



*Reflections*

# Reflection on the Challenges and Prospects of Theological Education within the Transatlantic Slave Trade Enclave:

*The Case of St Nicholas Seminary, Cape Coast, Ghana*<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Challenges facing theological institutions today are multifaceted, including funding, world economics, pedagogy, theology, colonization, culture, national churches' history, attitudes, and the lasting impact of coronavirus across the globe. In particular, funding theological education is a serious challenge. Investment in theological education by charitable organizations, governments, and philanthropists seems to be a thing of the past. Unlike the sciences, agriculture, engineering, technology, and so on, theological education is not often considered to offer immediate economic returns or to positively influence the well-being of society. Consequently, the most familiar funding sources for higher education often do not include theological education.

This is a wide-spread problem; for example, many well-known seminaries and theological departments and institutions of international repute have closed in America and the United Kingdom. This trend continues to affect theological education in Africa and in the Caribbean, leading to low enrolment and underutilization of infrastructure in some theological institutions. Yet, as many of us believe, theological education and the training and formation of those called to serve as ordained priests remains an important pastoral and

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: This was first presented, in part, as a keynote address during our workshop at UTCWI in Jamaica, August 2024.

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Joseph Justice Bain-Doodu

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pedagogical venture. I hope to expound on some of these challenges and prospects in the context of St Nicholas Seminary.

**British Colonial and Missional History, and the History of the Anglican Church in Ghana**

While we do not have space to explore the entirety of British colonial and missional history in Ghana, suffice it to say that, as in many other parts of the world, Anglican Church history and Anglican theological education and ministerial formation are connected to British missionary history.<sup>3</sup> In Ghana, the Anglican Church was “the official church for the colonial authorities” and had the nickname “the Governor’s church.”<sup>4</sup>

The Reverend Professor John Pobee (1937–2020), in his book titled *The Anglican Story in Ghana*, states that St Nicholas Theological Seminary was conceived of by the Rt Revd Reginald Richard Roseveare (1902–1972), the last missionary bishop to Ghana.<sup>5</sup> The reason was to provide formation to Anglican priests, because he considered the training at the alternative, Trinity College (an inter-denominational seminary), to lack the Anglican element.

Commenting on this, Pobee made a prophetic statement: “Whether St Nicholas Seminary fulfils the criteria of integrity, authenticity, creativity and contextuality used to judge excellent theological and ministerial formation is another matter. In any case, given the precarious finances of most dioceses in Ghana, the financial viability of St Nicholas is a recurring issue.”<sup>6</sup> I dare say that in terms of theological integrity, authenticity, creativity and ministerial formation, Bishop Roseveare has been vindicated. However, Pobee’s observation on St Nicholas’s finances as “a recurring issue” has remained accurate. This situation deserves further interrogation in order to understand and appreciate the case and to seek appropriate solutions.

Many interesting questions emerge for examination. What prevented the establishment of St Nicholas Seminary prior to Bishop Roseveare’s departure?

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<sup>3</sup> For robust discussion on this topic, see, for example, John S. Pobee, *The Anglican Story in Ghana: From Mission Beginnings to Province of Ghana* (Accra: Amanza Limited, 2006); Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and the British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester, England: Apollon, 1990); and A. J. Temu, *British Protestant Missions* (London: Longmans, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Cephas N. Omenyo and Abraham N.O. Kwakye, “Authentically African, Authentically Anglican,” in *Trajectories of Religion in Africa: Essays in Honour of John S. Pobee*, ed. Cephas N. Omenyo and Eric B. Anum, 127–141 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 127.

<sup>5</sup> Pobee, *The Anglican Story in Ghana*, 178.

<sup>6</sup> Pobee, *The Anglican Story in Ghana*, 178–179.

**Reflection on the Challenges and Prospects of Theological Education  
within the Transatlantic Slave Trade Enclave:  
The Case of St Nicholas Seminary, Cape Coast, Ghana**

What investment had Bishop Roseveare put in place for the Seminary before he relinquished his position? How was the investment managed to ensure the Seminary's sustainability and financial independence? What reasons account for the re-introduction of the proposal for, and the establishment of, St Nicholas Seminary in 1975 several years after the departure of Bishop Roseveare?

The climate leaves a lot of speculation. It may be that the establishment of St Nicholas Seminary was a rushed decision after Bishop Roseveare left. Prudent planning and costing of running a sustainable institution like a seminary may have escaped the imagination of our forebears. One remarkable issue to consider fairly is that St Nicholas Seminary began as a seasonal institution. This means that one intake of students would complete their course of studies and leave before new admissions were made. This arrangement might have been more financially viable for the Seminary. Financial challenges increased from 1983 when a regular and consistent admission system was introduced by Revd Canon Ralph Martin (SSM). This system exposed the Seminary's financial unpreparedness and the permanent dependence on foreign assistance for survival; yet, as we see today, funding from any corner remains a challenge.

In reflecting on this historical link of missions and theological education, and the inherited impacts on indigenous leadership, perhaps one hard liberating truth may be to have a critical appraisal of the missionary agent today, to refute the old impression of imperialist attitudes in history. How missionary oriented are their policies? What kind of relationship exists between mission agencies and mission partners? How involved are the mission fields in the planning and execution of missionary strategies for mission expansion? How are theological institutions enabled to engage, participate, and contribute to the missionary plans of the society? Are mission fields neighbours or they are strangers needing help? These suggested questions may help to reshape the missionary approach and make their work more engaging, participatory, and encompassing.

**Global Economies, the Diocese, and Ministerial Formation:  
Issues of Funding**

All theological institutions are impacted by the economic challenges facing their respective host countries; in many cases, the ability of Anglican dioceses to fund their seminaries are likewise impacted. In Ghana, the situation becomes even worse with high inflation and constant increases in prices of goods and services. St Nicholas Seminary depends upon tuition fees to fund the institution but struggles with low enrolment. The reason for low enrolment is partly a global phenomenon. The harsh global economy has seemingly reduced the willingness of people to give to charity and philanthropic work. Donations, endowments, and legacies have waned. This in turn means the Church cannot

Joseph Justice Bain-Doodu

**Reflection on the Challenges and Prospects of Theological Education  
within the Transatlantic Slave Trade Enclave:  
The Case of St Nicholas Seminary, Cape Coast, Ghana**

give meaningful allowances to students at the Seminary that would support them and their families to live a decent life. Moreover, those who have the desire to support priestly training cannot afford much. To avoid further financial challenges, people find it difficult to leave their jobs and families to undertake residential ministerial training for a long time in a distant place. These are some of the reasons for the regular decline in student enrolment at St Nicholas, as other seminaries also experience.

Since St Nicholas depends on student tuition fees to run, these low enrolment numbers mean the Seminary is generally in arrears with staff salaries and allowances to both full and part-time lecturers for months. This affects staff commitment, our ability to attract lecturers, and other workers, all of which erodes the credibility of the Seminary. This in turn means a decline in ordained clergy receiving their theological training and ministerial formation in an Anglican context.

Another challenging aspect responsible for the financial predicament of the Seminary is a lack of commitment by the dioceses. Some dioceses have established ministerial training centres, which compete with the work at St Nicholas Seminary. Some bishops consider it cheaper to train priests in their own dioceses, which obviously leads to dissipation of scarce resources. To depend on fee payment to run a centralized seminary is a stressful encounter. When dioceses do not send candidates to seminary because they lack the resources to provide for them, the result is low enrolment. This throws the budget of the seminary into deficit, and the cycle continues. It would seem prudent as an [Anglican] Church for us to determine a more unified course of action for training our priests.

Most dioceses started life on fractured legs. They need funds to mend their own painful and fractured legs. How much money can they spare to take care of a baby (St Nicholas Seminary) that was born from a wishful thought? The story may be similar in most theological institutions and seminaries. Any church with an ailing seminary has a fundamental problem. The seminary should be the powerhouse of the church, and its condition reflects the status of the church now and the future. The future mission, expansion, and growth of such a church remains uncertain.

**The impact of coronavirus on theological education**

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented both challenges and opportunities for theological education.<sup>7</sup> It has brought in the use of modern technology for

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<sup>7</sup> Editors' note: E.g., see *Decolonizing the Theological Curricula in an Online Age*, edited by Felix Chimera Nyika, Mzee Hermann Y. Mbula, and Kenneth Ross (Zomba, Malawi: TSM

Joseph Justice Bain-Doodu

**Reflection on the Challenges and Prospects of Theological Education  
within the Transatlantic Slave Trade Enclave:  
The Case of St Nicholas Seminary, Cape Coast, Ghana**

communication, networking and effective collaboration. There is a shift from face-to-face to online teaching and learning. This has helped us to use time efficiently and offers a helpful work-life balance. Virtual universities, theological colleges, and seminaries have come as an answer to travelling long distances for studies. While this may be convenient for some, it is problematic for others. Not everyone has access to the internet. Until recently, St Nicholas has lacked the necessary communication equipment and internet connection to enable the provision of online lectures; however, we have recently received support to for this and look forward to developing a virtual classroom. A significant downside to online learning, however, is that we lose aspects of [priestly] formation which come from being together in community. Online learning is not a perfect answer to our financial question.

### **Prospects**

We regularly witness cuts in charitable grants to institutions due to obvious reasons emerging from global economic perspectives. Funding theological education cannot be a burden on missionary agents alone. A number of solutions were suggested at the Summit on African Theological Education in the Anglican Communion at Gaborone, Botswana, in November 2022, to help theological institutions become financially sustainable. My sincere opinion is that, to implement and achieve every single decision requires some initial financial support. Again, a practical approach may be to invest in some income generating projects, which would promise some inflows at regular times for the work of the theological institutions.

The challenges facing theological education are multifaceted, with finances being perhaps the most urgent. This reflection simply highlights the present challenges so that we can begin to think about possible strategies. Answers to these challenges are not straightforward. Though suggestions have been made in some instances, they require careful reflection and collective action. St Nicholas Seminary is not alone as far as these challenges are concerned, and we look forward to creative collaborations to address them.

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