative purchasing, and shared subscription to e-resources. Existing Christian associations can play a bigger part in enhancing collaborations among theological librarians. Taking the case of Liberia, which has very limited opportunities for training in library science, whether short-term or long-term, collaborations with other parts of Africa that are well developed in librarianship could offer those opportunities. This applies to many other African countries that do not have library science training schools. Collaboration could lead to an establishment of a continental association of theological librarians that would give opportunities to the less privileged countries and help in developing theological librarianship on the continent.

There is a general feeling that the time for publicizing and developing theological librarianship is now and all efforts need to be put into making this a reality. However, there is a bigger challenge arising from the fact that theology is not a supported area of study in Africa. In Kenya, for example, the government offers scholarships for free tuition to students in universities who score a given grade but excludes those taking theology. Consequently, theological colleges have transformed into universities and now offer "popular" professional degree courses that attract both the students and government sponsorship. The effect of this move is that focus on collection development is leaning towards other courses, leaving theology behind.

Conclusion

The concept of theological librarianship is not yet well understood in Africa and needs more engagement at all levels. Perhaps a curriculum and structured training will need to be developed for theological librarians. The development of theological libraries and librarianship in Africa is a call for concerted efforts. It requires deliberate and focused support from the administration of theological institutions and heads of departments of theology to succeed. Theological library associations and organizations at national and international levels have played a key role in developing libraries to where they are and will continue to play a leading role in the future. The rapid growth of Christianity on the continent requires that theological training is made solid and one way is by ensuring a strong base of resources to support the training of Christian workers and ministers. This gives theological libraries relevance in the growth of Christianity on the continent.

The exponential growth of internet usage on the continent provides an opportunity for maximizing the advantages of the internet in the provision of library services. Theological librarians need to be positioned to plug into technological developments on the continent by ensuring full automation of their processes and services. The increased ICT infrastructural development on the continent gives hope of increased access to theological resources.

Cooperation and collaboration are the way to go to realize economies of scale in the acquisition of resources and services for theological libraries. Therefore, theological librarians must go out of their way to collaborate if they are to meet the increasingly changing user needs. There is a need for a continental theological library association to enhance a concerted move to develop theological librarianship on the continent. This will give exposure and support of

various kinds, especially to struggling libraries, and offer a forum for the exchange of information and skills among theological librarians.

Notes

1. The Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa was formerly Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa and majorly dealt with accrediting theological schools the continent.

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