Dissertation

The Concept of Ecodomy as Pedagogical Instrument in Intercultural Education

von
submitted by

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zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades Dr. phil.
for the degree of Dr. phil.

im Fach Erziehungswissenschaften
to the Department of Education Science

am Fachbereich Sozial- und Kulturwissenschaften
at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies

der Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen
at Justus-Liebig University Gießen

Eingereicht am: *Submission:*	21.08.2024
Verteidigt am: *Thesis defense:*	11.02.2025
Gutachten von: *Referees:*	1. Prof. Dr. Ingrid Miethe, Justus-Liebig University Gießen 2. Prof. Dr. Reimer Gronemeyer, Justus-Liebig University Gießen 3. Prof. Dr. Michaela Timberlake, Justus-Liebig University Gießen 4. Prof. Dr. Thomas Brinkmann, Justus-Liebig University Gießen

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INTRODUCTION

This cumulative doctoral project is an attempt to see how the concept of ecodomy can be used in intercultural education based on three already published articles (two published by myself as single author, and one that I co-authored with J. Buitendag) which deal with education as ecodomy, in conjunction with other nine articles that demonstrate how the concept of ecodomy can be applied in various domains of interest to tertiary education, especially to public universities, in intercultural contexts, such as Western settings and their African counterparts.

Particularly, the concept of ecodomy will be treated as a pedagogical instrument in both these contexts, since it is related to the activity of teaching theology and religion as humanistic sciences, although I argue that the concept itself, as well as its content, should not be restricted to humanistic sciences alone. The purpose of using the concept of ecodomy as pedagogical instrument in intercultural education is to see if it can fit within the field of intercultural education and specifically in intercultural pedagogy.

While the three articles on ecodomy are the core of this doctoral work and disclose no less than ten features of education as (a) science from the perspective of humanistic methodologies, the other nine articles reflect a palette of practical possibilities in which the concept of ecodomy could function as an educational instrument with factual relevance for various social contexts, beyond the boundaries of universities, in both Western and African situations.

While ecodomy is explored especially in relation to teaching – and, as I said before, teaching has to do, in this case, with theology and religion – I contend that ecodomy can be applied not only to teaching, but also to other tertiary education domains, such as research, within and beyond humanistic sciences. At the same time, ecodomy reveals some essential features of education in intercultural contexts, which can constitute a cursory example of how education can be done through the application of at least some of the most important characteristics of intercultural pedagogy as integrative part of intercultural education.

Thus, my doctoral work has three main chapters: first, I discuss the concept of ecodomy in religious education by focusing on the concept of ecodomy, the foundation of ecodomy, and the application of ecodomy; second, the focus moved from religious education to the broader field of intercultural education and some of its key features, such as intercultural education as migration multiculturalism, competence formation, and pedagogical application; third, I decided to revert to a narrower view, this time from intercultural education to the more specific intercultural pedagogy seen ecodomically as language teaching, critical thinking, and context modelling.

CHAPTER 1. ECODOMY IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

My work on ecodomy began in 2015, even if the articles which constitute the trilogy at the foundation this cumulative doctoral work were published between 2019 and 2023. The situation resides in the fact that methodologically I proceeded with my work on ecodomy – as it were – from practice to theory, not the other way around. This is why my ecodomy trilogy, which refers to education and specifically to teaching theology and religion in tertiary institutions, finds itself at the very end of my personal research history related to the notion of ecodomy. What follows is a presentation of the concept of ecodomy, the foundation of ecodomy, and the application of ecodomy in religious education.

The Concept of Ecodomy

A rapid glance at the articles which constitute the very core of this cumulative doctoral endeavour reveals that they revolve around the rather peculiar concept of ecodomy. While almost certainly not a very frequent occurrence in educational sciences, the notion of ecodomy is not strange to theology and religion. While it originally refers to the actual building of a house – from the Greek *oikodomḗ* - and figuratively to spiritual advancement and personal edification (Kok, 2015), the concept was adopted by the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria as its key research concept almost a decade ago, in 2014. Thus, ecodomy became the focus of an entire cohort of researchers who were supposed to investigate it within their own fields of research in order to see whether or not it was significant or helpful to their scientific efforts. It is important to notice as this point that ecodomy became a notion of interest not only in research, but also in teaching; this is why the research forced primarily on teaching theology and religion.

In other words, the notion of the ecodomy that I work with has multiple layers. First, ecodomy is essentially practical, because it refers to the actual building of a house. Second, the meaning of the term can be spiritual, when it deals with the idea of individual progress. Third, ecodomy also has a connotation which is social, especially as it points out the establishment of a community around the same preoccupations. Fourth, ecodomy emerges as decisively religious, when a set of common preoccupations are used to constitute a community around theological convictions. Fifth, the concept can be said to include issues that are pedagogical, when it focuses on the fact that it conveys a focus on constructive intentions. Sixth, ecodomy is profoundly ethical, when these constructive intentions are channeled in the direction of moral values. And seventh, ecodomy is intentionally existential, when these moral values are there to provide support so that life is lived in its fullness.

Although my focus on ecodomy is mainly pedagogical here, references can be made to research and other aspects, which is obvious throughout the 'Draft Framework Document', because university education is supposed to be not only constructive personally and socially, but also – if at all possible – existentially meaningful for all those involved in tertiary education activities, teachers and students alike, as well as those who benefit from these educational endeavours. As far as I am concerned, what I did was filter the whole array of scientific aspects which were included in the 'Draft Framework Document' through the very essence of the concept of ecodomy, which is not new to the history of Christian theology. For instance, J. Pillay shows that the idea of ecodomy was 'deeply rooted in Calvin's theology' (Pillay, 2015). Specifically, in all my three articles, I used the idea of ecodomy with reference to the teaching of religion in a tertiary education setting and I did so by extending the meaning of ecodomy to 'any constructive process', a phrase I came across in Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz. But it is not merely a constructive process; it is a constructive process aimed at provided life with meaning, or at living 'life in its fulness' (Rossing and Buitendag, 2020). I should stress here that I used the notion of ecodomy in these terms, as constructive process focused on providing life with meaning, in all my articles (Müller-Fahrenholz 1995). As far as I am concerned, Müller-Fahrenholz manages to capture the essence of the original *oikodomḗ*, while successfully applying it to multifaceted issues in our contemporary world and its variegated issues (Simuț, 2019).

My first article takes the idea of ecodomy in the direction of community building; in this sense, ecodomy can be considered the spirit of social cohesion. Therefore, I argue that the whole idea of ecodomy must be explained by means of its application to the realm of education, especially with reference to tertiary institutions, since these are the last venues that release – so to speak – their graduates into the most intricate web(s) of social complexities. Even though my explanations are theological in nature and religious in focus, their scope – as one could clearly see in the ensuing insights – go far beyond theology and religion into the domains of humanistic and natural sciences. However, the purpose was to see if ecodomy can be attached to education; if education can be ecodomical and if, in the end, education can genuinely be and remain an increasingly constructive process, and that in the long run – again, if education is edification; if it is ecodomy indeed (Harkness, 2000).

I must emphasize the fact that the entire discussion about ecodomy as education was brought about in the context of the relevance of university-level education in the fields of theology and religion; the 'Draft Framework Document', however, did not stop here and they often went beyond the boundaries of theology and religion into fringe conversations about theology/religion and natural or social sciences. In this context then, I followed the idea of ecodomy as education in some Western contexts in order to see if such an ecodomical perspective on education has real chances to

contribute to the development of various societies in the West. Of course, the idea is not new: L. M. Russell notices as early as 1984 that education should be described as building up or 'oikodome' (Russell, 1984). Thus, theology and religion should not be treated as some sort of exclusivistic disciplines which are meant to be dealt with by a certain category of people (those with more or less evident spiritual concerns), but rather as humanistic sciences that – like history, philology, and philosophy – should contribute significantly to the real development of Western societies by offering solutions in a wide range of domains (Simuț, 2019).

Very much in line with the first article, the second article – which I co-authored with J. Buitendag) also delves into the notion of ecodomy as community building, but it does so from the perspective of what happens and what should happen in African universities. The same spirit of social cohesion is embraced as core definition of ecodomy but the idea of teaching theology and religion within sub-Saharan African institutions of tertiary education becomes a bit more colourful in the sense that the challenges faced by African universities are consistently different from those in the West. If in the West centuries of education somehow cemented some old habits with certified degrees of successful outcomes, the African context is an entirely different story. In this context, most discussion focused on financial issues because financing education in Sub-Saharan regions is not merely an extremely difficult endeavour but often a life-and-death attempt to keep the fabric of society hanging by a thread.

At the same time, the fact that most African regions in Sub-Saharan countries were formerly governed by the West to the point of overall exploitation (Kalu and Falola, 2019), implementing educational strategies in African universities does mean a whole set of particular aspects which differ significantly from what one sees in the West: to give just one example, whether or not to follow the West in its educational policies, which can imply what is usually called decolonization (although what the actual meaning of decolonization really consists of is a totally different matter) and bears with it a consistent load of various definitions (Hargreaves, 2014; Birmingham, 2008). Thus, in such matters, ecodomy oftentimes becomes economy, simply because attempting to practically implement constructive strategies in education is massively dependent on financial realities which are not always available – if ever – across the geographical spectrum of Sub-Saharan Africa in the context of decolonization, which – as I. W. Zartman demonstrates quite compellingly – can became an issue of dependency (Zartman, 1976). My second article, therefore, investigates the way in which education – in the fields of theology and religion – can lead to building a distinctive kind of community spirit that is able to produce social growth not only within universities, but also across the wide spectrum of societies throughout the African continent (Buitendag and Simuț, 2020).

What is vital to notice at this point – and I expounded this aspect in my third article – has to do with the fact that ecodomy bears within it an idea which is deeply embedded in it, and that is change. Ecodomy intrinsically refers to change as a fundamental reality which is mandatory for any sort of human advancement or, as J. Beyers puts it, 'the wellness of the whole created reality' (Beyers, 2018). In other words, there is no progress in the absence of change, and change is the constitutive of ecodomy; consequently, there is no progress without ecodomy. If ecodomy is change and progress, then it becomes not only obvious, but also necessary to delve into the vast range of possibilities that can inform as well as transform the contexts in which ecodomy is planted to perform as part of a moral framework (Meeks, 1988) which inspires confidence. To draw the line, informing, performing, and transforming become key words for the very change which is carried by the concept of ecodomy.

With this in mind, I applied this specific content attached to the notion of ecodomy (seen as change that informs, performs, and transforms but it does by means of constructive processes) first to the reality of teaching religion and theology within university settings. In doing so, however, I also proposed that teaching religion and theology is not merely a pedagogical act; on the contrary, teaching religion and theology within tertiary education institutions must be done in ways which produce radical change; thus, when one performs religious education in universities and university-level institutions, one must take into serious consideration the fact that it must do so ecodomically or constructively; and that means producing change which inevitably, and quite naturally, leads to transformation, as in C. J. P. Niemandt who highlights that 'human experience' is permanently 'in need of transformation' (Niemandt, 2015). The whole point of the discussion is not only to adopt the concept of ecodomy as a constructive process, but also to adapt it actual contexts in order to produce change by means of social transformation. Through adoption and adaptation, ecodomy has the opportunity to develop into at least a contextual background against which constructive educational interactions can be conceived of in theory and practice.

In other words, and this is an idea that was captured by the authors of the 'Draft Framework Document' – regardless of whether it is religious or not, education must produce social transformation by enacting constant change in curricula and their application (without the university or beyond it, throughout society). In the absence of change – even historical change, as in K. Raiser (1996), education of any sort (theological, religious, or else) is unlikely to yield its expected results because it does not produce ecodomical consequences, namely results that not only inform, but also perform and transform societies for the enactment of the public good (de Beer and van Niekerk, 2017). Western and African scholars alike were in agreement that ecodomical change is mandatory not only for universities to continue their transformative social mission, but also for societies to move on along the lines of positive progress for the benefit of as many people as possible from the

perspective of the public good. In this regard, D. P. Veldsman, D. J. Human, A. G. van Aarde even suggest that 'a university is a public good' (Veldsman, Human, and van Aarde, 2017), in which case the entire tertiary education system is supposed to be ecodomical by definition. It was evident in the 'Draft Framework Document' that the economic, social, political, and even technological disparities between Western and African societies were a fact of reality (Goody, 2018); however, these differences are not insurmountable in theory. On the other hand, even if such differences are unlikely to be levelled in the years to come, an ecodomical attitude as part of teaching within universities – and I must stress here that the field of inquiry is irrelevant for this particular discussion – has significant chances to produce social transformation but informing people, performing the public good, and transforming the fibre of society (Simuț, 2023).

To conclude, the use of ecodomy as some sort of conceptual crown jewel for my research provided me with the opportunity to think positively about education and some of its main constructive characteristics, despite my own acquaintance with the field which was – and still is – significantly impaired by negative experiences. This is why, in relation to teaching, ecodomy can become a positive instrument in pedagogy, and that across Western and African educational contexts. While I must admit that education in general, as well as my perspective on it, is not without limitations, deficiencies, and intermissions of all sorts, the notion of ecodomy was useful to me in bridging – if not real educational contexts – at least some scholarly opinions originating in contrasting educational environments. Nevertheless, the common denominator of these scholarly perspectives was the fact that ecodomy can be used as a pedagogical instrument in higher education in Western and African cultures. Perhaps the most important aspect of the semantic domain of the notion of ecodomy was that of ecodomical change, which was envisioned as a mandatory step towards educational transformation. In this regard, I am massively indebted to W. H. Kazanjian Jr. and P. L. Lawrence, for whom the most efficient form of education takes shape when all its constitutive aspects are deliberately focused on transforming the reality of education for the students and the pedagogues (Kazanjian Jr. and Lawrence, 2000). Or, in the words of P. J. Palmer: 'education at its best is always about transformation' (Palmer, 2017).

This umbrella-concept of ecodomy made me see that, while there are no real situations without problems in any university across the globe, the theoretical possibility of change for transformation always has greater chances of success than a less dynamic or even a static notion. When seen as a pedagogical instrument, ecodomy is revealed as a dynamic concept that changes and transforms pedagogical and research activities in higher education across the larger spectrum of intercultural settings. In other words, conceived as *sine qua non* change, ecodomy is more likely to be successful than not. When applied to education, doing something for a change in order to transform educational experiences for both pedagogues and students is always more desirable than

an unchallenged *status quo*, no matter how successful this has been or still is. Education is essentially, inherently, and conceptually dynamic, and the notion of ecodomy has the formative capacity to keep in on the constructive path of social transformation for the public good in virtually any democratic society.

The Foundation of Ecodomy

In terms of the actual content of this cumulative thesis, I should reiterate that it is based primarily on three articles: a concise trilogy of education in theology and religious studies based on the concept of ecodomy, which seeks to provide a very condensed perspective on a philosophy of education. All these three articles were written based on the 'Draft Framework Document', an official volume focusing on education produced by some of the leading professors across the whole spectrum of sciences represented within the University of Pretoria – and they did so not only as pedagogues, but also in their capacity as administrators – and I used this document as a primary source for all three articles. On the other hand, my list of secondary sources consisted of various articles published by Western and African scholars on the educational aspects included in the document, and often with reference to ecodomy. The tertiary sources were various contributions from venues external to the document itself, mainly books and articles on specific topics related to the problems discussed in the primary and secondary sources.

Thus, my first article is Simuț, C. C. (2019). Ecodomy as Education in Tertiary Institutions. Teaching Theology and Religion in a Globalized World: Western Perspectives. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies 18*(53):141-155. This particular article is important for a number of reasons such as (a) the fact that my research focuses on education within university-level institutions, so its main focus is the reality of education; (b) the content of the educational focus is theology and religion as a field of scientific inquiry but this field is not treated dogmatically or ecclesiastically or even biblically – on the contrary, my perspective on the reality of theology and religion is entirely scientific, so it engages with theology and religion as humanistic sciences taught within the university, not as subjective beliefs exerted or practised within religious establishments; (c) the scope of the research aims at promoting theology and religion as educational tools across specific local or national contexts into the larger framework of the world – in other words, my concern is to see where the process of education in the fields of theology and religion can be successfully and effectively extended into educational realities which transcend specifically local or national settings; this is why I pointed out that I make reference to the globalized world, a pan-human reality which can benefit from the educational efforts of scientists specializing in theology and religion for the sake of the public good, a reality which – according to S. Marginson – is of

critical importance and must receive a proper definition (Marginson, 2011). In doing so, I put in order all the contributions presented by Western scholars and their specific preoccupations about the educational aspects related to the teaching of theology and religion. The reason why I decided to begin with Western education is merely historical, in the sense that Western educational systems have a longer history and a more consistent experience in teaching theology and religion than African contexts (taken in general). Whether or not Western educational systems are better today in managing to promote theology and religion as humanistic studies is an aspect which lies beyond the scope of this paper (Simuț, 2019); and so does the fact, pointed out by A. Stambach, that religious education in Africa, especially that associated with Christianity and its historical confessions, is traditionally connected with missionary efforts (Stambach, 2010).

The second article which constitutes the core of this doctoral endeavour is (with Buitendag J) Simuț, C. C. (2020). Ecodomy as education in tertiary institutions. Teaching theology and religion in a globalised world: African perspectives. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies 76*(1):1-8. It is clear from the onset that I wrote this piece with J. Buitendag, and his part in this scientific enterprise was twofold: first, as former dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria, and second, as fellow researcher engaged in the faculty's main research plan. Since I am a Western scholar myself according to the main African perspective regarding the West (in Africa, Europe is often seen as a whole, without the local dichotomy between Eastern and Western Europe), I felt I had been somewhat compelled to solicit the aid of J. Buitendag, given his long and extensive activity as tertiary pedagogue in South Africa. While this second article is a sort of mirror article when compared to the first, it is still fundamentally different in content, if not in method. Regarding the method, things are quite straightforward: like the first article, the second is also focused on education, which is approached from the perspective of theology and religion as educational content, although theology and religion themselves are treated as humanistic sciences, not as religious or ecclesiastical concerns, a methodological decision I share with H. Schilderman (2014). What is different in this second article, however, has to do with my decision to steer the discussion away from Western perspectives in the direction of local African inquiries. And it was precisely in this aspect that I needed the collegial support and scientific contribution of J. Buitendag who often used to elaborate on how specific aspects of African culture informed some of the African perspectives on education as science, and even on theology and religion as humanistic sciences taught within the university (to give just two examples, African life philosophies do not include the Western understanding of chronological time and private property, but rather as meaningful time and communal property). This is why, in this second article, I synthesized all the contributions produced by African scholars, regardless of whether they were from South Africa or other sub-Saharan African countries. What deserves special mentioning here is

the unexpected coherence about the need to have transformative curricula in all fields of scientific investigations, not only in theology and religion; such educational programs were seen distinctively as compulsory if moving in the right direction with educational systems in the entire region of Africa is to become a reality at all (Buitendag and Simuț, 2020). E. de Villiers, for instance, notices this critical aspect that juxtaposes the reality of religious traditions and the need for 'the transformation of society' (de Villiers, 2004).

The third article that constitutes the basis of my doctoral enterprise is Simuț, C. C. (2023) Teaching Religion as Change for Social Transformation in Contemporary African and non-African Universities: a South African Manifesto. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 79*(2):1-6. Very much like the previous two articles, this one also focuses on the 'Draft Framework Document' and its intention to produce recommendations which, although specific to South African education (in general, not only with reference to theology and religion), may prove useful to other contexts as well, even to educational venues such as those in the Western world. The importance of my article consists of narrowing down the necessity of educational change and educational reconsideration of the entire teaching and research system across tertiary institutions; what the article highly recommends based on the documents of the colloquium is the fact that contemporary education needs a thorough reconsideration of its most fundamental components. This way, its relevance and efficiency should ply much better on contemporary realities, especially those produced by globalization, as also suggested by R. Rieger who addresses the problems that derive from putting religion and globalization together (Rieger, 2010). In my opinion, some of these problems include curricular adaptations, teaching methodologies, research accessibility etc, all in light of the most fundamental reassessment and reconsideration of the basic human values, rights, dignity, equality, and freedom. This is why – and this is also when – distinctions such as African and non-African, Western and non-Western, or even the Global South and the rest of the world become not only blurred, but also incompatible with a genuine application of human values if all people – irrespective of their country of origin, social status etc – are to have access to good, decent, solid education across the world. One of the reasons why this should be the case is explained by I. Strenski, who believes that religion legitimated globalization by providing 'theological interpretations of natural law' (Strenski, 2004). My article, therefore, investigates only a small part of the 'Draft Framework Document' which deals with these aspects as an educational proposal not only to the African context, but also to the entire world (Simuț, 2023).

Personally, I found the 'Draft Framework Document' important and vitally useful, not only because I was presented with brand new information that I had not been aware of before, but also because some of the things which I already knew or was aware of were presented from angles that shed new light on the issues in question. In other words, Western theologies and theories of religion

ended up interacting with their African counterparts and the other way around, a reality which – K. Bediako informs us – is a rather old challenge (Bediako, 2003). All the contributors, African and non-African, had the chance and the opportunity to verify their long-held educational convictions against some of the newest realities they witnessed during their educational careers: Western scholars were faced with specific African problems which are not present in the West (such as large scale extreme poverty and the resulting lack of access to education), while African scholars were shown that extended access to education does not automatically result in efficient education for individual persons, unless adequate measures are taken with regard to adequate curricular changes) (Simuț, 2019; Buitendag and Simuț, 2020; Simuț, 2023).

The Application of Ecodomy

Resuming my methodological clarification about how I began my studies into the concept of ecodomy from practice to theory, I cannot help noticing that there are some silver linings in this particular enterprise which progressed from practice to theory; for instance, I entertained no prevalent misconceptions or preconceptions about ecodomy whatsoever – what I did was to investigate the content of the notion itself as 'life in its fullness' (and in doing so, I equated it with a constructive process or a sum thereof) (Rossing and Buitendag, 2020) and then I moved on while trying to find new investigative directions for fields in which I could apply it practically (Simuț, 2019). It should be pointed out here that, even if I had not considered the reality of education back then, the idea of education began to surface slowly and constantly during each of my attempts to apply ecodomy in a certain way or context (Buitendag and Simuț, 2017). Thus, the idea of education as ecodomy (or, conversely ecodomy as education) emerged consistently with every piece of research that I turned into a scientific article – hence the later idea of investigating various directions in research as possibly related to ecodomical attempts in education (Simuț, 2023).

The very first domain wherein I was able to apply the concept of ecodomy was Romania's Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Having discussed the idea of ecodomy with J. Buitendag for the first time in my career and following numerous discussions with him about the utility of the concept, I wrote an article (which I co-authored with him) on how the role of ancestors plays (Dorondel, 2002) an ecodomical role in contemporary Romanian Orthodox rhetoric – which, A. Mungiu-Pippidi tells us, found ways to creep even as far as political discourse (Mungiu-Pippidi, 1998). Even if I had not been aware of any possibility of connecting ecodomy with education at that time, I did realize the crucial role of theological and religious education (or of education – of any sort – within a predominantly Eastern Romanian Orthodox context, ecclesiastical or not) in connection with the development of ecodomic expectations within the members of a certain society. Ecodomic (or even

counter-ecodomic) expectations do not just happen: they develop within an educational context (or lack thereof) and they lead to concrete actions (Simuț and Buitendag, 2015).

Secondly, after applying the idea of ecodomy to the specific context of my native Romania with concrete reference to the Romanian Eastern Orthodox church and its rhetoric, I decided to select another context – radically different from Eastern Orthodoxy in Romania – and the next normal step forward seemed to be indigenous African religions. The notion of constructive process in African religions is quite old – as we see in E. Amoah – but it is important to be aware that the issue itself exists in academic quarters (Amoah, 1998). Now, I must admit that my first article dealt with Romanian Eastern Orthodoxy in a way which is specific to humanistic sciences: I did not discuss theology or religious aspects for that matter – what I did was just have a look at various rhetorical devices and methods used in a way which was constructive or destructive, while excluding references to practical aspects of daily life as, for instance, M. F. C. Bourdillon, who investigated hunger and starvation in certain African contexts (Bourdillon, 1993). A similar method was used for my article on ecodomy in indigenous African religions, for which I dealt with issues specific to cultural anthropology from various perspectives – such as African scholars who wrote from their own African contexts or from elsewhere, Europe or the United States of America) (Simuț, 2015a).

Thirdly, having been able to compare how ecodomy could be applied to Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa (with specific reference to Eastern Orthodoxy in Romania and multifaceted opinions belonging to Sub-Saharan thinkers who lived across the world), I decided to return to the context provided by my native Romania. This time, however, the idea of ecodomy was to be applied to a situation which was quite limited in scope, but was able to reveal the not-so-beneficial aspects of public attitudes towards a certain issue, perceived as problematic, which I called 'negative ecodomy'. Specifically, I investigated what happened in the Summer of 2015, when Romania was ravaged by a scandal – with public and even international implications – regarding the project of building a mosque in Bucharest (Bialasiewicz and Sariaslan, 2020), which was supposed to be financially supported by the Turkish state (Stegherr, 2017; Schip, 2020). My investigation dealt with some negative aspects of what was perceived by some as a constructive or ecodomic attempt to thwart the plans to build the mosque (Simuț, 2015b).

The fourth article took back – again – to the reality of Sub-Saharan indigenous African religions, but this time I sought to find some patterns in promoting ecodomy for the sake of providing safety to Africans across the continent. I should point out here that my approach is not sociological as, for instance, in B. Wahab (2004), but rather theoretical and cultural, like that of M. N. Kane, R. J. Jacobs, and W. E. Hawkins (2015). In addition to the three articles already listed above, this one was perhaps the very piece of research which opened my eyes to what had already

been there for a rather long while, namely the fact that ecodomy and education are intrinsically and inherently connected to one another. In short, ecodomy is educational and education is ecodomical; there is no long-term education in the absence of an ecodomical or constructive vision to sustain it as such; conversely, any ecodomical or constructive process has virtually no chance of being completed meaningfully in the absence of solid education. That is simply because, R. Impey indicates, education has this immense capacity to build up and develop persons and contexts (Impey, 2013). Thus, in my opinion, one of the biggest problems of the African continent is – and quite unfortunately, the situation remains extant – the lack of education which is, or should be understood, ecodomically (Simuț, 2016).

This to-and-fro process that took me from Eastern Orthodoxy in Romania to indigenous African religions made me realize that there might be a common ground between the two religious contexts (Romanian and African), and that was my fifth investigative direction which I took for my research on ecodomy: Christianity as liaison between religion in Romania and religion in Africa. In this regard, I found similar concerns in the work of J. M. van der Merwe, who explored the notion of reconciliation as 'oikodome' in South Africa (van der Merwe, 2017). The idea of education – and especially of proper education – came up again as contemporary Africa is marred by various attempts to decolonize its current way of thinking from its non-African (or colonial) past. How decolonization should be done is a discussion on its own, but a genuine process of decolonization cannot be done in the absence of dealing with the idea of ancestry (common to Eastern Orthodoxy and indigenous African religions). Nevertheless, in order for ancestry to be applied ecodomically in both contexts, one needs to push it in the direction of the public good, and that cannot be done without education (Simuț, 2017).

At this point – and this is my sixth investigative direction – I realized that ecodomy cannot and should not be divorced from education. I also understood that education is ecodomical in nature, so I decided to go on with my research, but this time I resorted to J. Buitendag's help once more. The reason behind my decision had to do with the fact that I intended – for the first time – to discuss ecodomy in conjunction with education, but with reference to teaching theology in African public universities, and for that I needed J. Buitendag's expertise as dean and pedagogue. Moreover, I did not just juxtapose ecodomy and education; what I also decided to do was to see if ecodomy and education can be investigated from the perspective of decolonization and contextualization – again with reference to the African public universities. In recent years, I welcomed other investigations, like that of B. Mpofu, who is concerned about how African communities can 'enhance oikodome' (Mpofu, 2021). One should not forget that I produced this research with J. Buitendag in early 2017 (Buitendag and Simuț, 2017).

What happened next in connection with my seventh investigative direction was a natural step forward in the direction of applying the idea of ecodomy to the reality of religion in order to identify what I called a 'protective realm' with general validity and applicability in all societies. Even if the scope of my endeavour is quite idealistic, it seemed to be the logical conclusion of putting together ecodomy and education. Connecting ecodomy with goodness is not new either; for instance, W. J. Hollenweger explored it as early as the 1970s, with a focus on how the 'oikodome' can work for the 'common good' (Hollenweger, 1978). The notion of goodness was employed again as the result of conceiving ecodomy as education, since the role of education is to promote goodness for the sake of the public good, but in order for this to be achieved as a social goal, education must be ecodomical, in the sense that – as pointed out by S. D. Lowe and M. E. Lowe – it should lead to 'mutual edification' (Lowe and Lowe, 2010). Even if I discussed ecodomy with an eye on religion in general, what I had in the back of my mind was, of course, indigenous African religions and Eastern Orthodoxy (Simuț, 2017).

It was the latter which opened to me the eighth investigative direction in my pursuit of applying ecodomy to various practical situations; this time, the context was decommunistization after 1989 in Romania and the consistent efforts of the Romanian Orthodox Church to strengthen the fibre of the Romanian nation through constant references to the notion of national identity, without what I. Kalemaj identifies as the much needed 'lustration measures' (Kalemaj, 2021). In short, while the Romanian Orthodox Church conceived this plan as an educational effort to teach Romanians about the need to recapture, develop, and promote the idea of national identity, I perceived it as a counter-ecodomical move, especially in light of Romania's sinister past dominated by the Iron Guard (Meale, 2016), a social movement which combined politics, religion, and spirituality with disastrous consequences for the welfare of the country (Simuț, 2019; Ioanid, 2013).

Having entertained this academic swing between Romanian Eastern Orthodoxy and indigenous African religions from the perspective of ecodomy as education for half a decade, it was in 2020 when I decided to move past it in what turned out to be my nineth – and last – investigative direction: ecodomy as applied to public attitudes about nature, especially in connection with my frequent discussions with J. Buitendag, who had been interested in the relationship between ecodomy and eschatology through the mediation of ecology (Rossing and Buitendag, 2020). In this article, I moved from ecodomy to education and then, finally, to ecology, but I did so in trying to leave behind the wide range of confessional theologies and secular philosophies about the state of the world. For instance, C. L. Nessan emphasizes that there cannot be an 'oikodome' without 'references to the natural world' (Nessan, 2001). My most fundamental conviction that education should have concrete positive results in the public square through a determined and constant pursuit of the public good was only fortified through this incursion into finding a way to move beyond what

theologians and philosophers think about the word: to put everything in a nutshell, I realized that education was the way forward towards an ecodomical understanding of reality as nature (Simuț, 2020).

It has been a rather short while now since I am thinking about the possible applications of the notion of ecodomy in education without any mentioning whatsoever of either theology and religion; in other words – and this is an investigation I have not turned into a research article – this possible investigative direction should be explored solely in non-religious and non-secular ways but still within the confines of humanistic sciences. For instance, I am considering the possibility of delving into the history of education, the philosophy of education, and even specific branches of cultural anthropology, which could shed significant light on how education has been performed (ecodomically or less so) in various geographical settings (with its derivative contexts: political, economic, social, etc). I must admit that, in this regard, I got the idea from R. Henze, whose anthropology of education connects a rather encompassing range of different fields, such as 'anthropology, linguistics, sociology, psychology, psychology, and philosophy, as well as the field of education' (Henze, 2020). I was also captivated by S. Fleury and J. Garrison who delve into the intricacies of philosophical anthropology in the context of 'educational policies' (Fleury and Garrison, 2014).

It should be mentioned here that the 'Draft Framework Document' emphasizes a series of facts that are ecodomically useful for any tertiary education. First, in order for South Africa – or any other nation – to have a good, solid education system, there has to be an ongoing 'reimagining' of its curricula in all fields of inquiry. Second, the tertiary system must be characterized by justice – in short, no field of inquiry should be left behind; regardless of one refers to theology and religion or not, all fields of scientific inquiry should be treated as equally important and equally vital. Third, such an educational system which is essentially characterized by justice can only be extant and efficient within a democracy, where political facts are bent on supporting all the aspects of (a certain) society, without preconceived ideas about anything – and that, quite understandably, happens within a democracy, but not only just a democracy – that democracy has to be vibrant and always focused on furthering the public good in all respects (Simuț, 2023). In the end, as P. P. Kumar notices, allowing religious education as part of the public education system is an issue of morality, and the government should not refrain from getting involved supportively (Kumar, 2006).

One last ecodomical aspect which defines the spirit of the 'Draft Framework Document' has to do with the fact that in the absence of genuine and ongoing discussions about all aspects of education – including theology and religion – there cannot be a true education philosophy. However, as A. Tayob points out, it is religious education, not religious practice, which should be supported by the government if that government wishes to adequately be in charge of a pluralistic

society (Tayob 2018). Exclusionary attitudes toward any field of inquiry – be that theology and religion or anything else for that matter – is not the apanage of democratic systems. Honest conversations can only be held within democracies, where education – of all sorts and in all fields – must be thriving. And they can do so for as long as these conversations are not only being held at certain points in time, but they are also carried forward. The reality of history is crucial for any educational endeavour; this is why the University of Pretoria prepared the 'Draft Framework Document' and it did so not only to defend education in general as deserving the support of the state, but also to ensure that all branches of education, theology and religion included, benefit from the same attention of the same state that is supposed to care for education as supportive of its very own welfare (Buitedag and Simuț, 2017).

In light of these clarifying considerations, the 'Draft Framework Document' is nothing but an educational strategy that ensures the continuation of specifically educational enterprises in the long run; it is there a long-term plan that aims at educational openness which is supposed to be available to be made available to all the beneficiaries of education by all the providers of education with the full support of the state in matters pertaining to finances, politics, etc. That is important because it seems that, from a global perspective, S. Gilliat-Ray suggests that religious education appears to be either underfunded or more poorly funded that other disciplines (Gilliat-Ray, 2019). With specific reference to theology and religion, the same strategy is aimed to treating all people the very same way irrespective of who they are, where they come from, and what they wish to pursue in terms of their focus on teaching, research, or both (Simuț, 2017).

To draw the line: the 'Draft Framework Document' reflects the more general and all-encompassing concern of decisional factors within the University of Pretoria to find ever new and ecodomical efforts to deal with education in a way which serves the welfare of the nation by providing good and meaning education to as many people as possible and in doing so, to serve the public good, an aspect noticed by R. S. Alley in connection with the positive outcome of religion throughout society (Alley, 1995). Thus, theology and religion are conceived of as vital aspects of general education in a democratic setting which encourages novelty, justice, and conversation as long-term realities to continuously reimagine tertiary education curricula in ways that foster beneficial developments to communities across nations. Thus, even if theology and religion are presented here as self-standing fields of inquiry in tertiary education, they are nevertheless integral part of educational system to the point that, as C. Calhoun shows, their constitutive nature to the educational system makes them irreplaceable and vital to the public good and the welfare of a nation (Calhoun, 2016). This is why they should be equally supported by the state not only declaratively, but also actively and thus financially, politically, socially, and virtually in any other way like any other field of inquiry within the educational system (Simuț, 2023).

Nevertheless, since my discussion about ecodomy swings between African and Western educational contexts with specific reference to theology and religious studies, the very next step for this investigation is to see how the concept of ecodomy can influence education in general as well as pedagogy within an intercultural setting. This is to say that, having seen in which ways ecodomy can contribute to theological and religious education, it would be worth investigating how the same concept can be useful in intercultural education and, more specifically, in intercultural pedagogy. A possible step forward in this direction would be not to segregate various cultural contexts – like I did in acknowledging Western and African education realities – but rather to treat them as a general focus of ecodomy in intercultural education taken as a whole. Such a decision would not cancel the reality of intercultural contexts – because that would, of course, be impossible – but it could provide us with a unified perspective on how ecodomy can work as a pedagogical instrument in intercultural education. In the next chapter, however, I shall investigate the main tenets of intercultural education, while also searching for some of its most obvious gaps it needs to address.

CHAPTER 2. INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND ITS KEY FEATURES

By its intercultural nature, religious education is one of the most visible aspects of the field of education sciences when correlated with intercultural education. It has been shown so far that religious education is dominated by the concept of ecodomy as constructive motivation for an ongoing support of educational efforts within theology and religious studies; in this sense, religious education is constructively prone to further transformational attempts to positively influence the cultural contexts wherein it works. Thus, given its multicultural coverage, religious education works interculturally across the entire world. Consequently, we need to focus on highlighting some of the main traits of intercultural education in its capacity as broader context for religious education, which is not aimed exclusively at providing constructive insights in a pedagogical way, but also focused on making the life of educational actors – teachers, students, and tertiary beneficiaries – full of meaning for a life worth living in rapidly altering and constantly changing world.

This fundamental move from the realm of education itself to the reality of the world was described by Wilhelm von Humbold as an attempt to connect the self to the world through the use of the the notion of *Bildung*. In the words of Løvlie and Standish, *Bildung* is about 'the interaction between the student's inner powers and capabilities and the eternal world in terms that reverberate through the literature on education' (Løvlie & Standish, n.d.); thus, seen as *Bildung*, education is thinking critically about one's inner person with the purpose of understanding what happens outside one's person in a way which provides comfort and meaning. This is in fact what ecodomical intercultural education proposes: a critical reflection about what one can learn for the benefit of one's inner self and others, in order to lead a meaningful life alongside others while focused on enriching the world for the common good. Conceived in these terms, *Bildung* is education through culture, civilization, and morality, which puts together aesthetic and intellectual endeavours for the meaningful building not only of the self, but also of communities in a liberal, democratic way through spiritual and rational pursuits.

In order for this to happen, however, education must transcend the reality of 'the' school into the intricacies of social life to the point that formal education in schools turns into informal education in families or other social segments, such as educational institutions. This is why Nordenbo speaks about the fact that *Bildung* presupposes not only formation by teaching, but also upbringing, or even that teaching does not consist solely in a certain transmission of information, but rather in educating the subject about itself and how it should related to others in the world (Nordenbo, 2002). If this is true, then education as *Bildung* promotes two aspects: first, the development of the individual according to his or her own natural disposition and talents, and

second, the progress of the individual through education within the reality of the world in the specific context of society, so the the individual should enjoy a meaningful life in the world.

This is why Uljens boldly affirms that 'the foundation of education as a discipline is not empirical research, but philosophical reflection' (Uljens, 2002). In seeing how the individual develops educationally within a society, one must consider the fact that a human person 'becomes a cultural subject' (Uljens, 2002). Thus, the various debates about education must take into account not only that knowledge presupposes criticism and reflection on past and contemporary approaches to education, but also that theory and practice are mandatory for the proper development of the individual as an autonomous self-reflexive human being in the world who perceives and experiences reality in fulfilling ways. Consequently, according to Teschers, *Bildung*, is self-formation through upbringing and teaching with a view to personal flourishing within the context of society (Teschers, 2017). So, if we put together the explanations provided by Nordenbo (2002), Uljens (2002), and Teschers (2017), we get this educational equation: as formation or rather self-formation, *Bildung* is upbringing and teaching for flourishing.

If the purpose of education is to impress meaning into human life, then one must find a specific way to interpret education along lines which offer such possibilities. One solution resides in the so-called 'epistemological interpretation' proposed by Biesta, who suggests that 'the particular and local' should be distinguished from the 'general and universal', in which case *Bildung* can be seen as 'the idea that rational autonomy can only be achieved by means of a movement that goes beyond the present and the particular toward the general and the enduring' (Biesta, 2002). The human individual is thus encouraged to think critically about his situation in the world, but in doing so he must move from theory to practice, as well as from uniformity to plurality. Concretely, one must transcend his own particular situation 'in order to engage with knowledge, beliefs, and values that are general and enduring' (Biesta, 2002). From this perspective, *Bildung* is the sort of education which helps the individual world not only 'respond to … the world', but also 'understand this very world' (Biesta, 2002).

If von Humboldt's post-Enlightenment *Bildung* did allow for the possibility of God's existence in some way although it recommended a sharp focus on the reality of the world, Gur-ze'ev is emphatic about the fact that education as *Bildung* should accept reality without any divine ontology; thus, if education is to be efficient as *Bildung*, one must accept that we live in 'Godless world', in which we must help one another for the sake of the common good (Gur–ze'ev, 2002). In order for education to be efficient as *Bildung*, the human subject must first become the 'center for reflectivity (as different from reflection)', then he or she must move against the tendencies of contemporary forces through counter-education in order to embrace 'suffering' and 'happiness' while never accepting them as 'pain' and 'pleasure'. In other words, education as *Bildung* should be

realistic about the human being's being-in-the-world, while accepting its limitations and capabilities while focusing on meaning and love.

Reichenbach (2002) proposes an even more radical perspective on education as *Bildung*, by claiming that its initial modern version is dead, while its contemporary form – if any – is characterized by helplessness (Reichenbach, 2002). Education must never succumb to serving the 'anonymous mass society' because in doing so it will remain forever lethargic and passive; on the contrary, if it is to genuinely educate human beings in ways which are powerfully meaningful, education must be accepted, promoted, and supported 'as a practice of human liberty' (Reichenbach, 2002). While leaving behind the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment moral pursuits 'for the moral betterment of society', education should no longer focus on the traditional 'moral, social, and cognitive competencies', but rather accept and even embrace the uncertainty of the future. According to Reichenbach, the 'future learner' should find ever new ways to be flexible, available, and willing to learn if he or she really wants to meaningfully understand and contribute to the world in which they live, hopefully within a democratic political system (Reichenbach, 2002).

Education as *Bildung*, which is formation through upbringing and teaching within a rapidly changing society is also noticed by Peukert, who argues in favour of a type of education that focuses on understanding and self-determination in order to acquire the 'capabilities requisite for this end' (Peukert, 2002). Since societies are transforming on a very fast pace, Mortensen (2002) shows that education must take into account not only the development of personal and collective reflexivity, but also a progress that is decisively and deeply anchored in rearing a new sort of literacy through 'teaching literature' for 'cultural understanding' (Mortensen, 2002). Mortensen also points out that this particular way of doing education brings to the fore 'the interaction of different cultures and different paradigms of ways of understanding', and this is precisely what ecodomical intercultural education has to offer.

This, however, is what Arcilla (2002) understands by liberal education: adopting a way of educating the self and others, individual and communities, so that 'more responsibility' is taken 'for the social context of … learning' as well as 'for preventing that context from turning into one hostile to such learning' (Arcilla, 2002). Liberal education, therefore, is supposed to further and promote honesty about humanity's 'contingency, ambiguity, and incommunicability', but in doing so it should also allow us to 'still live by beautiful grace' (Arcilla, 2002). In other words, education should help us understand our limitations, deal with them constructively, and then live in the world ethically (Arcilla, 2002). Løvlie (2002) is convinced that such an education is possible despite the contemporary consumerist trends which show that 'the classical idea of *Bildung* has lost its authority' (Løvlie, 2002).

However, there is a promise within the very idea of *Bildung*: that the human being's individual worth is powerfully driven by aesthetic, moral, and political virtues 'towards personal and cultural freedom and responsibility' through 'critical analysis' and 'normative proposals' for 'the democratic expansion of responsible personal and political interplay in society' (Løvlie, 2002). In a nutshell, education is about reflection and politics for the common good of the society – and that in spite of all the opposing forces moving against such a project. As Hohr (2002) puts it rather beautifully, education is about bridging 'the gap between reality and ideal' which helps the 'human being … to generate herself or himself as a person' through 'will and love' (Hohr, 2002). In other words, education is about helping human beings navigate between reality and ideal, without losing sight of either, so that life in society is meaningful based on morality and beauty.

In the end, as Korsgaard competently notices, *Bildung* encapsulates the very sort of education which, as a complex didactical and pedagogical process, aims at 'autonomy and self-activity', while the subject deals with 'objects and content that does not derive from the subject itself' (Korsgaard, 2024). This, *Bildung* not only is itself, but also needs a 'philosophy of education', which helps the subject to direct its 'attention to the world' while also reflecting on itself and the surrounding reality. In this specific capacity, *Bildung* is in itself 'an existential question' because it helps the subject 'to reach beyond himself to external objects' and it does so while attempting to help the subject not to 'lose himself in this alienation, but rather reflect back into his inner being' (Korsgaard, 2024). So *Bildung* is about educating through this constant and vital dialectics between introspection and outrospection, an interplay which helps the subject learn not only about itself, but also about the world by knowing itself and placing itself meaningfully within the reality of the world.

It should be highlighted here that, despite what *Bildung* positively entails as a comprehensive philosophy of education, Vogt and Neuhaus (2021) are extremely pessimistic about the fate of *Bildung* in contemporary education. Concretely, they argue that traditionally, *Bildung* focuses on one's personal educational development; hence '*Bildung* is a reflective and active endeavor', whereby one educates himself or herself through 'self-cultivation' and 'igniting interest' (Vogt & Neuhaus, 2021). The result of *Bildung* therefore is 'becoming a more complete human being' through 'the mastering of life and oneself on a multiple level of analysis' (Vogt & Neuhaus, 2021). Consequently, for Vogt and Neuhaus, '*Bildung* and its outcomes are infinite in its potential' simply because '*Bildung* enables progress, game-changing discoveries, and paradigm-shifting thoughts', while contemporary education with its standardization and focus on competences 'hinder intellectual disruption and ultimately progress' (Vogt & Neuhaus, 2021).

Thus, *Bildung* comes very close to what contemporary intercultural education has to offer in today's highly complex and multi-layered society with its plurality of cultures, languages, and

contexts if connected to ecodomy. When discussed from the perspective of the idea of ecodomy, intercultural education can be said not only to continue the history of *Bildung*, but also even to constitute itself as a sort of *Bildung*, with its formative, moral, and existential facets, which reveal what Vogt and Neuhaus call its 'enormous transformative potential' (Vogt & Neuhaus, 2021).

Intercultural Education as Migration Multiculturalism

The first dimension of intercultural education is the multiculturalism brought about by migration. Intercultural education started to develop as a concept following the situation of multicultural classrooms in the English-speaking world, which has been a constant reality for the past half a century. The whole idea of intercultural education thus is a Western construct that sprung from a context of immigrant situations within various public schools. In such specific backgrounds, where native English-speaking children sat next to their immigrant peers, the teaching systems were confronted with the need to provide multicultural instruction so that immigrant children should not be left behind when it came to their education. This is why Gundara and Portera (2008) point out that multicultural education consisted of a series of initiatives aimed not only at providing help to immigrant children, but also avoiding 'educational inequality in socially diverse and multicultural societies'.

In this regard, intercultural education is essentially a matter of educational praxis and experience. In intercultural education, people from variegated contexts interact with one another to the point that we should consider the reality of their interpersonal relationships. With this in mind, A. Holliday (2018) suggests that intercultural education becomes a matter of 'reflexive awareness of Self and Other'; in other words, each person should be able to recognize the existence of other persons, but this cannot be achieved adequately within a multicultural context in the absence of mutual awareness. For instance, a native English student who wants to know more about an immigrant student will have to step outside his own cultural context in order to leap into the immigrant student's own cultural context. Such a movement from one cultural setting into another cultural environment is like a 'crossing of boundaries', a vital element of intercultural education.

One crucial aspect of intercultural education, which focuses one's attention to the very nature of intercultural education as a social reality, has to do with what D. Coulby (2006) calls the 'lexical change' from multicultural education to intercultural education. While he points out that the change happened in the 1980s and it 'was accepted unquestioningly at the time', Coulby launches a series of questions about this particular phenomenon which has implications for the very nature of intercultural education as concept and reality. Two of these questions I find extremely important. Thus, he wonders whether the shift from multicultural to intercultural education happened in order

to ‘disguise the realities … of conquest, slave trade, genocide’, which points out that intercultural education must indeed address them openly. Then he askes if the move from multicultural to intercultural education has the capacity to ‘negotiate between cultures’, which – again – is an indication that intercultural education must do precisely that: show that there are no prevalent cultures, but cultures which must place themselves in a constructive dialogue.

R. Albert and H. Triandis (1985) discuss some critical issues related to intercultural education multicultural societies. Although they launched their work almost four decades ago, I think that their contribution is valid – and hence extremely useful – in dealing with the relationship between interculturality and multiculturality, which was later approached by Coulby (2006). Why are Albert and Triandis (1985) important? First, because they notice the reality of multicultural societies and the need for intercultural education within such societies. In other words, multiculturality does not guarantee interculturality. While multiculturality is a fact, interculturality is a desiderate. This is why they notice the factual reality of multicultural societies and recommend the implementation of intercultural education in order to ‘prepare individuals to function effectively in their environment’. This means that teachers ‘need to learn about the patterns of perceptions, values, and behaviours of culturally different pupils’, which presents intercultural education with the constant – permanent even – challenge to be actively involved in learning about cultures, regardless of whether they are native or alien.

The context, however, important as it is for intercultural education, cannot and should not remain a cold and objective reality. Educators and learners must realize that the objectivity of the context is one thing, while the subjectivity of what A. Portera (2008) calls ‘educational opportunity’ is a totally different matter. The contemporary context of intercultural education is a world reality which is characterized by globalization and intercultural education in a globalized context must understand the role of economy in a ‘multicultural society’. Thus, intercultural education becomes a mix between multicultural education and intercultural education, since globalized societies, especially in the West, deal with ‘people with different linguistic, religious, cultural or ethnic features’. This is why Portera supports the thesis that intercultural education ‘is currently the most appropriate answer to globalization and interdependence’ in this context of today’s predominantly Western societies, characterized by a multifaceted pluralism of cultures.

The reality of culture is extremely complex and, when coupled with that of education, it becomes genuinely complicated. This is why we must be aware that the plurality of cultural realities, especially in the educational contexts of Western countries, causes us to consider potential differences between intercultural education and multicultural education. Holm and Zilliacus (2009) are extremely important in this respect, especially because they explain how these two phrases are perceived across the spectrum of Western educational contexts. Concretely, although intercultural

education and multicultural education have usually seen as synonymous, the former tends to be accepted as more dynamic in Europe, while the latter is preferred in the rest of Western geographical locations, such as North America, Australia, and Asia. Given this situation, it is vital to differentiate between 'a culturally diverse classroom or a multicultural classroom and a multicultural education classroom. The difference between the two is given by the curriculum which can be either monocultural or pluricultural. Thus, a multicultural classroom can be monocultural, but a multicultural education classroom will always be pluricultural or, in this case, intercultural.

It is not always the case though that cultural interaction leads to more mutual knowledge for those interacting as part of different cultures. Even if the purpose of intercultural education is to foster more mutual understanding and knowledge for all those involved in the educational process, Leeman and Reid (2006) suggest that the actual classroom situation could be different. While intercultural education is prone on diversity, multicultural policies, and pluricultural practice, it may be the case that the reality of human interaction leads to a surprising result which is quite far from the intended purpose of reciprocal knowledge in intercultural education. Thus, in some specific educational contexts in Australia and the Netherlands, the theory and practice of intercultural education did not yield more mutuality when it came to having teachers and students learn more about one another. On the contrary, surprising as it may be, despite the 'interwoven dimensions of culturalism', the application of various intercultural education theories and practices revealed a 'tendency towards social agnosticism among teachers and teacher education students'.

A more optimistic approach to the efficiency of intercultural education theories and practices was proposed by I. Ferreira Martins (2008), who argues that intercultural education proved to work rather well in Portugal. What I find interesting in this particular case is the very purpose of intercultural education which, far from focusing exclusively on educational targets, was pushed more in the direction of living or the shared experience of learning as part of pluricultural social realities. To be more precise, intercultural education was aimed at 'learning to live together' as a specific contribution of intercultural education. Thus, intercultural education is seen as a tool that promotes and shapes one's life as a citizen in a certain community or society characterized by multiculturalism. Consequently, intercultural education is accepted as being able to 'model an intercultural citizenship societal project', because, on the one hand, intercultural education is focused on building 'the educational system', while, on the other hand, it helps immigrants to integrate within society. Within this framework, intercultural education appears to be working if the educational system is kept in balance with public policies. Alternatively, in order for intercultural education to work, it should be 'upgraded' from the reality of the educational system to the 'transversal dimension' of public policies.

The situation of intercultural education in Sweden brings up to the fore the rather sensitive issues of ethnicity, religion, and language, alongside the more classical aspects of gender and 'class variations', as shown by K. Norberg (2000). In a multicultural society, intercultural education is based on a certain range of 'pedagogical strategies' which promote 'cultural diversity' beyond the more or less standardized approaches of 'traditional education'. The reality of immigrant populations forced the education system towards adopting intercultural education, especially because of 'multiple cultural identities' and 'different cultural subgroups', which reflected themselves on a whole range of practical issues, such as popular customs. Intercultural education, therefore, must take into account 'what gives life a meaning', often with reference to eating, dressing, and living according to certain cultural traditions. In such a complex context, international education must take into account the reality of religion, such as Islam in Sweden, with specific reference to internationalization. In Swedish intercultural education, internationalization is based on education policies that further 'human rights, environment, and peace', so that people belonging to various cultures should be enabled to lead meaningful lives.

Dietz and Mateos Cortés (2012) insist on the necessity that comparison should be used in intercultural education, mostly because it helps with the development of this science as it stands at the crossroads of 'academic knowledge and professional development'. Contemporary intercultural studies are dominated by a 'multicultural paradigm' which involves 'the social sciences' and 'the anthropology of education'; hence the necessity of comparison. More precisely, since interculturality cannot be restricted to 'minority groups', the discussions within the field of intercultural education should also focus on 'national identity and broad societal identification process'. Such endeavors are based on critical engagement which, in turn, must work with a rather strong capacity to compare realities in a meaningful way. A constant process of self-reflection is also needed because, in dealing with such a complex range of issues, intercultural education should be characterized by a 'mutually comparative hermeneutical approach'. Comparative awareness in intercultural education is therefore supposed to avoid 'self-fulfilling and self-essentializing identity discourses in broader national society as a whole' and in doing so, intercultural education focuses on improving the actual state of affairs within a pluricultural society.

The fact that intercultural education should contribute to the improvement of society through the active promotion of interculturality from classroom situations to concrete social contexts is one aspect. The other aspect – and the most difficult one – is how this goal can be achieved. Resta and Laferrière (2015) come up with a solution, which consists of digital equity. Given that Western countries, which have been multicultural for decades, can be characterized as 'emerging knowledge-based' societies, digital access to information, and hence to education is vital for the realization not only of educational goals, but also of social improvement. Despite the global

increase of ‘mobile subscriptions across the globe’, ‘the digital divide’ is still a problem which hinders education in general. And it is here that intercultural education is needed, because countries with better digital possibilities can provide educational services to people is disadvantaged regions. The role of technology in education has been growing steadily for years and intercultural education should take advantage of this situation in order to provide digital equity for as good an education as possible across the globe, not only in specific social contexts.

In light of these considerations, intercultural education is not only a matter of immigration, but also an issue of migration, especially in Western contexts, although other settings are certainly not excluded (such as South Africa, which has been harboring immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa for more than three decades if not even longer). Thus, Faas, Hajisoteriou, and Angelides (2014) argue that intercultural education cannot be detached from the reality of ‘legal and illegal migration flows’ which affect Western societies and, in doing so, force them to reconsider their educational systems. Two critical aspects which are constitutive of intercultural education have to do with ‘fostering social cohesion’ and ‘incorporating migrant students’. In other words, intercultural education aims at integrating migrant learners within educational systems with the specific purpose of providing them with the proper means to help them become functional citizens within specific societies.

Most debates about intercultural education revolve around the reality of migration, hence the need for mutual understanding between the native culture and the manifold range of cultures which interact with it through migrant populations. There is, however, a notable exception, which is extant in South America, although it is not singular to that region: the native, indigenous culture in relationship with the dominant Latino culture. In this regard, S. Aikman (1997) indicates that one should investigate the reality of intercultural education in connection with interculturality, which should be defined by ‘democracy and equality’. It is argued that apolitical attempts to promote interculturality through ‘dialogue and respect for cultural and linguistic plurality’ fail to solve the problems of oppression and inequality; hence, interculturality – as well as the ensuing intercultural education – should be implemented through political, social, and educational programs which aim at levelling inequalities by dismantling exploitation. In this case, intercultural education must promote fairness and equal treatment of various populations, irrespective of their native culture.

But focusing on the culture, rather than on the ‘inter-’ aspect of intercultural education can be problematic. For example, Mikander, Zilliacus, and Holm (2018) insist that the field of intercultural education should go through a process of ‘re-conceptualization’ towards ‘more critically-oriented approaches’, especially in the context of immigration and migration. Moreover, ‘superficial version of intercultural education’, which usually focus on promoting diversity without social justice, should be replaced with ‘critical intercultural versions’, which are intended to

‘counter marginalization and discrimination’ through supporting ‘cultural diversity and social justice’, but that should be done both in education and society. Thus, intercultural education consists of social justice education in conjunction with ‘plurilingual education’, ‘global education’, ‘cosmopolitan education’, ‘inclusive education’, and sustainability education’. By focusing on the ‘inter-’ aspect of intercultural education, oppressive elements of falsely-perceived cultural superiority is supposed to eliminate cultural oppression and inequalities from within educational systems and institutions with a view to promote a genuine intercultural education focused on inclusion, social justice, and empowerment. To achieve this goal, one may have to give up even the term ‘intercultural education’, which could be replaced with intersectional education to exclude intolerant attitudes towards sensitive issues ranging from race, sex, class, language, age, religion, ethnicity, and migration.

Intercultural Education as Competence Formation

In the debates about intercultural education, competence formation is a second dimension that appears to be stand-alone as vital for the field. In order for intercultural education not to remain an exceptional concept without practical applicability, we need to consider how education works from the level of society to the level of institutions, then the classroom, and eventually, the subject or the student him/herself. Thus, Neuner (2012) suggests that there must be an educational vision for an entire society, which then is disseminated to educational institutions through a distinct philosophy of education, and then even further down to the classroom and individuals through educational principles and teaching/learning methods with a specific focus on acquiring competence. This downward spiral from education to institution, classroom, and student that works from an educational vision to an education philosophy through educational principles and educational methods has to be conceived as ‘value-oriented’ for ‘citizenship competencies’ with a view to preserving ‘the direct practice of democracy’. Neuner also acknowledges that the efficiency of intercultural education is dependent on realizing that the world is currently characterized by ‘globalization … mobility … and migration’.

Once we understand that globalization, mobility, and migration results in the need to educate people from multiple cultural contexts, the actual reality of intercultural education moves rapidly from theory to practice. While educational visions and educational philosophies are crucial for intercultural education, the reality of the classroom and the individual forces us to consider how intercultural education should be approached. Rapanta and Trovão (2021) recommend that intercultural education’s edifice should be built on three pillars: intercultural learning, intercultural competence, and intercultural dialogue. Thus, while intercultural learning is characterized by

cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity through an ethnocentric focus, intercultural competence should lead to the development of 'skills and attitudes' to 'interpret and relate' with other cultures. In the end, intercultural dialogue cannot function properly in the absence of 'stable and cohesive' mutuality, which takes into account 'objective and subjective cultures', namely cultural factual realities and individual perspectives on cultural realities.

It is clear that intercultural education must produce what Leeman and Ledoux (2010) call 'intercultural competence'. What they notice from the very beginning is that building this particular sort of intercultural competence 'is still not automatically part of teacher education', which presents educational systems with a major problem when it comes to integrating learners from various cultural contexts, especially migrants from non-Western countries. Nevertheless, in order for intercultural education to become focused on providing adequate competence in this respect, they argue that it should be included in 'preservice teacher education'. Then, intercultural education must be conceived of from a 'critical perspective' which excludes superficiality. Another mandatory feature of intercultural education must be its capacity to produce 'close ties with intercultural practices in schools', but that cannot be achieved if higher education does not find a solution to counter the 'current trend towards self-regulated learning'. Intercultural education, therefore, must present students with the current range of social realities, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable they might appear when presented in the classroom.

In order for that to happen, teachers must be made aware of what intercultural education really entails. Thus, M. Vižintin (2018) focuses on the development of intercultural education, which must deal with 'the integration of immigrant pupils' on the one side, while on the other it should come up various proposal about how teachers should function as part of intercultural education. There are a few steps which need to be considered here: first, teachers must be supported in their efforts to learn more and constantly about intercultural education; second, the school system must provide this active support with a view to the actual development of intercultural education; third, intercultural competence must be developed as part of the teachers' involvement in intercultural education; fourth, the learning process must develop in the direction of intercultural education to the point that 'concrete learning objectives need to be added to the curricula', and fifth, the curricula must be drafted in such a way that 'content on a multiethnic, multilingual, multi-religious society' should be included for the 'co-creation of an intercultural society'.

While it is clear that teachers need to develop intercultural competence for intercultural communication, how they should be doing this is what matters, and A. Nagata takes the discussion exactly in that direction. Thus, Nagata (2004) recommends that intercultural education should be performed through 'promoting self-reflexivity' which is defined as 'having an ongoing conversation with your whole self about what you are experiencing as you are experiencing it'. This is important

because intercultural education relies heavily on intercultural communication, which in turn must be not only learned but also taught. There are at least three aspects of intercultural communication in the context of intercultural education: first, bodymindfulness; second, metacommunication, and third, communicative flexibility, and they are all mandatory steps towards self-reflexivity. Since, intercultural education is done through intercultural communication, it is suggested that teachers should 'cultivate the ability to tune into one's own state of being' through 'intrapersonal and interpersonal exercises' while being aware of phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical social theory, and religion, as vital aspects that shape one's awareness of the surrounding reality.

Given the internationalization of access to information through digital devices, it has been usually accepted that the global availably of internet services made the traditional distinction between democratic countries and their autocratic counterparts a little bit more fluent. In other words, because of satellite connectivity, internet access is a global phenomenon unless hindered by specific government actions. Whether or not internet access is unrestricted in today's Russia remains outside the scope of this paper, but intercultural education 'from Russian Researches Perspective', as R. Valeeva and A. Valeeva (2017) put it, still remains an issue of interest. One crucial aspect here is the necessity that democratization processes should continue if intercultural education is to reach its formative goals. 'Ethno-cultural and civic self-determination' is another constitutive factor to intercultural education which can function adequately if national cultures are allowed to exist and to develop. Intercultural education should focus on preparing young people for 'the open multicultural world' by 'expanding the dialogue of cultures'. That is to say that students should be educationally oriented towards 'effective intercultural communication' through 'systematic, cultural, axiological, and competence approaches' specific to 'an interactive learning environment'.

Global access to information through mobile access to the internet across the globe pushes the reality of intercultural education in the direction of its global responsibility, an aspect which is competently covered by R. Räsänen (2007). Building on the permanent reality of change in today's world, Räsänen notices that change affects human societies in their entirety to the point that people start questioning the actual reality of phenomena in the context of 'the unifying effects of globalization' and the 'decentralization' of meaning, especially when 'the value of local cultures' is supported, especially in Western contexts. In a world where exacerbated competition has resulted in skyrocketing tensions between various nations and where social inequity has been running rampant across Western and non-Western societies, intercultural education, as based on neo-liberal political philosophies, is faced with the possibility to foster cooperation though policies aiming at 'equality, human rights, and peace'. This goal can be achieved through the active promotion of 'universal values or global ethics' by means of 'a commitment to mutual learning and dialogue'.

Dialogue, however, is not that easy to begin and let alone to maintain with a view to long-lasting interaction. This is why M. Porto (2013) insists on the relationship between language and intercultural education in an interview with M. Byram, who focuses on 'the cultural dimension of language education and education in general'. In order to be efficient, intercultural education must provide a historical take on the connection between language and culture. The relevance of intercultural education resides precisely in its capacity to historically liaise with people from various cultures by showing that language and culture are not only mandatory for educational purposes, but also inherent to human development. Thus, the connection between language and culture continues with that between imagination and literature, which all together promote 'intercultural competence' and 'cultural understanding'. Intercultural education must therefore build on encouraging the development of 'emotion, affect, and imagination', whose pedagogical value is vital for the attainment of the goals of intercultural education.

Consequently, intercultural education cannot be detached from the necessity of interaction, not only between teachers and students, but also between teachers and teachers, as well as students and students, mostly because interaction means cooperation, and cooperation leads to practical results. Thus, Finkbeiner and Koplin (2002) suggest a 'cooperative approach for facilitating intercultural education' which is based on the idea that the interaction between people of different cultures cannot be detached from learning processes. However, when it comes to learning, intercultural education must always be dealt with in 'a constructive way', based on a series of aspects which are mandatory for its effectiveness. To put it into a nutshell, intercultural education should be seen as a sum of learning processes based on 'critical thinking' and 'metacognitive awareness', so learning aspects about cultural contexts is mandatory. This leads to 'cultural and language awareness' and cooperation, and once cooperation has been achieved pedagogically (from the teacher to the student and the other way around), all the people involved become more aware of 'the subjectivity and relativity of culture and thinking', which results in 'increased competence' about various methods of research. The end results of intercultural education are therefore a boost in 'self-confidence' and a 'better understanding' of reciprocal trust.

Intercultural education is, after all, a form of education, which means that it must be done pedagogically by professional teachers. Hence, there should be a system which trains teachers in the field of intercultural education. With that in mind, Achaeva, Daurova, Pospelova, and Borysov (2018) indicated that intercultural education must take into account a complex range of facts, amongst which some of the most important are some 'interacting processes of unification, diversification, globalization, and multiculturalism'. For intercultural education to be adequately carried out, pedagogical and psychological standards must be in place and applied in the classroom for the 'formation of cultural pluralism' among the future teachers. The need for teachers to acquire

pedagogical and psychological competences in intercultural education is evident, because the purpose of this cross-cultural endeavor is to support 'harmonization of relations between representatives of different civilizations and cultures'. This means that intercultural education must find ever new ways not only to avoid ethnocentrism, but also to stimulate 'the interest of learners in new knowledge' about the multifaceted reality of culture.

Teaching and learning must be combined in any educational context and M. Laurenço (2018) demonstrates it, while also placing intercultural education at the same level with global education and international education. In such a globalized context, dominated by interconnectedness, technological progress, fast communication, and broad travel opportunities, intercultural education cannot escape crucial factors such as the 'economic, political, social, and cultural spheres'. The result is that the problems of some became the problems of many, to the point that intercultural education now has to deal with 'climate change, war and conflict, gender and social inequality, poverty and unemployment and forced migration'. When these problems bring together people from various contexts in the same classroom, addressing them becomes an issue of specific competencies. This is why, in efficiently dealing with these complex issues, intercultural education needs a broad range of skills, among which the most important stand out as critical thinking, negotiation, knowledge, understanding, communication, social justice, and a profound understanding of diversity. In light of these challenges, one of the most valued features of intercultural education is internationalization.

However, internationalization brings with it a series of social disparities which are quite sensitive in Western societies. This is why when it comes to discussing the lack of equality, especially in the context of social justice, opinions tend not only to be diverse, but also insisted upon. Consequently, Marginson and Sawir (2011) insist that any initiative which approaches intercultural education should not be seen or held as definitive or having the final word in the matter. Thus, the matters pertaining to intercultural education should be perceived rather as 'an ongoing conversation', without claims to categorical utterances but with an aim at forming competences in teaching and learning. This is because intercultural education revolves around complex issues which must always be contextualized while keeping in mind 'some general principles' like 'openness and responsiveness'. Another reason for this cautious approach resides in the fact that intercultural education is about 'human relations' that seek to find solutions to 'unresolved issues', especially the most sensitive aspects related to race, ethnicity, sex, gender, and the like, for which definitive solutions – if any – are yet to be found.

The complexity of intercultural education is evident from the various perspectives not as much on what it is, but rather on how it should be implemented by means of developing educational competences. It is the practical aspect of intercultural education and not so much its theoretical

counterpart which emerges as difficult to deal with in concrete terms. For instance, Leeman and Ledoux (2005) warn that 'the theoretical debate on intercultural education is far removed from daily practice in the classroom', and classroom experience is anything but positive in the absence of specific educational competences. Sobering as it is, this realization leads them to affirm that 'experience-related ideas' and 'the insights of teachers' should be constitutive elements of constructive debates about intercultural education. Moreover, intercultural education should be conceived of along the lines of a 'pluralistic interpretation', because this will lead inevitably to 'particular pedagogical approach'. This is why, when it comes to intercultural education, 'theoretical agreement' and 'conceptual clarity' should ideally go hand in hand from education policies to classroom teaching and individual learning.

Intercultural Education as Pedagogical Application

A third dimension of intercultural education is pedagogical application, in the absence of which education itself becomes superfluous. Classroom reality, therefore, is what makes things difficult in adequately dealing with intercultural education at a personal level. In this respect, K. Wereszczyńska (2018) points out that cultural realities are by no means definitive matters, which means that there should be a rather wide and consistent space within which we not only discuss about intercultural education but also apply it on a pedagogical level. Thus, in order for intercultural education to really work in the classroom, Wereszczyńska reminds us of a series of facts: first, there is no such thing as a 'typical' representative of a certain culture; second, there is no homogeneity across a culture; third, personal identity is always determined 'in relation to members of other groups'; fourth, a certain culture conveys 'values and patterns', and fifth, personal identity is never finished or oblivious to change. These five aspects are powerful reminders that intercultural education is extremely fluid and consequently open to various interpretations of virtually all the aspects specific to cultural realities.

K. Bleszynska (2008) also brings to the fore a key aspect of cultural education which relates especially to how it works in society, with particular reference to other branches of education, which confirms that the pedagogical level of intercultural education is crucial. Thus, Bleszynska insists that intercultural education must be conceived and applied in such a way that it should work in all the levels of society, in conjunction with the 'theory development' about its complex realities. She also argues that intercultural education must never be considered alone even if it is a field of inquiry of its own standing. For instance, intercultural education should work in close connection with other 'subdisciplines of the educational sciences', such as international education, comparative education, peace education, and civic education, especially in light of the fact that globalization and

migration have been affecting Western countries for decades. Also, intercultural education must be approached pedagogically in such a way that 'political and historical conditions' are taken into full account. Last, but not least, intercultural education must find ways to focus on global issues, regional concerns, national realities, racial problems, compensatory efforts, as well as 'civic and cultural borderland-oriented paradigms'.

The pedagogical element of intercultural education highlights the reality of intersectionality which, in its capacity as a sociological analytical framework, forces us to consider the role of the context in intercultural theology and a relevant piece in this regard is produced by U. Najar (2016). More precisely, Najar focuses on contextuality as a crucial component of intercultural education, because 'the individual learning experience plays an important role for intercultural learning processes'. Thus, one cannot exclude the reality of the context, mostly because the context is not given only by the 'out-of-class learning environments', but also the very reality of the classroom which works as a pedagogical context for intercultural education. Conceived of in these terms, the context becomes a dynamic reality based on complex networks of relationships 'involving human actors, practices, and objects'. One can even speak of an 'intercultural field' to denote the context in which intercultural education should be carried out by means of relationships, learning products, and various transformations in the classroom as well as outside it.

In dealing with intercultural education, both the aspects of 'inter-' and 'culture' have been not only analyzed but also disputed quite intensely. However, even if attempts have been made to minimize the idea of culture in favor of the 'inter-' aspect, to the point the culture because secondary to human interaction in the context of learning both in and outside the classroom, one cannot totally ignore the reality of culture, which is not merely experienced but also needs to be taught. For example, Ogay and Edelmann (2016) propose a new reassessment of culture and contextual reality for intercultural education, especially from the perspective of intercultural teacher training and especially its pedagogical elements. Culture cannot and should not be abandoned as a concept and even less so as reality. On the contrary, it should be highlighted as the context of intercultural education as well as the means of pedagogical efforts. Thus, culture should be approached heuristically as a context of 'cultural difference', which can be visualized by means of the three metaphors of language (a shared reality, although interpreted in different ways), air (a multilevel reality usually noticed only when missing), and liquid (a dynamic reality in constant change from one state to another).

When it comes to the heart of the matter, namely with the individual, personal, and subjective reality of the learners in a classroom, intercultural education must be implemented by well-trained educators whose pedagogy is adapted to the challenges of multicultural classrooms. Thus, P. Gorski (2008) proposes a 'philosophy of decolonizing intercultural education' which may

or may not have to do with actual geographical and political locations where colonization was an issue. In fact, this idea of 'decolonizing' intercultural education has to do more with 'colonial' attitudes, rather than colonial situations. Concretely, it is argued that a proper intercultural education must be based on an educational philosophy which excludes 'dominant hegemony', 'prevailing social hierarchies', and 'inequitable distributions of power'. In turn, such an educational philosophy should turn intercultural education into an effort to provide equity to all learners by working on 'practice and personal relationships'. In becoming so, intercultural education must be characterized by subtlety and consciousness, two features which must be cultivated in such a way that theory and practice converge in dealing with learners from different cultural backgrounds.

Even if traditionally, intercultural education had been approached from the perspective of Western educational contexts which have to integrate people from a rather large range of non-Western cultural backgrounds, M. Bennett (2009) shows that there is also another angle which must be taken into account if we are to deal with intercultural education from as many perspective as possible for the benefit of both teachers and learners. In doing so, Bennett highlights the fact that, especially in universities, students have the chance to come across intercultural contexts outside their Western comfort zone. Given that the European Union has a series of programs which finance student exchange, we are presented with concrete situations in which Western students are offered the opportunity to travel abroad, in non-Western countries, and witness firsthand interactions with people of radically different cultures. This indicates that intercultural education is far from being unidirectionally oriented from non-Western to Western contexts; the reverse move, from Western to non-Western cultures is also not only valid, but also desirable if intercultural education is to become more than merely a pedagogical slogan.

Given that not only Western countries in Europe face the challenge of migration, Western countries in Asia, such as Singapore, find themselves in somewhat the same situation. In this specific context, R. Tupas (2014) shows that intercultural education is defined predominantly by intercultural pedagogy which reflects the 'complexity of everyday intercultural classroom practices'. Learners are thus taught to deal with interculturality in a way which forces them to 'engage critically with intercultural issues'. Thus, Tupas discusses intercultural education from three perspectives: first, reification, which focuses on 'essentializing' individuals, communities, and countries); second, 'critical trajectories', that help learners pinpoint stereotypes as well as become more aware of the nuances characterizing individuals and countries, and third, 'conflicting trajectories' that are supposed to develop capacities towards identifying cultural specificities in a critical way, although they often collapse into reifying tendencies. To conclude, in order for intercultural education to develop critically, 'micro-lenses' are needed for critical reflection 'in everyday classroom practice'.

In order to adapt to so many cultural aspects within the reality of classroom situations, intercultural education needs to be essentially based on 'transformative learning'. This idea is promoted by A. Nagata (2006), who sees transformative learning as a 'major theory of adult education' aimed at 'stimulating personal change'. In other words, intercultural education should focus on transforming individuals on a very personal level, but this cannot be achieved unless intercultural education is seen as 'intercultural communication'. Students need to be taught how to communicate in such a way that subjective and objective meaning becomes transformative in their personal experiences. Consequently, intercultural education needs to be anchored in a 'holistic pedagogical approach' that 'emphasizes reflection and self-reflexivity'. The purpose here is to 'promote integrative development of students as whole people', which means that intercultural education needs to focus on all the aspects of the students' experience so that their lives should be meaningful in all respects. Thus, 'new ways of being' are envisaged as intercultural education seeks to transform human beings through pedagogical techniques that enhance self-awareness and provide them with 'new skills' as part of a life-long learning process.

Even though most discussions about intercultural education seems to be rather theoretical in nature, their focus on ideas that are supposed to be implemented in the practical context of classrooms is commendable, mostly because they are based on educational – often specifically pedagogical – models. In this respect, W. Stephan and C. Stephan (2013) came up with a 'six stage model for the design of evidence-based intercultural education and training programs': first, performing a selection of cultures and subgroups; second, setting the goals; third, identifying 'relevant theories of culture, culture change, and adaptation; fourth, focusing on psychological and communication processes; fifth, pinpointing exercises and techniques to set in motion the psychological and communication processes, and sixth, providing an evaluation of the effectiveness of these processes as part of an educational program. This solution shows promising results because it combines theory and practice in approaching the psychological and communication process, by promoting 'intergroup dialogues' for pedagogical effectiveness.

When cooperation is successful, Aguado and Malik (2009) demonstrate that intercultural education is capable of addressing a series of complex realities, such as 'the creation of new social spheres'. In doing so, the actors involved in the pedagogical and learning process of intercultural education will understand the crucial role of 'negotiation and creativity', because cooperation involves not only interaction, but also communication. It is argued, therefore, that interaction and communication should be heralded as the very 'focus for practice in educational institutions'. It is precisely here where the discussion gets a bit more complex and perhaps even more difficult because, while primary and secondary education institutions tend to be more flexible, higher education institutions tend to resist change and prefer traditional ways of doing education. So

intercultural education should become a focus in tertiary education institutions, which need to reconsider their educational convictions, teaching methods, pedagogical strategies, and internal organization – all with a clear focus on achieving intercultural education at all levels: academic, communitarian, and structural.

It is usually the case that the discussions about intercultural education focus on the 'common good' aspect of the process' efficiency, in the sense that they aim at improving the lives of students as a group. The other approach, which focuses on the students as individuals, is taken by M. Voinea (2012), who suggests that intercultural education has a role in 'defining the system of individual values'. In this regard, intercultural education should be seen as 'education for values' because it must shape a certain array of values if its main desiderates in fostering equity, inclusivity, justice, and respect are to be achieved at all levels of the students' learning experience. Intercultural education should not be directed only towards achieving learning outcomes, but also at pedagogically establishing a system of values, such as education, honesty, and religion, which are generally considered lost in Western countries. At the same time, intercultural education should be fully aware of what today's students consider as key values, among which the most salient appears to be financial stability. It is crucial thus to see that students today focus on a system of values which is not necessarily or exclusively moral, but also pragmatic.

The role of values in intercultural education pushes the debates on a rather interesting path, namely that of 'reading' its core ideological features in more than just one way. As such, M. Dasli (2018) proposes a 'deconstructive' reading of the UNESCO guidelines on intercultural education. In doing so, the focus does not reside mainly in identifying empirical realities, but rather in dealing with some 'basic ideological assumptions'. This deconstructive reading is based on Derrida's 'deconstruction strategy' which demonstrates that certain claims to 'social cohesion and peace' end up erasing 'difference' even if they promise the promotion thereof. The aim here is to raise awareness about the fact that the most important claims of intercultural education – which promise, for instance, social justice for the sake of individuals and communities of students – may result in achieving the opposite if certain pedagogical and learning standards are not carefully understood and applied in real life situations.

It should be clear by now that education specialists have attempted to cover the theoretical framework as well as the practical application of intercultural education from as many angles as possible, but we are not there yet. There is still some rethinking needed in the field, and M. Lanas (2014) manages to demonstrate that by highlighting two gaps in intercultural education: first, the student teacher education is somewhat left aside as 'a context for teaching intercultural education, and second, the very 'self of the teacher educator' is equally overlooked. In order to address these two gaps, two solutions are suggested: first, intercultural education should be seen as a proper

context for the student teacher education critically, structurally, and ideologically, and second, intercultural education is unlikely to achieve its goals in the absence of considering the 'pedagogical relationship between a student teacher and a teacher educator'. This second aspect should be approached with a specific focus on 'the self of the teacher educator'. When educators know what to do, intercultural education has increased chances of successful outcomes in pluricultural contexts.

Another gap in intercultural education is that between the collective nature of interculturality and the deciding factors regarding the differences between cultures. Thus, R. Aman (2013) reveals that, from the perspective of modernity, intercultural education must deal with the gap between the reality of cultural difference and the value of cultural difference. What he means by that is that we are still pursued by what he calls 'the shadow of coloniality' which is a phenomenon associated with modernity. Thus, Western perspectives on intercultural education are pretty much affected by colonial views which differentiate between the value of certain cultures, in the sense that some are considered more important than others. Intercultural education must make an effort to pedagogically erase this perceived difference about the value of cultures and, in doing, so to provide cultural equality and justice for 'a path towards improved global cultural relations'. Thus, the actual interculturality of intercultural education must be characterized not only by equality, but also by fairness and objectivity about the value of different cultures.

Having established the most important features of intercultural education as well as three of its main gaps that call for further investigation in the field, what follows is an analysis of how the notion of ecodomy as constructive intent works within intercultural pedagogy (seen as constitutive element of intercultural education) not only for professional achievement, but also for existential meaningfulness.

CHAPTER 3. INTERCULTURAL PEDAGOGY AS ECODOMY

When seen as a constructive process, ecodomy appears to be synonymous with constructiveness, while the adjective 'ecodomical' appears to share the same meaning with the adjective 'constructive'. Their synonymy, however, is not complete and the two adjectives do not overlap perfectly. While the adjective 'constructive' refers to the fact that a person or a group pursues improvement and development, the adjective 'ecodomical' brings with it the idea of a community that appears in the context of improvement and development for the sake of making life a most fulfilling experience. In other words, ecodomy is not just construction; it is a special sort of construction, which aims at building a community of persons interested in promoting improvement and development as a shared goal for a better life. So, if doing something constructively means that one pursues excellence in working towards a goal, doing something ecodomically implies, as we see in Rossing and Buitendag (2020), that one seeks outstanding results while surrounding himself or herself by like-minded people who live 'life in its fullness' as part of a community sharing the same purpose. It could be argued that, in addition to the idea of 'construction' which targets improvement and development, the concept of 'ecodomy' carries within an existential component that makes improvement and development a shared goal for a meaningful life. For instance, C. Niemandt (2015) explains that an ecodomical life is not only a life worth living, but a life based on values which sees value in the surrounding reality. This chapter is an attempt to show how intercultural pedagogy can be not only constructive in achieving its expected professional goals, but also ecodomical in doing so by enriching the lives of teachers and students with value and meaning.

Intercultural Pedagogy as Language Teaching

The first aspect which emerges as vital in intercultural pedagogy is language teaching. In A. Ojiugo Lilian (2018), intercultural pedagogy is a matter of exposure; an image which is quite telling especially with reference to early childhood, when learners are most avid to acquire knowledge. This cultural exposure leads to an 'encounter with different cultures' which, in turn, places the students on the path to 'growth and richness'. This is how they broaden their 'cultural horizons' through 'didactic activities'. This is true especially when culture and languages are put together, mostly because it is usually the case that different cultures come up with different languages. An ecodomical approach to pedagogy in the case of young children will help them engage with people of different cultures and thus train them 'to become citizens of a multicultural and plurilingual world'. In this sense, intercultural pedagogy results in 'intercultural awareness' and respect for other cultures.

The relationship between culture and language is also explored by R. Moloney (2012), for whom intercultural pedagogy integrates 'critical cultural reflection within language learning'. To achieve this goal, intercultural pedagogy must find new ways to present itself as a 'new pedagogy' which becomes an 'intercultural language pedagogy'. In this sense, if it is to reach its focus, intercultural pedagogy must operate as pedagogy of engagement as well as a pedagogy of daily interaction. An ecodomical intercultural pedagogy will foster 'changes in understanding' as well as in 'intended practice', while identifying not only the needs of the students, but also those of the teachers. In this regard, intercultural pedagogy is a pedagogy of intervention aimed at challenging established cultural assumptions in order to serve the teachers and the students in their educational endeavors.

Language teaching, as also confirmed by A. Liddicoat (2008), goes hand in hand with intercultural pedagogy because the interaction between cultures is first and foremost an interaction of languages. One of the most important aspects of intercultural pedagogy, when it comes to language teaching, is 'the development of intercultural abilities' for both teaching languages and learning languages. An ecodomical application of intercultural pedagogy in this field should address the challenges of language teaching so that teaching as well as learning languages leads to the integration of the students within their current society. The key word here is the need for constant 'refocusing' of intercultural pedagogy on the efficiency of the 'languages curriculum' with its permanent 'language focus'. In intercultural pedagogy, an ecodomical take on it means that 'the heart of the curriculum' remains language education.

For L. Kasumagić-Kafedžić (2023), language didactics is what constitutes the core of intercultural pedagogy when seen as critical pedagogy for teacher education. In the absence of teaching and learning languages, there is no intercultural pedagogy, mostly because without languages one cannot claim any attempts to implement interdisciplinary approaches for intercultural understanding. Since stereotypes and prejudices often constitute daily norms within societies, moving beyond them ecodomically, so that people live their lives meaningfully, is a crucial mandate of intercultural pedagogy. For that to happen, intercultural pedagogy must be able to articulate educational goals, promote values, enhance experiences, and transform lives by 'nurturing intercultural understanding and peace values'. Despite challenges and difficulties, intercultural pedagogy must focus on 'intercultural contents', come up with 'model lessons', and provide 'learning outcomes'. These goals can be reached for as long as intercultural pedagogy is ecodomically focused on theories of pedagogy that work critically, principles of learning that function trans-formatively, and humanistic convictions that enrich lives holistically.

A very interesting and yet potentially controversial perspective on intercultural education is proposed by S. Sorotou (2018), who advocates the use of myths in performing intercultural

education when focused on teaching Greek as a foreign language. In short, myths are considered as possessing a 'pedagogical value' that 'encapsulate the deeper aspects of the human psyche', in which sense they are 'attractive' and 'engaging' as pedagogical tools. Moreover, myths propose images of various interactions between different cultures while also 'aiming at making people go along with each other in a prosperous and peaceful way'. Debatable as it is with reference to myths, this statement can be true when one speaks about intercultural education in its ecodomical dimensions. As such, intercultural pedagogy should aim at the 'opening of the spirit', which is a decisively ecodomical achievement, especially when it leads to hospitality and permanence in dealing with learning. Intercultural pedagogy should ecodomically transcend ethnic and cultural differences in order to promote harmony, embrace, and creativity.

One of the most visible aspects of intercultural theology is plurilinguism, and J. Lwanga-Lumu (2020) discusses it in the context of 'massive migration' and 'rapid change' in South Africa. Plurilinguism is a huge challenge to intercultural pedagogy which, through its professionals, must find solutions to help students of various cultures to learn and live together. In such a context, intercultural pedagogy becomes a pedagogy of intervention which reveals its ecodomical strengths when it can 'improve student performance, social cohesion, economic development, and peaceful coexistence'. This seems quite a lot for a single educational field to deal with, but a starting point could be identified in the dialectical relationship between 'intercultural communicative language teaching' and 'language learning'. One of the many purposes of this complex endeavor is to support intercultural education in its efforts to decolonize African curricula for educational and social transformation.

Intercultural pedagogy uses many methods to engage teachers and students, but Gregersen and Due Tiemensma (2006) speak about storyline as method to foster intercultural competence. However, in order for the storyline to function with a view to producing intercultural competence, it needs to be aware of the crucial relationship between 'identity, culture, and language'. Intercultural pedagogy cannot work well if these three aspects are not included in the discourse of 'the intercultural speaker', namely the pedagogue who interacts with students 'through the teaching of both linguistic skills and cultural knowledge'. Concretely, intercultural pedagogy becomes ecodomical when it develops the storyline based on 'setting a scene', identifying the characters, finds a 'way of life to investigate', and singles out 'real problems to be solved'. The teacher must therefore develop his own perspective on the storyline, so that he becomes able to transfer his or her knowledge to the students.

Intercultural pedagogy can be useful not only for people who have normal abilities to learn, but also – as we read in R. Ayres (2022) – for students with Specific Reading Comprehension Deficits, who experience difficulties in understanding the meaning of the words that are being read.

These students find it hard to understand the texts they read even though their 'decoding competency' is still intact. Thus, it is suggested that intercultural pedagogy should be coupled with multimodal pedagogy in order to help them, which means that intercultural pedagogy will have to address a series of issues, amongst which the most important include 'semantic and grammatical processing skills', 'oral language skills', 'background knowledge', 'inference making', multiple comprehension aspects, 'working memory', 'inhibition', and 'attention'. Intercultural pedagogy can act ecodomically in these cases by 'critical intervention' and 'early enriching … experience', so that the few students in a classroom who fight these comprehension issues should be fully integrated within the multicultural society they live in.

Students may have to face difficulties from within by experiencing various psychological disorders or from outside, such as 'contexts of conflict'. In dealing with the latter, Holmes and Peña Dix (2022) focus on how intercultural pedagogy can use language and communication to help students in difficult times, especially as they go through various social conflicts. Thus, intercultural education is going to have to be applied in 'disadvantaged backgrounds', especially by pre-service teachers who specialize in language didactics. In such cases, intercultural pedagogy will have to find ecodomical ways to be transformative, collaborative, and critical, so that the students are exposed to intercultural communication. Conflict zones are usually multicultural because of 'forced migration', which comes with 'economic marginalization', which means that intercultural pedagogy will have to focus on being socially activist to 'engage young people directly in intercultural communication'. Intercultural pedagogy can therefore be ecodomical and attach meaning to the lives of young people by using 'creative arts methods' to encourage and enhance intercultural communication.

Even if teachers and students are both important in intercultural pedagogy, the role of teachers is primordial for making sure that the proposed result of the didactical enterprise are being met in the educational process. Aulia and Khaerudin (2021) investigate intercultural pedagogy through language teaching from the perspective of achieving not only intercultural communication, but also intercultural values. It is in this latter aspect that the ecodomical aspects of intercultural pedagogy are emphasized, especially when one realizes that teachers can provide profound meaning to the pedagogical context of students. Thus, intercultural pedagogy provides a correlation between what the teacher does and what the teacher believes, so there has to be an 'interrelationship between the teacher's 'personal development' and the teacher's personal belief. This is crucial because it is the teacher who the students' 'intercultural profile positioning'. In this regard, intercultural pedagogy should be 'personal, contextual, and dynamic' in order to ecodomically improve the students' individual perspective on the multicultural society wherein they live.

A crucial part of intercultural pedagogy is intercultural language teaching. Tajeddin and Khanlarzadeh (2023) focus on intercultural education from this specific perspective, which is supposed to produce 'intercultural communicative competence' in language didactics. For intercultural pedagogy to work towards the actual achievement of intercultural competences related to communication in specific languages, educational institutions need educational policies through dedicated programs. Acquiring intercultural language competencies is especially problematic in relatively monochromatic cultures, where dominant cultural perspective exert pressure on minority cultures, which is the case of Iran, for instance. Thus, an ecodomical goal for intercultural pedagogy in this respect could focus on the activity of educational policymakers to take into consideration the reality of intercultural 'similarities and differences'. This is why the first to be educated in this regard should be language teachers, so that their pedagogy becomes intercultural and competence-oriented.

In Bendraou and Sakale (2023), the notion of intercultural pedagogy is called 'critical pedagogy', mainly because it seen as a specific type of pedagogy which provides 'intercultural understanding' by promoting a 'value-based education' through high-order thinking skills' through language didactic. This reveals the ecodomical constitution of intercultural pedagogy, since high-order thinking skills include analysis, synthesis, reasoning, comprehension, application, and assessment – all cognitive processes that have the capacity to transform one's perception about self and other. Intercultural pedagogy is therefore focused on embracing 'educational values' and 'intercultural identity' by explaining the 'value of individual freedom' in a multicultural world dominated by globalization. The purpose of intercultural pedagogy is to help students accept people of different cultures by raising awareness about their 'intercultural and critical cultural responsibility'. This can be done through 'reflection, essentialism, and cosmopolitanism' for as long as the educational system is willing to promote value-based approaches to teaching and learning. Intercultural pedagogy encourages 'critical literacy' to help students understand the importance of 'description, interpretation, and explanation' through the use of language 'as a form of political and social practice'.

Internationalization is a key element of intercultural pedagogy, but it is not the only one needed for success, especially when dealing with learning a second language. As we see in J. Jackson (2017), students need more than just international experience to attain 'higher levels of second language proficiency, global-mindedness, and intercultural sensitivity'. While the traditional 'immersion assumption' works to a certain extent, intercultural pedagogy can be enriched by language learning when certain interventions are used to 'deepen and extend' student competence in learning a second language. What is needed here is 'to bridge the research-teaching nexus', in the absence of which optimization cannot be achieved with reference to study abroad initiatives. From

an ecodomical perspective, intercultural pedagogy must challenge already-in-place teaching and learning programs by supplementing existing teaching curricula with elements originating in ongoing research efforts to improve intercultural learning.

An approach which is inherently ecodomical with reference to intercultural pedagogy was provided by J. Peskoller (2023) sees 'classrooms as meeting places' that enable students to learn from one another, especially when they come from different cultural environments. In intercultural pedagogy, the understanding of culture should be 'open and dynamic' with a decisive orientation towards the individual as a learner. Since all human beings share not only similarities, but also differences, intercultural pedagogy should grow aware of the 'multitude of dimensions' that are extant within the human being as well as among human beings. In a multicultural context, intercultural pedagogy should use 'holistic and continuous' approaches to teaching and learning with a specific focus on language education. This, on the other hand, must be done critically given the 'existing diversity inside classrooms', which can make intercultural pedagogy integrative and reflexive based on promoting knowledge through 'perspective-changing' efforts and critical analysis. Thus, intercultural pedagogy will ecodomically cultivate 'open-mindedness, awareness of diversity, respect for otherness, reflexivity, empathy, and willingness to act'. In doing so, students will be equipped with 'cognitive, affective, and action-oriented dimensions' towards achieving a genuine 'global citizenship'.

Intercultural communicative competence is another often spotted highlight of the various discussions about intercultural pedagogy. In providing insights about the matter, H. Hoff (2014) points to Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence while showing the need for intercultural pedagogy to focus on 'the personal and cultural development of individuals' in light of the concept of *Bildung*. Thus, in intercultural pedagogy, acquiring intercultural communicative competence should be 'understood as an educational goal', especially when it comes to teaching foreign languages. Since Byram's model with five aspects – such as knowledge of self and others through interactions, attitudes about self and other by shifting the focus from self to other, skills for interpretation and relation processes, skills for discovery and interaction processes, as well as critical awareness about political education and cultural realities – is used for achieving intercultural communication competence, it is argued that his model places too much 'emphasis on harmony and agreement'. A better, and specifically ecodomical solution can be reached by using intercultural pedagogy to teach people how to read the reality of conflict. In other words, ambiguity and difference should not be regarded exclusively as 'challenging aspects' in 'intercultural encounter'; on the contrary, they should be critically read as 'fruitful condition' for encouraging a deeper 'dialogue between self and other', evidently for a better understanding of people across more or less conflicting cultures.

If I were to single out a key aspect of intercultural pedagogy which is truly ecodomical it will have to be linguistic citizenship. A useful investigation into the concept of linguistic citizenship is provided by L. Sun (2023), who explores 'the constructive role of English as a foreign language'. From this perspective, intercultural pedagogy can be viewed as a 'critical intercultural discourse' because it turns teachers into 'agents of action' and implementors of 'social change'. Also, intercultural pedagogy must use critical discourse analysis in order to oversee the development of teachers as individuals who acquire 'critical intercultural awareness'. To be successful in this endeavor, intercultural pedagogy should be supported by 'teacher education programs' which challenge 'hegemonic ideologies' in school curricula. To this end, intercultural pedagogy will have to engage in a 'justice-oriented dialogue' which helps learners to develop personal capacities for reflection and action. In doing so, the students will learn not only how to master a foreign language that allows them to become citizens of a multicultural society, but also how to engage in living purposefully in the world irrespective of cultural challenges.

Intercultural Pedagogy as Critical Thinking

The second aspect which defines intercultural pedagogy has to do with critical thinking. If intercultural pedagogy is to become truly ecodomical, then we learn from E. Start (2019) that it must turn into an 'intercultural communication pedagogy'. By focusing on efficient communication, intercultural pedagogy emerges as an efficient educational process by promoting 'crystallization' in the context of the students' 'creative process for learning' through critical thinking. Thus, intercultural pedagogy contributes ecodomically to the enrichment of the students' lives by helping them 'fulfil the need for relatedness', then by focusing on promoting 'insightful, personally meaningful knowledge', and, lastly, by encouraging them to cultivate 'reflexive thinking'. In doing so, intercultural pedagogy emerges as ecodomical by teaching students how to be critically open, authentic, sympathetic, appreciative, and reflexive in their relationship with people of different cultures.

Intercultural pedagogy is indeed ecodomical when it creates opportunities to 'critically examine cultural assumptions, as we find out in Moloney, Harbon, and Fielding (2016). In order for this process to be also meaningful on the long term, the people who participate in the learning process as representatives of different cultures working together in the same educational environment must work together not only in the classroom, but also outside it. Thus, their interaction must allow for all participants to 'voice diverse perspectives', as well as 'notice, explore, and respect the complexity of the interaction'. In this regard, ecodomical intercultural pedagogy

promotes transformative thinking and dynamic understanding by using critical reflection in the acquisition of knowledge through 'active questioning' of various cultural perspectives and assumptions.

On the other hand, intercultural pedagogy cannot be ecodomical without creating a context of 'cultural awareness'. Ghasemi Mighani, Yazdanimoghaddam, and Mohseni (2019) show that only approaches which are considered constructively have a real chance at promoting a genuine intercultural pedagogy by creating 'intercultural skills'. Thus, intercultural pedagogy must find ways to promote 'teaching procedures', 'concrete methodologies', and 'tangible pedagogical frameworks' to capitalize the intercultural skills for the implementation of teaching and learning processes. The medium by which all these can become not only possible, but also meaningful is 'effective communication', which allows for a positive experience of intercultural interactions. Intercultural pedagogy reaches its ecodomical capabilities when it is implemented through 'critical thinking strategies' for 'critical cultural awareness'. This way, intercultural pedagogy promotes meaningful processes involving discoveries, interactions, interpretations, relationships, and evaluations.

Within the very same line of thought, namely one which equates intercultural pedagogy with a critical pedagogy, L. Kasumagić-Kafedžić (2017) insists that such didactical efforts should always be in search of 'new opportunities for creativity, innovation, and new developments'. Intercultural societies are not always bent on providing the best opportunities for growth when it comes to people from other cultures, but an ecodomical intercultural pedagogy will strive for 'comprehensive reforms' that aim at teaching 'skills, attitudes, and knowledge'. All these must be done by transfer for transformation 'in critical, constructive, and empathic ways', which constitute the very essence of ecodomy. Dead ends and stagnation should be avoided at all costs, so that intercultural pedagogy seeks the best educational services for teacher education in general and for children's life in particular. Consequently, teachers must constantly attend 'teacher education programs', learn how to be 'educational administrators', and become involved in 'curricular reforms'.

The intercultural competence which intercultural pedagogy is supposed to provide students with is not just an abstract concept. On the contrary, as we see in Sommier, Wang, and Vasques (2022), intercultural competences should be 'sustainability-oriented', especially in the higher education which should 'produce creativity' and 'critical thinking'. Thus, the students should be 'empowered' by these intercultural competences to 'address urban sustainability challenges', which means that they should be taught how to lead their lives in the complex realities of the cities. This is why these sustainability-oriented intercultural competences must be based on 'transformative, interdisciplinary, and intercultural learning'. Intercultural pedagogy reveals its ecodomical capabilities when it helps students develop professionally as they actively integrate their lives in the

complex life of the urban environment. The integration though needs to be done meaningfully in order to be sustainability-oriented as supported by tertiary education curricula and didactics.

Investigating the reality of culture through intercultural pedagogy takes many forms, but A. Drissat (2022) explores how intercultural pedagogy is able to develop 'critical consciousness' in the lives of students, who are therefore helped to reflexively develop critical thinking about 'culture, identity, stereotypes, and ethnicity'. This goal can be achieved through 'dialogic classroom interaction', but in order for it to become genuinely ecodomic in nature, intercultural pedagogy must find ways to challenge the students by teaching them how to question as well as defend the complex realities of culture. One of the main goals of intercultural education is to identify 'the wider ideological structures' which not only provide legitimacy, but also support the 'processes of oppression and inequality'. As part of this endeavor, intercultural pedagogy can ecodomically promote 'critical consciousness', which in turn leads to 'stereotype deconstruction' by challenging 'normative assumptions' about the reality of the self and the reality of the other.

The various methods used by intercultural pedagogy to reach its goals includes a combination of what M. Aulia (2023) calls 'macro levels' and 'micro levels', which refers to 'discourse building' and 'personal belief' or 'personal trajectory'. According to this methodology, intercultural pedagogy is promoted by means of specialized curricula focusing on multilingual educational contexts. A key element that should be taken into consideration is the necessity to challenge the way teachers understand multicultural realities by cultivating their 'critical awareness' about 'values, beliefs, and behaviors'. For intercultural pedagogy to work ecodomically, it is not enough to entertain a focus on curriculum development; another aspect which is equally important revolves around the need to support teacher practice. Whan national identity collides with intercultural identity, intercultural pedagogy should be able to encourage didactic reflexivity in teachers as well as create 'critical intercultural skills' as part of the students' educational experience.

Another approach that focuses on teacher development is that of L. Darii (2023), who argues that today's teachers must find new ways to develop their own competences when faced with a series of social phenomena, such as 'globalization, migration, and population diversity'. These three aspects have been traditionally part of intercultural pedagogy, mostly because 'intercultural competence is considered a pivotal domain within the European framework'. Thus, intercultural pedagogy addresses the need to develop didactic skills and behavior, at multiple levels, such as personal, interpersonal, and intercultural, based on learning how to use critical thinking. This way, intercultural pedagogy provides a profoundly ecodomical input by helping students 'constructively engage in both social and professional spheres'. Concretely, intercultural pedagogy can help in at least three directions: first, to enhance the intercultural profile of educational institutions; second, to support the development of teachers towards intercultural competence, and third, to focus on the

intercultural progress of academic curricula by transforming their theoretical 'framework, content, and format'. This should lead to teachers and students transform their 'attitudes and behaviors' and assess their 'assumptions, worldviews, cultures, and knowledge' by critical reflection.

It is vital to understand that intercultural pedagogy works not only in primary, secondary, and tertiary education institutions, but also in preschool establishments. Stier et all (2012) indicate that preschool learners are capable of developing their 'respect to ethnic and cultural diversity' if intercultural pedagogy finds ways to address their 'intercultural sensitivity' by focusing on helping them attain 'intercultural competence'. Not only preschool learners, but also preschool teachers must be exposed to the same didactic challenges in order to become 'interculturally competent', and it is here that critical thinking becomes very important for teachers, who need to discern critically how to teach cultural differences to preschool learners. At this point, intercultural pedagogy exposes its ecodomical traits by focusing on systematic work with a view to developing 'intercultural communication skills' as well as creating 'discursive awareness'. It is clear then that intercultural pedagogy must find ever new ways to debunk 'cultural stereotypes' by actively and critically engaging both teachers and learners in permanent scrutiny endeavors aimed at developing personal values and cultural behavior.

Yaylacı, Yaylacı, and Kobak (2022) investigate a rather interesting method of developing intercultural awareness through what the call 'participatory photography'. Intercultural pedagogy should therefore aim at using any means which demonstrate didactic efficiency and, in this regard, tertiary education students managed to develop their intercultural skills and competence through participatory photography. In a multicultural campus context where foreign people meet and interact regardless of whether they are migrant, refugee, or international students, intercultural pedagogy demonstrate its enormous ecodomical potential by raising awareness about the realities of the 'other' and its often-accompanying prejudice. This specific result was achieved through internationalization policies that were open to accepting the complexities of migration, then by implementing critical pedagogy, and intercultural dialogue – all with the purpose of 'confronting otherness' by meaningful interaction and friendly attitudes. Intercultural pedagogy is therefore not only a means to learn theoretical information, but also to develop crucial social attitudes that build a meaningful perspective on life both at a personal level and throughout society.

An issue which is rarely associated with intercultural pedagogy, but appears to be often inferred within the various discussion in the field has to do with bullying. While investigating the phenomenon, E. Elamé (2013) focuses first on the actual meaning of the term, whose complex usage reveals how intercultural pedagogy can ecodomically help to confine the phenomenon if not completely eradicate it. If bullying is accepted as reflecting 'forms of harassment' which range from verbal to physical manifestations – but also with reference to other possibilities – then intercultural

pedagogy becomes a form of teaching that fosters the personal and communitarian fulfilment of students. Educational institutions are in place to provide formation, development, self-control, restraint, and critical judgment; thus, intercultural pedagogy can fight bullying by focusing on nurturing 'proper judgment' for all the persons who are involved in the educational act, both teachers and students. Intercultural pedagogy should therefore seek to manage and minimize conflicts, create a proper environment for development, deal with 'personal excesses' in specific 'social circles', and openly fight against violence of any sort. When bullying takes the form of sexual aggression, intercultural pedagogy should provide a safe heaven for teachers and students by attempting to eradicate the underlying discrimination involved in bullying.

The reality of conflict is a constant issue in intercultural pedagogy, because conflict is the actual reality which occurs when cultures meet, usually through collision. In exploring the matter, Mudambi et all (2023) focuses on how intercultural pedagogy can provide critical reflexivity through communication. Since conflict is never a reality to be easily appeased with light solutions, the ecodomical nature of intercultural pedagogy is evident when it uses communication as a pedagogical instrument for stimulating critical reflexivity in finding solutions to conflicts. Intercultural conflicts have a certain dynamic which can be addressed with increased efficiency when communication is used pedagogically. For this to work, however, communication must be channeled towards conflict solutions by means of critical reflexivity; one way forward is to determine students to 'question various assumptions' about their own selves as well as about other people. When that happens through pedagogically using communication through critical reflexivity, intercultural pedagogy reveals its capacity to find resolutions to conflict by showing people who they are culturally in relation to other people from different cultural milieus.

Having a similar focus on intercultural competence, M. Milani (2022) strives to provide a perspective which deals with how intercultural competence should be assessed through 'service learning'. Since service learning is directed towards meeting a wide range of societal needs, its ecodomical potential is enormous when intercultural pedagogy adopts it as a 'teaching strategy'. Concretely, service-learning works as a testing tool for evaluating the efficiency of intercultural pedagogy by connecting it with 'living experience' through critical reflection. Service learning is simultaneously an educational approach which, when used within the techniques of intercultural pedagogy, can ensure that intercultural competences are monitored constantly and evaluated permanently 'with a view to continuous improvement'. The aim here is to make sure that students are supported and guided in a way that leads to 'personal growth' for a better service in and to society.

The idea of value is of critical importance for intercultural pedagogy because it reflects and creates a specific ethos, as shown by K. Skubic Ermenc (2016). As an integral part of intercultural

education, intercultural pedagogy must be developed as a 'critical pedagogy' based on relevant 'pedagogical research' with the specific purpose of dealing with 'the power inequalities' within 'the education system itself'. This purpose can be reached if intercultural pedagogy seeks to implement 'a multi-perspective and anti-bias curriculum' by creating a 'school ethos' which is 'democratic', 'pluralistic', and 'inclusive'. When ethos is the core of intercultural pedagogy, the ecodomy of the field itself brings to light the fact that intercultural pedagogy aims at the improvement of human life. This is why intercultural pedagogy should not be seen just as a 'specific pedagogical discipline', but also – and more importantly so – as 'a pedagogical principle' which has the capacity to 'enable recognition and empowerment of all minority groups'.

Intercultural Pedagogy as Context Modelling

The third salient aspect of intercultural pedagogy is the important of context which needs to be modelled, created or shaped, so that it becomes a meaningful world for all those who live in it. For A. Szczurek-Boruta (2012), intercultural pedagogy is constructive process that places the student in 'interaction with the surroundings', thus creating a context of learning, because people tend to learn by challenging their already familiar patterns of thinking with new information they acquire from the environment. In this sense, intercultural pedagogy is a teaching methodology based on conflict, since what the student already knows is often placed against what he or she finds out from investigating the surrounding reality. By making use of this learning conflict, students learn in a constructive way, both in the sense that they build something and in the sense that they find meaning in what they learn. Ecodomic intercultural pedagogy, however, could go a step further in the direction of creating a community of teachers and learners who find meaning for their lives as a result of their 'conflict' with the world.

In providing learning based on the conflict between the context of the learner and the context of the surrounding reality of the world, intercultural pedagogy is a useful epistemological tool, especially in pluriethnic societies. Thus, S. Sani (2014) is a constructive attempt to educate people from various cultures by 'fighting prejudices' as well as the 'lack of knowledge', so that specific mentalities should no longer remain 'restricted' and prejudicious to the cultures of migrant people. The ecodomical nature of intercultural pedagogy resides therefore in helping people not only understand other cultures, but also 'live in a complex and cosmopolitan reality which changes continuously', so that both natives and migrants find meaning for their lives.

When people of different cultures meet, their encounter can turn into a collision or an interaction. It is precisely in this respect that intercultural pedagogy is so very important: it can turn potential conflicts into meaningful exchanges of 'cross-national and cross-cultural' human

experiences. We learn about this aspect from Lee et all (2018), who investigated what happened to 'international students and non-native English speakers' as they interacted in a context set 'to promote inclusion'. This arrangement shed significant light on the ecodomic constitution of intercultural pedagogy, because the participants not only acquired knowledge about 'best practices and relevant research' but also demonstrated that they had pursued 'more purposeful and substantive interactions'. This happened in the classroom and outside it, which confirms the ecodomical essence of intercultural pedagogy when it meaningfully engages people of different cultures.

In order to be ecodomical, intercultural pedagogy must be not only a critical pedagogy, but also an effective exercise in intercultural communication in a specific educational context. Accordingly, Shi-Xu (2001) reveals that intercultural pedagogy must be able to create a rather encompassing range of discourses about 'diversity, equality, common goals, and rational-moral motivation'. All these aspects reveal that pedagogy, is after all, about living life purposefully, but in doing so it must perform a crucial work of 'translation'. Intercultural pedagogy must translate intercultural and linguistic knowledge into intercultural competence. This can be achieved when domination, exclusion, and prejudice are no longer promoted pedagogically in intercultural educational settings. Ecodomic intercultural pedagogy provides 'alternative pedagogical discourses of combating power' through 'discursive transformation' while focusing on one single purpose: that of enriching pedagogical and life experiences with motivation, both rationally and morally.

A similar approach can be identified in C. Potter (2021) who notices that intercultural pedagogical initiatives transcend the mere reality of knowledge acquisition by creating ethical and moral meaning as part of a learning context that shapes the lives of students. Intercultural pedagogy is inherently constructive and ecodomical because it develops various educational approaches that transform learning and life experiences into 'meaning-making' activities, which – in turn – create an 'ethical framework'. This suggests, that ecodomical intercultural pedagogy is and should remain concerned with moral development. It is crucial though that, in intercultural pedagogy, personal values and individual morality should be kept in balance with 'group agreement and consensus'. What remains truly important in the end is that intercultural pedagogy does not succumb to political slogans such as 'global competitiveness and social mobility', but promotes 'deep ethical' commitments.

One of the aspects which are not so often discussed in connection with intercultural pedagogy is religion, although it is perhaps the most ecodomical factor in human life. Religion as a field of inquiry is extremely complex and it becomes even more so when coupled with education. However, for J. Irizarry (2011), Christian religious education can become ecodomically relevant when it focuses on 'the conceptualization of culture' with a view to 'understanding the social nature

of faith communities'; in this respect, Irizarry explains that ecclesiastical communities are essentially intercultural in nature as living and learning contexts, because they are made of people 'with distinct cultural perspectives' who 'come together to forge a shared religious identity' in a religious context that moulds their lives through values and meaning. Following this line of thought, an intercultural religious pedagogue finds himself or herself in a state of permanent intercultural conflict by evaluating his or her 'own cultural orientations' against 'those of the learners'. If true, then intercultural pedagogy in the field of religion is a 'contrastive pedagogy' characterized by an essential 'intercultural dynamics': on the one hand, the educational nature of the Christian experience and, on the other, the vocation of the pedagogue as 'intercultural religious educator'.

The idea of conflict emerges recurrently in the field of intercultural pedagogy because this sort of pedagogy involves a double encounter: between the pedagogue and the students, as well as among the various cultures of the educational actors, pedagogues and students alike. This is why an ecodomic intercultural pedagogy is a pedagogy of encounter between the native people in the classroom environment (pedagogues and students) and the migrant persons coming into it. The classroom becomes a fundamental learning and living context for both the teachers and the students. Melillo and Arrigo (2021) approach the issue of the encounter between natives and migrants in a globalized society by stressing the need for integration policies coupled with intercultural pedagogical approaches. An ecodomic perspective on intercultural pedagogy should focus on the reality of the migrant's alterity, identity, and culture if the future of intercultural education is genuinely enabled to absorb new challenges in teaching and research. Concretely, intercultural pedagogy should help the teachers and the students to dialectically move between their own cultures to intercultural communication by encouraging the development of differentiated linguistic abilities to be used in specific life contexts.

There is a feature of intercultural pedagogy which has not been intensely debated in the specialized literature, and that is cohesiveness. Although discussed by L. Perez (2023) in connection with Latino students, it is still relevant to the debate, because – seen through the lens of cohesiveness – intercultural pedagogy focuses not only on the usual topics, such as knowledge, abilities, and skills, but also on 'collectivist values' which can attach ecodomic value to intercultural pedagogy. Cohesiveness can produce 'educational aspirations' among the students, which – when nurtured in certain settings – will result in 'collectivistic values', like commitments, that may ecodomically enrich the lives of the students in their daily living contexts. Through cohesiveness, intercultural pedagogy may channel various educational efforts to help students 'experience academic success' in a culture different than their own, which becomes their existential context. Also, cohesiveness can assist students of various cultures to diminish their own tendency to discriminate against others as well as put off prejudice.

In order to be successful as well as ecodomical, intercultural pedagogy must be able to combine learning with multiculturalism, which is a key feature of the students' living and learning context. According to S. Omar (2011), intercultural pedagogy must be sensitive to cultural difference', so that it does not limit the didactical capacity of educational institutions. Our societies, Western or not, are 'increasingly marked by cultural diversity and plurality', in which case intercultural pedagogy must realize and understand the extremely diverse needs of people when it comes to teaching and learning. At the same time, intercultural pedagogy must identify the pedagogical deficits in our educational systems in order to provide 'a holistic intercultural education'. In doing so, intercultural pedagogy will have to be fundamentally transformative to move from 'cultural homogeneity' to inclusive interculturality. When this focus is kept, intercultural pedagogy becomes a crucial social tool for 'inclusive enterprise' in order to present students with equal opportunities with a view to integrating them in their society as active participants.

Taken at face value, intercultural pedagogy is a methodology which juxtaposes education and culture in the context of pluralism and globalization. Iuso and Marinaro (2023) explore this aspect by highlighting that intercultural pedagogy should be seen as a 'starting point' in dealing with the complex challenges of contemporary societies. In order to do so ecodomically, intercultural pedagogy must highlight the need for a crucial awareness, namely that historically cultures changed 'through interactions, exchanges, and hybridization'; the end result of this process is a society characterized by pluralism and multiculturality. In such contexts, intercultural pedagogy should 'develop approaches' that provide educators and students with engaging dialogue and 'mutual recognition'. Thus, monocultural mentalities should be nurtured into understanding the plurality of multicultural societies by countering the native ethnocentrism with 'a broader perspective'. When engaged in this process, intercultural pedagogy should seek to pursue the formation of citizens whose willingness to contribute to a multicultural society is adequately informed educationally.

Developing intercultural competences is a commonplace in intercultural pedagogy, but C. Bunăiașu (2015) demonstrates that, in order for intercultural competences to develop, one needs to consider 'curricular premises and strategies' first. The focus here is on students, who should work to develop their personalities in the direction of cultural diversity. The ecodomical capacity of intercultural pedagogy surfaces again, because the learning experiences of students and their social awareness cannot develop in the absence of appropriate educational curricula. On the other hand, these curricula will never become interculturally focused, unless some pedagogical premises and strategies are conceived and implemented before intercultural pedagogy really does its work in the context of classroom didactics. Consequently, before a curriculum becomes effectively intercultural, some steps need to be taken beforehand, such as: building a theoretical foundation so that the students have a chance to develop intercultural competences; including intercultural education

research results into a curricula that is intended to work as interculturally pedagogical; suggesting concrete curricular strategies for intercultural learning with a focus on acquiring specific competences, and taking into account the students' expectations and personal opinions, as well as the perspectives provided by the teaching staff, intercultural educators, intercultural researchers, and social sciences specialists.

The connection between pedagogy and intercultural communication provides a suitable combination of techniques which are supposed to help people navigate through postmodernity and the world it created, which is in fact the context in which students acquire knowledge and shape their life experience. Accordingly, M. Milani (2017) explains that intercultural pedagogy is a field with sufficient capacity for adaptation to deal with the plurality and complexity of postmodernity. The major problem of postmodernity is identified as the lack of meaning, so despite the 'multiplication of opportunities' provided by the postmodern world, what it does not seem to be able to offer is meaning for individuals and communities. If looked at ecodomically, intercultural pedagogy has the capacity to guide people through the 'current crisis' by fruitfully engaging 'thought, concepts, and perceptions'. In doing so, intercultural pedagogy shares light on the worth of 'being' when explained linguistically, culturally, socially, and religiously.

Beljanski and Dedić Bukvić (2020) are interested in intercultural pedagogy from the perspective of intercultural education and the development of intercultural competence. Interculturality is a reality in most contemporary societies, so what is being taught in educational institutions must reflect this aspect by having curricula that include intercultural content, especially in universities. Although in theory things appear to sound rather well, in practice the situation is less encouraging, at least in regions like Bosnia and Herzegovina, where interculturality has been a phenomenon for centuries. Thus, what seems to be needed is a thorough reconsideration of curriculum formation by 'introducing systematic intercultural education to teacher colleges and universities of education'. The purpose here is to provide a context for the professional and pedagogical formation of competent teachers who will in turn 'create a positive environment for proper intercultural communication'. This goes alongside another goal, namely that of developing 'intercultural sensitivity' among students in order to promote 'a culture of dialogue'. It is here that the ecodomical aspect of intercultural pedagogy is clearly emphasized: drafting an intercultural curriculum serves not only initial learning, but also life-long learning, which are excellent venues for the active promotion of 'intercultural values'.

Jackson and Sun (2020) come up with an interesting vision about e-learning, not necessarily because it is innovative, but because it was presented just before the massive lockdown caused by COVID-19 at the end of March 2020, when e-learning had not been that widespread as an actual teaching methodology through dedicated e-platforms. The research is based on the crucial

observations that foreign students who study abroad do not develop ‘second sensitivity or global mindedness’ just because they live in a foreign country, as their daily living context. Thus, an intervention is needed and that could be done by using ‘learner-centered technology’ based on a ‘fully online general education course’ facilitated by e-learning platforms. While asking the students to provide reflexive essays about their intercultural experience, relevant discussions are initiated which reveal an increased awareness about cultural realities towards ‘intercultural-global citizenship’. This way, the students make up an online community which is their learning context and, to a significant extent, also their daily life context, at least for a while. Intercultural pedagogy works therefore in an ecodomical way by making students not only more aware of cultural realities, but also by enriching their life experience through inculcating meaning in their ‘intercultural sensitivity and global mindedness’. This way, intercultural pedagogy becomes a mentoring e-pedagogy which provides students with ‘meaningful advances’, especially through language learning.

CONCLUSION

This argument for a cumulative doctorate in education sciences is based on the concept of ecodomy, which I extracted from my work within theological and religions studies. It is essentially an attempt to demonstrate that the idea of ecodomy, which refers to constructive attempts to make life more meaningful in as many respect as possible, can be relevant not only in theology and religious studies, but also in the field of education.

In this respect, I decided to focus on three distinct aspects, which also reveal the structure of my argument. In the first chapter, I provided an analysis of ecodomy in religious education, while I investigated the concept of ecodomy, the foundation of ecodomy, and the application of ecodomy. These three aspects were evident as I interacted with my sources, while dealing with the way in which the concept of ecodomy was used in Western and African contexts.

The fact that I delved into various perceptions about ecodomy in Western and African religious contexts with specific reference to the higher education helped me understand that ecodomy had the potential to become relevant in other fields of inquiry as well. This is why, having seen how ecodomy worked in Western and African higher education, I decided to see if it has any applicability outside the narrower field of religious education. This is how I came across two ideas: first, that I could expand my ecodomy research to intercultural education since my previous focus on African and Western higher education was indeed a intercultural approach; and second, that I should see whether ecodomy has any bearing on intercultural pedagogy, as a subfield of intercultural education, especially from the perspective that ecodomy was used in religious studies as a pedagogical tool.

Thus, the second chapter is a sort of general perspective on intercultural education and its key features, based on how my research into the subject and my personal delving into relevant sources eventually revealed some of the most salient characteristics of intercultural education. Although many such characteristics emerged as important during my research, only three ended up surfacing on a regular basis. First, it was the multiculturalism of intercultural education in contexts of migration; second, I noticed the need for competence formation in intercultural education, especially with a view to providing students with essential skills for social functioning; and third, the pedagogical application of intercultural education pointed out that the set of skills needed in society are best to be acquired if taught in educational settings.

This last fact directed me quite naturally towards the third chapter, which is an investigation of the relationship between intercultural pedagogy and ecodomy. Despite the overwhelming dimension of intercultural education which can prove to be ecodomical in nature (or constructive with a focus on providing a meaningful perspective on life), three such dimensions were highlighted

recurrently during my research. First, it was intercultural pedagogy as language teaching, which demonstrated that in variegated national and ethnic contexts, the teaching of language provided students with an intercultural capacity to understand the world more meaningfully. Second, intercultural pedagogy appears irrelevant in the absence of critical thinking, which prepares the students for a relevant interaction with the multifaceted and complex realities of life. Third, I noticed that intercultural pedagogy had this extremely important capacity to model the contexts in which people live. When adequate pedagogy is implemented in intercultural educational institutions, appropriate teaching of cultural similarities and differences are didactically implemented in the practical reality of the classroom. Also, when these educational efforts are carried out with a focus on equality, equity, and justice, this intercultural pedagogical process leads to dramatic changes not only in mentalities, but also in how mentalities end up modelling specific life contexts, especially through ecodomically raising the students' awareness about ethical values and the meaning of human life.

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Article 1

Simut, C.C. (2019a). 'Ecodomy as education in tertiary institutions. Teaching theology and religion in a globalised world: Western perspectives'. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies 58*(53), 1-8.

Ecodomy as Education in Tertiary Institutions. Teaching Theology and Religion in a Globalized World: Western Perspectives

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Abstract. This paper investigates whether and how teaching theology and religion in institutions of higher learning can contribute positively to the development of human society. The positive character of such development in described by means of the idea of ecodomy, defined as constructive process. The inquiry assesses the constructive role theology and religion can have if taught in higher education institutions in an open and critical way. As such, the relationship between theology (including the idea of religion in general) and a wide spectrum of aspects (such as pluralism, hermeneutics, globalization, public engagement, oppression) are debated with the sole purpose of identifying ecodomic, constructive ways in which theology and religion can contribute to the development of society. The article focuses on specifically Western contributions to educational reform with the sole purpose of identifying viable arguments in favor of tertiary theological and religious education (which can be seen as valid and functional throughout the world in contemporary societies and have the potential to be applied in non-Western contexts). The actual investigation of these Western models is preceded by a concise description of the premise and method used for the current research. The study concludes with a critical assessment conducted from a predominantly Western angle. This focuses on the practical application of theology and religion in various local contexts based on the implementation of renewed university curricula aimed at the ecodomic development of society in general.

Key Words: education, ecodomy, university, theology, religion, constructive, Africa

Introduction

The Western educational perspectives researched in this work emerged within a 2017 colloquium organized by the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria. Back then, the faculty had just decided to follow a long-term strategy based on openness to everybody and everything, namely to people of all backgrounds, faiths, convictions, and religions. This article is an attempt to see how teaching theology and religion can be conceived as being implemented realistically in the global

world in connection with the faculty's fundamental research theme identified as 'ecodomy'. It should be stressed here that, for the purposes of this study, the concept of ecodomy was used in accordance with the definition provided by Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz in the mid-1990s which focuses on the spirit of community building (Müller-Fahrenholz, 1995: 109). Conceived as including 'any constructive process', the idea of ecodomy as education based on teaching theology and religion in a university setting was the underlying theme which pervaded the colloquium as a red thread clearly visible through the presentations of all participants in the colloquium, Western and African. In this paper though only the contributions of Western scholars will be taken into account as educational patterns to see whether they applicability resides not only in Western contexts but also perhaps across the African continent.

In light of this proposition, the thesis of the article is the presupposition that these Western educational perspectives can have a positive common denominator which enables them to disseminate religious and theological education throughout the world in a ecodomic, constructive way not only in the traditional West but also potentially in non-Western contexts. The demonstration will follow the notion of education as ecodomy (with reference to religion and theology) in tertiary institutions with the purpose of contributing to the actual development of societies in the West as well as elsewhere in the world.

It should be highlighted here that while the colloquium was interested in discussing what happens in public universities everywhere in general educational terms, the papers and the subsequent discussions did end up focusing on teaching theology at faculties of theology in public universities throughout the world. More specifically, theology – as well as the general subject of religion – was taken into account as part of the larger field of humanities from the standpoint of its past and present ecodomic contribution (but also of its prospective future results) not only to the tertiary education system but also the whole of society in general across the globe.

Premise

Thus, this article is an attempt to investigate if the idea of ecodomy is theoretically feasible in connecting the idea of education in public universities with the particular endeavour to teach theology – which is traditionally confessional and hence positively or negatively divisive – in such a way that, within the context of public universities, students and professors are provided with a constructive working environment as well as an open-to-all approach to personal and communitarian development. While such an investigation may appear to have a rather natural

answer in the Western world, it may not be the same with the general situation on the African continent – hence the colloquium's preoccupation not only to investigate if education can be carried forward in terms of ecodomy but also if the very idea of ecodomy as education can at least be conceived in a theoretical way as making sense for the future. Why?

Because the question of whether or not education can be seen as ecodomy or if ecodomy can be achieved by education is not without relevance in today's world. Conflicting ideologies roam free not only in Africa where the colonial past with its respective philosophy is still visible throughout the whole of Africa at least by means of its practical consequences resulting in the poverty of most black Africans. The Western world as well is caught up in this ideological conflict between opposing ideologies such as the exclusivism of traditional capitalism and the more recent inclusivistic philosophies focusing on minority groups of all sorts (feminist, sexual or else). In other words, to quote Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, in dealing with theology and religion one can usually identify a 'standard typology' which deals with 'exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and sometimes particularism' (Tanner Lamptey, 2014: 115), and this appears to be the standard virtually everywhere in the world.

In order to see if and how these philosophies can or should be dealt with in contemporary times throughout the global academic spectrum, the Pretoria colloquium included a rather wide range of Western and African participants. While African contributions came from sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa, Western insights were provided by scholars from Europe and the United States of America. Firmly anchored in the belief that theology and religion is not only a perennial reality of the world across the globe, contributors were keen to demonstrate that teaching theology in a public university can indeed provide a constructive way forward for religious education in the 21st century in terms described by this article as ecodomic. A common denominator of all contributions was the staunch conviction that there is no true, genuine education without the earnest study of theology and religion which can and should be done ecodomically or constructively across the spectrum of institutions of tertiary education throughout the world.

Method

Methodologically, this study is based on qualitative research which is an indication that the only aspect of interest for the research itself is the totality of ideas expressed throughout the colloquium. Quantitative aspects such as the number of participants and the various percentages represented by their ideas as originating in different geographical, social, economic, and cultural contexts are

irrelevant for the purposes of this study. The places of origin of each of the colloquium participants are going to be taken into account exclusively for their informative value, with the sole intention of raising awareness of how various ideas may or may not circulate in different geographical, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.

For instance, it is considered important that a certain idea which was proposed by an American can be not only accepted but also implemented in a different geographical, social, economic, and cultural environment. Likewise, it is equally important to establish whether or not an idea expressed by an African can be of both theoretical and practical value in a contexts of different geographical, social, economic, and cultural characteristics. To be sure, none of the ideas displayed throughout the colloquium will be considered based on where their promotor comes from - thus, the Americanness, Africanness, and/or Europeanness of the ideas debated during the colloquium will not be considered as possessing any epistemological value whatsoever. Moreover, for the sole purposes of this study, only the Western contributions will be subject to critical analysis in hope of discovering principles which demonstrate the ongoing validity of theological and religious education in contemporary societies across the globe.

What matters to this study is the quality of ideas, their theoretical worth, as well as their practical feasibility and especially whether or not ideas originating in a certain different African and Western contexts may or may not have any bearing upon a different context. To be sure, in this paper, only Western contributions will be subject to investigation. In other words, the purpose of the study is to see if ideas collected from all over the world by Western scholars are indeed capable of possessing a common feature which can establish that education may work as ecodomy across the world in various geographical, social, economic, and cultural contexts, such as the Europe and the United States of America (but also have the potential to work throughout the whole of the African continent).

Theology and Pluralism

The honorary guest speaker at the banquet which followed the Pretoria colloquium was David F. Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity (Emeritus) at the University of Cambridge, England, United Kingdom. Ford began his discourse by emphasizing the fact that the field of theology is under the pressure of responsibility which needs to be correlated not only with the realm of tertiary education or the university, but also with the whole world – including the African continent. As such, the responsibility of theology – and, by extension, that of religion – is to make sure it produces ‘life at

its fullness' (Ford, 2017: 6), an expression which was the unofficial motto of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria. Ford warns that the world is full of various types of faith which fall under the careful watch of theology whose responsibility is to educate people in this respect. Men and women across the globe understand faith in ways which Ford describes as 'ignorant', 'foolish', and even 'dangerous', so the responsibility of theology is to provide people with a proper education so that these approaches to faith are corrected (Ford, 2017: 4).

It is Ford's conviction that theological and religious education in the university is capable of providing people with a suitable understanding of faith which allows them to enjoy a better life; hence, his belief in the capacity of theological and religious education to improve human life. Ford emphasizes that the duty of theology in a public university is to search for 'wise, more intelligent, and more responsible faith an belief, and wise, more intelligent, and more responsible understanding of faith and belief, all for the sake of the flourishing of a healthily plural world' (Ford, 2017:4). In other words, there is no genuine religious pluralism without a proper theological and religious education in public universities. Reversely, if a certain society seeks to enjoy true religious pluralism, then it should focus on building a solid system of public universities where theology and religion are taught responsibly. Such pluralist societies do not just create themselves; the key ingredient which makes a certain society pluralist appears to be theology – in fact, responsible teaching of theology and religion in public universities.

As far as Ford is concerned, the role of theology in educating societies towards genuine pluralism is immense since the very foundation of pluralism rests on how theology is taught in public universities. Nevertheless, the reverse is also true; in Ford's words, 'pluralist societies are ... stakeholders in the future of theology' (Ford, 2011:148) which indicates that the presence of theology and religion in public universities can really survive only in pluralist societies. If this is true, a genuinely pluralist society will strive to keep theology and religion as part of its public university system not because people may or may not be interested in these fields but because theology and religion are vital in keeping the pluralist essence of that society. By extension, in Ford's view, theology and religion are instrumental in preserving democracy in any society. This means that theology and religion can work ecodomically for the improvement of society not only in education and learning, but also in politics and economy for the wellbeing of as many members of that society as possible.

Theology and Hermeneutics

If theology and religion in general may indeed be useful for the flourishing of democratic societies, what can be said of the Christian religion? Should public universities seek to focus on religion in general or a religion in particular? Since the Western world appears to be facing a certain 'waning of Christianity in Europe and North America' - if one is to believe the phrase coined by Donald Armstrong (Armstrong, 1999:95) - is it still feasible to finance the study of theology, and especially of Christian theology, in public universities? A possible answer is provided by Marcel Barnard, professor at the Protestant Theological University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, who describes a global picture of what theology is or can be. For instance, since Christianity is a global phenomenon and not only a feature of European life, Barnard chooses to no longer insist on philosophical and economical considerations but rather to focus on the geographical impact of the Christian religion.

Concretely, he points out that the continent of Africa has over 800 million people who belong to the Christian religion in all its confessional traditions. This already significant number is very likely to increase, Barnard opinates, and if he is right than it is possible that the number of African Christians should rise to over one billion by the year 2050 in the geographical area lying south of Sahara (Barnard, 2017:5). The Christian religion, however, is on the rise not only in sub-Saharan Africa, but also in South America and Eastern Asia, so if Ford is right in postulating that the study of religion - Christianity included - is a vital ingredient in ecodomically creating a democratic society, then the very same ecodomic benefits of theological and religious study are more than merely obvious should one consider the geographic expansion of Christianity in the global South according to Barnard's example. Nevertheless, when it comes to the actual study of theology, Barnard insists that is must be based on a certain type of hermeneutics which is characterized by freedom, criticism, and commitment. The study of theology must be performed as objectively as possible and it must always include 'traditions, convictions, beliefs, and practices' (Barnard, 2017:5).

Thus, according to Barnard, each religion, Christianity included, must be treated the very same way, so that all communities - and, by extension, all societies - reap the same benefits of a critical and honest study of theology and religion. Only this particular sort of committed and objective hermeneutics will eventually contribute to the ecodomic development of human life across the globe (Barnard, 2017:6). Commitment and objectivity, however, cannot be achieved without earnest critical assessments; this is why Barnard warns that 'students and scholars are invited to introduce their beliefs and practices and discuss them critically with others' (Barnard, 2017:8). Thus, according to Barnard, no aspect of religion – theoretical or practical – should escape the vigilance

of informed criticism if society is to genuinely reap the ecodomic benefits of the academic study of theology and religion in public universities throughout the world.

Theology and Globalization

It must be pointed out here that in order for the entire world to benefit from the academic study of theology and religion, the very idea of theology and religion should never be restricted to Christianity alone. Theology and religion – and especially the academic study of theology and religion in public universities based on earnest, critical, and committed hermeneutics – have the capacity to enact social transformation in potentially any human society; it is important therefore that the very definition of theology or religion be explained from the very start if it can have results which can be described as beneficial or ecodomic. This particular idea was advanced by Ruard Ganzevoort, professor at the Free University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, who discussed the study of theology and religion within the complex reality of globalization. Thus, Ganzevoort is convinced that contemporary times provide the perfect example of a world which is inter-connected like never before in its history to the point that various societies are linked to one another via the internet and media irrespective of their past, economic development, religious affiliation or anything else which may otherwise be a motive for division. In such a globalized world, Ganzevoort believes, restricting the study of theology and religion to the Western world and Christianity is not only impossible but also detrimental, or anti-ecodomic. Theology should be equated to religious studies, so that the academic study of religion in public universities includes not only Christianity but also every religion still extant in the world (Ganzevoort, 2017:22-23).

It is crucial for public universities to include the study of theology and religion(s) in their academic curricula because theology and religion contribute to a better understanding not only of the human being, but also of human existence in the world in an ecodomic, constructive, positive way. In doing so, however, the study of theology and religion must never remain restricted to the academic realm; on the contrary, theology and religion must become actively and ecodomically present in society. In Ganzevoort, therefore, theology and religion must attempt to deal with as many social problems as possible and they must do so without fear of nefarious consequences. Faith seeking understanding, Ganzevoort believes, is the very slogan which should animate the academic study of theology and religion in public universities; thus, the task of theology is to explain the infinitely complex psychology of the human being in the contemporary globalized world – and this is exactly what ecodomy is all about (Ganzevoort, 2017:24). In this particular world, when the academic study of theology and religion meets the extraordinary progress of science, the positive transformation of

society is not only possible, but also mandatory; thus in the 21st century, to quote Lieven Boeve, 'theology finds itself at the crossroads of academy, church, and society' (Boeve, 2016:54).

For this positive transformation to become actual, however, the world must find a common language and Ganzevoort is convinced that this common language is provided by the critical study of theology and religion in public universities; theology as common language is perhaps the quintessence of ecodomy. When theology becomes the ecodomic common language of the world, humanity can really address difficult issues like gender inequality, poverty eradication, climate change, injustice, and war. Also, when theology turns into a language spoken by as many human beings as possible across the wide and complex range of world religions, Ganzevoort explains that theology is no longer 'the prerogative of the church'; it is the property of the whole world which can and should use it in ecodomically dealing with still ardent global issues like human sexuality, public life, active politics, feminist ideologies, and black marginalization (Ganzevoort, 2017:25).

Theology and Engagement

The academic study of theology and religion in public universities across the globe in order for the whole world to acquire a common language in dealing with social problems may appear if not utopian, then at least extremely difficult to achieve. Christian Danz, professor at the University of Vienna in Austria, demonstrates that it is not exactly that hard to do so. First and foremost, public universities need to understand that theology and religion can indeed be engaged in dealing with the most essential problems of human societies across the globe. Second, the very same institutions of higher education need to comprehend that theology and religion do not refer exclusively to 'everyday religion', namely the actual practice of various religions, but also to what is nowadays described as 'public theology', or the academic attempt of public universities to provide solutions to as many social problems as possible based on the academic study of theology and religion (Danz, 2017:16).

Thus, the idea of 'public theology' incapsulates the very substance of ecodomy because theology can help society solve its public problems. Danz argues that theology and religion are not just scientific subjects of more or less interest to be included in tertiary education curricula throughout the world. Theology and religion are much more that this; in fact, they are ecodomic instruments which can provide significant support in helping human beings realize what societies are made of and why they face specific problems. According to Danz, theology and religion are crucially important to any society because they deal with interpretation. Theology and religion can

ecodomically provide the necessary means whereby human beings are capable not only of interpreting themselves and their problems but also of providing possible solution to those problems. If theology and religion are hermeneutic instruments to decipher human problems and ecodomically offer ways to solve them, how can or should theology and religion be studied in public universities? Danz has the solution: theology and religion should always be studied in conjunction with secular philosophy, religious philosophy, and social ethics (Danz, 2017:16).

Theology and religion communicate certain information but they do so in dealing with what Danz calls 'symbols'. These symbols, which include ideas like God, Christ, and Spirit, must be interpreted for each society and once the interpretation is provided, these symbols become useful in providing ecodomic solutions to social problems. Roger Haight notices that this mechanism is in fact 'symbolic communication' (Haight, 1999:209), and it is precisely this sort of idea which Danz uses to exemplify how the academic study of theology and religion can ecodomically work in solving social problems. Theology and religion offer explanations about human development, Danz writes, and in doing so they not only inform society on the fabric of its problems, but also provide ecodomic solutions to these problems by assisting societies in reaching individual and communitarian self-understanding. It is important, however, to realize that the role of theology and religion in providing ecodomic solutions to social problems is not passive. On the contrary, it is active because the academic study of theology and religion in public universities has a trinitarian/triple dimension. Thus, the scientific study of theology and religion deals with the ecodomic identification, engagement, and resolution of such social challenges in all social contexts (Danz, 2017:17).

Theology and Oppression

While theology and religion have the potential to be ecodomic and constructive in all social contexts, in order for them to genuinely work ecodomically in all social contexts they need to be adapted to each social context. An excellent example of how theology and religion should be applied to particular social contexts is provided by Patrick Hornbeck, who teaches at Fordham University in New York, United States of America. Hornbeck uses the notion of 'proyecto social', an idea he borrowed from Ignacio Ellacuría who first used it in connection to the university. By extension, however – and this is exactly what Hornbeck is doing – the 'social project' can be applied not only to the university *per se*, but also to how theology and religion should work in a certain social context, especially in those dominated by oppression of some sort. Thus, according to Hornbeck, the ecodomic effects of theology and religion being within the particular context of the

university, simply because universities do have a powerful and visible impact in society through their graduates (Hornbeck, 2017:27).

In conjunction with Alain Touraine's conviction that 'the university reproduces society, it produces for society, and it serves to transform society', Hornbeck uses Ellacuría's thought to insist that all universities – public and private, secular and confessional – not only have to potential to work ecodomically in the world, but also have the duty to do so in each and every social context. For instance, all universities where theology and religion is present in the curricula, should find a way to help people whose lives are afflicted by perennial social problems such as poverty (Hornbeck, 2017:28). In fact, according to Hornbeck, universities should target such problematic contexts because they can deal with poverty by means of theology and religion. Whenever they do so, universities work ecodomically for the social transformation of society. In order to do so, however, universities must become aware of the ecodomic potential of theology and religion which in turn should be translated into various social programs aiming at social improvement in particular social contexts, especially in those where poverty is pandemic. Hornbeck, however, is aware that this cannot work unless societies develop a vision in this respect, namely that public universities are not only the 'common property of us all' but also instruments which can ecodomically promote 'the public good' and 'the actualization of human potential' (Hornbeck, 2017:29).

In other words, universities have an immense potential to improve the quality of human life and the very fabric of human society if theology and religion are taught seriously, earnestly, and ecodomically for the sake of each human being in all such institutions of higher learning. This is an indication that teaching theology and religion in tertiary education systems is not only a theoretical endeavour but also a practical mission. Consequently, universities must find ways to practically apply all sorts of social measures with the specific intent to eradicate vicious ideologies like 'racism, slavery, and segregation'. When this happens in any particular social context or hopefully around the world, Hornbeck is convinced that teaching theology and religion in tertiary education institutions has achieved its ecodomic purpose of actively and effectively resisting oppression of all sorts (Hornbeck, 2017:28).

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to find if there is a common characteristic for all Western perspectives on university education as ecodomy, and all seem to have focused on the fact that

teaching theology and religion in tertiary schools may have both theoretical and practical outcomes in the actual development of society.

If universities should focus on the local problems of each society for increased chances of success, it means that teaching theology and religion in higher education with the specific purpose of achieving ecodomic, constructive results should be done by contextualization. As such, Bruce J. Nichols expresses his conviction that it is only through contextualization that theology and religion can truly be ecodomically effectively when they critically assess the contexts in which they are applied practically. Thus, theology makes critical evaluations through education and interpretation but in order for this process to be ecodomically successful, universities across the world and those within the African continent must work unceasingly based on the conviction – competently expounded by Wolfram Weiße – that proper education never excludes religiosity (Weiße, 2008:349).

In this case, teaching theology and religion in universities should always be considered a mandatory educational endeavour throughout the world because even if our world is globalized, problems are always contextual. Nevertheless, globalization is made of a conglomerate of individual contexts, so contemporary education must always be contextual despite as well as because of contextualization. This is why Joseph E. Bush appears to be correct in his assessment that globalization is nothing but 'shared praxis in society' which leads to the conclusion that a contextualized approach to teaching theology and religion in universities cannot and should not be avoided in the 21st century (Bush, 2016:114). If this is true and if teaching theology and religion in universities is aimed at solving local problems first, then any contextualized theology turns into what Ivor Davidson identifies as 'practical, public, contextual, conversation or transformational theology' (Davidson, 2015:73).

When this happens, teaching theology and religion in institutions of higher learning will be ecodomic and constructive in the most genuine of senses because, as George M. Newlands prophetically predicts, 'God has consequences for all human life' (Newlands, 2006:186). Translated pedagogically, Newlands' prophecy indicates that theology and religion have consequences for all human life and it is the duty of the university system to make sure that these effects are socially ecodomic in all respects, irrespective of people's traditional or non-traditional convictions. This certifies that teaching theology and religion in universities is not only recommendable, but also mandatory because of their ecodomic potential if human societies across the globe are truly interested in solid progress and constant development.

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Acknowledgment

On July 29, 2017, the Faculty of Theology – now the Faculty of Theology and Religion – within the University of Pretoria in South Africa held a colloquium on 'Re-Imagining Curricula for a Just University in a Vibrant Democracy – Carrying the Conversation Forward'. The colloquium occurred in a rather special context because the Faculty of Theology celebrated not only its centennial anniversary but also 500 years since the Protestant Reformation. This double celebration was appropriated as a milestone opportunity to reconsider its academic and spiritual mission as an African institution of higher education in a globalized world where the problems of a certain society tend to become issues of more or less serious concern for societies around the world. Within the same year, an article was published based on the colloquium papers: 'Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonization through Education and Contextualization'. Authored by Johan Buitendag and Corneliu C. Simuț, the article appeared in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* [73(1): 1-8] and focuses on how teaching theology in African institutions of higher learning can advance the local issue of decolonization.

Article 2

Buitendag, J. & Simut, C.C. (2020). 'Ecodomy as education in tertiary institutions. Teaching theology and religion in a globalised world: African perspectives'. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 76*(1), 1-8.

[Contribution percentage: Buitendag, J. 20%, Simut, C.C. 80%]

Ecodomy as Education in Tertiary Institutions. Teaching Theology and Religion in a Globalized World: African Perspectives

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Abstract. On July 29, 2017, an international colloquium entitled 'Re-Imagining Curricula for a Just University in a Vibrant Democracy – Carrying the Conversation Forward' was held at the Faculty of Theology within the University of Pretoria. A wide range of scholars from African and non-African countries provided variegated perspectives on how tertiary theological and religious education can contribute positively to the development of contemporary societies, African and non-African. This paper focuses on the colloquium's African contributors and it does so by means of the concept of ecodomy, envisaged as constructive process. While the attending academics came from Europe, the United States of America, South Africa, and Ghana, this paper will take into consideration only the contributions provided by African scholars. The purpose of this selection is to identify ecodomic or constructive ways to argue in favor of university education in the fields of theology and religion which share the potential to be applied across the whole African continent. Bearing in mind that Africa has been dealing with decolonization for a while, these African contributions investigate issues like contextualization, science, practice, illumination, and holism from the governing principle of decolonization, which is also the overarching societal umbrella for academic development in Africa. This study concludes with an assessment and a proposal written from an exclusively South-African vantage point which demonstrates the viability of tertiary theological and religious education for the ongoing ecodomic development of African societies.

Key Words: education, ecodomy, university, theology, religion, constructive, Africa

Introduction

‘Re-Imagining Curricula for a Just University in a Vibrant Democracy - Carrying the Conversation Forward’ was a vital event for tertiary theological and religious education. Thus, on July 29, 2017, scholars from all over the world, African and non-African, demonstrated that theology and religion can be extremely important when and if taught in universities and other institutions of higher learning. The Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria (the oldest of its kind in South Africa) celebrated its centennial in 1917 and this colloquium epitomized its slogan of ‘Gateway to …’ and its emphasis on an open and inclusive Faculty. Even a doyenne like Moltmann acknowledges this approach when he writes in one of latest publications:

> Iche sehe, wie überall in der weltweiten Christenheit eine umfassende Theologie des Lebens entsheht: Papst Franziskus hat der katholische Theologie den Weg gewiesen mit den Enzykliken ‘Gaudium Evangelii’ und ‘Laudatio si’. In der reformierten Theologie is in Korea eine OHN-Theologie entstanden und in Südafrika entsteht eine ‘Oopmaak’ (Gateway-) Theologie, eine Öffnungstheologie (Moltmann, 2019:44).

This paper investigates the specific African contributions to the colloquium based on the idea of ecodomy, the main research theme of the Faculty of Theology and Religion within the University of Pretoria. Anchored in Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz’s understanding of ecodomy as constructive process (Müller-Fahrenholz, 1995:109), the investigation of African contributions to the Pretoria colloquium aims at seeing how teaching theology and religion in tertiary education institutions can contribute to the development of a special community spirit, a key ingredient of social growth. Buitendag (2019a:7) explains the appropriateness of the theme as follows:

> In 2014, I introduced the concept of ecodomy to the Faculty, and it was accepted as the overarching Faculty Research Theme (FRT) for the decade to follow. I encountered this concept for the first time in a publication of the World Council of Churches (Muller-Fahrenholz 1995). He addresses the current world crises with regard to ecological and social disequilibria. We need new visions for ‘household politics’ (oikodomia) on the one hand and a reinterpretation of the traditional ‘aliens in a foreign land’ (paroikia) on the other hand. The constructive and immanent thrust of ecodomical communities must incorporate the element of critical non-conformity (Buitendag, 2019a:7).

A spinoff of 'Teaching Theology at African Public Universities as Decolonization through Education and Contextualization', authored by Buitendag and Simuț[1] (2018:1-8). This current article attempts to move beyond decolonization towards the investigation of its outcomes, such as the actual development of society. Thus, the article intends to demonstrate the thesis that the study of theology and religious in university settings can simultaneously be an active contributor to the progress of African societies in general by eliminating long-lasting problems such as oppression and its pervasive presence in local African contexts. This is a ramification of what Buitendag envisages in a recent article (2019b).

Theology and Contextualization

In fighting oppression in all its forms of theoretical and practical manifestations by teaching a wide range of subjects, and thus including theology and religion, Snyman, professor at the University of The Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, underscores the crucial role of history. Thus, Snyman reveals that teaching theology and religion in tertiary education institutions cannot be done effectively without a proper knowledge and understanding of history because history provides perspectives and perspectives shape contexts. If this is true and Snyman is right, history is capable of contributing to the development of society in general and also to the development of African societies in particular. In order to prove his point, Snyman builds on the Marxist conviction that human being is a 'product of history', a notion explained by Fromm in terms of human creativity (Fromm, 2103:24). Concretely, human beings are inextricably connected to the natural world and also to the temporal existence of material reality which means that human beings cannot detach themselves from history. The reality of all human beings is determined by their existence within the complex developments of history, so history in its entirety – with positives and negatives – must be known of university education is to make an ecodomic difference in the world. This is why Snyman insists that the human being is a 'product of history'; without a proper knowledge of history which can be done effectively by university teaching there is no real development and progress (Snyman, 2017:63).

According to Snyman, history reveals not only a certain chronology but also the action of politics; in the case of the African continent, the proper knowledge of history leads to an equally proper knowledge of the problems which have afflicted the continent, such as the Apartheid. Since the

[1] A book publication, 'Ecodomy – Life in its Fullness', was subsequently published by some members of the Faculty offering a coherent and conceptual portrayal of aspects regarding Ecodomy. See Human, D. J. (ed.), 2017. This was based on an international conference of the Faculty in September 2014 in Pretoria.

African continent has been been involved in decades of various decolonization attempts in dealing with its colonial past, it is imperative that universities, and especially public universities, to make sure that decolonization is performed in ways which serve African societies. Thus, Snyman proposes that decolonization should be performed from the standpoint of African societies. Decolonization must serve and help African societies and while this may or may not mean a certain degree of de-Westernization and de-Europeanization, it is clear that any decolonization effort must be initiated and carried out by the local African people. In Snyman, this is nothing but decolonization based on contextualization: African societies must decide for themselves if decolonization should be done by accepting or rejecting Western or European values or whether the whole process should be implemented in different terms. Regardless of which way forward is accepted, decolonization itself cannot be done without the assistance of universities which can ecodomically serve local communities in virtually any respect: scientific, economic, social, or else (Snyman, 2017:62).

When it comes to theology and religion, Snyman admits that Africa's connection with Europe and the West in this respect – many Africans are Christians – may be a problem, but this is not an indication that this connection is indeed a problem. Africans must decide for themselves whether or not decolonization includes or excludes such non-African connections and values, because this decision – the very essence of contextualization – is the only way which can lead to a truly ecodomic development of African societies (Snyman, 2017:62) and, by extension, of any other human society for that matter.

Theology and Science

While contextualization is a crucial effort to adapt various solutions to particular societies, especially in Africa where the process of decolonization is a specific issue, ecodomic effects with visible impact within societies in general may not become real unless universities broaden the influence of theology and religion within their teaching and research curricula. This perspective was proposed by Mante, professor at Trinity Theological Seminary in Accra, Ghana, who began his argument in favor of the teaching of theology and religion in universities from the conviction that real life – and all life for that matter – is 'seriously religious' (Mante, 2017:31). Therefore, in distancing himself from any Western attempt to support secularization in higher education and life in general, Mante postulates that secularization itself is a 'metaphysical assumption' and consequently neither a natural and progressive movement within history and society, nor a necessary condition for human progress. Mante is aware that human beings have always been in

search of some sort of 'proof' – regardless of whether this was scientific or not – but proof itself is not necessarily and certainly not always scientific. Thus, Mante argues that not all human beings are by necessity compelled to look for scientific proof in their lives (Mante, 2017:31-32); some, and possibly more than expected, may be in search of the sort of proof which is provided by theology and religion, as argued by Overbeck, one of Friedrich Nietzsche's closest friends, towards the end of the 19th century (Overbeck, 2002 [1873]:76).

In other words, scientific proof based on secular or secularizing methods do not necessarily provide objective and implicitly helpful results for all the members of a certain society. For Mante, religious answers are equally, if not more effective in ecodomically assist the progress and development of human societies, in Africa or elsewhere (Mante, 2017:32). Nevertheless, since in the Western world the influence of secularization prompted universities to divorce theology and religion from natural and social sciences with the rather logical result that theology and religion was taught separately from any such scientific field of inquiry, Mante has a radically different approach. Since all life is 'seriously religious', what he proposes is that universities should seriously consider putting social and natural sciences back together with theology and religion. In more concrete terms, any university – secular or confessional, public or private – should make sure that they no longer entertain the 'idea of ghettoizing religion into some private sphere' but teach theology and religion together with social and natural sciences (Mante, 2017:34).

In other words, a student of chemistry should also take classes in theology and religion if he or she is really concerned to benefit from a wider, more encompassing, and positively broad perspective on human existence. If this works for a certain person, it should work for an entire society, so the liberation of theology and religion into the wider spectrum of university sciences is the only truly ecodomic way to provide students with solid academic training. To be sure, Mante does not advocate the prioritization of theology and religion over natural and social sciences or what he calls 'the pontification of a particular religion' (Mante, 2017:36). On the contrary, what he defends is the reconsideration of both categories of sciences – theology and religion, on the one hand, and social and natural sciences on the other – in light of their equally ecodomic, constructive potential for the development of genuinely pluralistic human societies in Africa and across the globe.

Theology and Practice

Having established that in order for theology and religion to work ecodomically in the world, they must be taught as a science among sciences, or as a humanistic science among other humanistic,

social, and natural sciences; nevertheless, while this is a theoretical endeavour, the very next step to ensure that theology and religion do contribute ecodomically to the development of society is to make sure that their theoretical teaching in the academic setting of universities is coupled with their practical involvement in all the aspects of any human society. This idea is promoted by Bosman, professor at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, who advocates the necessity that theology and religion be practically involved in all the facets of human society. In other words, as Bosman suggests, theology and religion should pervade – in a practical way – the economic, social, political, environmental, intellectual, and legal life of society if they are indeed to bring an ecodomic, constructive contribution to the development of human beings throughout the world (Bosman, 2017:10).

The effectiveness of the involvement of theology and religion in the practical life of men and women in society does not 'just' work; they need to be defined according to certain criteria if they are indeed to be ecodomically functional and practically effective. This is why Bosman suggests that theology and religion can indeed work in society in a practical way if they are conceived in terms of rationality, pedagogy, and ethos – these are, according to Bosman, the three fundamental criteria which must define theology and religion if they are to work practically in society (Bosman, 2017:11). Defined as rationality, theology and religion must find ever new methods to practically apply human reason in key domains of human action and predominantly in hermeneutics, assessment, and action. Contemporary societies need to understand that theology and religion are vital for the development of society not only because they help people interpret human life and the value of human existence, but they also provide men and women with ways to evaluate the dynamics of whatever happens in the world. If what Bosman says is true, then it means that James W. McClendon is right when he argues that theology and religion should never be treated exclusively as a theoretical discipline taught in tertiary education institutions, but should in fact be accepted and promoted as a practical *métier*, a genuine vocation which works like any other job with concrete ecodomic, constructive results (McClendon, 2002:38).

The practical value of theology and religion as rationality is given by their capacity to interpret what happens in the world, then evaluate the complexity of world events, and finally assist men and women in taking responsible decision for the improvement of individual and communitarian life in the world. When defined as pedagogy, theology and religion must practically work in serving all human beings across the globe and in doing so they must detach themselves from serving ideologies of any sort, political or otherwise. The ecodomic goal of theology and religion is also pursued when they are practically implemented as ethos because in this capacity, as Bosman makes clear, theology

and religion must get involved in tackling the highly complex and extremely sensitive issues of 'class, gender, and race'. In doing so, however, theology and religion can reach their ecodomic potential only if they are put into practice in ways which exclude 'ideologized prejudice' of any sort (Bosman, 2017:12).

Theology and Illumination

It should be clear by now that theology and religion are not just academic disciplines or not just practical manifestations of human religiosity. In fact, theology and religion are much more than this: they are instruments of world transformation beyond any possible boundaries. Meylahn, professor at the University of Pretoria in South Africa, uses two very appropriate metaphors in describing the ecodomic role of theology and religion in transforming the world by proper interpretation and practical involvement in the complex issues of human societies. Meylahn's metaphors are those of light and *logos*; as such, theology and religion are the light or *logos* which have the capacity to 'illuminate' the whole world (Meylahn, 2017:37). While it is clear, as Harink points out, that the metaphors of light and *logos* are borrowed by Meylahn from the very core of Christian dogmatic theology with reference to the transfiguration of Jesus Christ (Harink, 2009:158), Meylahn's intention is not to restrict his explanation to the tenets of the Christian religion.

On the contrary, what Meylahn attempts to achieve by using the metaphors of light and *logos* is to move beyond Christianity into the realm of all world religions. As such, Meylahn is interested in presenting theology and religion as instruments which can help human beings see the world from different angles, so they they can explain how and why men and women should perceive the world in literally 'a new light'. The process whereby one can see the world in a new light begins in the university, where theology and religion should be taught in such a way that they provide inspiration and innovation. Meylahn, however, warns that this particular approach to theology and religion in tertiary education can be achieved exclusively in 'just universities' which can work properly only if they are allowed to exist as such in 'vibrant democracies' (Meylahn, 2017:38). It is only in such democratic contexts that theology and religion can truly achieve their ecodomic, constructive potential when taught within institutions of higher education. Meylahn's next step is to make sure that the world is an extremely complex reality which is characterized primarily by an incredible diversity, so the world is made up of smaller worlds. Teaching theology and religion in tertiary education institutions must take this reality into full account, so theology and religion must be

taught based on a university curriculum which is capable of creating 'spaces for different worlds' (Meylahn, 2017:38).

Thus, teaching theology and religion ecodomically means promoting a way of thinking which is unrestrictive, critical, and multi-cultural. This particular approach to theology and religion should always be based on an epistemology that is constantly open to the multi-layered realities of the world with the specific intent to create equality for all people in all societies. According to Meylahn, the teaching of theology and religion in tertiary education illuminates the world and in doing so they work ecodomically whenever they create an environment which allows for everybody to be treated equally, openly, and justly irrespective of where they live across the globe in what Meylahn identifies as 'multi-cultural' and 'multiple-world contexts' (Meylahn, 2017:39).

Theology and Holism

At this point, however, things get a bit more complex because the actual study as well as the teaching of theology and religion leads to various interpretations of all aspects pertaining to (a) theology and (a) religion. In the 21st century, as a result of many intellectual influences exerted over centuries of earnest inquiries and research, the tenets of (any) theology and (any) religion can be interpreted in at least two ways: traditional and non-traditional or in terms which allow for the existence of God as an ontologically real and personal being or in terms which present God as a mere concept in one's mind (or even as absent altogether). Since these interpretations are conflictual, how can theology and religion achieve their ecodomic, constructive purpose? Simuț, senior vice-chancellor postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Pretoria in South Africa, suggests that the conflictual nature of traditional and non-traditional interpretations of (a) theology and (a) religion are not a problem for as long as both hermeneutical approaches to theology and religion are taught holistically in public universities (Simuț, 2017:56).

Whenever (a) theology and (a) religion are being studies as sciences, various methodologies based on predominantly rational approaches to all theologies and religions are being used for the research of their constitutive doctrines and practices to the point that traditional interpretations are perceived as less or even non-scientific, while non-traditional understandings are seen as more modernistic and scientific. This dichotomy, Simuț warns, leads not only to different approaches in teaching theology and religion but also, in many institutions of higher education, to the exclusion of one or the other from the curricula. Thus, more traditional institutions of tertiary learning tend to avoid modernistic approaches to theology and religion, while more non-traditional schools are happy to

exclude traditional views from their curricula. The result is what Simuț calls the 'pigeonholing of theology', a phenomenon which has disastrous consequences on the educational process and also has the potential to cancel the ecodomic nature of both theology and religion. Despite this grim perspective, however, Simuț is convinced that there is a viable solution which can not only maintain but also boost the ecodomic potential of theology and religion: since pigeonholing theology ends in providing students with selective information, theology and religion should be taught holistically in all their complexity, traditional and non-traditional, so that students should benefit from the whole experience of learning the entire spectrum of doctrine and practice in theology and religion (Simuț, 2017:57).

When theology and religion are being taught in a holistic way which includes both traditionalism and non-traditionalism, both classical and secular approaches to doctrine and practice, theology and religion can and will achieve their ecodomic potential. While such an integrative approach may be a bit more difficult to achieve in confessional schools, it is a must in public universities where there should be no 'shifts' from 'liberalism to traditionalism' and the other way around, as Vainio recommended (Vainio, 2016 [2010]:1). Simuț is most emphatic when he suggests that public universities must always provide students with all available information pertaining to the academic study of theology and religion, traditional and non-traditional, because this is the only way to make sure that theology and religion do work ecodomically in all social contexts (Simuț, 2017:57).

Assessment

The idea of this paper was to explore whether there is a feature which belongs to all African perspectives on tertiary education explained in terms of ecodomy, namely if university education, and especially religious or theological education, still has a powerful, relevant, and long-lasting impact in the development of African societies.

Thus, in attempting to find ever new methods to not only get involved in society but also in doing so to actively and effectively contribute to the betterment of people's individual and communitarian situations, institutions of higher education have the chance to ecodomically achieve what James K. Mashabela, professor at the University of South Africa, describes as 'community development' (Mashabela, 2017:4).

The hottest potato in the whole African continent has been for decades the rather thorny issue of decolonization which deals primarily with the fact that African needs to find ways to deal with its

colonial past. Mashabela insists that in order for decolonization to work, it must turn into a program which is constantly fed intellectually and implemented practically. Decolonization, therefore, must be build in such a way that it becomes continuous, durable, and permanent. This particular purpose cannot be achieved, Mashabela believes, without the aid of universities and other institutions of higher education, which means that decolonization must be forged in the university, built within the university, and applied by the university in society. Mashabela is convinced that without the assistance provided by tertiary education, the program of decolonization is doomed to fail gloriously and African societies will not benefit from any development whatsoever (Mashabela, 2017:3-4).

Decolonization, Mashabela thinks, must be steered towards building an African consciousness, a valid Africanness, but without university education this cannot be achieved. No practical ecodomic project can be achieved without university education, but in order for education to work towards community development, the whole tertiary education curriculum must be re-imagined, re-formed, and re-organized. According to Mashabela, nothing can work without this tremendous effort to rebuild university education anew through a constant process of reconstruction, reexamination, reinterpretation, and reconsideration; these actions are time-consuming processes in themselves which, if performed for the sake of society, will eventually produce ecodomic effects with concrete results throughout all the strata of African societies (Mashabela, 2017:3), but also anywhere else in the world.

Thus, an effective program of decolonization, as proposed by Mashabela, needs to take into account the fact that the re-formation of university curricula should be worked based on the fundamental conviction that tertiary education is for everybody. This is not to say that everybody will eventually attend university courses, but if anyone is indeed interested in pursing tertiary education he or she will have the opportunity to do so without facing discrimination of any kind. University education, therefore, must be devised for the majority of people within any society; in the case of Africa, for what John D. Hargreaves designates as the ‘underprivileged African majority’ (Hargreaves, 1996:e-book).

To resume Mashabela’s argument, universities in Africa must focus on how to solve the problems of the African continent if the program of decolonization is to be successful at all and produce ecodomic results which are visible and beneficial for African societies. The local African needs and local African problems must be the aim of any decolonization effort worked in an African

institution of higher education. Otherwise any such decolonizing efforts will yield no ecodomic results and the program itself will not serve the needs of African societies (Mashabela, 2017:4).

If the common denominator of all contributions presented at the 2017 Centenial Colloquium is the development of society in as many respects as possible based on university education in all fields, including theology and religion, with the purpose of providing men and women in all human societies with ecodomic solutions to their problems, then it makes sense to promote theology and religion in all their hermeneutic complexity. Thus, David Ford's recommendation that theology and religion should be taught in order to educate people regarding inadequate forms of faith (Ford, 2017:4) coupled with Joseph Mante's suggestion to teach theology and religion alongside natural and social sciences and with Corneliu Simuț's proposal that traditional and non-traditional understandings of theology and religion be included in all university curricula leads to a single conclusion: in higher education, teaching theology and religion must be as inclusivistic as possible. Nothing should be excluded and everything should be included, even what Gavin D'Costa identifies as 'secularized forms of theology' (D'Costa, 2005:ix).

Why such a wide approach to pedagogical inclusivity in teaching theology and religion in higher education? Simply because in order to be ecodomically effective for the whole world, theology and religion must be a faithful mirror of the contexts they are attempting to help. If problems are misdiagnosed the solutions are very likely to be problematic as well; this is why the issues of a certain context must be identified as precisely as possible if proper solutions are to be found and applied there. In the case of Africa, if decolonization is to be ecodomically successful, then one should consider the proposal of Edward Shizha who explains that decolonization efforts should 'reflect Africa's social and cultural realities' (Shizha, 2012:171).

In Africa, however, decolonization goes hand in hand with fight against poverty and it is always good to be aware of the fact, correctly underlined by Philip Kennedy – that poverty is a key focus of contemporary theology (Kennedy, 2006), so various theological approaches from across the world can be appropriated or at least considered for ecodomic results within the African continent. Nevertheless, one must never lose sight of the fact that the foundation of theology is hermeneutics because, as explained by Thomas G. Guarino, hermeneutics conveys 'enduring meanings' to any theological endeavour (Guarino, 2005:171). Thus, any ecodomic attempt to teach theology and religion in any university, African or not, must feature a serious, earnest, open, and inclusive hermeneutical approach. Hermeneutics is understanding and proper understanding is the key to

ecodomic development, so teaching theology and religion based on a sensible approach to hermeneutics is vital for any university, African or not.

It is clear thus that there is no genuine development without tertiary education, and since theology and religion are part of the university curricula, they both contribute ecodomically to the development of human societies. Augusta Dimou is right to underline that in modern times, under the influence of various secularization tendencies, 'the state challenged the prerogative of the church over instruction' (Dimou, 2009:17), but this should never mean the exclusion of theology and religion from university curricula, especially on the grounds of secularization, laicization or similar social tendencies. On the contrary, one must realize anew that the very essence of theology and religion is their educational propensity despite secularization, so if true education leads to social development, then it is rather evident that teaching theology and religion will also lead to social development. In the case of Africa, teaching theology and religion in local universities can and will eventually contribute to the social development of African societies with potentially excellent ecodomic results for decolonization and the fight against poverty.

Conclusion: A South-African Proposal

Since the common feature of all colloquium contributions was to highlight the importance of social development based on the ecodomic teaching of theology and religion in higher education institutions as anchored in open and critical hermeneutics, a team of top management officials from the University of Pretoria authored a *Draft Framework Document* which aims at the radical rethinking of the whole teaching curricula in the field of theology and religion (this was rather a happy coincidence because the document was available long before the colloquium). In order for the actual teaching of theology and religion in higher education to work ecodomically in society, the theological and religious curriculum must be reconsidered – or, as it was rendered in the document itself, re-imagined – in accordance with the local situation of each institution of higher education and its immediate social context. With regard to South Africa, the recognition of the problems within the local context was crucial, so the document underlined the 'exclusion, marginalization, and social injustice' which still marrs South African society more than twenty years into its post-Apartheid history (University of Pretoria, 2017:65). The Eart Charter (2000) says it aptly in two of its principles[2]:

[2] https://earthcharter.org/invent/images/uploads/echarter_english.pdf (retrieved on 20 Feb 2020).

2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.

a. Accept that with the right to own, manage, and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people.

b. Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

3. Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.

a. Ensure that communities at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone an opportunity to realize his or her full potential.

b. Promote social and economic justice, enabling all to achieve a secure and meaningful livelihood that is ecologically responsible.

This is why it was suggested that the new university curricula should be heavily anchored in the fundamental human values of 'dignity, equality, human rights, and freedom' (University of Pretoria, 2017:65). Teaching theology in higher education is considered a notorious failure in the absence of such values, so the rethinking of the university curricula along these lines is seen as a mandatory vision which needs to be shared by the university management teach on the one hand, as well as the members of the academic staff and the students, on the other (University of Pretoria, 2017:66). Ecodomic results, however, cannot be achieved unless this vision is practically implemented in university curricula which promote 'critical inquiry, thinking, and democratic public engagement' (University of Pretoria, 2017:66). In other words, there will have to be a constant interaction between the university and society, between teaching and application, between theology and religion as appropriated in the classroom and theology and religion as applied in society. This is why the new curricula will have to aim at providing 'responsiveness to the social context, epistemological diversity, renewal of pedagogy, and classroom practice' (University of Pretoria, 2017:66).

When teaching theology and religion will be performed based on these prescriptions, the ecodomic results of theological and religious ideas will be revealed in society provided that universities entertain an 'institutional culture of openness and critical reflection' (University of Pretoria, 2017:66). Nevertheless, intellectual vigilance is compulsory because the new curricula will have to avoid the 'limitations, gaps, and shortcomings' of the old curricula if teaching and religion in universities is to ecodomically transform and reform not only theological and religious education but also the local and global contexts which they address (University of Pretoria, 2017:72). Thus, ecodomy is possible, not only in universities but also in societies because theology and religion are fundamental features of humanity in general and of the human being in particular. Indeed, ecodomy

as education is possible for as long as the institutions of higher learning across the world and local governments will actively support the teaching of theology and religion for their intrinsic educational, pedagogical, interpretative, and transformational values.

God has created the household of life and human beings to live in community with one another.

> *We are created in God's own image and likeness and have the responsibility to take care of God's good creation. The Christian notion of oikos resonates with the African understanding of ubuntu/botho/uzima (life in wholeness) and ujamaa (life in community). They embrace among others, the values of the fullness of life, full participation in all life processes including in the economy and ecology. It further entails the just care, use, sharing and distribution of resources and elements of life. Where the above and life-affirming relationships have been violated, the institution of restorative, redistributive and certificatory (wisdom) justice is necessary. These principles of justice, reparation, restoration and reconciliation, forgiveness, mutual love and dignity for all God's creation ought to be promoted ecumenically as bases for constructive critique of global capitalism, which increasingly violates life-in-abundance. (WRC, 2007)*[3]

No wonder that Moltmann (2018:99) changes Luke 7:27 rather to read that you must love, God, your neighbour *and the earth*, as yourself.[4]

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[3] https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/neoliberal-paradigm/dar-es-salaam-statement-on-linking-poverty-wealth-and-ecology.

[4] See the article of Buitendag (2019c) on this https://www.litnet.co.za/you-must-love-the-earth-as-yourself/ (retrieved on 10 Feb 2020).

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Article 3

Simuț, C.C. (2023). 'Teaching religion as change for social transformation in contemporary African and non-African universities: a South African manifesto'. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 79*(2), 1-6.

Religious Education as Ecodomical Change in Higher Education. Teaching Religion for Social Transformation in Contemporary African and Non-African Universities: a South African Manifesto

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Abstract. This article is a research report on the international colloquium entitled 'Re-Imagining Curricula for a Just University in a Vibrant Democracy', hosted by the University of Pretoria in 2017 to address a series of prospective changes in religious studies curricula in African and non-African universities. Anchored in the principles of the *Draft Framework Document*, a South African manifesto authored by a team of specialists from the University of Pretoria advocating educational reform in the field of religion, the colloquium debated the necessity of curricular change from the perspective of ecodomy, seen as a constructive attempt to modify university curricula to include relevant approaches to religion. Consequently, the discussions revolved around the idea of 'ecodomical change' as a socially transformative step towards achieving community development in tertiary education religious institutions.

Key Words: university; education; ecodomy; change; society; development; Africa; teaching

Introduction

The year 2017 was auspicious for the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria. Still bearing its shorter, traditional name 'Faculty of Theology', this prestigious institution of theological higher education was at crossroads half a decade ago. Having been put in the difficult position of justifying the relevance of religious education within a tertiary education setting, the then Faculty of Theology organized an international colloquium entitled 'Re-Imagining Curricula for a Just University in a Vibrant Democracy', which was held on July 29, 2017. It was not without reason that this conference was organized in 2017 because it celebrated not only the theological faculty's 100th anniversary, but also half a millennium since the Protestant Reformation – both within the pressure to explain its very existence within the university's contemporary setting, an aspect which had often been underlined by the then Dean of the Faculty of Theology, professor Johan Buitendag.

The colloquium was attended by African and non-African scholars, although this particular aspect is irrelevant in light of the fact that all participants underlined the necessity of change as mandatory for tertiary education. With specific reference to religious education, it was clear for all those involved in the conference that change was no longer a mere concept, but a reality which had to be pursued relentlessly, consistently, and persistently. Change was the common denominator of the discussions within the spectrum of the faculty's research focus, which was the notion of 'ecodomy'. Defined as 'constructive process' by Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz almost three decades ago, ecodomy is permeated by the idea of change as necessary for any human progress (Müller-Fahrenholz, 1995:109). For the 2017 Pretoria colloquium, however, discussions and the proposed solutions revolved around the idea of 'ecodomical change', seen as mandatory for the development of religious education not only in Africa, but across the globe as well because of its capacity for social transformation.

Thesis

The argument of this article is that the idea of 'ecodomical change' is not only a theoretical construct, but also a real possibility if pursued within a certain set of directions which become a programmatic framework for its practical application in order to achieve social transformation. Faculties of theology throughout the world, as well as in Africa, tend to be organized based on traditional and confessional grounds, an aspect which can become problematic for contemporary perspectives on education. For instance, Protestant faculties of theology would normally hire Protestants, while Catholics and Orthodox sister institutions of religious education would follow the same pattern. Although this is not the case everywhere, it is perhaps safe to presume that there is a vast majority of such institutions of tertiary education which function within these traditional parameters.

The confessional reality of contemporary faculties of theology may result in a certain lack of sympathy and empathy for the problems of contemporary society; also, religious studies departments, which are conceived as more inclusivistic than traditional faculties of theology, may be equally ineffective because they do not address the problems of significant portions of society that focus on traditional religious convictions. If so, both faculties of theology and religious studies departments tend to be equally ineffective in addressing some of the most stringent concerns of today's society. Jerusha Tanner Lamptey, for instance, sees a 'standard typology' characterized by 'exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and sometimes particularism' (Tanner Lamptey, 2014:115)

which fails to address the concerns of both traditional segment of society anchored in traditional capitalism (targeted by confessional faculties of theology) and its more liberal quarters focused on minority issues like feminist, sexual, and environmental concerns (supposedly served by religious studies departments).

Thus, this article seeks to investigate if the notion of 'ecodomical change' can be applied to religious higher education in a way which offers a viable solution that has the potential to work efficiently across today's complex range of traditional and liberal philosophies of life in order to achieve social transformation. In other words, religion – as a constant feature of human existence in the world – must be studied in such a way that 'ecodomical change' produces long-lasting constructive results which not only improve human life in general but also provide existential meaning to individuals interested in any religious pursuit via concrete methods of social transformation.

Methodology

The scientific method used in this article is qualitative analysis, which is used to investigate the claims of the participants at the 2017 Pretoria colloquium in light of similar concerns expressed within African higher education. Given the fact that the colloquium focused on religious education from the perspective of the necessity of change, quantitative aspects like the number of participants and their contexts become irrelevant. It must be highlighted, however, that all participants were higher education professionals, actively involved in tertiary education and research with considerable track-records in the academy and consistent visibility across the spectrum of their religious studies field of expertise. One of the positive aspects of the 2017 Pretoria colloquium was the focus of all participants on what can be changed in religious higher education so that it becomes better, more efficient, and more constructive not only for certain societies but for human life in general.

For instance, all participants sought to live up to the idea of 'ecodomical change' in light of which religious education was earnestly investigated from a large range of African and non-African perspectives. The economic, cultural, social, and geographical specifics of participants were blurred by the colloquium's focus on 'ecodomical change' as mandatory for religious education in the 21st century for the sake of human development, scientific progress, and societal relevance, all concrete aspects of social transformation mediated by the transformation of religious education itself. The proposed solutions for the transformation of religious education through ecodomical change came

from various geographical, social, economic, and cultural contexts but the way they were brought together by the notion of ecodomical change made all participants, African and non-African, hopeful of a better future for religious education in Africa and beyond.

Methodologically, no epistemological value is ascribed to the ideas expressed by the 2017 Pretoria colloquium participants as connected to their geographical, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. For the purposes of this article, their preoccupation for religious education as an instrument of ecodomical change for human progress and social transformation across the globe is the sole aspect which was analyzed qualitatively in light of specific African concerns about tertiary education.

Ecodomical change in higher education, especially with reference to the study of religion, has potentially at least ten distinct ways in which social progress can be achieved both in Africa and around the globe. What follows is a brief analysis of the contributions delivered at the 2017 Pretoria colloquium with specific emphasis on the idea of ecodomical change and how it can contribute to social transformation across human societies in African and non-African contexts in the academic field of religious studies.

Ecodomical change as social understanding

David Ford, Regius Professor of Divinity (Emeritus) at the University of Cambridge, England, United Kingdom, was the colloquium's main speaker and he oriented his speech towards the necessity of having religious studies which educate people with regard to faith. The actual reality of faith, Ford contends, is not called into question but it is not understood correctly, and this faulty perception about what faith is for various religions is a global phenomenon. According to Ford, one of the biggest problems of today's world is the flawed understanding of faith in ways which he presents as 'ignorant', 'foolish', and 'dangerous' (Ford, 2017:4). Thus, religious studies scholars have not only the professional responsibility but also the social duty to address this potentially flammable situation by making sure that the various approaches to faith across the whole religious spectrum are corrected, so that religions serve societies rather than cause damage and wreak havoc.

In Ford's view, religious studies must provide the public with a suitable understanding of faith irrespective of the kind and nature of particular religions. Having a proper understanding of faith in any religion should have positive consequences on any society ranging from enjoying a better life to fostering a pluralistic model of religious cohabitation. This is why Ford emphasizes that tertiary

education institutions which deal with religious studies should constantly search for 'wise, more intelligent, and more responsible faith and belief, and wise, more intelligent, and more responsible understanding of faith and belief, all for the sake of the flourishing of a healthily plural world' (Ford, 2017:4). This is the first and perhaps he most urgent way in which religious studies can contribute to social progress through ecodomical change.

Ecodomical change as social awareness

Ford's idea about the capacity of religious studies to produce ecodomical change through social understanding towards a pluralistic society was taken over by Marcel Barnard, professor at the Protestant Theological University of Amsterdam, Netherlands, who explained why studying religion is still a feasible academic endeavour in the 21st century. Barnard's idea is anchored in this conviction that, given the global presence of religion, a good way forward is to teach religion in a way which is characterized by freedom, criticism, and commitment. In other words, any study of religion must be characterized by academic objectivity or at least by an earnest attempt at scientific approaches to religion. This means that all the aspects of religion must be studied with equal interest, to the point that 'traditions, convictions, beliefs, and practices' are investigated as thoroughly as possible (Barnard, 2017:5).

According to Barnard, the study of religion should be honest, but honesty is based on inquiry and criticism. When religion is studied honestly and critically, the results are more likely to produce a more dispassionate approach to the content of that religion which in turns leads to social awareness about the nature of the respective religion. As Barnard points out, tertiary education institutions can therefore be venues in which 'students and scholars are invited to introduce their beliefs and practices and discuss them critically with others' (Barnard, 2017:8). Such an approach to the study of religion will eventually lead to increased social awareness because all aspects of religion, theoretical and practical, will be investigated with the same degree of honesty and criticism.

Ecodomical change as social inclusivity

When religious studies are performed ecodomically through structural change in higher education they should lead not only to social understanding and social awareness, but also to social inclusivity, an aspect which was tackled by Ruard Ganzevoord, professor at the Free University of Amsterdam, Netherlands. He began his contribution by making concrete references to Christian theology but only to indicate that Christianity should no longer be studied confessionally but rather

religiously (Ganzevoord, 2017:22-3). Consequently, Ganzevoord advocates the idea that Christianity should be studied as a religion of various world populations, not as the religion of certain people. Moreover, in tertiary education institutions, all religions or at least as many religions as possible should be included in the curriculum because awareness about a larger spectrum of religious beliefs and practices will lead to the inclusion of more religions is otherwise more traditional religious contexts.

According to Ganzevoord, today's world is inter-connected like never before, and this is a huge chance for social inclusivity. The more we know about as many religions as possible in today's globalized world should make people more inclined to accept beliefs and practices which are not specific to their local contexts. This is why, Ganzevoord writes, theology should no longer be seen as the exclusive 'prerogative of the church' but the object of study in tertiary institutions which increases the chances for social inclusion to actually occur in certain human contexts. Moreover, Ganzevoord stresses the fact that ecodomical change in the study of religions should extend over a consistent range of sensitive issues like public life, feminist ideologies, black marginalization, active politics, and human sexuality (Ganzevoord, 2017:25). When these are covered by religious studies, ecodomical change will have been performed and social inclusivity will have a real chance.

Ecodomical change as social symbolism

Social inclusivity, however, must become a reality across human societies, including those whose beliefs are mono-religious. Christian Danz, professor at the University of Vienna, Austria, focuses on religious symbols which, in his opinion, must be translated for today's world and for as many people of different religious persuasions as possible. For instance, concepts like God, Christ, and Spirit should not only be understood as symbols but should also be interpreted in ways which make sense for people pertaining to religions other than Christianity (Danz, 2017:16). This means that traditional religious curricula should undergo processes of ecodomical change with a view to providing solutions to social problems. A way forward in this direction, Danz believes, is to study theology and religion in connection with secular philosophy, social ethics, and religious philosophy (Danz, 2017:16).

The combination of these academic disciplines in the study of religion can only be performed meaningfully if religious symbols are explained so that they make sense to society or societies in general. When people in certain societies are made aware of the content and significance of such religious symbols and they understand them in light of human development, one can adequately

speak of the social symbolism brought about by the study of religion. To take one example: if in Austria, a traditionally Christian society, concepts like God, Christ, and Spirit are explained as symbols so that people of other religions understand their social meaning, not only their religious content, social symbolism can be said to be at work in that society. Danz, however, underlines that such social symbolism is only the result of a scientific study of religion which aims at human progress in all human societies (Danz, 2017:17).

Ecodomical change as social help

When seen as symbols, religions concepts are not only meaningful but also helpful. In this sense, religion should be applied to all social contexts with a view to helping as many people as possible in any human society. This idea was developed by Patrick Hornbeck from Fordham University in New York, United States of America, who borrowed Ignacio Ellacuría's notion of 'proyecto social' as applied to the reality of the university. In brief, universities are not only venues of scientific education but also social projects, in the sense that they provide help in various human contexts especially in those characterized by various forms of oppression. According to Hornbeck, universities can have an extremely powerful impact in society not only by means of what they teach but also through the methods used in teaching which have direct bearing on their graduates (Hornbeck, 2017:27).

Based on Ellacuría's idea, Hornbeck explains that universities have the opportunity to provide a lot of help to any society, especially through the mediation offered by the study of religion. Poverty and oppression are problematic aspects in any human society, so the study of religion can lead to concrete solutions to social problems if graduates are equipped to serve and help wherever they are active in society (Hornbeck, 2017:28). University curricula, therefore, should be changed ecodomically with a view to providing a constructive perspective on religions and how they can help in any human society. When religion is studied ecodomically, Hornbeck is convinced that universities can focus on 'the public good' and 'the actualization of human potential' (Hornbeck, 2017:29) by encouraging and promoting social help in any society.

Ecodomical change as social decolonization

Being ready to provide social help is one thing; being able to do so ecodomically is a totally different thing. This is why Fanie Snyman, professor at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, speaks about the necessity to adapt social help to particular social

contexts. For instance, in Africa, the issue of decolonization has been long debated from various perspectives (cultural, economic, religious etc.) but given the numerous views on the issue, it is rather difficult to find a constructive way forward. Snyman therefore brings into discussion the idea of social decolonization by means of which he indicates that decolonization must be enacted in a such a way that it is helpful to African societies (Snyman, 2017:62). The social component of decolonization is mandatory for any human context and Africa is no exception.

However, without a proper knowledge of how colonization happened, decolonization has no chance to be implemented. To illustrate his idea of social decolonization, Snyman insists that the human being is a 'product of history' (Snyman, 2017:63); without an adequate knowledge of history, decolonization cannot be implemented with long-lasting social results which are beneficial to the people living in a particular society. Universities, therefore, must be actively engaged in the study of society and history, but neither can exclude the encompassing reality of religion. In this case, Snyman makes it clear that universities must change their curricula ecodomically, in all fields including the study of religion, so that social decolonization becomes a positive reality in African societies at least economically, scientifically, and culturally (Snyman, 2017:62).

Ecodomical change as social openness

Joseph Mante, professor at Trinity Theological Seminary in Accra, Ghana, anchored his contribution in the realization that ecodomical change cannot be performed without social openness. People tend to have biased and uninformed perspectives on religion but even when highly educated, men and women appear to detach religious knowledge from scientific investigation. This is why Mante proposes that human beings should realize that, regardless of whether they consider themselves religious or not, all life is 'seriously religious' (Mante, 2017:34). What he means is that religion and sciences should be put together again into a unified curriculum for the sake of a better understanding of reality in its entirely, human and non-human. According to Mante, 'the idea of ghettoizing religion into some private sphere' (Mante, 2017:34), is not only wrong epistemologically but also faulty morally because not being aware of either religion or sciences is a serious problem when it comes to integrative knowledge.

It should be stressed here that Mante does not advocate the return to a medieval approach to knowledge or education in which religion reigns supreme over sciences. What he wants to establish is a normativity of epistemology that promotes religion and sciences equally in order for human beings to benefit from a broader perspective on reality. To make sure that he is not misunderstood,

Mante underlines that education should never pursue 'the pontification of a particular religion' (Mante, 2017:36). Tertiary education, however, must attempt to provide students with as good an education as possible, and since religion is so intrinsically bound to human life, studying it for the benefit of knowledge in the context of natural and exact sciences is the ultimate demonstration of educational openness. When this becomes a matter of policy in any society, social openness towards religion and sciences is the ecodomical result of educational endeavors.

Ecodomical change as social sensitivity

Social openness towards religion may well remain a beautiful dream even if religion and sciences are studied together as part of the same curriculum if sensitive human issues are avoided by either or both. Hendrik Bosman, professor at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, makes it clear that human beings are currently struggling with a series of sensitive issues like 'class, gender, and race' (Bosman, 2017:12), none of which having been satisfactorily resolved across the world. Educational change in higher education can be worked out for as long as a significant number of individuals pertaining to a certain society are made aware of such sensitive problems. Religion must address all human preoccupations, class, gender, and race included, and in attempting to make people aware of them, educational systems must relentlessly pursue ecodomical change in their curricula with a view to building social sensitivity in matters of class, gender, and race.

Bridging individuals and societies through social sensitivity in problematic issues, tertiary education institutions can genuinely provide a beneficial contribution to human progress. Bosman insists that social sensitivity must encompass as many domains of life as possible: economic, political, environmental, intellectual, and legal, so that ecodomical change in tertiary education curricula should be pursued systematically and efficiently (Bosman, 2017:10). But in order for social sensitivity to be achieved realistically, Bosman suggests that universities should focus on three aspects of ecodomical education: rationality, pedagogy, and ethos (Bosman, 2017:11). In Bosman, they are three criteria which should define not only religion but also any other subjects studied in the university for the sake of social improvement.

Ecodomical change as social enlightenment

Social sensitivity is a project which may last for decades and institutions of tertiary education should be fully aware of this reality before they proceed with ecodomical changes to transform their curricula. Such ambitious plans cannot be attained without proper educational measures which are

based on profoundly shared convictions about what to do and how to do it in order to provide constructive education to as many people as possible. What is needed thus for such a program to be successful? Johann-Albrecht Meylahn, professor at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, may have a valid response. Using the concept of *logos*, specific to the Christian religion, he insists on the capacity of the *logos* to illuminate the whole world (Meylahn, 2017:37). When applied to education, the *logos* reveals that educational changes must be performed in ways which enlighten the minds of people living in a certain society so that they accept ideas which would otherwise be impossible to adhere to.

University curricula must go through demanding processes of ecodomical change so that they bring 'new light' on aspects related to human experience in the world. Religion, therefore, becomes an instrument which assists people in seeing the world from different perspectives. Meylahn is convinced that religion has the capacity to enlighten sensitive facets of human life, which must be reflected in the capacity and willingness of universities to embrace an ever-broader spectrum of ideas. Concretely, according to Meylahn, universities must strive to produce ecodomical changes to the point that they are able to create 'spaces for different worlds' (Meylahn, 2017:38) so that more and more people find themselves at home in various societies irrespective of their beliefs and customs.

Ecodomical change as social integrality

In order for everyone to feel at home is a social context, a certain frame of mind should be accepted by the majority of people living there. For example, people who have certain convictions about specific religious issues must come to terms with ideas they do not believe or support. The problem, however, lies in the fact that antagonistic perspectives on convictions shared by the same religion may be taught in tertiary education contexts and perpetuated in religious and social contexts. Thus, traditional perspectives on religion may appear to be less scientific, while modernist or liberal views of religion are considered closer to science. The resulting dichotomy may have nefarious repercussions not only on religious education but also on social cohesion. Consequently, Corneliu C. Simuț, senior vice-chancellor postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, suggests that university curricula in the field of religion must be changed and adapted in a way which renders this dichotomy void of any consistency. Mutually exclusive curricula end up in enterprises characterized by 'theology pigeonholing' or, by extension, 'religion pigeonholing' which do justice only to one perspective to the detriment of others (Simuț, 2017:57).

When antagonistic curricula collide, students are no longer provided with relevant information about religion as a whole, which is a faulty educational paradigm not only in methodology but also in epistemology. This is why Simuț recommends that religious curricula in tertiary education institutions should be characterized by educational integrality, so that students have access to as many perspectives as possible (Simuț, 2017:57). Integrality, however, must not be exclusively the result of ecodomical changes applied within universities but also a collective effort which eventually leads to social integrality – a prospective reality in which the majority of individuals in a social context are willing to consider opinions they do not normally hold or embrace.

Prospects

In light of these ten educational proposals for reimagined curricula, the prospects of religious education to produce ecodomical change in higher education may have numerous possibilities of concrete applications not only in Africa but all over the world because of its huge capacity for social transformation. For instance, although it is a commonplace that decolonization in Africa must involve dealing with extreme poverty, it is a demonstration of common sense to realize that poverty is a global phenomenon. Poverty is not only an African reality; on the contrary, it is to be found across the globe from the poorest regions to the richest environments. Philip Kennedy writes that the fundamental focus of contemporary theology is poverty (Kennedy, 2006:e-book) and, in many respects, he is right. If religious education as ecodomical change has a multi-faceted social impact, then it means that religious education can produce fundamental and long-lasting change across all the layers of society. Through religious education, people can understand not only how the world works, but also how individuals and societies function; once this awareness has been achieved, religious education can produce ecodomical change through concrete social results. But in order for this ecodomical change to take root in contemporary societies, African and non-African for an effective fight against poverty, a consistent number of people must be exposed not only to religious education, but to that sort of religious education which ensues in 'enduring meanings' a phrase coined by Thomas G. Guarino to express the efforts of religion to help society on the long run (Guarino, 2005:171). In this sense, religion can help people – hopefully as many as possible – if sensibly taught in universities in Africa and all over the place in the world.

Moreover, since religion is a fundamental human phenomenon, it means that is must not only be known as a basic human feature but it must also be taught in all forms of education, especially in tertiary education institutions. Wolfram Weiße explains that good education should never lose sight of religion (Weiße, 2008:349), which indicates that religion should be part of any earnest

educational endeavor. Even if wrongly considered the source of various conflicts around the world, religion must perhaps be seen not in light of human nature, which is more likely to be actual source of conflict, but an aid or support of human nature towards obtaining sustainable education for social improvement. For as long as human beings are taught as efficiently as possible by making recourse to religious instruction for a better understanding of human thinking, conflicts are likely to decrease rather than increase and the fruit of religious education as ecodomical change have a good chance to demonstrate their efficiency through all the levels of formal instruction, including tertiary education. In this respect, however, Bruce J. Nicholls reveals that religion must be taught through contextualization (Nicholls, 2003:20). When contextualized and properly understood in any human setting, religion can become a key factor in social improvement and human development if professionally taught in tertiary education institutions. A proper understanding of religion in general and of religions in particular can only lead to an increased awareness of human thinking across global culture – and this is exactly the purpose of good education.

When religious education has been taught constructively through ecodomical change: one can speak of a globalized result. Until then, however, globalization should be seen as a change as well as an opportunity to at least attempt to organize religious education at all levels, university included, with a view to ecodomical change aimed at social transformation. Education must produce positive change; likewise, religious education must result in positive, constructive, ecodomical change across the globe. Joseph E. Bush seems to be right in his assessment that globalization is 'shared praxis in society' (Bush, 2016:114). especially from the perspective of the capacity of education to yield concrete and long-lasting results. If religious education is tailored in such a way that it fits this mandate, then globalization becomes a vehicle of ecodomical change virtually in any society, African and non-African, which seeks to transform itself for the better. Religion should, therefore, connect people globally and, in this particular respect, religious education has the chance to put people in conversation so that they know one another better. Ivor Davidson writes about 'practical, public, contextual, conversational or transformational theology' (Davidson, 2015:73), which is nothing but contextualized theology in a globalized world; in the realm of religion education, it becomes ecodomical religion in a world inhabited by people who learn how to understand one another better and better by the day. In fact, given that the world in the 21st century is characterized by globalization, one cannot escape the fact that education is globalized – and religious education cannot and should not be an exception.

In a globalized world, religion is a global phenomenon. Regardless of whether it is appreciated or demonized, religion is a fact of human life and a constant characteristic of humanity. Religious

thinking influences people in many ways and in many respects to the point that peace or conflict cannot be detached from the reality of religion. George M. Newlands correctly teaches us that 'God has consequences for all human life' (Newlands, 2006:186) and even if he writes from the perspective of the Christian religion, there is no reason to limit the application of his affirmation to Christianity. On the contrary, one may rightly see that 'religion has consequences for all human life' and if this statement is true, then one can easily infer that such consequences can be either positive or negative. Education, however, must produce positive results. Within the same line of thought, religious education must produce positive results but such excellent outcomes cannot be theoretically conceived and then practically applied in the absence of ecodomical change and its inherent capacity for social transformation. If the world changes, then education must also change, and so must religious education. The potential of religious education to help by providing aid for human development is enormous for as long as ecodomical change does happen and people across the world have access to proper religious education. Universities should not waste such immeasurable potential but strive to develop new methods to teach religion in ways which enable ecodomical change to produce positive and long-lasting results for human development and transformation across the globe.

A South African Manifesto

Sometime before the 2017 Pretoria colloquium, a team of officials from the University of Pretoria's top management authored and published the *Draft Framework Document*, a paper which presents a series of guidelines for the rethinking of the teaching curricula in theology and religion. This is indicative of the fact that the need for educational change had been felt at the University of Pretoria long before the actual 2017 colloquium took place. As it happens, by the time the colloquium brought together specialists in theology and religion from African and non-African contexts, predominantly Western scholars, the idea of change had been a matter of consideration – if not also of concern – for those in charge of educational matters at the University of Pretoria. At the same time, one may infer with a reasonable degree of confidence that the focus on educational change at the University of Pretoria was not exclusively the product of Pretoria academics; on the contrary, it seems that their connections with colleagues from the whole of South Africa, Africa as a whole, and the rest of the world for that matter were the ingredients that ignited the spark of interest in educational change. It is thus logical to presume that when the 2017 colloquium took place and the matter of educational change was debated among religious scholars, what happened was that educational change turned into ecodomical change in the field of religious studies with a view to concrete social, transformative results.

The *Draft Framework Document* does not claim exclusivity in anything, and even less so in pretending that it is the only official paper which brings to light problems and solutions for educational change in the field of religious sciences. The document is nothing but a proposal, hopefully one among many, which has a specific South-African flavor in the sense that it is the result of South African concerns and realities. The main idea is that the religious studies curriculum must go through a radical process of change; in other words, teaching religion at the University of Pretoria – and, by extension, at South African universities, and even throughout the whole Africa – must be undergo serious reconsideration. In the language of the document itself, this reconsideration translates as reimagination with reference not only to higher education institutions but also to their social environment. The local context must never be excluded from the reality of university and educational change because tertiary education institutions exist precisely to serve human contents: local, national, regional, continental, and global. However, since educational chance must be efficient primarily in the local context, the document identifies a series of problems like 'exclusion, marginalization, and social injustice' which, although not specific or restricted to South Africa alone, require special attention with a view to possible solutions. Post-Apartheid South Africa needs to find ways to deal with these issues, and ecodomical change can be effected if pursued through the mediation provided by relevant religious education within the tertiary education system (***, 2017:65).

The document also recognizes that ecodomical change through religious education can be neither pursued, nor implemented in the absence of 'dignity, equality, human rights, and freedom' (***, 2017:65). These fundamental human values are specific to religions across the whole spectrum of human spirituality, so it is not only natural but also logical that the active pursuit of religious education at tertiary level should be encouraged and supported as assiduously as possible. In order for such support to be efficiently provided within a specific university setting, the document postulates the need for all the people involved in university life to be captivated by these core human values. Human dignity, equality, rights, and freedom can be achieved and promoted within tertiary education institutions if both university management teams as well as the members of the teaching staff and students are not only convinced of this program but also involved in the dissemination of religious values through ecodomical change mediated by a reimagined curriculum (***, 2017:66). Such efforts amount to a cultural vision which has considerable chances of success for as long as religious values are promoted based on 'critical inquiry, thinking, and democratic public engagement' (***, 2017:66), three academic aspects that may become vehicles of efficient and long-lasting ecodomical change that can produce the transformation of contemporary societies.

In moving from these theoretical aspects to more practical means of curricular application, the document underlines the mandatory character of concrete actions guided by 'responsiveness to the social context, epistemological diversity, renewal of pedagogy and classroom practice' (***, 2017:66).

When put together, the *Draft Framework Document* and the papers presented at the 2017 Pretoria colloquium bring to light the stringent necessity of educational change. With respect to religious studies in tertiary education institutions, both types of contributions underline the fact that religious education is not only necessary but also beneficial to human development in human societies regardless of whether one refers to African or non-African contexts. However, in order for religious studies to positively impact society, immediate and adequate measures must be taken so that educational change should be applied with concrete results for social progress. Thus, institutions of tertiary educations must foster an 'institutional culture of openness and critical reflection' (***, 2017:66), so that the entire spectrum of religious spirituality and world religions be comprehensively taken into account for university study and research. At the same time, the 'limitations, gaps, and shortcomings' (***, 2017:72) of the old curricula must not only be acknowledged but also avoided if ecodomical change through the study of religion is to be achieved and implemented in specific social contexts with a view to their transformation. University teaching and research can change for the better and can change human contexts ecodomically for as long as one admits the capacity of religion to provide good education, efficient pedagogy, interpretative significance, and existential transformation in all human contexts, African and non-African. Nevertheless, university professionals, students, and the global public must learn how to be intellectually vigilant so that the spiritual values of religion should be disseminated as widely as possible in all human contexts through responsible ecodomical change.

Discussion

It is clear that ecodomical change is no longer merely a fancy idea but rather a concept which has both the potential and the power to transform religious education across the world, Africa included. The theoretical and practical connotations of ecodomical change in the context of tertiary religious education must be aimed at the progress of human beings and the development of human societies irrespective of their geographical, social, economical, and cultural backgrounds. James K. Mashabela, professor at the University of South Africa, speaks about 'community development' (Mashabela, 2017:3-4) and this is exactly what ecodomical change seeks to produce in tertiary religious education. To give just one example, the issue of decolonization has been intensely

debated throughout the African continent and elsewhere in the world, but the reality behind the concept of decolonization cannot be achieved properly and efficiently in the absence of solid tertiary education.

Mashabela is crystal clear in his assessment that the program of decolonization is not going to be successful if tertiary education fails (Mashabela, 2017:3-4); this is why institutions of religious higher education should pay heed at ecodomically changing their curricula so that human progress is not hindered and human significance is not cancelled. According to Mashabela, decolonization is profoundly dependant on good, solid education, which includes religious instruction of all sorts. Ecodomic change becomes irrelevant if university education is not rebuild again and again, on ever new grounds which turns universities into venues of human progress. In Mashabela's mind, the purpose of education is to produce ecodomical change for the better, for a real, positive transformation in all the layers of a human societies, especially in African societies (Mashabela, 2017:3).

Such an academic endeavor is not beyond contemporary human possibilities; on the contrary, it can be done for as long as, according to Mashabela, universities are willing to reconstruct, reexamine, reinterpret, and reconsider their curricula, so that they address contemporary human concerns (Mashabela, 2017:4). Education in general and university education in particular, religious studies included, should actively work for a sustainable community development. In the African context, which is Mashabela's main concern, ecodomical change can be oriented towards community development if decolonization focuses on African consciousness and a genuine Africanness – a purpose that cannot be achieved without tertiary education, a key component of which is religious instruction.

At this point, however, one must underline the universal character of religious education and its enormous potential for ecodomical change and social transformation. If university education in general is perceived as not suitable for everybody, popular ideas about religious instruction includes the conviction that religious education may be suited for everybody. This particular popular perception about religious education may help the entire spectrum of disciplines which are part of the university curriculum. How? By simply educating people that university education may be not only available but also suitable for everybody. Consequently, what John D. Hargreaves describes as the 'underprivileged African majority' (Hargreaves, 1996:e-book) can be reached with tertiary education in the decades to come and one of the ways in which university education can become available more rapidly to a large number of people is religious instruction.

If so, ecodomical change as instrument of religious higher education becomes a realistic prospect in light of curricula change across the institutions of higher education aiming at fostering human progress, scientific development, and social trnasformation. Mashabela admits that the African continent has its problems and decolonization is a viable way to start solving those problems provided curricula change in higher education becomes an educational reality. In this respect, religious instruction can be beneficial to African societies by making religious education available to as many people as possible, and in this respect ecodomical change is a factor of crucial importance.

Ecodomical change is nothing but an attempt to make education more efficient by turning it into a reality which is available to ever growing numbers of people for a transformative improvement of their life in socicety. Thus, ecodomical change takes the shape of David Ford's proposal to educate people about deficient forms of belief (Ford, 2017:4), Joseph Mante's recommendation to fuse religious education with science education (Mante, 2017:34), and Corneliu Simuț's suggestion that all forms of theology and religion, traditional and liberal, be included in university curricula so that students have access to as broad a knowledge as possible (Simuț, 2017:57). Nothing should be omitted from religious instruction and ecodomical change must make sure that fosters the development of new, inclusivistic tertiary curricula which accommodate all aspects of learning. With reference to religion, controversial dogmatic issues, historically debated events, sensitive moral issues, and virtually anything else which escapes current or past consensus should be included in university curricula, so that students have unmediated access to as much information as possible and as broad a spectrum of problems as possible. Ecodomic change, therefore, should never exclude relevant material; on the contrary, it should include all the aspects – controversial or not – which have the potential to enhance understanding, progress, and awareness with a view to a real social transformation.

In university education, ecodomical change must be as inclusivistic as possible, not for the sake of including everybody, but with the purpose of including as many people as possible from as variegated backgrounds as possible. With respect to religious education, Gavin D'Costa speaks about 'secularized forms of theology' (D'Costa, 2005:ix) which should never be excluded or detached from more traditional forms of theology; ecodomical change, therefore, will mandatorily include both in religious instruction for the sake of advancing knowledge, educating people, and supporting progress if human societies are to be transformed in a genuine way.

Such an approach will include awareness of what happens in the world; for instance, Edward Shiza writes about the fact that decolonization should 'reflect Africa's social and cultural realities' (Shiza, 2012:171) and this will most likely happen if religious higher education is characterized by ecodomical change. Augusta Dimou notices that, in modern times, 'the state challenged the prerogative of the church over instruction' (Dimou 2009:17) which led to the exclusion of the church from the university. In contemporary times, however, the church – as well as other religious bodies – should be included in the university curricula for a more inclusive and encompassing perspective on the world. When that occurs, ecodomical change in higher education will have reached, if not its pinnacle, at least a significant milestone in transforming human societies. Within the African context, ecodomical change in tertiary religious studies should have a positive impact or, as Mashabela correctly puts it, university education must produce beneficial outcomes in all the layers of African societies (Mashabela, 2017:3), a conclusion one might expect to be universally valid for any human society in the world.

Conclusion

Universities must work to promote religion in all its complexity as a constructive aspect of human spirituality despite claims like that of Donald Armstrong who warns about the 'waning of Christianity in Europe and North America' (Armstrong, 1999:95). Similar alarming signs may be attached to any world religion, but this is not a reason to fall prey to such pretentions. On the contrary, we must realize – alongside Lieven Boeve – that 'theology finds itself at the crossroads of academy, church, and society' (Boeve, 2016:54), which creates a good environment for religion to flourish in any society, irrespective of its specific spiritual beliefs and practices. It is often the case that religion communicates fundamental realities of the human spirit in ways which are not accessible to other sciences, humanistic or not. For instance, Roger Haight explains that religion has the capacity to operate based on 'symbolic communication' (Haight, 1999:209) beyond the symbolism of other sciences for the edification of spiritual aspects that are not always or completely accessible to other sciences. In line with this argument, Erich Fromm reveals that religion expresses itself as human creativity precisely because the human being is the 'product of history' (Fromm, 2013:24).

However, in so doing, human beings do not search for scientific proofs the way other sciences do, but the sort of evidence religion needs lies in the realm of human spirituality, as one learns from Franz Overbeck's experience as one of Friedrich Nietzsche's closest friends (Overbeck, 2002 [1873]:76). Consequently, James W. McClendon confirms that this is one more reason to promote

religion in tertiary education institutions not only as a domain leading to a job or as a theoretical discipline, but also – and more importantly – as a practical vocation open to and oriented towards ecodomical results in society (McClendon, 2002:38). The specific nature of religion as practical vocation illuminates certain foundational aspects of human experience in ways resembling the transfiguration of Jesus Christ, an image Douglas Harink brings to the fore (Harink, 2009:158). This specifically Christian metaphor of Christological illumination can be extended to all world religions since religious spirituality across the whole range of human cultures aims at finding light of some sort for human problems irrespective of one's traditional or non-traditional convictions. This is why Oli-Pekka Vainio invites institutions of higher education to make sure there are no 'shifts' from 'liberalism to traditionalism' – and one can suppose that the other move from traditionalism to liberalism is also valid – when it comes to teaching religion in university settings (Vainio, 2016 [2010]:1). For this to happen though, universities must not only be committed to accept and promote religion as vital for spiritual and professional formation but also be willing to make ecodomical changes in their curricula if they really aim at long-lasting social transformation.

Religious education as ecodomical change in higher education is a realistic prospect for as long as tertiary education institutions are willing not only to include religion in their curricula, but also to use it constructively for the positive transformation of human societies in Africa and beyond the continent into our globalized world. The University of Pretoria's *Draft Framework Document* is proof of this realistic possibility, especially when coupled, improved, and enhanced by specialist advice provided at the 2017 international colloquium via the input of scholars from other African and South African institutions of higher education like those in Accra, Bloemfontein, and Stellenbosch. Regardless of whether ecodomical changes in higher education curricula lead to a religious education which seeks to ensue in social understanding, awareness, inclusivity, symbolism, help, decolonization, openness, sensitivity, enlightenment, and integrality (all vital aspects of social transformation) – or all the above for that matter, a final word of wisdom from the University of South Africa seals the debate. Concretely, religious education as ecodomical change, or simply education as change in tertiary institutions, is a valid endeavor with prospectively beneficial outcomes only if the sole focus of such curricular transformation is community development. When pursued within these parameters, such educational contributions within tertiary institutions are likely to demonstrate their efficiency not only on the African continent but also across the globe because concrete aspects of social transformation will follow closely.

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Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis (as, for example, the instances where credit was due to my co-author/s).

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Date: 15.07.2024