

**The fragile identity of being Lutheran and African:
the vulnerability of confessional Lutheran seminaries
in Africa today¹**

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Abstract

The Hermannsburg Mission Society (HMS) missionaries who were first sent in the mid-1850s by Louis Harms from Hermannsburg were revived in confessional Lutheranism. Their independent foundations were disturbed when the Kingdom of Hannover was cemented into the Kingdom of Prussia that insisted that the HMS was to abide by the rules that governed the united state church in Prussia and Hannover in 1866. Ever since, a small number of Lutherans have maintained their adherence to the Lutheran Reformation confessions despite the global call for ecumenism, open opposition to state injustices, women ordination and opposition to duplication of institutions. This article intends to show how fragile in Africa the confessional Lutheran identity is today. The challenges facing the African Lutheran confessionalism in seminaries are manifold. For instance there is increased global Christian cooperation, dwindling financial support for Third World countries and a free expression of African religious identity.

Introduction

This article will attempt to show how it has become increasingly difficult in Africa for confessional Lutheranism to survive in its supposedly original purity. According to the Confession of Augsburg (CA) of 1530, Article VII on the Church, this refers to purity in terms of the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments (Tappert 1959:32). In an article, David Tswaedi the former bishop of the LCSA elucidated on this when he wrote about the clarity of the Gospel thus:

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It follows that Lutheran ecclesiology has been located in quite simple, but not simplistic ways. First, the CA VII refers to the church as “the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are rightly administered”. Any gathering strictly speaking wherein the sacraments are not administered in accordance with the explicit injunction of our Lord Jesus Christ carries the signification of church inappropriately (Ntsimane & Schneider 2000:5).

Anyone in the church preaching and teaching anything other than the salvation through Christ and administering sacraments in any way different from that instituted by Christ has moved away from that purity. By looking back at how confessional Lutheranism came about in the 1500s during the Reformation era and how it was revived in the mid-1800s in Germany, we shall see how it survived in Africa until now. This article will argue that, despite its inherent fragility, confessional Lutheranism became more vulnerable in Africa owing to the manner in which it was taught and propagated. The article will argue further that, unless urgent and drastic changes are made to the manner in which theological education is taught in the three confessional seminaries in Africa, the current situation will not be sustained. It is fitting that we begin by explaining what confessional Lutheranism is and its historical background in Africa. Along with that explanation we shall also explain what is African in relation to that confessionalism.

Confessional Lutheranism

The basic tenets of Lutheran confessionalism can be found in the constitutions of the confessional Lutheran churches. They have similar preambles that state that the various churches were founded on the inerrant Word of God as found in the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible, the three ecumenical creeds, viz. The Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasius Creed, as well as the Small and Large Catechisms of Dr Martin Luther, the Augsburg Confession of 1530 and its unaltered Apology, the Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration and the Epitome), as true expositions of the Word of God.

The following is an example of such basic confessions from the global Lutheran body called the International Lutheran Council (ILC) about which we shall discuss later in the article.

The ILC is a worldwide association of established confessional Lutheran church bodies which proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the basis of unconditional commitment to the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and infallible Word of God and the

Lutheran Confessions contained in the Book of Concord as the true and faithful exposition of the Word of God (www.ilc.org).

The other tenet is that within this strand of Lutheranism, as opposed to the LWF-aligned strand, there is a practice of a closed Holy Communion altar, in order to exclude from partaking in the Lord's Supper those who are outside these church formations. Previously, the HMS had a strong leaning towards a closed Holy Communion altar but later in the 1950s changed to welcome other Lutherans who were liberal (Schlyter 1953:86). Christians from other Lutheran churches and even Lutheran ministers have been denied the opportunity to partake in Holy Communion of confessional Lutheran churches in South Africa. Also, in contrast to other Lutheran church formations, the confessional Lutherans have not included women in ordination for public ministry. Lutherans have also followed Martin Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms which they have understood to mean that the church does not have to involve itself in the affairs of the state and likewise the state does not have to dictate to the church how and how not to conduct its business (Scriba & Lislserud 1997:174, 191).

Instead of ecumenism, church fellowship, or *ubudlelwano* in Zulu, is the popular term used among the confessional Lutherans to explain the relationship of acceptance among church bodies with similar doctrinal beliefs. As we have seen in the divisions that took place in the church in Hermannsburg in Germany, confessional Lutherans do not mind remaining few rather than compromising their fundamental Lutheran doctrines, such as the exclusion from Holy Communion of those who deny the real presence of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. On its website, the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA) has given its position on church fellowship as follows,

The FELSISA admits to fellowship with all churches that accept the Word of God as recorded in the Holy Scriptures and that are bound by Lutheran confessions. Consequently the FELSISA is not in fellowship with churches, that do not teach the Holy Scriptures as the inspired Word of God and who tolerate false doctrine – and also those, that are in fellowship with churches that do so (www.felsisa.org.za).

All these doctrines and practices have alienated the Lutheran churches, especially those who adhere strictly to the Lutherans confessions, not only from other churches but also from individual people who come into contact with the church or its strict members.

The roots of Lutheran confessionalism in Africa can be traced back to the revival of Louis Harms that took place in Hermannsburg in Germany from 1844 (Harms 1999:26).

Historical background in Germany

When Friedrich Wilhelm III, the Kaiser of Prussia, annexed the Kingdom of Hanover in 1866 (Oshadleus 1993:21) and declared his ecclesiastical authority over it, Louis Harms had already died leaving the revived Hanover with a strong quest for mission outreach. However, before he died Harms had already in June 1863 called upon the Lutherans in Hanover to hold fast to the confessional teachings of the Augsburg Confession of 1530 (Oshadleus 1993:144).

On 12 October 1849 Harms established a seminary in Hermannsburg that signalled the establishment of the Hermannsburg Mission Society (Harms 1999:25). It is important though to note that, in 1817, Wilhelm had decreed in Prussia the unification of the Lutheran Church of Prussia and the Reformed Churches into the Prussia Evangelical Church (Oshadleus 1993:145). The Lutherans in Hanover came under pressure after 1866 to recognise the clergy of the Prussian Evangelical Church and partake in Holy Communion with them (*ibid.*). Owing to the controversy with the Reformed Churches regarding the doctrine of the presence of Jesus Christ at the Lord's Supper, the Hermannsburg Lutherans refused to recognise and partake in the Holy Communion with the Prussia Evangelical Church clergy. The second matter caused by the forced relationship with the Reformed Church was the civil marriage code introduced in 1874. With that code the state removed the responsibility of registering births and deaths and solemnising marriages from the church and handed it to the magistrates (*ibid.*).

As far as the mission was concerned, Louis Harms ceased his support for the North German Mission as his confessional stance became firm and later, after he had taken over the Hermannsburg congregation in 1849, he formed the Lutheran Hermannsburg Mission (Oshadleus 1993:28-29). Originally meant to spread the Gospel among the Oromos of Ethiopia, the HMS worked first among the Zulus in Natal (1854) and among the Tswanas (1857) (Harms 1999:48-49). The work was also started in India in 1864 and in Australia and North America in 1866 (Harms 1999:68, 48, 49).

As a result of the interference of the state into church doctrinal matters, Theodor, the brother and successor of Louis Harms, led a split from the State Church (Landeskirche). He established a free Lutheran Church in Hermannsburg in 1878 (Harms 1999:86). The new confessional church was officially called the Hanoverian Evangelical – Lutheran Free Church (Oshadleus 1993:147). The HMS recognised the leadership of the State Church and placed itself under it through the adoption of the five-point Agreement (Oshadleus 1993:151). A new mission society called the Hanoverian Evangelical Lutheran Free Church Mission was established in Bleckmar about fifteen kilometres away from Hermannsburg in June 1892 (Oshadleus 1993:152) in protest against the anti-confessional leanings of the

HMS. The effects of that confessional discord spilled over to the HMS-related mission fields, including Africa.

When Heinrich Prigge left the HMS and later became the first superintendent of the Hanoverian Free Church Mission, he gave as reason the fact that the HMS mission leader Georg Haccius partook in Holy Communion with African missionaries who were from the State Church (Oshadleus 1993:154-155).

There has been a new but gradual revival of Confessional Lutheranism since 1952 (Uelzen, Germany), 1959 (Oakland, California, USA), and 1993 (Antigua, Guatemala). Since the late 1990s the ILC has brought together seminary rectors and presidents to attend church leaders' meetings for discussions.

African and confessional Lutheranism

A brief explanation of what is African and what is confessional Lutheran is necessary so that we can understand how the two can have a symbiotic relationship. Although the title of the article refers to African, what it really refers to are Nigeria and Ghana in West Africa and South Africa. These are the only countries where confessional Lutheran churches have theological training institutions. A recent visit to the ILC website shows that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya has become a new church member of the ILC (www.ilc.org). The distinct African tenet I want to emphasise crosses geographical borders of Africa. The spirit of oneness makes people want to come together as social beings. That tradition of coming together is in fact based on the role of ancestors in a family or community life. Anyone who disturbs the tranquillity of the family or community will face the wrath of the ancestors (Ntsimane 2000:24).

Confessional Lutheranism by its strict adherence to the Book of Concord, which is a collection of confessional books of Lutheranism and the three ecumenical creeds of the early church (the Apostle Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed (Tappert 1959:18-21), and its interpretation of the scriptures is openly exclusive and thereby alienating. While the Europeans have not found it strange to practise that separation from other people, it was not easy for African people to adhere to that separation. To separate people and compartmentalise them has been shunned by African people. Many African people have the adage *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu/motho ke motho ka batho*, which applies to both Zulu and Setswana, meaning a person only survives among others through other people. It is also correct to say that such separation of people, unless based on proved sorcery (Cannell 2006:31); is anti-African social cohesion. All the family festivities, such as new birth, thanksgiving, initiation, marriage and more especially death, are celebrated and commemorated together, from the clan to the tribe to the village and even

the whole township (Cannell 2006:25). Should anyone stay away they are suspected of harbouring malicious intentions, especially hatred. Hatred is a characteristic of witches and sorcerers because it is informed by jealousy and envy which can lead to the destruction of the object of such jealousy and envy. When a denomination chooses to exclude rightly or wrongly neighbours who are not members it will be unpopular.

Although the issues discussed here seem to be irrelevant to Africa, we shall see later how the practice of confessional Lutheranism in other countries became important to the Lutheran seminaries in Africa. We shall look at the three Lutheran seminaries in Africa which were directly affected by this, viz., The Enhlanhleni Lutheran Seminary in South Africa, Jonathan Ekong Lutheran Memorial Seminary in Ibot Idim, Nigeria, and the seminary of the Lutheran Church of Ghana. Let us first survey the confessional Lutheran churches that are operating the only confessional seminaries in Africa. The other Lutheran seminaries like Paulinum in Windhoek, Namibia, Woodpecker near Gaborone, Botswana, and the Lutheran Theological Institute in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, are not confessional seminaries and fall under LWF member churches.

Confessional Lutheran seminaries in Africa

The confessional Lutheran churches in Africa are numerically small in comparison to those churches that are part of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The confessional Lutherans did not join the LWF for its liberal stance as Scriba and Lislrud (1997) describe it thus:

During and immediately after the First World War the General Lutheran Conference in America launched a comprehensive aid programme which, after the Second World War, was intensified; it led, in 1947, to the establishment of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Lund, Sweden. The LWF, with its headquarters at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva has regarded itself as a free association of Lutheran churches, a means of serving the international Lutheran community; its member churches regard themselves as in “pulpit and altar fellowship” with one another (Scriba & Lislrud in Elphick & Davenport, 1997:193)

In Africa the four national churches run parallel to the LWF-related churches and the size difference is easy to see. The comparison is the same with seminaries which are invariably supported from Europe or America. Both the material and human resources are sourced from overseas partners or founding missions. Nelson Unwene, the then rector of the confessional Jonathan Ekong

Memorial Lutheran Seminary (JEMLS) in Nigeria, lamented the dire situation of the seminaries in Africa thus: “One major source of our deficiency in the effort to interpret God’s Word in the different cultures at JEMLS is the text-books. Almost all our text-books are from America and Europe. They are written in English by English speaking authors” (Unwene 2006:92-93). He continues:

The word for “school” in most Nigerian languages, translates as ‘house of books’. Some of our theological schools, especially those in Africa and Asia, for this reason, are not worth the very name of a school. Some of us have just a few volumes of books (Unwene 2006:93-94).

South Africa

Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa (FELSISA)

Both the FELSISA and the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA) had a seminary where they trained ministers or their churches. The reason for this can be found in the racial division between the two church bodies. From its establishment in 1892, the FELSISA catered mainly for white German-speaking South Africans, while the Hanoverian Evangelical Lutheran Mission, later called Mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Churches (MELFC) from which it was formed in 1967 the LCSA, catered mainly for the Setswana- and Zulu-speaking blacks of southern Africa. Prior to the establishment of its seminary, the FELSISA used to recruit ordained ministers from its German partner church, Selbstandige Evangelische Lutherisch Kirche (SELK), and sent seminarians to Germany for training. Some of its pastors came from MELFC which was formed along with other Lutheran Free Church bodies outside Hannover. After graduating fewer than fifteen pastors during its existence, the FELSISA was forced to close down its seminary in Arcadia, Pretoria around 1990.

The seminary had a short lifespan because it is generally expensive to run a fully-fledged seminary with full-time lecturing staff. Maintaining two full-time lecturing staff for not more than six students at any time is quite expensive. Almost all the graduates from that seminary found it necessary to obtain further theological training exposure in European or American confessional seminaries before ordination, thereby unintentionally exposing their seminary training as inadequate to prospective seminarians. Students had to find their own funding to pursue overseas studies with little support from their church body. After the closing of the seminary, prospective FELSISA ministers resumed their overseas training, mainly in Germany at the SELK seminary called Oberursel and in the LCMS seminary in Fort Wayne,

Indiana. This was despite the fact that almost all the prospective ministers completed their junior degrees at the University of Pretoria, besides the fact that there was already a long-established confessional Lutheran seminary of the LCSA in Natal. The LCSA seminary taught mainly in Zulu owing to the poor English proficiency of the majority of students it recruited but it had an extensive rather than an intensive programme. The Biblical languages, that is, Greek and Hebrew, were always on the curriculum at the LCSA seminary from the early 1960s. With regard to the teaching staff, the LCSA was better equipped in comparison. The same cannot be said about the quality of the curriculum at the confessional seminaries in Ghana and Nigeria.

Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA)

Although the LCSA was only constituted as a church body in 1967, the missionaries who founded her had already begun to train black pastors for the public ministry in confessional Lutheranism. A retired pastor, Aaron Ntuli, wrote a brief history of the theological training initiatives up to the time a fully-fledged seminary was established in Enhlanhleni near Pomeroy in Natal. It was obvious that despite the humble beginning, the missionaries adhering to the confessional Lutheranism wanted the initial training of black clergy to have strong confessional foundations. Heinrich Prigge, who seceded from the HMS to become the first Mission Superintendent of the Hanoverian Free Church Mission in South Africa, established the first theological training “school”, which lasted two years, in Etshondo in the then Eastern Transvaal in 1906 (Ntuli 2007:27). Christoph Johannes, who succeeded Prigge as the Mission Superintendent, also saw the value of indigenous clergy trained in confessional Lutheranism. Owing to a lack of finances and personnel at the time of the First World War, he abandoned the project after graduating four men in five years (Ntuli 2007:27). In 1940, the work was re-established as an evangelist school in Salem and closed in 1954 after producing ten evangelists out of 29 candidates. The lecturing work was done by the two missionaries, Christoph Johannes and Karl Meister. The work that was started in Enhlanhleni was sustained longer than the previous initiatives. That seminary opened in 1955 after the formal resolution of the mission council (Ntuli 2007:97).

At that time the national church was not yet constituted and decisions were taken by the mission council. The seminary, simply put, was in fact an initiative of the mission society and was therefore run according to the stipulations of the mission leadership. The first lecturer and rector of the seminary in Enhlanhleni was Gottfried Stallmann (1955-1967), who in keeping with the strong confessional stand authored a booklet in Zulu meant to teach seminarians about the doctrines of other denominations in South Africa. This book, recently republished, was titled *Izifundo zamanye*

amabandla. The two reasons for writing the book according to Stallman were:

To expose the doctrines of other denominations so that we know what they are and be able to respond to them, and
To sharpen our thinking so that we know how to distinguish between truth and heresy (Stallman 2007:12).

Wilhelm Weber (senior), who succeeded Stallmann in 1970 as the rector of the seminary in Enhlanhleni, expanded the seminary by introducing an annual intake of students. His ability to speak and write Zulu and Setswana became an advantage as he could teach seminarians with no English literacy. His dedication to the teaching of Lutheran confessions at the seminaries was demonstrated by the Zulu and Setswana translations he continued doing even after retirement in the year 2000. In the first *Festschrift* launched on the day of his retirement, his friend and colleague Bishop Georg Schulz wrote in his biographical sketch: "If one were to ask Dr Weber for the foundation on which the church rests, his answer would certainly be: the Holy Scripture and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church" (Schulz 2000:2).

During the seminary training, which took six to seven years, especially in the 1980s, Weber ensured that in a course called Symbolics, there was at least one of the Lutheran Confessions found in the Book of Concord included in each year of study. Seminarians had to memorise and recite in their own languages selected pericopae of the Old and New Testaments, the entire Small Catechism and the entire Confession of Augsburg, especially in their first two years at the seminary. Some criticality was encountered in a course called Old Testament and Old Testament Seminars. In no way does this suggest that there was no space to ask questions during the teaching of other courses.

In 2005, the Lutheran Theological Seminary was forced to grapple with the question of the viability of a seminary in Africa. Wilhelm Weber, the now-retired rector of the seminary, presented to the seminary community a paper published as an article in the seminary newsletter titled, "The Challenge to be a Lutheran Theological Seminary in Africa for Africa," in which he addresses the same issues dealt with in this article. As should be expected Weber's point of departure is the value of the scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. He asked two important questions:

- (i) Are we prepared to take the challenge to have and support a seminary to be abound by the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the inerrant Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit and to the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the

- 1580 Book of Concord, which was accepted as the true and binding exposition of Holy Scripture?
- (ii) Are we prepared to take the challenge to be a Lutheran Theological Seminary with the aim to promote the purpose of the Lutheran Confessions to testify to all nations that we hold to the Gospel of Christ correctly and faithfully...? (Weber 2005a).

In the following issue of the LTS Newsletter, Weber was careful to consider the most pertinent of the stumbling blocks to a “Lutheran Seminary for Africa in Africa”. He concedes that “[w]e will have to face financial and doctrinal challenges to promote and get such a seminary going” (Weber 2005b). Currently, the LCSA with its membership of less than 20 000 baptised people, is operating its seminary in Pretoria, largely on finances from the German Lutheran Church Mission (LKM), the then MELFC and from the LCMS. Most students come from outside the LCSA especially Uganda. Since 1993, the LCSA seminary has attracted students from West Africa especially Liberia and the Ivory Coast, where the LCMS had missionaries. The sponsors of the LTS include the American LCMS and some of its districts and the LKM.

The challenge that the LCSA seminary is facing in its attempts to expand its programmes to non-confessional Lutherans to make its programmes financially viable, has to revisit its stance on a strictly closed Holy Communion altar. Again, owing to the limited production of literature from the Lutheran confessional churches, one has to rely on the website. From the LTS website the excluding clauses under the page on Devotions in LTS are unmistakably clear:

- As we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we joyfully receive Christ’s Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins.
- Since the Lord’s Supper is a public expression of our common confession of the Christian faith, we ask that only those persons who are members of this congregation or stand in confessional fellowship with the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa to receive the Sacrament.
- Guests wishing to receive the sacrament are asked to first speak with our pastor before the church service. (www.lts.org.za)

Already students from other Lutheran denominations who for various reasons cannot participate in their churches’ training programmes have been admitted to the LCSA seminary.

Ghana

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana came about as a result of the mission work of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) of America in 1958. Dr Paul Kofi Fynn of the Lutheran Church of Ghana received his theological training from one of the LCMS seminaries and has until today maintained the partnership with the LCMS. This church has 21 ordained pastors. His seminary in Accra receives both seminary personnel and funding from the LCMS. On its website (www.lcms.org), the LCMS is making requests for \$25 000 for the support of the seminary. The money is meant to subsidise basic training for 18 young men. From the LCMS website it is obvious that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana is greatly dependent on the LCMS: "Currently, the LCMS missionaries support the work of the national church through seminary education, deaf ministry and Sunday school curriculum development." In relation to the seminary the website in its solicitation of gifts for the seminary work indicates that the seminary is wholly depended on the LCMS, as it begs the LCMS congregants: "Your gift provides for all aspects of the seminary operation: living expenses for students, board and room while at the seminary, books and materials, utilities, phone, transportation from and to the students' village, even medical expenses for students" (www.lcms.org).

Nigeria

We have already heard that the Jonathan Ekong Memorial Lutheran Seminary's ex-rector Nelson Unwene lamented that a lack of resources was militating against proper seminary training. Like the Ghana seminary, the JEMLS receives substantial amounts of financial help from the LCMS. Since the Lutheran Church of Nigeria is a member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), financial support for theological training is received similar to other church members. With the unusual dual membership in the LWF and the International Lutheran Council, the Lutheran Church of Nigeria stands a chance of receiving strong support from other Lutheran churches. We have yet to find out why those church members in the global body have remained in the ILC with churches holding dual membership like that of Nigeria and of Papua New Guinea.

Besides the seminaries of the major two churches established by the LCMS in West Africa, there are small Francophone churches that train ministers in the Togo Theological Education Centre in Dapaong, Togo. The churches benefiting from the generosity of the LCMS are Togo, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Benin, Burkina Faso, Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo. There is no doubt that the seminary is making an important contribution to the development of the church leadership in the French-speaking part of

Africa. Both financial and human resources (lecturers) for the continuation of the institution come from outside the country and that is a disadvantage for the school. The local church cannot determine the agenda of the institution while finance comes from elsewhere and the absence of local lecturers indirectly portrays whites as the only race that can teach theological studies.

Like the other two seminaries in West Africa, the LCSA seminary has always had at least one missionary on its teaching staff. As the most expensive of all the models of theological education, seminaries can best survive financially when they cooperate with other churches to run them. Seminaries with small numbers of students, as in the case of FELSISA, poor financial support by local churches as in the case of LCSA, a shortage of qualified lecturing staff as in the case of LCSA, mean that seminaries in Nigeria and Ghana are unsustainable.

Daniel Mattson has made important observations about the sustainability of confessional Lutheran seminaries in Africa. In his chapter titled: "Does the African seminary have a future?" he uses Herbert Zorn's book to show why, among other things, the numbers of staff members in relation to students are important for their survival. Unless a seminary has a ratio of two full-time lecturers to 30 students it will collapse. Concurring with Zorn, Mattson argues that unless a church body has a minimum of 600 000 members and 600 active pastors with 75% of local funds, the seminary will be unsustainable.

Based on the current conditions in both the African confessional Lutheran churches and their seminaries, it is clear that the writing is on the wall. Diminishing block grants and financial subsidies from founding missions, the lack of involvement and support by local members, a training programme that is not popular with the local people, and a programme that does not prepare graduates to face difficult situations outside the seminary comforts are mentioned by Mattson as the lessons from Zorn's thesis.

A multiplicity of routes is open to the transformation of the current confessional Lutheran seminaries for survival. Whichever route the church chooses to follow in training its church leaders for public and other ministries, the following questions need to be considered:

- Is the new program contextually appropriate? Do local people believe in it and support it or do they follow attractive foreign programs.
- Is it educationally rigorous? Does it aim to find ways for people to learn or is rigid on passing and failing? Relevance of content to appeal to locals
- Is it Biblically and confessionally sound? Does it seek to include and restore or to exclude and condemn? (Mattson 2000:67-68).

Mattson wrote in favour of the local churches making their own decisions as to the direction their church must follow, without depending on the directives of the mission agencies. Matthias Krieser, a former SELK missionary, worked in Botswana in order to train deacons for ordination. As one of the authors in the *Festschrift*, he wrote about the issues of the discipline of sinners and their absolution. He supports the fact that local peoples, in this case Africans, should find their own way to receive the sinner back to the church fold. The two authors who served the LCSA as missionaries in the 1980s and 1990s showed openness for increased African participation in the direction and leadership of their churches, as advocated by another former missionary Melvin Hodges in his 1996 book, *The Indigenous church*.

The ILC and ecumenism

Today such constituted confessional Lutheran churches outside Africa are found in the USA, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Paraguay, the Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Russia, England and France. All in all there were twenty member churches in 2005. These churches, including those in Africa, have formed themselves into a global body called the International Lutheran Council (ILC). However, we need to bear in mind that there are other confessional Lutheran church bodies like the Lutheran Church Wisconsin Synod in USA that can be regarded as ultra-confessional and have not come into the ILC.

In Africa, the confessional Lutheran churches include the Free Evangelical Synod in South Africa (FELSISA), the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (LCSA), the Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus, the Lutheran Church in Ghana, the Lutheran Church of Nigeria, and the Lutheran Church in Togo. Both the FELSISA and the LCSA came about as a result of the split that took place in the Hanoverian Lutheran Church and the Hermannsburg Mission Society in the 1800s. They were the splinter that held on to the confessional tradition of the Lutheran tradition. The Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus was born out of the efforts of the HMS (Harms 1999:46), while the others on the list were established by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS) from the USA. Each church that is concerned about its doctrinal purity must either have its own seminary or have its ministers trained in a seminary that subscribes to its doctrinal beliefs. Alternatively, the concerned church body has to establish other forms of pastoral training in order to ensure that the pastoral candidates are adequately trained for public or other ministries.

As a small section of the world, the Lutheran community called the confessional Lutherans formed themselves into the International Lutheran Council in the 1980s. Among the members there were four Lutheran churches in Africa, two in South Africa and two in West Africa, all with

origins and sustained ties to churches in America and Germany. In the 1990s, the ILC began to support the ILC seminaries. The question is, can confessional Lutheranism be sustained in Africa where the few national churches are poor and ecumenism is rife? This article will show that this Lutheran strand is vulnerable and cannot survive without foreign support for its theological training.

Contexts determine programmes

The evidence of financial support from abroad received by the African ILC-member churches to support their pastoral training programmes indicates that future of such seminaries are bleak. For the seminaries to remain alive and relevant they will need to include in the curriculum those issues that are uniquely affecting Africa. For instance, issues of the African Worldviews that refuse to go away that the Lutheran and other missionaries wanted to eradicate in the twentieth century such as ancestral beliefs, polygamy, initiation into womanhood and manhood, witchcraft, sorcery, and so forth. The African Lutheran seminaries will be irrelevant if they do not prepare church leaders to be able to develop an African Lutheran response to the challenges they face. For instance, poverty, the famines and food insecurity, the destruction of the environment, epidemics like HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, human trafficking, xenophobia, corruption, political instabilities and devastating wars are just some of the issues that top the African socio-political landscape. To what extent do the African Lutheran seminary programmes give serious attention and not just a passing mention to these issues? Maybe these are not issues for the European-American Lutherans who are the main financial supporters of the theological institutions in Africa?

The fact that these pastoral training programmes bind themselves to the Lutheran confessions can be seen as a way that attracts support for the sustenance of the seminaries. This article does not in anyway intend to undermine the value of Lutheran confessionalism. Instead, it wishes to advocate for a balance. The context of the national churches should determine what the content of the curriculum should be. In Africa, Lutheranism must address African issues and help provide answers to African questions. Unlike western Lutheranism, which is resourced with qualified teaching staff and financial adequacy, African Lutherans need to recognise that confessional Lutheranism can be confessed in churches and taught in seminaries or through other forms of training using local means. Apart from raising the minimum entrance requirement from Grade 10 to Grade 12 in the year 2000 when there was a black rector, and introducing tuition fees to be paid either by parents of seminarians or their parishes on the part of the LCSA, there have not been radical changes. When taken, the opportunities for further training made available to pastors and seminarians of the confessional

Lutheran churches by their fellow Lutherans of ILC in America and Europe can create a pool of critical ministers in Africa. To minimise financial dependency trained African ministers can take secular jobs and continue to serve in their churches. Taking advantage of existing interdenominational or non-denominational training institutes can also minimise dependency on importing missionary teachers to the seminaries; where seminaries have to continue in the same manner as before, each church could insist on changing the ratio of the teaching staff to favour locals. The African Initiated Churches found innovative ways of practising their faith in their own context early on in the nineteenth century. Accordingly, the blacks saw the need to set their own agenda by enculturation and indigenisation (Pretorius & Jafta in Elphick & Davenport 1997:217).

Where family ties and the spirit of community still abound, African people cannot stay away from their neighbours' funeral services which are invariably conducted along denominational lines. At such funerals ministers often work together, irrespective of denomination, to bury the dead and comfort the family. Some people who visit confessional Lutheran churches are known to have come forward to partake in the Holy Communion and saw no reason not to do so. The seminaries, however, would emphasise the closed altars that keep non-confessional Lutherans away, but it is not easy for black ministers to refuse people from taking communion. Barring a hungry person from partaking of a meal goes against the core values of African hospitality (Gathogo 2008:39-53). The Lutheran mission societies that formulated their divisions during the era of the Co-operating Lutheran Mission in Natal and Zululand were influenced by the western value of exclusion (Schlyter 1953:20; Florin 1965:99).

Conclusion

This article was an attempt with little available literature to show that the seminaries teaching confessional Lutheranism have no way of thriving on the African continent, as they survive largely on financial support from abroad. In the absence of such support, which comes mainly from the LCMS, the confessional Lutheran seminaries will either shut their doors or go in partnership with other denominations to train their leaders. The confessional Lutheran identity will thereby be changed. Consequently, it is fragile and African confessional Lutherans, both black and white, can help to modify confessional Lutheranism to become African by acknowledging their context and using the available resources to integrate it into theological training. When integrated into liturgies and other forms of worship, in cleansing rituals and prayers for restoration of health, Lutheran confessionalism can begin to have resonance with the African context. Maybe confessional Lutheranism could have an African shape just as Christianity has been influenced and

reshaped in every geographical area it has touched. However, theological training, whether in residential or non-residential mode, remains the point of entry to reverse the fragility in the identity of being simultaneously both African and Lutheran, in this context where HIV/AIDS, poverty, degradation of the environment, drought, human-trafficking and xenophobia are real and frightening issues.

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