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An ongoing search for constant and sustainable Lutheran theological education in South Africa in the 21st century¹

ABSTRACT

This article explores the recent history of Lutheran theological education in South Africa, which is still confronted by the legacy of colonial and apartheid education systems. The latter need to be confronted with liberation and decolonisation systems that reclaim African indigenous identities. There is a need to cultivate a culture of quality and equal education, spirituality, politics, and socio-economic systems for the service of South Africans. Evangelical Lutheran churches in Southern Africa are committed to improve and reform Lutheran theological education in the 21st century. Lutheran theological education is necessary to make a meaningful contribution towards training theological students to assist the church in its response to societal concern and contextual issues. The article introduces a recent renewal of Lutheran theological institutions in a new teaching and learning environment by the Lutheran Church. It discusses the implications and successes of Lutheran theological education in South Africa.

1 This article based on the dissertation "The Lutheran Church in Southern Africa and its perspectives on theological education from 1900-2016" by K. Mashabela 2020.

1. INTRODUCTION

As the 21st century drew nearer, Evangelical Lutheran churches in Southern Africa started to investigate alternatives for Lutheran theological education in South Africa. Although an integrated form of Lutheran theological education already existed in the 20th century, the Evangelical Lutheran Church struggled to establish a theological institution or an integrated theological institution, due to the legacy of apartheid and colonialism. The problem was about whether Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College should be amalgamated with Lutheran House of Studies to form the Lutheran Theological Institute in Pietermaritzburg, a work contract of Lutheran lecturers at the University of Natal, now the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This forced them to leave the university to be employed as full-time lecturers elsewhere, students to enrol for a Bachelor of Theology degree only or for a Diploma in Theology and a Bachelor of Theology, meeting the required number of theological students at South African universities, and a disappearance of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa's R40 million. It is vital to stress that Lutheran theological education ensured that pastors were trained to work together with the church, in order to identify challenges such as spiritual, economic and environmental injustices in the changing socio-political context. This article revisits a recent historical account of Lutheran theological education. It discusses the identified challenges and potentials of ministerial education in Lutheranism and ecumenism in South Africa.

2. ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT COMMITTEE ON LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL TRAINING

In the 21st century, Lutheran theological education in South Africa was the key for a continuous agenda of Lutheran churches. Evangelical Lutheran churches in Southern Africa had to review their 20th-century theological education with the guidance of Lutheran theological institutions. In 1998, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) sent an assessment team to Marang Lutheran Theological Seminary (MLTS) and the Moravian Theological Centre, with the purpose to link a Lutheran seminary with a university in South Africa (Nürnberg 2000:3-4). The Church Council Minutes (ELCSA Church Council Minutes 1998:12) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) recorded as follows:

As a response to the LWF report, the ELCSA Church Council resolved to appoint a Technical Team to produce a document to the next Church Council, Lutheran World Federation to be consulted. This committee produced an interim report to the Church Council in which various principles and options were considered. This report was forwarded to the General Assembly (GA) in December 1998.

The General Assembly Minutes (ELCSA GA Minutes 1998:16) of the ELCSA recorded as follows: "The General Assembly accepts the Technical Team and that it should continue with its work." As the 21st century drew nearer, the ELCSA, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA), the LWF, the Moravian Church, and the Lutheran theological training institutions were in a process of renewing theological institutions for closer cooperation, and for developing and fostering a new theological institution to meet the demands of the 21st century. Theological education committees were established to research and make suggestions for theological institutions that could be relevant within the South African context. The churches and the LWF found it difficult to agree on a common identity for theological education.

3. THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN PIETERMARITZBURG

This section discusses the role of black theology students in Lutheran theological education. From 29-31 August 1993, the Lutheran House of Studies (LUTHOS) organised a Theological Conference to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Lutheran theological education in Pietermaritzburg, at the Church of the Cross in Hayfields. As Lutheran students had not been adequately consulted about this, they rejected the anniversary celebrations, which they interpreted as "a white project" (Scriba 1993:i). The other view dismissed Scriba's "white project" as not true, because the Student Representative Council (SRC) of LUTHOS was extensively involved in the preparation and shared the planning process with students on a continuous basis. LUTHOS was, in fact, non-racial. Racism was certainly obvious in a university environment (Mashabela 2023b). Some Black students on the SRC were involved in deciding on invitees who were then invited. This was a subgroup of students who decided to protest and to besmirch the conference as a racial one. Scriba (1993:i) states that "[d]uring the conference[,] this matter was discussed with the students" and the conference continued as planned. Scriba does not provide full details of a rejection of the anniversary celebrations. A corresponding e-mail with Prof. Masoga, who was among the students' protest, mentioned that the anniversary was controversial and perceived as a racial one. Black students demanded that Black Lutheran lecturers be employed to work at LUTHOS at that time and at the University of Natal (UN). A year or so later, one Black lecturer was employed, and senior theological students started to work as assistant lecturers (Mashabela 2018a). In another interview with Rev. Solomuzi Mabuza, a classmate agreed with Masoga's view. Mabuza further stated that Black (African) students demanded the inclusion and integration of Black (African) students into the

Pietermaritzburg theological plan, which was supported by the LWF. They strongly felt that the whole structure and governance favoured White students, or to be more precise South African (German) White students (Mashabela 2019b). This challenge had to do with how the content and approach of teaching theology was done at the time. Black theology students were not enjoying their theological studies at both LUTHOS and the university. Black consciousness and black theology were in their blood to continue with the agenda of liberating educational systems in South Africa.

In 1992, Rev. Veikko Munyika was the chaplain of LUTHOS (Mashabela 2023b). In an email correspondence, Masoga mentions that in 1993, in preparation for the Theological Conference,

we as students – black students raised many concerns about the situation of theological training at the Lutheran Theological House of Studies (Mashabela 2023c).

Rev. Horst Muller was appointed as the chaplain. The vast majority of students did not like him because he lacked the acumen and capacity to deal with diversity issues, especially racial clashes and understandings. Simple issues such as food preferences and choices concealed big racial challenges faced by LUTHOS (Mashabela 2023c). Rev. Desmond Lesejane agrees with Masoga that, in 1995, these clashes and unresolved tensions forced Rev. Muller to resign, and Rev. Veikko Munyika was appointed as the acting chaplain (Mashabela 2023a). Students regarded him as slightly neutral, noting the fact that he was a student from one of the Lutheran dioceses in Namibia. The students observed that Munyika's weak point was that he did not command any authority. However, he tried to please both the students and the management of LUTHOS. In 1995, Dean Louis Sibiyi was officially appointed as the chaplain. This transformation brought stability at LUTHOS. The Black students' agenda was critically important for both LUTHOS and the university, in order to become inclusive higher teaching and learning institutions.

Already at the time of the conference, Rev. Nsibande was lecturing in Church History at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, and was involved in LUTHOS (Mashabela 2023b). In a WhatsApp conversation with Rev. Desmond Lesejane, who was one of the students who rejected the anniversary celebrations, indicated that the rejection was for two reasons. First, ELCSA was not represented when the anniversary was planned and, secondly, students needed Black lecturers to be part of LUTHOS and teach at UN. Rev. Ernest Nsibande, part-time lecturer in Church History, and Rev. Victor Vivian Msomi, part-time lecturer Practical Theology at UN in Pietermaritzburg, were self-supporting pastors in 1993 (Mashabela 2023a). According to Masoga, Black lecturers were coming from Umphumulo Lutheran Theological College

(ULTC) on a weekly basis. It is not true that they were permanent members of staff at LUTHOS. In fact, Rev. Msomi became the first full-time lecturer in the Department of Theology, UN. He was responsible for Practical Theology in the fields of Pastoral Counselling and Homiletics. Rev. Ernest Nsibande never worked full-time in the Department. He usually came in on Wednesday evenings to teach on Thursdays and then drove back to Kwa-Maphumulo on Fridays. The Department of Theology has always been a lily-white affair. It has never transformed (Mashabela 2023c). Thereafter, the few Black individuals (such as Rev. Bafana Khumalo) who were invited, never stayed. Rev. Dr Elelwani Farisani could not stay, due to his contract conditions. Fortunately, in the later years, the University of South Africa (UNISA) appointed him as Associate Professor, which the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) failed to do.

The transformation of LUTHOS by the role played by Black students led to the appointment of Dean Sibiyi as the first Black chaplain at LUTHOS. The appointment of Msomi and Nsibande as Black lecturers in the Department of Theology was a sign of transformation in the department. It could not have been easy for both of them to push the African liberation agenda and the fight against racism at the university. Racism was predominant at South African universities, and made it difficult to employ Black lecturers or for some of them to occupy higher university positions.

Concerning the events surrounding the Theological Conference, Masoga mentions that, as Black students, they raised concerns about the following:

- Students wrote a formal protest indicating that the conference would celebrate “whiteness” in the context of theological training.
- Unfortunately, the students’ voices were ignored.
- Students thought hard and fast – they had the LUTHOS van, and their driver would fetch Prof. Simon Maimela.
- Maimela was the only Black voice included in this planned conference.
- Masoga and other students hijacked him and had a five-hour meeting with him. They twisted his arm to address issues of racism and theological training.
- Fortunately, Prof. Maimela was amenable, and students crossed their fingers.
- The following day, they all went to the conference venue – Hayfields Lutheran Church.
- They staged a protest demanding to be listened to.

- Masoga states: “I must confess it was not a good spectacle – At last we were able to change the character of the conference”.
- It was agreed that Prof. Maimela presents his paper and thereafter students could have open debates.
- What impressed students were that Prof. Maimela’s presentation set the tone. It was about “Self-righteousness and God’s righteousness”. Masoga mentioned that “Maimela was spot on calling out self-righteousness evil just like apartheid. A great paper indeed” (Mashabela 2023c).

Black Lutheran students were unhappy about the inequalities related to Lutheran theological education in Pietermaritzburg. They demanded an end to racial discrimination against Black students and insisted that Black lecturers be employed to work at both LUTHOS and the UN. Theological students were clear in their demand that Lutheran theological education in Pietermaritzburg should urgently transform to a non-racial and inclusive theological training in a university environment. They were not necessarily against the 20th anniversary celebrations, but rather against the way in which the anniversary was planned and because long-outstanding demands were not met. Within the context of decolonising former White higher teaching and learning institutions, black theology students revealed their boldness to urge Maimela to change an irrelevant presentation from LUTHOS authorities to a relevant one about “Luther’s justification by faith in the context of apartheid”, in order to address the question of Pietermaritzburg’s theological view on blackness. This was indeed liberating. As a Black activist and theologian, Maimela acted in solidarity with African theology students at LUTHOS in response to Black concerns and contexts.

4. THE THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ABOUT SEMINARY OR UNIVERSITY: A THORN IN THE SIDE OF THE CHURCH

ELCSA grappled with the issue of returning to a seminary or partnering with a university, in particular South African universities. ELCSA strongly needed to retain its theological training at ULTC and to allow students who qualified to study at the university. ELCSA had no agenda to close ULTC because it was producing quality students for ELCSA churches.

However, ELCSA leadership wanted a seminary, or a university that offers a contextual theology. The ELCSA Church Council adopted a seminary linked to a university approach. The UN, the University of Pretoria (UP), and UNISA were identified to partner with ELCSA. If MLTS or ULTC were chosen, the link

could be either with UNISA or with UN. The UN was accepted (Nürnberger 2000:33). ELCSA and UELCSA were interested in training their theology students in the ecumenical environment of a university. However, the difference between these churches was the link between seminary and university. For decades, mainline churches have trained their theological students at their seminaries.² During apartheid, Black churches generally trained their clergy at church-owned seminaries, because Black students were not allowed to study at universities, except those universities under the authority of the Bantustans. These seminaries linked ecumenically to certify examinations through the Joint Seminary Board (Mashabela 2023b). Lutherans and LUTHOS/UN Pietermaritzburg Department of Theology were at the forefront of obtaining permission and campaigning for the possibility of Black students to study at university, and to be accommodated at LUTHOS. The other churches' approach was to delink theological seminary and university. It was interesting to note that mainline churches chose their theology students to be trained within the theology education at university faculties. The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa trained its theology students at a university.

The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa had no home base for its trainee ministers for over a decade, but in 2006, opened the House of Formation in Pietermaritzburg, where their students are registered for theology degrees at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Richardson 2007:144).

Churches in Africa practise this Lutheran approach of the unity between church and theology education at a university. Churches such as the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) also took a similar approach to train its theology students at the UP. The following comments confirm the struggle of finding a theology home from the viewpoint of the UPCSA:

Theological and ministerial formation of the UPCSA was marked by a period of unsettled and nomadic experience in a quest to find the most viable location and reshaping its theological training. This vacillation and nomadic experience culminated in the UP Faculty of Theology becoming a major training institutional partner of UPCSA in 2002. The ministerial formation in the UPCSA is facing a number of challenges since joining forces with UP (Faculty of Theology) (Mogashoa & Makofane 2017:9).

2 In his PhD thesis, entitled "The Lutheran Church in Southern Africa and its perspectives on theological education from 1900-2016", Mashabela (2020:11-13) discusses in detail the historical background of church seminaries.

The study argues that the approach of the Lutheran Church and of the abovementioned churches was to allow Black and White theology students to be trained in a united theological education space at a university. However, the unity of theological training in the 21st century still faces several challenges. This may mean that training theology students at a university is still unsolved and could lead to the return of a seminary.

5. A PROMISING JOINT LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTION

Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA), which was passionate about theological education, consisted of the following member churches: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Botswana, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, Moravian Church Western Region, South Africa, Moravian Church Eastern Region, South Africa, ELCSA, ELCSA Natal-Transvaal and ELCSA Cape Church (LUCSA 1993:1). At its meeting in October 1993, LUCSA (1993:47) decided that

[t]wo centres for degree level training be developed: Pietermaritzburg and Harare. Each specialise[s] in different fields. Diploma level education continues at the different seminaries of the member churches. LUCSA to petition Lutheran World Federation to continue to support the theological education projects in Pietermaritzburg and Harare. LWF may provide scholarship for post-graduate students at Harare and Pietermaritzburg. The possibility of establishing a Lutheran House of Studies also at Harare be investigate[d].

LUCSA was responsible for the affairs of Lutheran theological education in Southern Africa. It had a good working relationship with the LWF, which was the main theological funder in Africa. LWF financially supported Lutheran theological education in Pietermaritzburg and Harare. The above development revealed that Lutheran theological education in Southern Africa needed more work and growth.

However, for the Pietermaritzburg project, after lengthy and radical discussions and research, ELCSA and UELCSA agreed to establish a joint Lutheran theological education at a university level to address emerging South African environmental changes. A report on Lutheran theological training in South Africa was accepted by the Joint Committee on Lutheran Theological Training (JCLTT) in March 2000. It recommended that all Lutheran pastors be trained in a common institution, an ecumenical setting, without losing Lutheran identity; that ULTC and LUTHOS amalgamate to establish a Lutheran

Theological Institute (LTI) located in Pietermaritzburg and linked to the School of Theology at the University of Natal, and that lecturers be promoted to university status. The link between the LTI and the School of Theology and the university at large included negotiations related to administration, academics, remission of fees, bursaries, and so on.

A provisional settlement of the issues of property and running cost contributions by the partners was reached on the 9 October 2002 (Scriba 2012:3).

LTI started to operate on 1 January 2003 (Scriba 2012:3-4). JCLTT achieved its goal of establishing the Lutheran theological education at the UN. The establishment of LTI in 2003 was a third phase of the Lutheran Church in South Africa to promote Lutheran unity and witness in a theological education space.³ For years, ULTC and LUTHOS provided an effective and profitable theological training to serve Southern African Lutheran churches and society. The intention of establishing LTI was an important objective of Lutheran unity and ecumenical growth. The big concern was whether LTI would meet the requirements of the 21st century. The greater challenge for Evangelical Lutheran churches in Southern Africa was to sustain Lutheran theological education in South Africa.

6. EVOLVING LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE: NEW DEVELOPMENT AND CHALLENGES

The disturbing trend at LTI was that Lutheran theological training was unstable. In 2009, a great concern was the resignation of Lutheran lecturers from Lutheran academic contracts to join other higher theological institutions such as UNISA, ecumenical organisations, and others. Five lecturers were appointed and three seconded to teach at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the UKZN. The secondments were restricted to one-year contracts as the South African Lutheran Theological Training Trust (SALTTT) was not committed to long-term employment with UKZN (LTI principal's report 2012:3-4). The other view was that lecturers were appointed on three-year terms mainly because LWF funding, on which their appointment was based, came in three-year terms. The agreement between UKZN and SALTTT was renewed once without difficulties. In subsequent developments, however, UKZN prevented and postponed the renewal of the contracts (Mashabela 2023b). The lecturers who resigned did so because a full-time university post gave better stability, independent

3 To learn more about other Lutheran theological education phases, see Mashabela (2020).

of LWF funding cycles, and greater scope for promotion and development of research profiles. This study argues that there was a growing uncertainty of lecturers for full-time employment and sustainable partnership with UKZN. LTI's lecturers went to other theological institutions such as UNISA and ecumenical bodies, due to a threat concerning the future of LTI's survival and its lecturers' employment security. New lecturers were employed to replace migrated lecturers. The question was: What was the contractual position of the newly appointed lecturers. A three-year secondment contract threatened the future of theological education at LTI and its lecturers. SALT and Evangelical Lutheran churches in Southern Africa were supposed to be proactive to secure LTI and its staff.

ELCSA and UELCSA leadership implemented the following errors:

- A theological curriculum that excluded a Diploma in Theology at LTI to be taught at university, according to the agreement between LTI and UKZN.
- Failure of these churches to honour an agreement to contribute funds consistently to SALT, a trust project. LTI survived with donated funds from LWF and Lutheran donors from America.
- ELCSA Church Council used to oversee theological education at ULTC. It controlled the affairs of ULTC. When LTI was controlled by the rules of a university, ELCSA lost its support for LTI (Mashabela 2016).

Mainly ELCSA did not contribute its fair share of funds, especially after the R40 million debacle, when ELCSA funding to SALT/ LTI suddenly ceased in March 2015. The Lutheran theological training committee and churches had not applied a well-researched and well-considered evaluation of theological candidates for requirements for a degree at university and of those who qualified for a diploma in theology (Mashabela 2023b). Initially, ELCSA and UELCSA supported LTI to meet their needs. However, during the years of LTI's existence, the above identified mistakes created a crisis for the future functioning of LTI. The problem was that churches agreed to enrol their theology students only for a degree. The failure of churches not to contribute to the theological training trust fund was bound to let LTI collapse.

The churches decided to only agree to a degree, in order to reduce costs. The churches, especially ELCSA, did not adhere to agreements on minimum academic standards of candidates sent for education (Mashabela 2023b). Initially, there was a bridging year that formed part of the contract between SALT and UKZN. This was discontinued because the South African government subsidies for such were too low for the UKZN authorities to regard as sustainable.

LTI did not get any students from UELCSA in 2012 and 2013. UELCSA churches tried to encourage its young people to study theology at LTI. Many young White people from KwaZulu-Natal preferred to study various disciplines at Cape Town, Pretoria, or Stellenbosch universities and not at UKZN. This also applied to White theology students. This may have been due to a perception of lack of academic standards at UKZN, or to the fact that the vast majority of students at UKZN were Black and Indian, and young White people felt isolated and uncomfortable in this environment. This latter point also relates to residence at LTI, where 95 to 99 per cent of the residents were Black (LTI principal's report 2012:3, 8). A decline in theology students from UELCSA was cause for serious concern at LTI. UELCSA played a big role in both the establishment of LTI and the commitment to the unity of Lutheran theological training in South Africa. UELCSA contributed financial resources to LTI and enrolled its theology students at LTI for training at UKZN. This was based on the realisation and possible future for Lutheran theological training in South Africa. However, it was disappointing that UELCSA theology students' enrolment at LTI declined, due to the issue of race. It was also a theological problem that UELCSA would agree to enrol its theology students at the universities of Cape Town, Pretoria, and Stellenbosch. In implementing this, UELCSA paralysed the unity and witness of Lutheran theological training in South Africa.

7. INTRODUCTION OF A DIPLOMA IN THEOLOGY AT THE LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

LTI experienced a decline in enrolment for the Bachelor of Theology (BTh) degree, while many theology students enrolled for a Diploma in Theology (DipTheol) from ELCSA, in cooperation with the Theological Education by Extension College (TEEC). Scriba (2012:4) points out that,

[d]ue to concern about the progress and admission of students from poor schooling backgrounds, ELCSA decided to establish a diploma level theological education on the LTI campus, beginning in 2009.

The LTI principal's report (2012:3) records the following:

Churches are encouraged to identify pastors in service of the church for further studies, and to recommend to them to apply for registration for bridging to BTh Hons, BTh Hons, MTh, or PhD, as appropriate. LTI Staff are willing to assist applicants with applications for bursaries.

ELCSA regarded the introduction of a diploma as necessary, due to the low graduation rate of candidates it sent to LTI/UKZN. Many students took six years or more to complete the three-year degree. This was the reason for the vast majority of students, especially those without university exemption senior certificate, being placed on the diploma track. LTI lecturers actively encouraged capable students in the DipTheol to do a bridging year and to then obtain a BTh Hons at UKZN (Mashabela 2023b). In reflection, it was disappointing that ELCSA enrolled many theology students for DipTheol and thus defeated the purpose of Lutheran unity and witness to commit to an initial plan to enrol all theology students for a BTh programme. Thus, it betrayed LTI's vision of producing graduate students with a BTh degree. However, the DipTheol was a basic theological education for the renewal of churches to ensure that commitment to Lutheran unity and witness became a reality in South Africa. It ensured that theology students were trained to be theologically competent for church leadership and to fulfil evangelistic and mission work.

8. RENAMING OF THE LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE: SAVING THE INTEGRITY OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

When LTI faced challenges, the teaching staff had to renew its image. LTI was an investment for Southern African Evangelical Lutheran churches. Theological institutions such as LTI are an investment and a creative institution that provide relevant research for these churches.

In 2015, LTI was facing a serious crisis due to its existence and future. The existed LTI teaching staff from ELCSA saw a dissolution of SALT TT as a recreated opportunity to form a new theological seminary. Not to so say, it was happy about the dissolution of SALT TT (Mashabela 2018b).

LTI staff created a plan to ensure that the campus would not die with the name Lutheran Theological Institute, but rather with a new seminary name. In August 2015, LTI was meant to close down; yet teaching staff continued to the end of 2016 to educate theology students and to fulfil academic administrative work without a salary. In the same month, the ELCSA leadership retrenched the LTI administrative staff. The teaching staff renewed LTI within the context of historical Lutheran sources of the 1530 Augsburg Confession. LTI was renamed after this historical event as the Augustana Lutheran Theological Seminary (ALTS) in July 2015, after lengthy discussions to find solutions for the LTI crisis (Mashabela 2018c). Thus, in 2016, some of the ALTS teaching staff opened a new bank account named Augustana Lutheran Theological Seminary and this account name was used throughout 2016.

In 2015, the crisis was caused by the cessation of monetary support from ELCSA Head Office, as the R40 million, whence funding for LTI and the Diploma programme came from the interest, had been otherwise invested and lost. SALT TT was not dissolved then, but had, jointly between ELCSA and UELCSA, recommended to transfer the SALT TT degree education to the University of Stellenbosch. This was done on the basis of an evaluation conducted in 2014 by an independent team. SALT TT was later dissolved, due to the significant liability, caused by the loss of the R40 million, for any partners of the institution that suffered this loss without having the responsible parties face consequences (Mashabela 2023b). The renaming of the DipTheol activities at LTI to Augustana Lutheran Theological Seminary occurred prior to these developments. However, this identity proved useful, in order to raise donations in view of the lack of funding from ELCSA Head Office.

In September 2016, the ELCSA Church Council meeting, held at Lakeview Airport Lodge, Bonaero Park, Kempton Park, accepted the name Augustana Lutheran Theological Seminary, while ELCSA created a partnership with the Methodist Seminary. It appointed a theological education committee that would report in November 2016 prior to the General Assembly (ELCSA Church Council Minutes 2016:11, 17).

ALTS was now under ELCSA leadership. During the renaming time of LTI, the ALTS teaching staff addressed the process of the ALTS accreditation. The plan was that, after a process of accreditation, ALTS would offer a BTh and BTh Honours degree and diploma in theology, and ELCSA would end its relationship with TEEC programme. ALTS would incorporate theological education courses with sociology, economics, and psychology (Mashabela 2018c). ALTS would continue its partnership with the UKZN for postgraduate studies. As ELCSA product, ALTS would establish a new Lutheran theological education institution in South Africa for the Lutheran family in Southern Africa, ecumenical, and international churches.

The renaming of LTI and its accreditation saved Lutheran theological training in South Africa. It aimed to continue its project of training local and international students who enrolled for undergraduate and postgraduate studies at UKZN. Thus, the vision and mission of establishing and sustaining the early beginnings of Lutheran theological education did not die during this challenging period. It was, in fact, sustained through constant renewal of theological education by ELCSA and other Lutheran churches in Southern Africa. The 21st century presented the opportunity for keeping Lutheran theological education alive and productive in South Africa.

The other important aspect about ALTS was the issue of funding. ALTS acknowledged the impact of the #FeesMustFall campaign in 2016 by university

students in South Africa (Mashabela 2018b). ALTS was seriously affected by the disruptive campaign strikes of #FeesMustFall. To give a historical context about #FeesMustFall, Langa (2016:6) asserts:

Students protests against fees are not new in post-apartheid South Africa, especially in historically black universities. Student-led protests gained momentum in 2015/16 and spread across the country. The #FeesMustFall movement sparked heated debates on fee increases in universities.

Even in post-apartheid South Africa, Black students struggle to finance their university studies. The 2015/2016 students' campaign of #FeesMustFall made a historical turning point to demand free education and the decolonising of curricula at universities. Lutheran theological education in South Africa forms part of this historical 21st-century development in tertiary education. The Lutheran family in South Africa could not afford to lose the opportunity to make a theological education contribution during this important era in the midst of South African spiritual, political, and socio-economic changes. This challenge included the question of #FeesMustFall and decolonisation in South Africa.

The issue of the future of Lutheran theological education became complex because there was a plan to partner with the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA). In September 2016, the ELCSA Church Council Minutes (2016:15) recorded as follows:

The diocese requested the Church Council to hand over Marang Lutheran Theological Seminary to Western Diocese. The Church Council accepted the request.

The ELCSA-Western Diocese needed to re-establish theological training at MLTS for its theology students and laity. Perhaps this decision was informed by doubts about the existence of the new ALTS. There was also a question of partnering with MCSA on theological training. These two conversations and the approach to Lutheran theological education in South Africa played an important role in saving the future of theological education in ELCSA, its dioceses, and the Lutheran family, in general. However, this study observes that there was uncertainty about a united ALTS and Lutheran theological education within ELCSA dioceses.

9. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CLUSTER OF THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS IN PIETERMARITZBURG

Cluster of Theological Institutions in Pietermaritzburg (CTIP) was established as an ecumenical education network. The then leader of the theological education in Pietermaritzburg, Prof. Gunther Wittenberg, was the driving force behind the establishment of this cluster (Mashabela 2023b). The main members of this cluster were LUTHOS, St Joseph's Catholic Training Institute, School of Theology, UN Pietermaritzburg, Evangelical Bible Seminary of South Africa (EBSEMSA), and Federal Theological Seminary (Fedsem) (Richardson 2007:149).

When Fedsem closed, it was replaced in the Cluster by the Evangelical Seminary of Southern Africa (ESSA). Also attached are the Lutheran Theological Institute, the Congregational House of Formation, and the Moravian College. Even if the University's School of Religion and Theology were to be downsized or closed, the Cluster would still be able to operate effectively with the various institutions offering each other mutual support and assistance (Richardson 2007:149).

This initiative's ecumenical approach enabled theological institutions to work together in Pietermaritzburg. In October 1989, the first Convocation of the CTIP led to the establishment of a theological cluster. The Convocation decided to implement its proposal and resolutions at the beginning of 1990. The Evangelical House of Studies was established in the vicinity of the university similar to LUTHOS (Brown 1989:41). CTIP was already in the process of being established, due to the acceptance of a cluster proposal by theological institutions. CTIP had a vital commitment to ensure that ecumenical education would make a valuable contribution to academic research and work at the UN and for the theological house of studies. Theologically, ecumenical principles were applied to build a progressive and contributing African ecumenical education in an academic space. Thus, the establishment of ecumenical education at the UN Pietermaritzburg campus was a radical change to deliver quality and effective theological education for churches. The closure of ALTS in 2016 affected the unity and operation of the CTIP. However, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, Pietermaritzburg, UKZN, St Joseph's Catholic Training Institute, Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary replaced by Fedsem, United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) House of Formation, Evangelical Seminary of Southern Africa, and KwaZulu-Natal Council of Churches as an observer forcefully revived the cluster. From 2021, cluster reignited with its activities to further revive itself.

10. THE LUTHER VARSITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) was very interested and supportive of theological education in Southern Africa. LUCSA identity (2013:1) recorded that the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa was established as the successor of the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa (FELCSA) in May 1991 at the Lutheran Conference Centre, Bonaero Park, Kempton Park. LUCSA was one of three LWF sub-regional representatives that understood itself within the context of the Lutheran churches' communion. The other sub-regions were the Lutheran Communion in Central and Eastern Africa and the Lutheran Communion in Western Africa. Scriba (2014:97) points out that LUCSA was established by 14 former FELCSA member churches. This context motivated LUCSA to investigate the establishment of a regionally coordinated theological education at a university of its own, namely the Luther Varsity in Southern Africa (LUSA) that would make affordable theological education available to churches. LUSA was the brain and spiritual child of Lutheran churches in the region of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In 2010, LWF member churches assembled in Germany. At that time, Dr I. Noko was retiring as the LWF General Secretary (1 November 1994-2010). During that assembly, three LUCSA leaders, namely Bishops Z. Kameta, J.M. Ramashapa, and A. Moyo approached Noko to investigate the establishment of a Lutheran university in the SADC region. In January 2016, LUCSA established the Luther Varsity of Southern Africa (LUSA) at Denel Campus, Kempton Park. LUSA was designed to be funded sustainably by the LUCSA member churches (Mashabela 2019a).

LUCSA wanted to establish a Lutheran university that was integrated with both Lutheran region churches and teaching and health institutions. The theological education would be taught at the same university. This was a sixth attempt to establish and sustain Lutheran theological education with education work in other education fields, or as a full university in South Africa. LUSA was a private higher education institution and differed from other universities on education in that all students in various study fields would be equipped with basic theological education. It appears that LUSA was established to train its students to become accountable, well-informed, and critical citizens in service of society. However, LUSA is at its infant stage to reach full requirement of a university in South Africa.

11. A THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION CRISIS IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

In the early 21st century, Lutheran theological education in Southern Africa experienced a serious financial crisis. The ELCSA Church Executive Committee decided to disinvest an amount of R40 million of ELCSA money from Old Mutual without the approval of the Church Council and General Assembly. In December 2016, the General Assembly meeting was highly divided and disappointed about the disinvestment and disappearance of the money without proper consultation with all ELCSA structures. Lecturers' salaries were unpaid, no catering was provided for theological students, and other LTI operational needs such as municipality fees and taxes were unpaid (Mashabela 2018b). The churchwide staff and LTI staff were not paid. ELCSA experienced a serious financial crisis since 2015. In late November, beginning of December 2016, students were notified that LTI was closed. The LTI teaching staff were placed at parishes from early January 2017. The R40 million saga created division among dioceses and parishes. Some pastors in ELCSA Central Diocese and ELCSA South Eastern Diocese and deans in ELCSA South Eastern Diocese were suspended when they demanded accountability for the missing money (Mashabela 2018c). The disinvestment of this huge amount of ELCSA money had a negative impact on ELCSA life and existence, as it was unable to pay and manage its finances. The 2016 ELCSA General Assembly discovered that the R40 million disinvestment had the biggest impact on theological education at ALTS. It would take decades for ELCSA to rebuild ALTS, which had not operated since January 2017, due to the fact that ELCSA was facing a financial crisis. The experience of ALTS was a theological problem within the ecumenical network in Africa. ELCSA leadership had dismally failed ALTS to fulfil its ecumenical education task of providing ELCSA congregations with quality-trained pastors in service of society in South Africa. The above insights show that the demand for accountability of the misused R40 million led to the unfair suspension and expulsion of deans and pastors for asking critical questions about the missing money that could not be accounted for. This scenario instilled fear into other pastors, deans, and "laity" to call for accountability. This unnecessary challenge frustrated the entire ELCSA.

In addition, UELCSA was faced with debts at LTI, as it shared the responsibility with ELCSA. Mashabela (2018c) asserts that,

[d]ue to a crisis of ELCSA, UELCSA had to leave a joint theological training at LTI. It sold its property of LTI to pay debts it owed at LTI. ELCSA remained with its property at LTI.

This development affected the future of Lutheran theological training in South Africa. UELCSA acted proactively to save its integrity, in order to sustain its partnership with the ecumenical church and other institutions. There was silence about whether the remaining LTI property was still under ELCSA or not.

12. CONCLUSION

This article explored recent historic developments of Lutheran theological education in South Africa. Lutheran theological education must constantly exist, in order to relevantly address the 21st-century challenges facing South Africa. There is no doubt that ELCSA is struggling to produce more pastors for its dioceses. The challenge with ELCSA is the quality of pastors accepted for its ministry at present and the lack of pastors to serve in parishes. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa is tasked with regaining its theological institutions, in order to enhance community engagement through theological education that is extremely efficient and sustainable in service of the people. Thus, Lutheran theological education must join the continuous business and ranks, as Mashabela (2017:4) states:

African theological education must be a priority and a basis for the struggle for transformation, to promote the African agenda within justice, human rights and dignity in Africa.

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