

World Council of Churches
Education and Ecumenical Formation

July 2003



*Participants at the Ways Ahead on Ecumenical Theological Education Conference
hosted by St.Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya,
at the Centennial Celebrations, 2-7th June 2003*



This biannual journal aims to encourage sharing and cooperation among all who are working for the renewal of the churches through programmes of ministerial formation. All correspondence regarding MINISTERIAL FORMATION should be sent to the address below. Submission of relevant articles, reports and news is welcomed. Items in this journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the WCC and its programme on Ecumenical Theological Education.

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Cover picture : Participants at the Ways Ahead on Ecumenical Theological Education Conference hosted by St.Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya,at the Centennial Celebrations, 2-7th June 2003

LETTER FROM STAFF

Dear friend and colleague,

One of the principal purposes of the World Council of Churches, stated its present Constitution, is to “nurture the growth of an ecumenical consciousness”. The original Constitution adopted at Amsterdam in 1948 expressed the same sentiment – “To promote the growth of ecumenical consciousness in the members of all churches”. An ecumenical consciousness is about being open to others whose ways of believing, worshipping and serving are different from our own - not only being prepared to learn *from* them but also learning *with* them how we respond to changing contexts in a Christ-like way. This means that the WCC should not only undertake activities of an ecumenical nature. It requires us to encourage people to think, relate and act ecumenically, *to be* ecumenical.

Regrettably, in some places, we are seeing a growing emphasis on a kind of consciousness which places denominational interests above everything else. Ecumenical relationships and collaboration are only seen as useful in so far as they serve those interests. We can find this in theological education as well as in the churches.

In the WCC’s work on Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE), however, we do have something to celebrate. An ecumenical theological education is one which engages with traditions and contexts in order to open people up, which aims beyond training individual specialists to the development of community. The articles in this issue illustrate how ETE is an instrument for nurturing ecumenical consciousness.

From the Harare Assembly onwards, ETE has implemented a strategy of appointing consultants who are based in three regions. The significance of this is clearly demonstrated in the articles written by the consultants: José Duque, Vladimir Fedorov and Wati Longchar. They offer us important insights for their region and from their region. Nyambura Njoroge, from her global perspective as Programme Executive for ETE, explores how theological education can promote Christian unity.

We should be looking towards a time when we no longer have to have to add ‘ecumenical’ before theological education. As we describe it, ecumenical theological education is all about good educational practice and being Christian in its fullest sense. Christian theological education ought to be ecumenical by nature. However, until it is, we need ETE and we need to be intentional about nurturing an ecumenical consciousness.

Simon Oxley

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THE ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN ASIA AND PACIFIC: Towards a Common Strategy and Mechanism

Wati Longchar

Ecumenical Theological Education – Vision

When we speak of ‘Ecumenical Theological Education’, we come to a quick conclusion that it is about ‘inter-denominational programs or institutions of theological education’. Ecumenical Theological Education is much broader than institutional collaboration; it is no longer limited to the history of attempts to reunite churches or the growth of ecumenical organization.¹ It aims at preparing leaders of Christian communities who in turn would inspire new life, renew and transform society and peoples as well as congregation. The role of ecumenical theological education is not limited to training Christian ministers alone. It involves equipping whole Christian community so that they can become living witnesses of the life-giving power of the gospel. Theological education is enabling and building up community for multiple forms of ministry in the Christian community as well as in wider human society. Each Christian community lives among and for the sake of a wider human community. It is in this wider human community that Christian community becomes viable community of hope and healing, community of sharing in solidarity, community that build and sustain relationship of reconciliation and mutual empowerment.

Ecumenical theological education is centered on three visions (a) which affirms life and relationships/community, (b) which inspires rebuilding and reconstruction of community, inclusive of different and diversities, and (c) which reaches beyond the future of church and society and embraces God’s entire creation. Therefore, the vision of ecumenical theological education cannot be narrowly confined to ministerial training program of the churches alone; rather it involves equipping the whole people of God. It is for the *Laos* – the whole people of God. It is an ongoing process in which the whole people of God are empowered for formation and transformation of the whole community. It searches to build a just and inclusive community in the context of the people of other faiths.² How do we integrate these visions in our teaching and learning process?

Ecumenical Theological Education Networks in Asia and Pacific

There are several ecumenical theological education networks in Asia and Pacific. Most of the theological colleges/seminaries established by the mainline churches come under the following regional theological associations³:

(1) **BTESSC**: The Board of Theological Education of Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC) is an Association of theological schools based in India. No name is more honored in the history of modern mission than that of William Carey, the founder of Serampore College. As a result of the vision of Carey and his successors, the Senate of Serampore College became a reality through the Bengal Legislative Act IV, 1918. The BTESSC today is one of the major representative bodies of Churches legally constituted and responsible for administering theological education in South Asia. It stands as a unique example of ecumenical participation of the churches and theological institutions in curriculum planning and evaluation towards common degrees and in their quest for holistic training for ministry.

The BTESSC tries to meet the demands of modern ministries effectively by responding to current social challenges and evolving newer patterns of theological education and research. Forty-eight

¹ Simon Oxley, *Creative Ecumenical Education* (Geneva: WCC Publication, 2002), p. 11.

² For more details, refer to Simon Oxley, pp. 43 ff.

³ Apart from Christian studies in secular universities, there are evangelical theological associations like Asian Theological Association (ATA) which also gives accreditation of theological degrees. Though ATA is a fast growing theological association in Asia, I have limited our discussion to ecumenical theological education only.

colleges and Federated Faculties from all over India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College (University) and it reaches over to 10000 students in English and major regional languages.

The Senate of Serampore College offers the following degrees through a full-time residential study: Bachelor of Theology (B.Th), Bachelor of Religious Education (B.R.E.), Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.), Master of Theology (M.Th), Doctor of Theology (D.Th.), and Diploma in Clinical Pastoral Counseling (D.C.P.C.), Masters in Ministry (M. Min.), and Doctoral of Ministry (D. Min.). These degree programs are designed to train Christian leaders in various forms of ministry to offer opportunities for theological study and reflection in the light of the challenges faced by them in their own situation. Besides these residential programs, the University, with the help of the colleges, runs Bachelor of Christian Studies (B.C.S.) program for equipping and training of the laity. The program is designed to enable the laity to gain a better understanding of Christian faith and to deepen their commitment to service in the context of their vocation. In addition, the University also offers Diploma in Christian Studies (Dip. C.S.). This course was introduced for the benefit of people of different religious traditions and ideologies so that they could study Christianity as a religion in its indigenous character in terms of its faith, history and practice. Through all these extension programs, the University reaches over 4000 students through the affiliated colleges and federated faculties.

To promote women in theological education, the University created a space, namely, the Association of Theologically Trained Women in India (ATTWI). It is an all India body consisting of more than 400 members, who are theologically trained women. The Association is divided into seven regions namely, Andhra Region, Karnataka, Kerala, Chennai, North India (2 regions) and North East India. ATTWI is an interdenominational organization. It strives to uplift women and girl child, deal with issues pertaining to women and girl child right, have dialogue with the concerned organizations, and make representation on their behalf and by doing so help the society to develop a healthier community by creating awareness. ATTWI conducts seminars, writers' workshop based on the above mentioned issues in various regions from time to time.

Indian Women in Theology (IWIT) is the publishing wing of ATTWI established in 2001. It has published the first book entitled *Feminist Hermeneutics* when they celebrated the first anniversary of IWIT in December 2002. IWIT further plans to publish *Recasting Women: Reshaping Theologies* with the help of ETE.

(2) **ATESEA:** The Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA) was established in Singapore in 1957, with 16 mainline Protestant schools as founding members. It was the first formal regional association of theological schools in the non-western world. Today it has the membership of 95 schools in 16 countries, with approximately 12,000 students and 1000 faculty members and has broadened to include Evangelical, Pentecostal and Adventist schools. The ATESEA has five (geographical) areas in its work. They are: the Indonesia Area, the Philippines Area, the Malaysia-Thailand Area, the Myanmar Area and the Hong Kong-Taiwan Area.⁴ The plan to create a new region for Sri Lanka under the South East Asia Graduate School of Theology (SEAGST) is under consideration.⁵

Apart from its various degree programs, the ATESEA responds to the changing needs of theological education by running various programs through its different organs to meet the needs of theological education in the region. Some of its present programs include the improvement of the management and administration of schools, the search for a new spirituality in Christian formation, new pattern of theological education, the promotion of closer relationship between seminary and

⁴ Some schools in S. Korea are under the Hong Kong and Taiwan Area.

⁵ The ATESEA family continues to expand its ministry in South Asia particularly due to political reasons in the region. Altogether there are five theological colleges in South Asia affiliated with ATESEA (two in Sri Lanka, two in Pakistan and one in Bangladesh).

church, the search for a more adequate understanding of excellence in theological education and the development of Asian perspective and insights in Christian theology through seminar-workshops. It also gives special emphasis on empowering women some of who have assumed considerable leadership role in theological education in South East Asia. The present executive director of ATESEA is a woman as well as that of Indonesia Theological Association. There are a number of women leading the colleges as principal/presidents, for example, there are two women principals in two leading theological colleges in Myanmar and there are five women presidents in the Phillipines. This is very encouraging.

The Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia (FTESEA) plays a significant role in China and South East Asia. The FTESEA is an ecumenical agency that provides financial support to ATESEA and SEAGST as partners in the on-going development of theological thoughts and education in the region. Established in the 1930s to support Nanjing Theological Seminary in China, FTESEA expanded its work to South East Asia in the 1950s. Today FTESEA continues its relationship with Nanjing Theological Seminary and the Commission on Theological Education of the China Christian Council as well as its partners in South East Asia. Two denominations in Canada and eight in the United States are members of FTESEA. FTE continues to play major role in (a) Christian theologies that arise from the specific contexts of China and South East Asia; (a) theologically equip Christian leaders who provide competent leadership to their communities of faith; and (c) Christian churches who share the Good News of the Gospel with enthusiasm and relevance. FTESEA co-operates and supports the work of ETE in the region.

(3) **NEAATS:** The North East Asia Association of Theological Schools (NEAATS) covers S. Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Unlike the other theological associations in Asia and Pacific, the NEAATS does not have an administrative structure; it does not provide accreditation of theological degrees. The Association organizes fellowship once in two years to promote ecumenical programs and institution cooperation.

(4) **ANZATS :** The Australia-New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS) is a fellowship umbrella that works for the promotion of common theological concerns in Australia and New Zealand. Like NEAATS, the Association does not have an administrative structure and does not provide accreditation to its member schools. The theologians meet from time to time to exchange views and ideas to promote mutual cooperation in the field of theological education.

(5) **SPATS:** The South Pacific Association of Theological schools (SPATS) is an ecumenical body serving theological education in the Pacific region. It was established by the Pacific Churches in 1969 and has its secretariat in Suva, Fiji. It is governed by SPATS council, the executive committee, and the general secretary on a fulltime basis since 1998. There are 26 member institutions spread across the vast area of the Pacific Ocean.

The SPATS' challenge is to bring together a multi-lingual, multi-cultural and geographically scattered membership with a view to strengthening of theological education of the churches in the region by developing and maintaining high standards, and promote cooperation and mutual consultation among the schools for theological research relating to the ministry and mission of the churches in the region. The SPATS has close ties with both the Melanesia Association of Theological Schools (MATS) and the Australia-New Zealand Associations of Theological Schools. The SPATS is hopeful of starting its doctoral program in near future with the help of some universities in Australia and New Zealand. To promote and stimulate theological thinking and writing, the SPATS publishes *The Pacific Journal of Theology* twice a year.

The SPATS plays an important role in women's theological education through WEAVERS program. The Weavers establishment as a program of the SPATS was the result of a consultation on *Women and Ministry in the Pacific* held in Tonga in 1989. Women involved in theological education in Suva, Fiji formed a committee with a mandate from SPATS Executive to promote theological education for women. The name WEAVERS was adopted to emphasize the communal and participatory nature of the act of weaving. WEAVERS encourages women to weave together a distinctively Pacific way of doing theology. In 1994 a full-time co-ordinator was appointed to the SPATS' secretariat to coordinate the program and liaise with church leaders and principals of theological schools to promote theological education for women. WEAVERS advocates for women to be fully involved in theological education throughout the Pacific churches to give life and to create inclusive community of women and men of all ages in the Body of Christ. WEAVERS have published (2003) *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania*.

Besides BTESSC, ATESEA and SPATS, there are a number of national theological associations like Association of Theological Education in Myanmar (ATEM), Perhimpunan Sekolah-sekolah Teologia di Indonesia (PERSETIA) etc. who strive to enhance theological education by sharing of both human and material resources among churches and theological schools, facilitate accreditation of theological schools, curricula formulation, etc.

Altogether there are seven major theological networks, including the national theological associations, who facilitate and work towards strengthening theological education in Asia and Pacific. Besides, as mentioned before there is the Asian Theological Association (ATA) which was started as a parallel organization by the evangelical churches.

At present, there is no umbrella organization to bring these theological associations for a better co-ordination in training future church leaders.⁶ ETE-WCC is exploring the possibility of creating an umbrella forum for theological associations in the region to work towards a closer co-ordination in future to avoid misunderstanding and to help these theological accrediting bodies to establish healthier relationship, and to develop a standard accreditation policy of the institutions to give global credibility and acceptability.

Theological associations, both at regional and national levels, have been making serious attempt to make a blending of the theological and pastoral dimensions in ministry. The primary objective of theological education is seen as a vocation of discipling the nations which involves nurturing the candidates to relate faith to life, worship to work, prayer to action, proclamation to protest as authentic form of Christian obedience. The social awareness is being recognized as the key factor in the renewal of congregations. The training of women has also attained acceptance for meeting the challenges in both rural and urban situations.

In addition to these theological networks, we have also the Forum for Asian Theological Librarians (ForATL) who gather to the need of library development of theological schools. This Forum was started in 1991 through the initiative of Program for Theology and Culture in Asia (PTCA). The Forum was actively engaged in producing resource materials for "Doing Theologies with Asian Resources" and training program in the past. However, the Forum could not initiate much activity due to lack of resources and initiative during the last few years. Recognizing that library development and networking is crucial in theological education, ETE helped in revitalizing this important Forum. The Forum is now actively engaged in various training program, resource sharing, networking and publication, and is playing a vital role in ecumenical leadership formation.

⁶ The BTESSC, ATESEA and NEAATS jointly publish the *Asia Journal of Theology* with the aim (a) to encourage Asian Biblical scholarship and theological thinking; (b) to relate the Gospel to Asian cultural, historical and religious situation; (c) to study problems related to the teaching theology and aims of theological education in Asia; (d) and to share news about member schools of the Associations and to maintain contact with theology and ministry beyond the region of Asia.

Although *In God's Image* and Cluster of Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment of Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) are not directly related to theological education program, they continue to play a significant role in shaping theological thinking on gender sensitivity. For example, in a survey conducted a few years ago by the publications staff of *In God's Image*, it was found that many users/readers of this region-wide feminist theological journal in Asia are seminary teachers and researchers, not only in Asia but also in other parts of the world. Using both scholarly and popular languages⁷, *In God's Image* has become a helpful tool in doing contextual feminist theology. And CCA commitment to women's empowerment is clearly reflected in its decision to create a program desk for women's concern. Recognizing the value of such desk, many member churches and councils have also established their own women's desks, thereby highlighting the work for and with women in Asia. It is a policy of CCA to ensure gender balance in the selection of resource persons and participants for its programs. Part of the ongoing challenge is incorporating the gender sensitive perspective in CCA's program planning and implementation, including the methodology of doing things.

There are still Problems:

In spite of great achievements in ecumenical leadership formation, theological communities in Asia and Pacific continue to face many problems and challenges. A few may be highlighted here:

a) **Financial viability:** The present system of ministerial formation involves a high capital investment. Till today most of the ecumenical theological schools in Asia and Pacific have been heavily dependent on external sources – mission agencies and evangelistic associations in the West and in North America. The salary of teachers, construction of buildings and other infrastructure, the implementation of masteral and doctoral programs are still expected from external agencies. Now that assistance from ecumenical partners is dwindling for various reasons, there is an acute financial crisis in most of our ecumenical schools. Many schools suffer from the “everybody's-baby-but-nobody's baby” syndrome. The initial enthusiasm of inter-denominational ventures is slowly disappearing, leaving many schools without a proper owner. Several schools have now sprouted in lines of denominational affiliation. The other sad aspect is that Christians in many two-thirds world have not been educated to support ecumenical formation. Many churches in Asia and Pacific do have resources to support theological education, but many churches do not want to invest resources on theological education; they are more interested in “mission”. Besides, students including those who can afford to do so do not pay for their education. People seem to have a notion that money for theological education should come from mission agencies. As a result of these wrong understandings, the role of principals/presidents in many theological schools in Asia and Pacific has been reduced to that of fund raising. We need to consider this problem seriously. We cannot go on depending on ecumenical partners in the West and North America for maintenance of our theological schools. Measures have to be taken to share the resources wherever possible. The co-operation of the members' schools, associations and churches in several matters will certainly ease the financial burden.

b) *The church's involvement in theological education:* A common criticism that many theological schools face today is that graduates are alienated from the church and society. The churches often accuse theological institutions as elitist and the churches tend to think that the kind of training received in the theological schools is not suitable for the rural context and not helpful to the spiritual nurturing of congregations. Some even assert that theological graduate with B.D. or M.Div., M.Th. degrees cannot deliver a good sermon relevant to people's situation. The churches often

⁷ Scholarly language means academic-style research and writing while popular language means the use of varied styles of expression such as stories, poetry, critical social analysis, Biblical studies with creative and participatory methodology, experiential liturgies, and drawings and paintings.

criticize graduates as not being fully equipped to deal with crisis situations such as sickness, mental break-down, family quarrels, HIV-AIDS problem and so forth. On the other side, those leaders responsible for theological schools often express disappointment about the church leaders' lack of commitment to theological education. Sometimes theological schools blame the churches for their irresponsible screening of candidates and lack of support. All these problems show that there is no sufficient interaction between the church leadership and theological institutions. What are the ways to bridge the gap between the theological educators of the institutions and the pastor of the congregation? We must address this problem, if we want to make theological education relevant in today's context.

c) *Male biased theological education*: The structure of theological education is mainly male dominated - almost 70% theological students; 80% teachers; 90% members of the governing board are males. In several theological schools, Women's Studies have been incorporated as a branch in theological curriculum at the graduate and post-graduate levels of study. But we have not achieved gender justice both in theological colleges and the other forms of Christian ministries. It has proved that an addition of one subject or department alone is not enough to bring gender justice in the church and society. We are yet to integrate women's perspectives in the process of theological education. The integration of the perspective of women in theological education will create awareness of discriminatory gender realities and help people to do something concrete to change oppressive structures.

What do we do?

Today theological schools face both internal and external problems. The internal problems relate to the structure, administration, curriculum, pedagogy and finance. The external challenges are terrorism, economic injustice, religious intolerance, ecological destruction, mass poverty, child laborer, gender injustice, political corruption, globalization, identity problem, the HIV-AIDS pandemic, etc. What do we do to overcome these problems? A few suggestions:

1. Financial Viability: Asia and Pacific are the two regions where Christianity is a minority faith and Christians are economically very poor. In some countries, Christians are treated like a second-class citizens and given very limited freedom. In some contexts, we cannot talk about theological education in full-fledged formal sense, but we can talk about it only in terms of informal way of theological learning. In some countries, people have just begun to enjoy greater religious freedom. Christian communities are growing and Churches and larger human society need theological education. But we need to take concrete steps to liberate ourselves from financial dependency.

a) *Federated Faculty*: There are hundreds of theological colleges especially in Asia. Without counting big cities like Seoul, Manila, Chennai and Bangalore, it is quite surprising to see dozens of theological schools even in a small town. Yet, there are very few advanced theological research centers. Resources are utterly divided. There are few schools in Asia that offer M.Th and Ph.D or D.Th degrees, but these have limitations. Library, human resources and other infrastructure are not adequate. Several schools admit just one or two doctoral candidates in an academic session. This cannot cater to the fast growing demands of the churches and theological communities in the region. Due to lack of advanced theological research centers, researchers are compelled to go to Europe or North America for theological training. Since the training in the North is very expensive, it puts more financial

burden on ecumenical partners. The cost of one doctoral candidate in the US can support four to five doctoral students in South Asia and South East Asia, for instance. On the other hand, sometimes students undertake research that is not relevant to their own context. Unfortunately, some students who excel in their studies do not return to their countries as promised when the scholarship is granted. We do recognize the advantage of doing theology outside of the region, but we must give equal importance to develop advanced theological research centers in the region. Therefore, it is very vital that theological schools come together and work out “Federated Faculty” for advanced theological research. This will promote not only quality leadership in the churches, but also promotes ecumenism and contextual theologies as well as reduces financial burden.

b) Sharing of Resources: It is not only theological colleges, but many other institutions like Students’ Movements, National Christian Councils, Publishers and Social Institutes who are also involved in different programs of ministerial formation. The legacy of these institutions/organizations has to be tapped and effort should be made to collaborate with them in different training programs. For example, the Ecumenical Christian Centre in Whitefield, Bangalore, India, under its theology unit (India School of Ecumenical Theology) has been organizing regular courses on various “Ecumenical Issues” for 10-15 days for theological teachers and students. It provides an occasion for students and teachers under the Serampore University and other Roman Catholic institutions in India to meet and interact on several current ecumenical issues. This is done with the financial resources of Ecumenical Christian Centre, making use of the faculty resources of the Catholic and other secular and theological institutions in India.⁸ The financial dependency of the colleges/seminaries on the Western or North American partners could be partially solved if proper strategies and mechanism in this direction are taken and implemented.

2. Educating Congregation: Though Christians are minority and economically poor, there are possibilities to mobilize resources for theological education. When many churches are able to send thousands of missionaries and spend thousands of dollars for different mission projects, then, why not for theological education? It is imperative that we educate our churches to invest money for theological education. The churches must also realize that “theological teaching and learning contribute significantly to their own viability.”⁹ The churches must own theological institutions. The church and theological schools are like two sides of one coin. It is necessary that a mutual interaction between the church and theological schools take place in terms of financial support, policy making and curriculum formation. Churches and theological schools should play not only the supportive role, but also prophetic role to each other in training future leaders of the church and society.

3. Providing Opportunities: The present patriarchal structures of Christian ministry need to be consciously changed if the partnership of man and woman is to be realized fully. Today women are not represented significantly in theological faculties and in decision-making bodies of the churches just because they are not given the opportunity. While governments have gender policies and have adopted quotas for women participation in decision-making at the highest levels of government, theological schools do not have clear gender policies. They do not have clear mechanisms of redressing historical inequalities and cultural prejudices against women. With an optimum quantity of women theologians taking up strategic position in the theological institution and in the churches, the clamor of gender equality will not be attained. A creation of special scholarship for women at all levels of theological studies, reservation of seat for theological studies and reservation of certain position in church and theological colleges will promote women’s leadership in the church and society.

⁸ Report on “Priorities of Theological Education in India”, Senate of Serampore Convocation, Aizawl, 7th February, 2002.

⁹ Lothar Engel, “A Response by Lothar Engel” in John Pobee (ed.) *Towards Viable Theological Education: Ecumenical Imperative, Catalyst of Renewal*. Geneva: WCC Publications 1997, p. 104.

4. New Area of Studies: Today we find ourselves in a historical situation where a new articulation of theological education is urgently required. The new situation of the rapid globalization of markets, media and technologies, and the counter-reaction in the form of growing fundamentalism affirming exclusive and particular national, ethnic, cultural or religious identities, demands global and local interaction in expressing the ecumenical vision. If theological education is to play a transformative role in human communities, it is imperative that theological studies move into such new areas. Though such problems impinge on our lives and relationships, all these areas have been outside of our traditional schemes of theological education. Many of theological educators, pastors, missionaries and Christian ministers are ill-equipped to meet these new challenges. That is why our churches are losing the significance of ministry in the wider human society.

A reading of the Word of God without taking into consideration of these issues will have no impact. Ecumenical theological education needs to wrestle with all these problems and issues to make Christian ministry effective and relevant in our times.

Action Plans

To facilitate theological communities and to respond to these challenges and problems in Asia and Pacific, ETE and Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) plans to focus on the following programs in the coming years:

(a) *Institute of Theology Teachers* - The Institute will attempt to bring about fifty participants from various theological seminaries in the region and three professors from outside of the region and will strive to understand the new challenges of contemporary society and work out a clear pedagogy, methodology, theological perspective and new ways of working in unity. The Institute will be organized in three regions: South Asia, South East Asia and North East Asia. This will be joint program of Christian Conference of Asia and Ecumenical Theological Education Programme of WCC. The Institutes will be coordinated in collaboration with the sub-regional theological associations.

(b) *Training Program of Theological Librarians* - ETE plans to initiate a group training program for theological librarians to help in enhancing their skills in library management in collaboration with Forum for Association of Theological Librarians (ForATL).

(c) *Networking* - ETE will continue to explore the possibility of creating an umbrella forum for theological associations in the region to facilitate a closer co-ordination in future to avoid misunderstanding and to help these theological accrediting bodies to establish a healthier relationship.

(d) *New Area of Studies* - ETE will strive to create space to develop new curricula in theological studies on contemporary issues like HIV/AIDS and Theological Education, Overcoming Violence, Globalization and Theological Education, etc to make theological education relevant and to prepare theological students to respond to these challenges.

**CHALLENGES TO THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN CENTRAL
AND EASTERN EUROPE:
EDUCATION AS A LITURGY BEFORE LITURGY.**

Vladimir Fedorov

Time flies. The third year of the new century and the new millennium will soon be over. The turn of the centuries, and even more, millennia, makes itself keenly appreciable in politics and culture, in mass consciousness, in inter-church and inter-faith relationships. This is true with regard to every region of the world, but it seems to be most poignantly taken in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, that is in post-communist space, which is undoubtedly related to the processes of liberalisation that have been going on for more than fifteen years. The new vision of European culture, relationships between the Church and the State, politics, economics and social ethics is conditioned by the process of globalisation which is quite contradictory in itself.

Another process that demands special attention is integration of Europe. The new Europe is getting to see itself as a whole with increasing clarity, but there are countries that have not been recognised fit to be members of the European Union (EU). There are countries among the candidates in which atheist ideology was predominant not long ago, and there are countries with Moslem populations prevailing, e.g. Turkey. There are countries like Russia that have not yet been invited for EU membership. The attempts at formulation of a European constitution have been severely criticised by Christian Churches since the draft constitution even fails to mention the Christian roots of the European civilisation and the religious constituent of the evolution of Europe.

It is quite natural that the Churches cannot but concern about such a secular image of the future Europe. Still, we have no choice but to admit that such is the real picture of our politics, our mass consciousness, such is the position of the Christian Churches in the eyes of our society. To change the situation, we need evangelising activities of the Churches, a new interpretation of the mission of the Church in the society, which in its turn requires a new approach to theological education. The peculiar nature of the region of Central and Eastern Europe and objectives of theological and religious education in the region were described in the previous number of the *Ministerial Formation*.¹ It makes sense now to turn to what has been taking place in the region over the last year and to try and discern a strategic prospect in the past events, processes and tendencies. The gained experience suggests new emphases, helps articulate new tasks that while not disregarding the former, would further the identified and accepted in the region strategy of evangelisation.

Setting up theological faculties at secular state and independent educational institutions

It is long since secular culturology came to see that education is the dynamics of culture. Maintaining and developing the system of education alone can guarantee keeping the level and richness of culture in the society, intactness of a people, of a nation as a whole. The language of Orthodox theology in which the word “tradition” is one of the key notions helps understand that faith, spiritual heritage, and traditions are being stored and passed over from one generation to another, and it is this conveyance that should be meant when we speak of a system of education. The latter should ideally comprise not only a system of educational settings, but the whole system of annunciation, that is evangelisation.

¹ Vladimir Fedorov, “Eastern and Central Europe Context: Problem of theological and religious education in the 21st century”. *Ministerial Formation*, No.100, January 2003, p. 46-51.

The importance of education has been repeatedly pointed out by Orthodox hierarchs and Councils, the highest Church authorities. As far back as ten years ago, in 1994, the Bishop's Council of Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) accepted a decision "On the tasks of the Church in the Field of Theological Education" which, in particular, said that theological education is a "prior all-Church task; to what degree we are equal to it will considerably shape the image of our Church". Since that time the tasks of theological education have become still more diverse. It's not only training of prospective clergy for new communities, but also evangelisation of the society at large, implementing the mission of Christian culture, theological interpretation of new aspects of social responsibility, searching after answers to the continuously raising questions and challenges of the technological and informational civilisation, resistance to the negative side-effects of the globalizational processes, and first and foremost, service to peace and concord, Christian witness to the secular world.

The scope of these tasks is by far wider than what the theological educators had to deal with a hundred years ago. As to Russia, theological education was in the country relegated to special church educational settings, i.e. seminaries and academies, there have been practically no precedents of a theological school being included into the structure of a university or other secular institutions. To this day, the idea that theology cannot be studied at a secular educational institution is prevailing.

The Orthodox education in the other Eastern European countries – Bulgaria, Serbia, Rumania, Macedonia – was long ago introduced into university curricula, but practically ceased to exist in this form under the regimes with the communist ideology. Today, the university programmes are restored in these countries, but this is not the case with Russia, where establishing theological faculties is absolutely new and in many respects, disputable. Though there have been some first attempts, the classical models of strictly confessional faculties can hardly prove promising in the new Russia. Anyhow, there are theological faculties or departments that are now functioning at nine Russian universities. One has to admit, though, that the general level of theological education is very poor, and both inter-confessional cooperation and integration into the European educational system are desperately needed.

A year ago (from 4 to 7 July 2002) in Europe a significant event took place: the Consultation of Theological Faculties and Educational Institutions in Europe "The Future of Theology" in Graz, Austria. By invitation of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Catholic Theological Faculty of the Karl Franz University of Graz, Austria, more than 60 representatives of theological faculties and theological education officers of Christian churches in 24 European countries gathered to consult together on the future of theology and theological education. Delegates were present from the representative Christian confessions, including the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches and the traditions of the Reformation. Brought to discussion were the confessional, ecumenical and pluralistic aspects of theological education in the European context.

Papers were presented on the relationships between theology and religious studies, and on the academic and professional education of theological students. It was emphasised that religious studies cannot substitute for theology, and that theology should exercise its critical function, among others, with regard to church and society. Five workshops dealt with the following current themes: ecumenical training and further education, gender issues in theological education, joint research projects, assuring quality in theological education, and academic grade structures.

In discussing these issues, the necessity and the value of stronger cooperation among theological faculties, colleges and institutions across national and confessional lines became evident. Student and teacher exchanges and integration of ecumenical learning into theological education are indispensable for the future of Europe's churches. Disputes on ecumenical issues, and just getting to know one another better as different churches and confessions - from the viewpoint of each one's own self-concept - were seen as essential. It was stressed that it is not enough to hold isolated special ecumenical events; rather, all classes and lectures should be enlivened and imbued with ecumenical thinking. Encounters and study trips are very important in promoting ecumenical ideas. In the new Europe that is in the process of integration, a common Christian voice, even if not a uniform one, needs to be heard. Theological educational institutions can give significant guidance on current ethical and social-ethical issues and also contribute by demonstrating possibilities for action.

In addition, the following concrete steps toward continuing and promoting intensive cooperation were named: convening of Europe-wide biennial or triennial consultations on theological issues and education; setting up partnerships between different educational institutions independently of their confessional belonging; and finally, as a long-range goal, establishment of an Ecumenical Conference of European Theological Faculties, Colleges and Institutions. Such intensive work together can make a valuable contribution to the future fellowship among the churches and peoples of Europe.

The response from theological faculties, colleges and institutes of Christian churches in Europe, gathering in Graz from almost every part of Europe in their ecclesiastical and confessional diversity, was gratifyingly large. The planning group will continue to be responsible for carrying on this work. In the frame of the program there is an initiative of WCC Ecumenical Theological Education program to organise in October 2003 in St Petersburg, Russia a Central and Eastern European Consultation on theological Education "The Challenges of New Europe and our Concepts of Theological Education".

The Chairman of the Study Committee of the Russian Orthodox Church, Archbishop Verejskij Eugenij was among the participants of the Graz Consultation. Cooperation with Theological European Institutions is important for ROC. Up to now, the Church schools, i.e. seminaries and academies have not been accredited by the state. Cooperation with European universities can foster getting accreditation. Russia has already signed the Bologna agreement, and the European system may in the future become standard for theological schools in Russia. One should keep in mind, however, that many European theological faculties are critical about the Bologna standards.

Very keen and vitally serious controversies are now going on in Russia about admissibility of religious education within the framework of state's schools. The outcome of the debates is likely to affect other post-communist countries, such as Macedonia and Serbia, for there, too, the issue is far from being brought to a close. As a compromise, the Orthodox Church proposed for the Ministry of Education a course "Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture"; however, this initiative was met by the public with a wave of protest. The principal argumentation against introducing this new course in state's curriculum is reproaching with intolerance and lack of religious pluralism. The nature of the debates is not incidental, the topic of religious pluralism and tolerance being recently rated among the priorities by the society at large and by religious communities, in particular. The latest of the annual international conferences entitled "Christmas Readings" may serve an example of the difference of opinions in the society.

Conference “Christmas Readings”

A routine occurrence of the conference “Christmas Readings” in Moscow last winter turned out to be one of the most impressive events of the year in religious life of Eastern Europe. The “Readings” are a major educational form, held with the blessing of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and presided by him. Christmas Readings have been held since 1993. The opening ceremony of the 11th International Educational Christmas Readings took place in the State Kremlin Palace on January 26, 2003. About 4, 000 people participated in them, including hierarchs and priests of the Russian Orthodox Church, state and public figures, scientists and scholars, men of education and experts in culture.

The theme of the Readings was “Education and Culture of Russia in the Light of Orthodoxy”. Patriarch Alexii II of Moscow and All Russia addressed a message of greetings to the participants of the forum. Vladimir M. Philippov, Russian education minister said, “Moral diseases of the century can negatively affect all the realms of human and social life and it is particularly evident in the field of education. That is why we consider our cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church to be our practical ministry to the values and ideals that consolidate our society”.

Among the speakers were chairman of the Department for Education and Catechism of the Russian Orthodox Church, Minister of Justice, vice-chairman of the Parliament (Federation Council) of Russia, chairman of the State Duma Committee for Public Associations and Religious Organisations, vice-chairman of the State Duma Committee for Science and Education, president of the Russian Academy of Science. The session was attended by the Presidential Envoy to the Central Federal District. The participants in the Christmas Readings were greeted by the head of the Presidential Staff, governor of the Moscow region, Byelorussian education minister.

Though the Conference, which comprised over fifty round tables and seminars, was focused on education (the main subject was designated as “Orthodox Education and Upbringing”, there were five more lines to be considered separately — such as “Church and Society”, “Church and Culture”, “Christianity and Science”. This conference is evidence of the fact that in the field of ideology, at the level of governmental structures the role of the Orthodox Church is becoming increasingly important in Russia. All participants of the Conference agreed that issues of spiritual life and ethics should have priority in the modern Russian society and Christian themes should occupy a more prominent place in the framework of state education.

The “Christmas Readings” conferences are known to be invariably emphasising the Orthodox tradition; their approach to education is strictly confessional, not ecumenical. Their merit lies in that they draw public and government’s attention to the issues of religious education and upbringing, thus contributing to Orthodox evangelisation. Still, it is obvious that in the context of contemporarity - and even more so, of the Christianity of the third millennium, the matters of Christian culture, the Christian roots of the European culture, the matters of tolerance and religious pluralism are not being paid sufficient attention.

Nurturing tolerance as a new task of theological and religious education

To be allowed to take communion, according to Orthodox Eucharistic piety, one is obliged to get reconciled to the members of one’s community. This gospel principle “while your offering is still

before the altar, first go and make peace with your brother, then come and make your offering” (Mt 5, 24), as before, remains for us a commandment of our Saviour. But we entered the third millennium with a new vision of the community of people of the world. We have come to be possessed of a wide scope of knowledge and the tragic experience that should be sufficient for us to see how closely we the human family are tied in the community of people created in God’s image.

We may not be particularly emotional towards the other, but we are bound to realise our responsibility for each other. Because of the inescapable processes of globalisation, because of the gigantic technological progress the Earth our dwelling-place has turned into a “communal” flat where in the power of every inhabitant lie its condition and quality of life of all the rest. In such a situation, enmity and aggressiveness, which are underlain by intolerance and lack of pluralism, may prove fatal for the whole family.

The experience of wars and terrorism of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first century makes us admit tolerance and pluralism as new and essentially important social values. Both religious tolerance and religious pluralism are not something perfectly new; the history of Christianity has known such experience, but never before have they been proclaimed Christian values, significant guiding lines for evangelisation and mission of the Church. The ecumenical lesson of the twentieth century has prepared the ground for such interpretation and calls for further elaboration.

The opposition to tolerance and religious pluralism that manifests itself today in Christian Churches can be to a large degree accounted for by difference of opinions as to the meaning of the very word “tolerance”. If tolerance is taken as ability of a person, a group or a state to hear and respect another’s views, to meet opinions that differ from their own without hostility, we Christians loyal to our traditions have no grounds for intolerance.

In the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance which was proclaimed and signed by the Member States of UNESCO on 16 November 1995 we read: “1.1 Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.”²

To see what religious pluralism and confessional tolerance are, one should keep in mind that tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. In no circumstance can it be used to justify infringements of these fundamental values.

Religious tolerance consists of valuing the right of another person to hold beliefs that you know absolutely to be wrong. Religious tolerance means to refrain from discriminating against others who follow a different religious path. Tolerance is more difficult to maintain when you are sure that your religion is right and their religion is wrong. For many believers (especially in fundamentalistic circles) it is natural to confess: “Truth, not tolerance”.

² <http://www.peace.ru/tolerance/doc.htm>

Tolerance is to be exercised by individuals, groups and states. The Declaration says: “Tolerance is the responsibility that upholds human rights, pluralism (including cultural pluralism), democracy and the rule of law. It involves the rejection of dogmatism and absolutism and affirms the standards set out in international human rights instruments”.³ It is noteworthy that we are not expected here to take the word dogmatism in its theological meaning. To be tolerant, a Christian doesn’t need to reject dogma of the Church. Religious tolerance is not religious indifference. Tolerance is a privilege of those strong and clever who don’t doubt their ability to move towards the Truth through a diversity of positions and opinions and through the dialogue. We need not to forget that the practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one’s convictions. It means that “one is free to adhere to one’s own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs. It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behaviour and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that one’s views are not to be imposed on others”.⁴

Unfortunately, the concept of tolerance has not been brought to theological discussion in all Churches. One can meet in church documents warnings against tolerance. For example, a ROC document of consequence (namely, *Basic Principles of the Attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church Toward the other Christian Confessions*⁵) reads: “Even a position of tolerance towards differences in faith is unacceptable”. This warning follows the statement “2.10. It is inadmissible to introduce relativism into the realm of faith, to limit unity in faith to a narrow set of necessary truths so that beyond them ‘freedom in what is doubtful’ may be allowed”. Sufficient reflection upon this statement makes one get aware once again of the urgency of paying special attention to the subject of tolerance in theological education.

As to religious pluralism, of special reference seems to be the latest assembly of the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCATI), which took place in Thailand in December 2002.⁶ So far, the Eastern European Churches (and the West European ones likewise) haven’t contributed to activities of this organisation since there are no theological educational associations there. But soon they’ll have to do so, and that, for several reasons. First, it’ll facilitate for them the procedures of being accredited by the state and help to improve the level of education.

³ 1.3.

⁴ 1.4.

⁵ Adopted by the Jubilee Bishops’ Council of the Russian Orthodox Church August 14, 2000

⁶ WOCATI held its inaugural meeting in June 1989 at Kaliurang, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. To provide an established and continuing forum for members to confer concerning matters of common interest related to theological education; To consider and promote relations of member associations to one another, to other educational organizations and units throughout the world, to appropriate ecclesiastical agencies as they relate to theological education, and to other bodies as may be relevant; To identify and advocate excellence in theological education and ministerial practice and to encourage full compliance with the standards and purposes as established by the member institutions; To provide leadership and understanding of the purposes, role and needs of theological education in the following ways: By cultivating a broad and informed understanding of theological education; By serving as an advocate locally and globally for theological education and its implications for church, society and education in general; By interacting with other appropriate agencies and groups; To provide services to member associations in the following ways: By facilitating cooperation and co-ordination among associations; By gathering, maintaining and sharing information and resources that will facilitate the work of member associations; By encouraging, sponsoring and conducting research on theological education and related matters; By enabling and supporting member associations in implementing standards, policies and procedures by which they may best serve their constituencies; By assisting and guiding the establishment of procedures and criteria for equivalency of academic diplomas and degrees awarded by the institutions in the different regions; By being instrumental in identifying resources for the development of the global nature and implications of theological education; To promote the improvement and advancement of theological education in such ways as may be appropriate.

On the other hand, it is indispensable for being able to adequately respond to the demands of the whole Christianity and to join the all — world discussion on the religious pluralism. It was just the problem of religious pluralism in Asia and Europe that the conference was centred round; the theological approaches of the two contexts were compared.⁷

There has been another step in Eastern Europe in the same direction — a Christian-Jewish-Islamic Trialogue (Skopje, Macedonia, May, 2002). The decision of the Orthodox and Islamic rectors of theological institutions to develop cooperation in theological education through exchange of professors was one of the fruits of the Trialogue. At the beginning of the new millennium it is clear that Christian ecumenical formation is not “complete” in our world today without attention to the realities of inter-faith encounter and dialogue. An important step is now in the plan of Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland to give greater emphasis on inter-faith encounter.

Education and upbringing as a Liturgy before Liturgy

The Orthodox idea of theological education and upbringing bears a clear-cut liturgical tinge. The point is not only that the main task is to prepare clergy, to inculcate in their mind that Eucharist is the heart of a Christian life. In twentieth century there has been a strong emphasis in Orthodox Ecclesiology on the eucharistic understanding of the Church. Truly, the Eucharist Liturgy is the event in which the people of God are celebrating the incarnation, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, sharing His glorified body and blood. But sometimes there arises a misunderstanding, sometimes opinions are voiced that the Orthodox reduce the notion of the Church to an exclusive worshipping community, to protecting and to preserving the Good News for its members.

Father Ion Bria said that it was important to affirm that the Liturgy is not a self-centred service and action, but is a service for the building of the one Body of Christ within the economy of salvation which is for all people of all ages. “The liturgical assembly is the Father’s House, where the invitation to the banquet of the heavenly bread is constantly voiced and addressed not only to the members of the Church, but also to the non-Christians and strangers.” He explained that there is a double movement in the Liturgy: on the one hand, the assembling of the people of God to perform the memorial of the death and resurrection of our Lord “until He comes again”. It also manifests and realises of the process by which “the cosmos is becoming ecclesia”.

Therefore the preparation for Liturgy takes place not only at the personal spiritual level, but also at the level of human historical and natural realities. In preparing for Liturgy, the Christian starts a spiritual journey which affects everything in his life: family, properties, authority, position, and social relations. It re-orientates the direction of his entire human existence towards its sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Father Ion Bria spoke about “Liturgy after Liturgy” because renewed by the Holy Communion and the Holy Spirit, the members of the Church are sent to be authentic testimony to Jesus Christ in the world. The mission of the Church rests upon the radiating and transforming power of the Liturgy. It is a stimulus in sending out the people of God to the world to confess the Gospel and to be involved in human liberation.

Now this concept of “Liturgy after Liturgy” is very popular and it helps us to see our charity activity as a sacral responsibility, as a part of our liturgical life, our church life. But the same logic, I think, brings us to the concept of “Liturgy before Liturgy”. Religious education, evangelisation, catechisation, having the believers ready for Eucharist is a worship: a “liturgy before Liturgy”.

⁷ It was my privilege to make the presentation “European answer to the presentation “Christianity and other faiths: emerging theological and missiological discussions in the context of Asian plurality” by the Daniel S. Thiagarajah.

It seems reasonable that this phrase should embrace not only the process of catechisation, not only religious education, but theological education as a whole. While receiving communion demands of an Orthodox member of the Church a certain preparedness, that is a period of abstinence, special prayers, penitence, — such matters as giving a trial to one’s conscience with special attention paid to the dogma should also belong here. It should be made clear that checking up one’s own conscience and confession means also testing one’s beliefs and aspiration to ridding oneself of vagueness and obscurities. A member of the Church is expected to keep oneself aware of one’s attitudes toward every religious rite one participates in and to be ready to the best of one’s abilities, spiritual maturity and moralities for intelligent Christian answers to the questions life poses before oneself. One should not only, if asked, be able to give an account of one’s faith “be ready at any time when you are questioned about the hope which is in you, to give an answer in the fear of the Lord and without pride” (1 Peter 3, 15), but first and foremost, make out this answer for oneself.

Continual learning is needed not only in the form of approaching the comprehension of the Revelation of the Holy Scripture and the Tradition, but also in the form of perceiving the Revelation discernible in nature, sciences and social structure. Being a well educated person is a virtue; a neglectful attitude towards education moves one further away from God, because ideally, education should prepare one for meeting Christ, for thanksgiving, for Eucharist, for grateful service to Our Lord. The way towards Christ is a way towards Light, for “Christ is our Light”. He is “Light of Reason”, “Light of Truth”; “Light of Christ enlightens all persons”.⁸

The Light of Christ emanates upon everybody, but focusing its beams and turning them to educate, enlighten and warm an individual person is a peculiar service, it’s a mystery of Christ’s enlightenment, it is a process of education and formation, it is also a priority work of the Church, it is a service to God, it is a Liturgy before Liturgy. The words uttered by the blessed Edith Stein, a refined intellectual and a humble Roman-Catholic nun, who savoured the joy of philosophical knowledge and through the latter came to Christ, a martyr of the twentieth century, are simple and clear, and none the less, sometimes we fail to see this simple truth. What she said is near to a truism: “The one who seeks after the Truth seeks after God, whether or not he is aware of it”. To help a seeker after the Truth means to contribute to this service to God through education and enlightenment, thus participating in a Liturgy before Liturgy. And we ought to stir the instinct of thirst for Light Our Lord endowed the person within the one who is not after the Truth and has not experienced the joy of acquisition of knowledge, and then to cultivate his or her taste so that one might recognise the fruits of true spirituality, to tell true Light of Christ from artificial luminescence.

Thus theological education should be also interpreted as a prerequisite of liturgical life. Besides, it is just theological education that serves a basis for religious education and provides the society with trained catechists. Education ranks among the objectives of the Church, it is a common cause, it is a “Liturgy before the Liturgy” and the beginning of the liturgy. However, this conception may include a religious constituent found in secular education, too. The words of a secular course in any science or art, if they help the students to find the Way, the Truth and the Life. The first words of evangelisation, will be also a liturgy before liturgy. That is why one of the tasks of theological education is close cooperation with non-theological disciplines and secular educational institutions. The phrases a “Liturgy before Liturgy” and a “Liturgy after Liturgy” may be taken skeptically, for they are not dogmatic definitions; rather, they belong in imagery. The impressiveness of the language of theology, however, like that of the language of the arts, lies in its imagery, but not definitions.

⁸ Expressions from Orthodox liturgical texts.

The subject “education as a Liturgy before Liturgy” was among the others at the international conference on “Family and Religious Education in the post-atheistic society” (Kiev, Ukraine, September 2002). This subject represents ecumenical implication, too. Another international ecumenical inter-disciplinary conference “Family. Upbringing and Education” is planned for December 2003, St Petersburg, Russia.

Ecumenical education as education in tolerance – our missionary task.

The issue of tolerance and religious pluralism is a key one when a discussion is focused on the question, if a “believer faithful to his or her confessional tradition can be an ecumenist”. Practically all the anti-ecumenical and fundamentalist arguments are based on rejection of tolerance as a permissible Christian attitude. This fact should not escape the strategy of ecumenical theological education; on the contrary, this issue deserves special attention.

The roots of intolerance are ideological and psychological; not infrequently it is caused by inexperience, ignorance and the false stereotypes of the mass consciousness which, in essence, underlie the ideology. So overcoming intolerance should allow for all these factors. It is not only informational correction that should be covered by the notion of education, but personal experience, meeting bearers of other views, traditions, faiths and cultures, as well. The deeper level of cooperation in the corresponding projects, the more efficient practice may be the result.

The number of projects of ecumenical cooperation tends to grow in Eastern Europe. Of them, educational ecumenical programmes seem to be most attractive. In September 2003, in St Petersburg, the second meeting of members of the German-Russian theological partnership is about to take place. The partnership was set up within the framework of the state programme “Academic Exchange”. The first such Orthodox-Catholic-Lutheran colloquium on “Mission and Ecumenism” was organised in Hamburg in autumn, 2002. The programme is intended for three years. Another original international ecumenical project is a course in ecumenism at the Institute of Diaspora at the University of Leipzig. Students from different European countries (mainly from Central and Eastern Europe) were offered a 24-hour course in the “Beginning and Making of Ecumenical Movement and the Role of Orthodox Churches”. The lectures were delivered by turns, by a Lutheran and an Orthodox professor. The material of the lectures are planned to serve groundwork for a textbook in German.

A new form of inter-church collaboration is being practiced at the Protestant Institute for Mission Studies in Budapest, Hungary. This institute was established in 1995 by the Reformed and Lutheran Church in Hungary and the Gaspar Karoli Reformed University. The purpose of the PMTI is to offer courses in missiology to theological seminaries in different countries and to develop programmes for local congregations to grow into open missionary communities. Recently Masters of Theology programme was adopted, in which 16 students of 6 nationalities and 7 denominations are expected to be participants.

A colourful evidence of a progress in the ecumenical relationships was demonstrated last year by the International Baptist Seminary in Prague. In August 2002, they organised a seminar on Orthodoxy, and in February 2003, on “Evangelicals in Mission within the Commonwealth of Independent States” (CIS). Dr Walter Sawatsky and Dr Peter F. Penner offered this conference to help national as well as international missionaries in the CIS to understand the history and presence

of missions in the CIS, particularly in a Russian Evangelical and Orthodox context, to enable better partnership and dialogue.

Projects of missionary nature provoke most optimism, for it is just the task of common witnessing may prove today an efficient determinative of unity, as the case was at the dawn of ecumenical movement. This situation remains topical in our region.

A common mission is likely to be the most fertile and efficient ecumenical path. It is essential that on this path of joint efforts a value that has not before ranked among the missionary ones should be recognised, i.e. tolerance. A peaceful life is impossible in the multi-confessional and multi-religious world without preaching tolerance as a value, without cultivating a taste for tolerance. This concept can be differently defined and referred to, it can be treated as a liberal value, but anyhow, tolerance is one of the priorities in ecumenical education which should make it possible to interpret adequately the many aspects of mission, for example, the phenomenon of proselytism.

It is noteworthy that in new Russia, the government approved of a special state programme on fostering tolerance among the citizens of the country. For a society that has for years been living under a totalitarian regime, it means much. Were such education a reality, many inter-confessional and inter-religious conflicts might have been escaped. Reversibly, steps towards preventing inter-confessional and inter-religious crises are beneficial for introducing tolerance as a Christian value. The situation in other Eastern European countries is better but can be much more ecumenical.

Above all, tolerance, the ability to refrain from condemning the others, from reproaching them and calling them to order, but instead, to be anxious not to lose one's own way is a matter of spirituality. The spirituality of humility, the spirituality free from arrogance by no means neglects missionary goals. But the mission then should be interpreted not only as a call "repent!", but as witnessing to the Truth through the fruits of its assimilation, that is, through the love and light of the Truth. Such task of education and upbringing is sacral, it cannot be limited by methodological prescriptions. Approaching the issue in such a way, one can find an image to refer to education and upbringing: a Liturgy before Liturgy.

Today, one of the most efficient models of nurturing tolerance is the model of ecumenical education in Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland. Undoubtedly, this Institute is one of the most important resources, at least for Central and Eastern Europe. The point is not only that here are regular study representatives of different Churches of the region, but rather, that the Institute programmes are being developed to meet the urgent missionary and ecumenical demands. It's very important to have ecumenical resource centers and chairs opened at various theological schools of Central and Eastern Europe and to correlate their activities with the successfully acting programme of ecumenical education in Bossey. It's just here that one can feel that theological education is not only acquiring knowledge, learning practical skills, but first of all, a Liturgy before Liturgy.

TAREAS Y DESAFÍOS DE LA EDUCACIÓN TEOLÓGICA

José Duque

Después de tres años de haber comenzado a participar como consultor de educación teológica para la región, ensayando así un modelo descentralizado y regionalizado de la nueva estructura de FTE (Formación Teológica Ecuménica), es hora de hacer una pausa a manera de balance tanto retrospectivo como en perspectiva. Esto es, hacer un recuento de aquello que nos parece ha sido lo más relevante en esta tarea, además de puntualizar en perspectiva, aquellos desafíos que se perfilan en la realidad de la educación teológica en la región.

La estructura de FTE que empezó a funcionar hace tres años, requirió, según mi criterio, una redefinición pedagógica epistemológica al menos en cuatro elementos: descentralización, regionalización, contextualización y responsabilidad compartida entre Ginebra y la región. Tal redefinición suplía una vieja aspiración regional en educación teológica. Pues la tradicional estructura centralizada en Ginebra, aún siendo muy generosa y abierta, no dejaba de funcionar sobre la base de una relación centro – periferia. Llegar a producir la nueva estructura constituyó, de por sí, un esfuerzo compartido entre Ginebra y la región, que requirió muchas jornadas intensivas de reflexión. Las Asociaciones de educación teológica regional tomaron parte activa en la formulación del modelo actual.

La nueva estructura no era entonces, un mero reacomodo de la forma, sino una profunda transformación de fondo. Afortunadamente, contamos no solo con una voluntad transformadora también en Ginebra, sino con un personal capaz y riguroso en la conducción del fondo de esta nueva estructura. Debido a ello, hoy las reuniones del Grupo de Trabajo resultan de una gran calidad y de mucha inspiración para continuar con la tarea en las distintas regiones de FTE

Comenzamos con esta ubicación del proyecto de ETE, porque la función del consultor en la región, no es un hecho aislado sino que es parte de un modelo pedagógico novedoso de responsabilidad compartida. Veamos a continuación algunas de esas tareas más relevantes en las cuales ha participado la consultoría regional. Debido al reducido espacio con que contamos para este ejercicio, nos limitaremos a exponer poco más que un simple bosquejo.

Tareas relevantes

Las Asociaciones de educación teológica.

Hoy día podemos afirmar que hay un proceso de crecimiento continuo en estas Asociaciones. Se crece cuantitativamente pues cada año se afilia una buena cantidad de nuevos miembros. Las Asociaciones más antiguas de la región apenas cumplen los cuarenta años. Y las ha acompañado en la mayor parte de su historia, un anti-ecumenismo ideologizado que no les había permitido crecer. Hasta hace muy poco, sus miembros preferían agruparse entre quienes compartieran doctrinas afines y modelos educativos tradicionales, sobre todo copiados del Primer Mundo. Hoy, las Asociaciones, en general, se caracterizan por crear espacios abiertos a la diversidad. Es así que a ellas se afilian, cada vez más, seminarios, institutos y facultades de iglesias llamadas históricas, nacionales, adventistas así como pentecostales, debido a que han logrado convertirse en lugares de encuentro para compartir tradiciones eclesiales, modelos pedagógicos y contenidos.

Las Asociaciones, además de ser un lugar de encuentro, también son hoy un importante lugar de interpretación bíblico-teológica- pedagógica y social. Es debido a ello, que nuevas instituciones buscan afiliarse a las Asociaciones, pues ofrecen junto a sus Asambleas, simposios y coloquios a manera de consultas o como debates de temas de actualidad, lo cual permite a sus miembros conocer o y profundizar contenidos y modelos educativos nuevos. Creo que es en las Asociaciones hoy día, donde se comparte lo mejor del pensamiento en los campos de Biblia, teología, pastoral, pedagogía y realidad social.

También en las Asociaciones, se puede apreciar el crecimiento cualitativo intelectual. Hoy, a diferencia de hace 15 años, casi no hay facultad o seminario de teología donde no haya una buena cantidad de docentes con posgrados, incluyendo doctorados. Esto sin duda le da un mayor rigor a la educación teológica.

Por lo tanto, las Asociaciones son un magnífico ambiente de estudio, apertura y convivencia, facilitando un amplio espacio para introducir y compartir el espíritu ecuménico. De esta manera, la participación del consultor en las Asambleas y simposios de las Asociaciones, constituye no sólo la presencia de ETE allí, sino la desmitificación de lo que en el pasado se le atribuía al ecumenismo del CMI por parte de sectores fundamentalistas y evangélicos.

Servicios y demandas más comunes solicitadas al consultor de ETE en la región.

- a) Entre los treinta y cinco proyectos (aproximados) que llegan por año a la oficina del consultor, hay solicitudes encaminadas para el desarrollo de bibliotecas, producción de materiales didácticos, becas para posgrados de docentes, desarrollo de programas de extensión e intercambio de profesores y estudiantes Sur- Sur. En general estos son proyectos acompañados con solicitudes de financiamiento.
- b) Lo más interesante, es que muchos de los viajes que debo hacer en la región, no necesariamente media una solicitud de financiamiento. Muchos de estos viajes exigen mucho tiempo prepararlos y realizarlos, pues se trata de solicitudes de consultorías sobre desarrollo curricular, formación de asociaciones nacionales o locales, filosofías educativas contextuales, modelos pedagógicos, modelos de extensión, modelos educativos para comunidades indígenas, ejes transversales en la educación teológica y auto-gestión y desarrollo en la educación teológica. En realidad, podría casi dedicarme solamente a este tipo de consultorías, pero desafortunadamente los demás compromisos requieren también gran parte de mi tiempo, lo cual no me permite atender todas las solicitudes en este tipo de consultorías.
- c) Diálogo pedagógico. En muchas ocasiones, cuando llega una solicitud de información de nuevas instituciones sobre las posibilidades de apoyo por parte de ETE, se pueden iniciar diálogos amplios sobre diversos asuntos de la educación teológica. Generalmente se inicia solicitando a la institución que formule un proyecto específico. Este proyecto es analizado en nuestra oficina observando más o menos los siguientes aspectos: ¿Tiene alcance ecuménico? Es inclusivo? Participan las mujeres en las distintas instancias del proyecto? ¿Muestra capacidad autogestionaria? Se puede apreciar algún alcance social en el proyecto? Si estos criterios, entre otros, no aparecen bien claros en el proyecto presentado, entonces preguntamos a la contraparte por las razones del por qué no se incluye dicho criterio. Esto ha sido muy fructífero en cuanto se produce un gran espacio para el diálogo. Por eso decimos que tal experiencia se constituye en un diálogo pedagógico, en cuanto tenemos que intercambiar sobre visiones epistemológicas y claves hermenéuticas diferentes en la educación teológica.

Perspectivas y desafíos para la educación teológica en la región.

Como dijimos arriba, el ambiente de la educación teológica en la región ha cambiado cualitativamente en los últimos diez años. Hoy hay mucho más apertura para el cambio, como también hay mayores posibilidades para asociarse y hacer esfuerzos conjuntos. Creo que también podemos afirmar que las escuelas teológicas tradicionales con pedagogías “bancarias”, autoritarias y monolíticas no solo no responden a las necesidades del contexto social y eclesial, sino que están dejando de ser atractivas para profesores y alumnos. Una de las razones, sin haber estudiado esto a fondo, es que circula muy buena literatura bíblica y teológica hoy día en la región. Preguntas teológicas contextuales y claves hermenéuticas desde sujetos específicos constituyen un gran atractivo a disposición del mundo religioso de nuestro tiempo. La teología latinoamericana, católica y protestante ha hecho grandes aportes en este aspecto.

Sin embargo, aún quedan nuevos y grandes desafíos para la educación teológica ecuménica en la región, entre los cuales queremos destacar los siguientes:

- 1) La educación teológica ecuménica constituye aún una minoría. Muy a pesar de los avances logrados en algunas de nuestras escuelas de teología sobre apertura ecuménica, estas constituyen un grupo minoritario en la región. Como ilustración, podemos citar la situación de Nicaragua, donde existen más de 40 instituciones de educación teológica distribuidas entre institutos bíblicos, seminarios y facultades de teología, entre las cuales, un máximo de tres tienen una clara definición ecuménica. Por otra parte, las 4 Asociaciones de educación teológica vinculadas a ETE, agrupan una pequeña minoría de instituciones miembros en la región. Hay que aclarar también, que muchas de las instituciones educativas afiliadas a las Asociaciones, siguen siendo denominacionales sin real apertura ecuménica. Lo cual constituye un desafío de gran envergadura para la comunidad ecuménica regional.
- 2) Para muchas escuelas de teología, el aula constituye el único lugar de aprendizaje. Como sabemos, algunas pedagogías recientes insisten en que la formación, es una experiencia de vida. Sobre todo en teología debiera serlo, puesto que las experiencias religiosas empiezan en el hogar, continúan en la primaria, siguen en el colegio, pasan por el trabajo y por la iglesia. Los procesos educativos se suceden en la vida cotidiana dentro y fuera de casa. El aula no es más que una pequeña porción del proceso educativo. Pero si el aula se limita a los obsoletos métodos “bancarios”, entonces se disminuye su capacidad pedagógica, debido a que solamente requieren un buen oído para seguir la reflexión lógica, es decir, ni siquiera se necesitan los demás sentidos. La formación requiere más que solo razonamiento lógico, hay que abrir procesos pedagógicos en los cuales permitan el ejercicio de otros sentidos (el tacto, el gusto, la vista) así como el compartir sentimientos, sueños y experiencias espirituales. Asuntos estos, que generalmente no se dan en las aulas, sino en la misión y la práctica pastoral. Este sin duda es un desafío para la educación teológica ecuménica, pues entre comunidades negras, indígenas y entre pentecostales el discurso racional, no es la sola forma de aprendizaje.
- 3) En gran parte de las instituciones de educación teológica la realidad social y sus contradicciones no son de su responsabilidad. Debido a la herencia del fundamentalismo y del dualismo religioso, sobre todo del que nos vino y viene de EUA traído por misioneros, la espiritualidad y la vida del cristiano es un asunto individual y de devoción interior. La responsabilidad social, la preocupación por asuntos como la violencia, la guerra, la pobreza, la contaminación ambiental, la discriminación de género, el abandono de la niñez etc. no entran en el curriculum de la mayoría de nuestras escuelas de teología. Debido a ello, la teología que se enseña en estas escuelas es más doctrinal y repetición de fórmulas ya conocidas. Aquí debiéramos hablar de educación contextualizada.

- 4) Muchos ambientes educativos teológicos no incluyen aún en sus programas el problema de género. En las aulas como en los curriculum de la mayoría de nuestros seminarios no se considera nada relacionado a la discriminación y a las relaciones asimétricas entre varones y mujeres. Esa falla discriminatoria se puede apreciar en el porcentaje de mujeres que enseñan en nuestros seminarios y facultades de teología. Debido a esta escasez de presencia femenina en los seminarios, la participación de ellas en las asambleas de las Asociaciones y sus simposios es en extremo minoritaria. Claro las instituciones teológicas reflejan la realidad de las iglesias, donde las mujeres están igualmente discriminadas.
- 5) En gran parte de nuestras escuelas de teología no existe la libertad de cátedra. Este concepto liberal de la autonomía universitaria no encuentra lugar cómodo en la educación teológica. Esta realidad se da así porque las jerarquías eclesiásticas tienen la potestad absoluta de fiscalizar e intervenir en las escuelas de teología. En general estas intervenciones no se dan sobre bases pedagógicas o teológicas, sino debido a políticas eclesiásticas. Lo lamentable en estos casos, es que las jerarquías que actúan así lo hacen por motivos ideológicos o porque no tienen formación teológica. Creo que uno de los grandes desafíos hacia el futuro inmediato de la educación teológica ecuménica, es cultivar la libertad de cátedra en nuestras escuelas de teología, sin descuidar la cercanía con las comunidades cristianas.
- 6) La alarma del HIV/AIDS, afortunadamente, el Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias (CLAI) ha tomado algunas iniciativas sobre este grave problema de salud. También el CMI nos ha desafiado no solo a las iglesias, sino a las instituciones de educación teológica proponiendo incluir en los programas curriculares el tratamiento bíblico, teológico y médico de esta enfermedad. Esta tarea va lenta en nuestras escuelas, pero debido a ello es mayor el desafío para la educación teológica ecuménica. Lo bueno es que el diálogo ya está planteado.
- 7) Década para la superación de la violencia. Podemos constatar, que el material que ha producido el CMI sobre esta iniciativa ya ha llegado a varias de las escuelas teológicas, sin embargo, el desafío sigue siendo, que las mismas instituciones lo asuman como suyo y lo transformen en parte de sus programas de formación.
- 8) Volver la Biblia a los agentes que la enseñan. El protestantismo latinoamericano y caribeño se conocía como un pueblo que leía la Biblia. Al contrario de los protestantes, hace apenas unas tres décadas, los católicos romanos no eran conocidos como lectores de la Biblia. Esto cambió radicalmente después del Concilio Vaticano Segundo, y en la región a partir de Medellín en 1968 en la Conferencia Episcopal Latinoamericana. El problema para los protestantes, es que hoy día si siguen leyendo las Escrituras, pero siguen haciéndolo como ayer, de forma literalista. En esto el fundamentalismo marcó el protestantismo en general, en la región. Lo halagador, es que las redes de biblistas tanto populares, como de eruditos son hoy muy numerosas en nuestros países, pero como el 99% de esas redes, con espíritu ampliamente ecuménico, esta conformada por agentes de pastoral católico romanos. Ilustro lo anterior mencionando que este mes de julio se realiza un taller popular de Biblia para agentes pastorales en el DEI (Departamento Ecuménico de Investigaciones), con docentes connotados como Pablo Richard, Elsa Tamez, Silvia Regina e Irene Foulkes y aunque se han buscado agentes protestantes para que participen, no habrá en este taller sino un solo protestante. Menudo desafío devolver el estudio hermenéutico y exegético de la Biblia a los agentes que la enseñan en las iglesias en la Escuela Dominical. Pienso que el desafío es principalmente para las escuelas de teología, ya no hacer leer la Biblia, sino estudiarla, escudriñarla más allá del método literalista. Además, motivar la creación de una red de biblistas protestante sobre claves hermenéuticas liberadoras.

TASKS AND CHALLENGES FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION¹

José Duque

Three years after beginning to work as theological education consultant for the region, thus putting into practice a decentralized and regionalized model for the new structure of ETE, it is time to pause in order to both look back and put things into perspective. That is, recount that which we feel has been most relevant in this task, and from this perspective point out the challenges that we foresee for the reality of theological education in the region.

The ETE structure that was put into practice three years ago required, I believe, a pedagogical and epistemological redefinition in at least four areas: descentralization, regionalization, contextualization and shared responsibility between Geneva and the region. This redefinition fulfilled an old regional aspiration in theological education. The traditional structure centralized in Geneva, albeit generous and open, functioned on the basis of a “center- periphery” relationship. The production of a new structure constituted, in and of itself, a joint effort between Geneva and the region, required many hours of joint intensive reflection. The regional theological education associations took an active part in the formulation of the current model.

The new structure does not merely have to do with form, but rather with a profound in depth transformation. Fortunately, we are blessed not only with a transforming will in Geneva, but also a very capable and rigorous staff in the conduction of this new structure. For this reason, the Working Group meetings today are of high quality and inspire us to continue with the task in the different regions of ETE.

We begin with this overview of the ETE project, because the functions of the consultant in the region are not isolated but part of a new pedagogical model of shared responsibility. Following we will look at some of the more relevant tasks the regional consultancy has been involved in. Due to space limitations I will limit the exposition to a brief outline.

Relevant tasks

Theological Education Associations.

Today we can state that these associations are in a process of continuous growth. They are growing in numbers, every year more members are affiliated. The oldest associations in the region are barely forty years old and most of their history has been accompanied by an idolized anti ecumenism that had not allowed them to grow. Up until recently, the members preferred to gather with those shared common doctrines and traditional educational models, especially those copied from the first world. Today the associations, in general, are characterized for creating opportunities that are open to diversity. More and more seminaries, institutes and church schools from the historical and national denominations as well as Adventists and Pentecostals are becoming affiliated with the associations, since they have become places for gathering and sharing church traditions, pedagogical models and contents.

The associations, besides being a gathering opportunity, are also an important place for biblical-theological, pedagogical and social interpretation. The opportunity to participate in symposiums, colloquiums, consultations and debates on current themes allows members to get to know or deepen their knowledge of new contents and educational models. This also draws new members. I believe that it is in the associations where, today, the best of current thought in the areas of Bible, theology, pastoral ministry, pedagogy and social reality is being shared.

¹ The English version is translated from Spanish version in the previous pages.

We can also appreciate the qualitative intellectual growth in the associations. Today, in contrast with 15 years ago, there are few seminaries or theological schools without a number of faculty with postgraduate degrees, including doctorates. This without a doubt adds rigor to the theological education that is offered.

Thus, the associations are a magnificent environment for study, openness and sharing and facilitate the opportunity for introducing and sharing the ecumenical spirit. In this way, the participation of the consultant in the assemblies and symposiums of the associations constitutes not only the presence of ETE in these meetings, but also the demystification of what in the past has been attributed to WCC ecumenism by fundamentalist and evangelical circles.

Common services requested from the ETE consultant the region

- a) The approximately 35 projects that arrive at the consultancy office yearly include requests for developing libraries, production of teaching materials, scholarships for postgraduate studies for professors, development of extension programs and South-South exchanges of professors and students. In general these projects are accompanied by requests for financing.
- b) What is more interesting though is that in many of the trips that I am requested to make throughout the region, there is not always a request for funds involved. Many of these trips required much preparation time since they have to do with consultancies on curriculum development, formation of national or local associations, contextual educational philosophies, pedagogical models, extension models, educational models for indigenous communities, transversal themes in theological education, self-development in theological education, etc. I could practically dedicate myself only to these types of consultancies, but unfortunately other commitments also require a large part of my time, which does not allow me to respond to all the requests for consultancies.
- c) Pedagogical dialogue. On many occasions when new institutions request information about the possibilities of receiving support from ETE, new dialogues can be initiated about diverse topics related to theological education. Generally this begins with a request for the institution to formulate a specific project. The consultant's office analyses the project observing the following aspects: Is it ecumenical? Is it inclusive? Do women participate in the different levels of the project? Does it have self-supporting capabilities? Is there a social outreach aspect of the project? If these criteria, among others, are not clearly present in the project, we dialogue with the institution about the reasons. This has been very fruitful when an opportunity for dialogue develops. That is why we say that the experience becomes a pedagogical dialogue, an exchange of different epistemological perspectives and hermeneutical keys for theological education.

Perspectives and challenges for theological education in the region

As mentioned above, the environment of theological education in the region has changed qualitatively in the past ten years. Today there is much more openness toward change, as well as many more opportunities for associating and joining efforts. I believe that we can also affirm that traditional schools of theological education with "banking" pedagogies that are authoritarian and monolithic not only do not respond to the needs of the social and ecclesial context, but are ceasing

to be attractive for professors and students. Without having studied this in depth, I suggest that one of the reasons for this is that there is very good biblical and theological literature circulating in the region these days. Contextual theological questions and hermeneutical keys from specific acting subjects are greatly attractive to the religious world of our time. Latin American theology, Catholic and Protestant, has made great contributions in this respect.

There are, however, still new and great challenges for ecumenical theological education in the region, among which we would like to point out the following:

- 1) Ecumenical theological education is still in the minority. In spite of the advances in some of our schools of theology with respect to ecumenical openness, these are a minority in the region. For an example we can mention the situation of Nicaragua, where there are more than 40 institutions of theological education - Bible institutes, seminaries and faculties of theology – among which a maximum of three are clearly ecumenical. On the other hand, the four associations of theological education related to ETE gather the small minority of member institutions in the region. It is important to clarify that many of the educational institutions affiliated with the associations continue to be denominational with no real ecumenical emphasis. This is a great challenge for the ecumenical community in the region.
- 2) For many schools of theology, the classroom is the only place for learning. As we know, some recent pedagogies insist that learning is a life experience. Above all this should be true in theology, since religious experiences begin in the home, continue in primary school, then secondary, pass through work and the church. Educational processes take place in everyday life in and out of the home. The classroom is nothing more than a small part of the educational process. But if the classroom is limited to “banking” methods, then it diminishes its pedagogic capacity, since the students only need to have a good ear to follow a logical reflection – they don’t even need to use the rest of their senses. Formation requires more than just logical reasoning, it must pen up pedagogical processes that allow for exercising other senses (touch, taste and sight) as well as sharing feelings, dreams and spiritual experiences. These topics are generally not discussed in class, but rather in mission and ministerial practice. This is without a doubt a challenge for ecumenical theological education, since among black, indigenous and Pentecostal communities rational discourse is not the only means of learning.
- 3) In a large number of theological education institutions social reality and its contradictions are not considered to be their responsibility. Due to our fundamentalist and religious dualistic heritage, above all that which was brought to us by missionaries from the USA, spirituality and Christian life is an individual thing, having to do with inner devotion. Social responsibility, concern for issues such as violence, war, poverty and environmental contamination, gender discrimination, the abandonment of children, etc. are not a part of the curriculum of the majority of our schools of theology. For this reason, the theology that is taught in these schools is more doctrinal, repeating already known formulas. We need to speak here of contextualized education.
- 4) Many educational programs do not even now include gender issues in their programs. Both in class as well as in the curricula, the majority of our seminaries do not consider anything having to do with discrimination and the asymmetrical relationships between men and women. This discriminatory fault can be appreciated in the percentage of women who teach at our seminaries and schools of theology. Due to the lack of feminine presence in the seminaries, their

participation in the assemblies of the associations as well as the symposiums is extremely minor. Of course theological institutions reflect the reality of the churches where women are discriminated as well.

- 5) A large number of our schools of theology do not have freedom in their teaching. This liberal concept of university autonomy does not find a comfortable place in theological education. This is so because the church hierarchies have absolute power to control and intervene in the schools of theology. In general these interventions are not based on pedagogical or theological issues, but rather church policies. What is unfortunate is that the hierarchies act this way for ideological reasons or because of a lack of theological training. I believe that one of the great challenges for the immediate future of ecumenical theological education is to cultivate freedom to teach in our schools of theology, while maintaining the ties with Christian communities.
- 6) The alarm over HIV/AIDS, fortunately the WCC has taken some initiatives concerning this serious health problem. The WCC has challenged not only the churches, but also theological education institutions to include in their curricula a biblical, theological and medial approach to the disease. This task is moving slowly in our schools, but for this reason it is a greater challenge for ecumenical theological education. The positive aspect is that the dialogue has begun.
- 7) Decade to overcome violence: We can confirm that the material produced by the WCC on this initiative has been received by many schools of theology, however the challenge continues to be for these institutions to take on the initiative as their own and make it part of their formation programs.
- 8) Return the Bible to those agents who teach it. Latin American and Caribbean Protestantism used to be known as a people who read the Bible. As opposed to the Protestants, Roman Catholics only three decades ago were not known to be readers of the Bible. This has changed radically after the Second Vatican Council and in this region after the Latin American Episcopal Conference in Medellín in 1968. The problem for Protestants today is that they continue to read the Scriptures, but in the same way they always have, literally. This is the fundamentalism that marked Protestantism in general in the region. What is positive is that Bible networks, both grassroots and scholarly are numerous in our countries today, but 99% of these networks, although broadly ecumenical, are made up of Catholic pastoral agents. I illustrate this by mentioning that in this month of July the DEI (Ecumenical Research Department) is holding a grassroots Bible workshop for pastoral agents with well known professors such as Pablo Richard, Elsa Tamez, Silvia Regina de Lima and Irene Foulkes, and although they have looked for Protestant pastoral agents to participate, there will not be a single one at this workshop. The challenge is therefore to provide hermeneutical and exegetical study of the Bible to agents who teach in the church's Sunday School classes. I believe that the challenge is primarily for the schools of theology to not just read the Bible, but to study it beyond the literalist method. It is also important to motivate the creation of a Protestant Bible network based on liberating hermeneutical keys.

SEARCHING FOR WAYS OF PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND MINISTERIAL FORMATION

Nyambura J. Njoroge

Introduction: Communicating the mission and vision

We who in the World Council of Churches have the responsibility of promoting and facilitating ecumenical theological education and ministerial formation consistently wrestle with how best to communicate the mission and vision of the Council to theological institutions and programmes sponsored by the member churches. The ecumenical agenda and the activities that preoccupy the staff and the members of the governing and advisory bodies of the Council range from critical reflection on matters of faith and doctrine, justice and peace, mission and evangelism, education and ecumenical formation to fundamental issues of relationships among the member churches in the Council, international affairs and human sexuality that affect people in their daily struggle for life.

A frequent reader of WCC publications, especially the quarterly periodical *The Ecumenical Review* and the website <http://www.wcc-coe.org> will by the end of the day have a glimpse of the current issues and the wide variety of views and multiple approaches that emerge as people of many cultural and historical backgrounds attempt to express themselves. Because of the many challenging issues that confront Christians the world over, it is very easy to forget why the world council came into being in the first place: the quest for Christian unity.

The quest for unity in faith in Jesus Christ is not new in the life and the mission of the church. It is rather one prayer that Jesus uttered at the moment of great despair as he faced the last longest hours of his life before crucifixion as we read in John 17. Being able to embrace the gift of unity in faith in Jesus Christ as we have come to know is not an easy responsibility as Jesus himself demonstrated in this long prayer and through the ministry of the apostles, especially theologian Paul. We too must pray earnestly for Christian unity as much as we study, reflect, analyse, evaluate and take action to make unity concrete in our daily lives. According to Ian M. Fraser:

Unity is not a general word for “committed togetherness” in Christian theology. It is rather a word which points to a reality that underlies all life, makes sense of it and gives it direction and purpose. There is a basis for all hopeful relationships in human society and human history, its source lies beyond human life, affirms human life and acts in its favour. That source of unity on which the human race may draw to manage history creatively is the life of the Trinity (Fraser 2003:13).

On the outset let me remark that the themes and activities that appear on the ecumenical agenda are not the making of the staff in Geneva office of the Council. Rather the ecumenical agenda is based on the concerns that emerge from the member churches and their various networks through dialogues, consultations, seminars, reflections and from decision-making processes of the Council. The methodology of discerning the ecumenical agenda is one of critical consultation through

concerned and responsible persons whose voices emerge from the churches and other Christian communities. These concerned voices are deliberated on at various stages and places before they are selected at various levels of decision-making namely the general assembly, central committee, the executive committee and the officers' meeting.¹ The staff is then charged with the responsibility of implementing these decisions and mandates together with the member churches and their various networks through the designated programmes and policies.

Since the beginning of 1999, for instance, a Special Commission was created to fulfil the mandate of the eighth general assembly (Harare assembly, December 1998) to deliberate on the internal relationship between the Orthodox member churches and the other member churches of WCC. A report on this commission was submitted during the last central committee (August 2002) and now it has been made public for critical engagement, study and scrutiny by member churches and its various networks before it is received in the next general assembly².

Correspondingly, the Harare assembly decided to focus on overcoming violence and during the central committee held in Potsdam, Germany, February 2001, the launching of the Ecumenical Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV): Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace, 2001-2010³ took place. Soon after Harare assembly the staff embarked on looking for ways of communicating with member churches on how best to launch the decade in the regions and to ensure that issues related to violence plays a central role in the agenda of the churches and the networks.

Likewise churches are mobilized to focus more intentionally on HIV/AIDS pandemic starting in Africa where there is a high concentration of the infected and affected persons.⁴ Significantly there is deliberate focus to mainstream HIV/AIDS theological curriculum in theological institutions, TEE programmes and lay training centres in Africa.⁵ Discussions are underway on how to give focused attention to South Asia, China, Central and Eastern Europe and the Caribbean where the rate of infection is increasing rapidly, according to the UNAIDS report.⁶ Many other decisions were taken and other long standing mandates like that of education and ecumenical formation were affirmed and given the green light to continue.

¹ The general assembly is the highest decision making body made of appointed delegates from the member churches according to agreed policies and meets every seven years. The next assembly will meet in February 2006 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the first time the Council will hold the assembly in South America. The central committee is the highest decision-making body between the assemblies and meets every 12-18 months, its members are appointed by the assembly. The executive committee meets every six months and its members are also members of the central committee and the officers' meeting is made of the Moderator of central committee, its two vice-moderators, the general secretary, deputy-general secretary and the directors of programmes and management and it meets every two months. Each region/continent has a President and is selected at the assembly. There are several commissions, advisory bodies and working-groups that accompany the programmes of the Council and in the central committee there are several sub-committees that assist in the in-depth discussions of issues and concerns.

² This report can be found on <http://www.wcc-coe.org> under Special Commission and The *Ecumenical Review*. Geneva: WCC Publications. Vol. 55, No. 1, January 2003.

³ For more details see the Decade to Overcome Violence in *The Ecumenical Review*. Geneva: WCC Publications. Vol. 53, No. 2, April 2001, especially p. 227-241.

⁴ HIV/AIDS pandemic was among the issues that motivated the general assembly to call for special focus on Africa and urged the global church to accompany the African churches and its people to address the many destructive activities that confront the continent.

⁵ A theological curriculum has been developed and is being promoted in theological institutions through training of trainers by a theological consultant in Africa. There is also the *Plan of Action: the Ecumenical Response to HIV/AIDS in Africa* for churches and other church-related institutions that was drafted at the global consultation on the ecumenical response to the challenge of HIV/AIDS in Africa, Nairobi, Kenya 25-28 November 2001. Both of these documents are available on hard copy or on the WCC website in English, French and Portuguese. In addition to the theological consultant there are four sub-regional staff persons responsible for promoting the plan of action and one fulltime staff in Geneva office responsible for coordinating the work and managing the finances.

⁶ See UNAIDS, *Report on the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, 2002*.

Central in education and ecumenical formation programme is to promote ecumenical mutual learning and in-depth understanding of unity in faith in Jesus Christ that leads to the process of renewal and reconciliation as the church of Christ struggles to overcome historical divisions and disagreements as well as the ones that continue to emerge in our time. The programme struggles to facilitate and promote the delivery of creative education of ecumenical people and leaders.⁷ The programme also supports activities such as faculty and library development, transformation of theological curriculum through creative initiatives in theological institutions and programmes and provides scholarships for church personnel in hospitals, schools and lay training centres among others. In addition, the programme through its staff, commission and working groups attempts to make known the ecumenical agenda and the activities that are currently under consideration to the member churches and the various networks that are involved in education for action.⁸

Seeking the mind and will of Christ

Nevertheless, seeking the mind and will of Christ, in my view, is the greatest challenge we face in all that we do to promote Christian unity because it is easy to forget to stop and to discern the will of God in our lives as individuals and as communities of faith. The modern day ecumenical movement has done much to promote unity in faith in Jesus Christ yet there is a growing concern that some historical divisions and new ones continue to make it difficult to realize the will of Christ and that denominationalism is a major challenge in the 21st century.

Even though churches are not where they were when the first world missionary conference met in 1910, Edinburgh, Scotland, one is bound to ask: Could we have missed the way? How can theological institutions and programmes become a channel of making Christian unity in our daily lives a reality, is the crucial question in this article? How can the way we learn and prepare youth, women and men for church ministry in theological institutions and programmes lead to better understanding of Jesus' last will and testament as he approached the cross?⁹

As we seek to understand the scriptures in theological education and ministerial formation, how we live up to the Christian affirmation of unity in faith in Jesus Christ should be of utmost importance. We must wrestle with the divisions, disagreements, and sometimes deep bitterness and hostility that keep us away from realizing this gift of unity to the extent that many Christians the world over cannot communion together at the same Lord's Table or Eucharist. We must persist in prayer if indeed reconciliation and renewal of the church, which are central in embracing unity in faith expressed in a variety of ways, will be realized.

The writer of Ephesians 4: 4-6 brings to our attention: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all through all in all".¹⁰ In addition through God's grace we are endowed with a multiplicity of gifts and richness for the sake of the growth of the church into Christ, to summarise Ephesians 4:11-16 and 1 Corinthians 12. We are called into unity in faith in the midst of a plurality of gifts and richness and therefore we must mutually learn how to put these multiple gifts and richness

⁷ In the attempt of addressing this commitment, staff person in Education and Ecumenical Formation Simon Oxley wrote the book: *Creative Ecumenical Education: Learning from One Another*. Geneva: WCC Publications, Risk Series, 2002.

⁸ For the first time during the Harare Assembly a Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation was created which has 32 members and ideally is supposed to meet every 18 months and has two working groups, one for Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) meets once a year and the other one for Scholarships, which meets twice a year.

⁹ Lukas Vischer a Swiss theologian and a long time staff of WCC raises almost similar questions but limits himself to the communion in the Reformed churches in "Theological Schools – a dividing force?" in *Reformed World*, Volume 52, Number 2, June 2002, p. 76-85.

¹⁰ All bible references are from the New Revised Standard Version.

into good use for God's mission. This is where theological institutions and programmes play a critical role in providing an introduction of in-depth and focused learning about Christian faith from the scriptures and history, life in society and stewardship of all the resources and gifts put at our disposal.

Ecumenical theological education and ministerial formation is not an end in itself but is a means of systematically and intentionally enlightening and educating those called to ministry in its various manifestations for lay and ordained persons. The process of training women and men to interpret scripture and understand the faith of the church so that they can follow Jesus in God's mission in preaching, teaching, healing and feeding is inevitable. Because of the many evil challenges we face in society, every generation of theological educators must discern how best to equip those who receive the call to ministry so that in due course they can return to the churches and society "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4: 12-14).

However, a long time American theological educator, F. Morgan Roberts reminds us:

[T]he call to ministry is a joint call to both *pastor* and *people* to follow Jesus in a long-term commitment such as that of Paul, whose resolve was to know Jesus Christ, and him crucified. It is a determination to let ministry and mission continually exhibit the love of the crucified one. It is to fashion together a community based upon Calvary love, a community of faith whose basic creed is that which the church at Corinth finally inspired Paul to formulate: "the more excellent way." When we commit ourselves to a pastoral call, we are vowing to live with God's common people in the love that is patient and kind; never envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude; not irritable or resentful; the love that bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things (Roberts, Fall 2002: 12, his emphasis).

Challenges and obstacles for ecumenical learning

Through consultations and reflections theological educators in different parts of the world have identified some of the obstacles and challenges that must be addressed if at all they are adequately equipped to carry out the ministry of ecumenical teaching and learning in theological institutions and programmes. One of these challenges and probably the underlying problem is that many theological educators lack adequate preparation in the art of teaching or pedagogy, let alone lack of skills in ecumenical learning. We now turn to a few of these challenges and obstacles but the list is not exhaustive.

a) The art of teaching ecumenically

All those who are called to the ministry of teaching in theological institutions deserve proper preparation on how they mutually share knowledge with students and how to interact with knowledge that comes from scripture, tradition, books and other sources. How teachers go about their profession is important because it has great impact on the life of the students and how best they can develop skills that are needed in ministry. Most important is for theological educators to assist students to identify their talents and gifts for ministry as they nurture and mentor them. Whatever else theological educators do, it should first and foremost be empowering, motivating and transforming so that students can leave seminary with skills that will lead to a creative, engaging and transforming ministry. Above all, given our fundamental question in this article, because of the historical and new divisions in the church, theological educators need to have a deep understanding

of the call to unity in faith in Jesus Christ as a fundamental requirement in ministerial formation and the skills to help students identify the root courses of the divisions.

Secondly, both theological educators and students should develop a clear understanding of reconciliation and how to bring opposing sides at the same table for dialogue, reflection and conversion into the body of Christ. Such a process of learning requires particular skills in the art of teaching, with an unambiguous intention of building a community where each person is taken seriously and listened to. In other words, just because one has a diploma in teaching on other subjects does not necessarily make one a good theological educator rather there is need to identify particular skills and methodologies in ecumenical learning. Matters of identity and background, may it be ethnic, racial, cultural, gender and denominational affiliation should not be taken lightly in the process of learning. For instance, theological educators need to have a general knowledge of the churches and societies that students come from and which they are likely to serve upon graduation.

Many students come to theological institutions and programmes without much knowledge about other denominations, let alone their own, and when they leave theological institution they need to have a profound understanding of other Christian expressions and perspectives so as to live and work (witness) in unity in faith in Jesus Christ. Even when theological educators and students may happen to belong to the same denomination and their focus is ministerial formation for a particular denomination as many Bible schools are; it is prudent that the institutions seek ways of learning about other Christian expressions and the ecumenical movement. Moreover we live and work in multi-religious and multi-cultural societies, which require of us to study other religions and cultures so that our approach to mission and evangelism is well informed and tolerant of other people who are different from us.

Today inter-religious and inter-faith education is also encouraged and this too deserves particular skills and methodologies in teaching.¹¹ Learning to live with differences, God-created or of our own making is indispensable in ecumenical theological education and ministerial formation as well as in inter-religious and inter-faith education. This leads me to highlight the need for inter-disciplinary learning so that students will have a wide knowledge of different aspects of life and how they impact on the daily lives of the people. For instance, safeguarding human dignity and ensuring fullness of life have a lot to do with human and environmental rights and law, among other things. It then makes sense if theological students left theological institutions knowledgeable about these basic rights and how people can seek for help if their rights are violated. Time does not allow us to highlight all that need to be said about pedagogy in theological education suffice it to say that it is one area that deserves critical attention. Most importantly, however, this should not be limited to an academic exercise, this community of learners (teachers as well as students) should learn to pray and worship together. Mutually they should grow into a spirituality that teaches them to embrace the leading of the Holy Spirit.

b) Relevant and contextual theological literature

It goes without saying that sound and profound teaching requires relevant and contextual literature and other resourceful materials. In most parts of the world and in particular Africa, theological institutions mostly focus on ministerial formation without paying much attention on the academic nature of theological education and the critical need to develop theological literature, including worship material that speaks to the hearts and minds of the people. Learning in a theological institution should include skills and strategies of creating theological literature together with the students. Again this depends very much on how best theological educators are skilled in researching and analysing undocumented resources and from the “living historians and theologians” of the day but who may not be academically trained.

¹¹ For further reading see Ruppell, Gert and Schreiner, Peter. eds. *Shared Learning in a Plural World: Ecumenical Approaches to Inter-Religious Education*. London & Hamburg: LIT VERLAG Münster, 2003.

Creating relevant and contextual literature in Africa, for instance, necessitates great creativity and courage because the most profound theological knowledge is with the women and men who may have the least academic qualifications yet their great commitment in the life and mission of the church qualify them to be great church historians and theologians. It also entails financial resources that will enable theological educators and students to interact with committed Christians in the churches, women's and men's fellowships, recording what they have to share for future analysis and documentation. It is also urgent that theological institutions collect and record stories, sermons, bible studies, songs, choruses and hymns that have been formulated by Christians and which are largely transmitted orally.

Equally theological institutions should pay attention to children and young people who raise critical questions about faith matters and who are struggling to make ends meet in hostile environment. Here we are reminded that in most countries of the South large percentages (sometimes up to 65%) of the population fall into the age-groups of children (0-18) and youth (19-30) years. The God talk and walk that take place in these age-groups should be given its rightful place, well documented and reflected in theological literature. Only then can we claim to have relevant and contextual theological literature.

By the time students receive their diplomas they should have acquired skills in research and how to put the information they gather in an intelligent manner for others to comprehend and consume. This can be done in the process of developing sermons, liturgy and a required thesis project before graduation. The budget should be inbuilt in the overall tuition so that this is not seen as extra burden or unnecessary requirement. Even though not every graduating student will become a writer, video and CD-ROM producers, for instance, at least they should acquire the knowledge about research, recording, writing and publishing so that they can mentor others to consider this line of profession. Theological institutions should also ensure that students are exposed to situations where ecumenism is practised not just talked about for them to have first hand experience as well as documenting it for wider readership. Indeed theological institutions ought to be such places where ecumenism is not just taught but experienced.

Theological educators should always bear in mind that they are educating future leaders in a variety of ministries in God's mission who should see themselves as nurturers of skills and gifts of others. Theological educators must at all time take into account that they are preparing those called and endowed with gifts to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Equipping of saints or Christians in the churches take many forms and should be the subject of another article. The work of preparing leaders, however, is a daunting one and should be accompanied with sound contextual literature. Such literature should include basic biblical and theological reflections on the unity of faith in Jesus Christ, in other words, what it real means to be a Christian in a divided institutional church and world. Examples where ecumenism is happening should be central in these writings.

Developing relevant and contextual literature on different fields of theology should be accompanied by well equipped library that is also managed by well trained librarians. This is another area that has been identified as wanting in many of the theological institutions in the South and there is a high demand that librarians are considered part of the faculty. Well trained librarians play a critical role in research methodologies and documenting of information among other things.

c) Stewardship and ecumenical leadership formation

As a matter of fact one area in ecumenical theological education and ministerial formation that calls for critical attention is stewardship, policy making and ecumenical leadership formation. This is an area that is taken for granted and rarely researched and written on in the church and theological institutions. Yet, quality ministry is far fetched if theological institutions continue to ignore nurturing accountable and responsible ecumenical leaders. As already noted the majority of those who go through theological education end up holding positions of leadership in the churches and other church-related institutions including theological and ecumenical institutions from the local to international level. It is no wonder that there are many churches and church-related institutions including ecumenical bodies that are in leadership and financial crisis. Sometimes divisions that occur in churches are a true reflection of bad leadership where power struggle, bad stewardship and lack of clear policies that safeguard abuse of power and God-given differences like ethnic or gender go unchecked.

Theological educators and students in the process of mutual learning should explore different patterns of leadership among different age-groups, same-gender, gender-mixed gatherings and intergenerational groups as well as the various institutions to overcome abuse of power and mismanagement of skills, resources and gifts in the body of Christ. Moreover mutual ecumenical learning should intentionally examine how patriarchy, sexism, hierarchy, elitism, clericalism and institutionalized paternalism and racism, hence internalized inferiority complex and self-hatred impact on human relationships, stewardship of gifts and resources and leadership patterns in the churches and church-related organizations. Bad stewardship and leadership are very costly to any institution (including the family) and students should not be left on their own to learn stewardship and ecumenical leadership skills on the job. Profound understanding of the ecumenical movement, policy and decision making and stewardship are a great advantage for all those called to equip the saints. Once more, theological institutions should go beyond teaching ecumenism into intentionally modelling different patterns of living ecumenically as a way of nurturing ecumenical leaders. Living ecumenically is a gospel imperative.

d) Teaching about faith and economy

More and more theological educators have become very concerned about the impact poverty and global economic injustices have on huge populations the world over but mostly in the countries of the South. Hence theological educators in the South are insisting on the teaching about faith and economy as a core subject in biblical studies. Through liberation theologies and ecumenical theology that have developed in the last 40 years, more Christians have become critically aware that matters of faith and economy are prevalent in the bible and that ecumenical theological education should help theological students come to glimpse with this reality and to have a deep understanding of how economy impact on our faith journeys. It is also to be noted that poverty and economic injustice create divisions among individuals and groups of people including Christians. Therefore biblical and theological reflection on faith and economy is fundamental in promoting unity in faith in Jesus Christ.

A master piece on this topic is the well written book by Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life: An Invitation to Personal, Ecclesial and Social Transformation*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001, third printing, which I highly recommend to all theological institutions and churches. This is a book written in such a way that theological educators and students can study the topic about faith and economy with small groups in the churches and in community to benefit more people in their daily struggle for life. The pedagogy used in this book should be extended in the churches in the practice of ministry.

Poverty and economic injustice cannot be eradicated by governments and non-governmental (NGOs) bodies alone. The poor themselves and those experiencing injustice must become agents of change but they must be empowered to do so. "To empower is to help people get in touch with the power that is theirs – to help them identify their power, claim their power, and/or to recover power that has been taken away from them" (Ali 1999:139). Theological education by extension (TEE) programmes and bible studies can be powerful spaces for exploring matters of faith and economy for personal, ecclesial, social transformation and for empowering one another.

Over the years the World Council of Churches and other church agencies have produced literature that explore alternative ways of addressing poverty, economic injustice and globalization, which are biblically based and theological institutions can benefit from such writings.¹² Such literature brings many diverse voices and experiences together that helps to expose the global economic system that condemn millions of people into poverty. Many theological institutions in the South are themselves victims of poverty and global economic injustice because most Christians are poor and can hardly support themselves let alone their churches. Critical attention should be given to eradicating poverty for after all Jesus' mission and ministry was focused on the poor, the "least of the least" (Luke 4: 18-19, Matthew 25).

e) Mainstreaming other major issues affecting our lives

It is not possible to highlight all areas and issues that need to be mainstreamed in theological curricula and future *Ministerial Formation* articles will deal with that but suffice it to say that ecumenical theological education must include and articulate all theological voices that have otherwise been excluded historically. People living with disabilities have called for critical pastoral theological reflection about their life experiences and the many challenges they face in society and in the church. Similarly indigenous communities the world over have added their theological voices and urge all involved to take their spirituality seriously for it is not barbaric and pagan as many of us were made to believe.

Certainly the theological voices of women have been with us now for more than fifty years and many women continue to claim their God-given place in the leadership of the churches and theological institutions. At this juncture I would like to pay tribute to one such voice, the womanist theological and ethical literature, which celebrates twenty years this year. African American women in theology after being inspired by the creative writings of Alice Walker coined the term Womanist theology in 1983 and provided churches and theological institutions with a voice that had been suppressed, silenced and excluded for centuries.

Since 1983, several articles and books come out of the printing presses in the USA bearing the name Womanist on them.¹³ But these women have gone beyond researching, writing and quoting one another to discovering ways of how to mainstream womanist theology and literature in theological institutions in their homeland USA. In *The Womanist Theology Primer Remembering What We Never Knew: the Epistemology of Womanist Theology*, Professor Katie G. Canon one of the pioneering professors and writers in this field has given us a glimpse of how to construct such theology as well as to mainstream it in the curriculum.

¹² For example two books by Michael Taylor: *Not Angels but Agencies: the Ecumenical Response to Poverty – A Primer*, Geneva: WCC Publications and SCM Press LTD, Risk Series, 1995; *Christianity, Poverty and Wealth: the Findings of 'Project 21'*. Geneva: WCC Publications & SPCK, 2003 and WCC, CCPD Development Studies, *To Break the Chains of Oppression*, November 1975.

¹³ Two recent publications are Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "If It Wasn't for the Women...": *Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in the Church and Community*. Maryknoll: New York, Orbis Books, 2001 and Stephanie Y. Mitchen, *Introducing Womanist Theology*. Maryknoll: New York, Orbis Books, 2002.

As more voices as these continue to emerge and to claim their rightful place in the academia and theological institutions, the more we are forced to look into the curricula and to transform it accordingly. As mentioned in the introduction, similar trend is taking place due to HIV/AIDS pandemic where we are not only forced to include it in the curriculum but to construct theologies of the body, compassion, healing and life because infected and tormented bodies and shattered lives by diseases such as AIDS is not the will of God. Churches must speak a theological and ethical language that makes sense among all those who are infected and affected by HIV/AIDS including millions of orphans whose young lives are devastated and left to the mercy of good Samaritans.¹⁴

In the same light those whose lives and bodies have been violated and tortured and their humanness reduced to nothing through poverty, starvation and violence are demanding pastoral theological reflection that speaks to their deep wounds and traumatized lives.¹⁵ Among the most violated and neglected are internally displaced persons and refugees who make that large group of the “least of the least” that Jesus taught about in Matthew 25. Whatever else a pastor, minister or priest does, worship, pastoral care and counselling must be accompanied by appropriate pastoral theology for all those who suffer most and are perishing at the margins of the society and the churches.

No relevant and contextual ecumenical theological education that leaves these excluded and silenced voices out is worth the name and integrity it tends to claim. Furthermore, this discussion should include mainstreaming ecumenical theology and missiology if indeed we are intentionally promoting unity in faith in Jesus Christ in theological education and ministerial formation. In my view, mainstreaming these new areas of concern is one of the greatest challenges facing theological institutions because the debate is left at the question: “What do we give up in the curriculum so that we can mainstream new theological voices and concerns?”

This discussion demands great courage, determination and creativity. But it should not be left to individual theological institutions and churches rather it should be presented at the theological association networks, academic fora and in ecumenical gatherings for in-depth reflection and for financial accompaniment. Once more, it is not just including these new theological voices in the curricula, it is also learning how to be an inclusive community of faith where these sisters and brothers who are excluded and silenced have a place in the church of Christ and at the ecumenical table.

f) Mentoring and networking

In any theological education discussion I have engaged in, in the last several years and they are many, there is an overwhelming outcry about the new wave of denominationalism mentioned above. Most often this concern is voiced by the few who struggle to nurture ecumenical theological education in inter-confessional theological institutions. Even where financial and personnel resources are obviously scarce, in particular Africa, denominations are asserting their identity by building universities that have faculty of theology for ministerial formation irrespective of the fact that they are sponsoring churches in the inter-confessional institutions.

As a result, ecumenically engaged theological educators are struggling to discover constructive ways of engaging churches in dealing with this new trend of divisiveness and competition. Needless to say that there is genuine fear that much of what the ecumenical movement has achieved over the

¹⁴ UNAIDS, *Report on the global HIV/AIDS epidemic*, July 2002 gives an estimate of 14 million orphans (have lost one or both parents to AIDS) worldwide and 11 millions of these number live in Africa, p. 133.

¹⁵ A good example is the newly published book by Kristen J. Leslie, *When Violence is No Stranger: Pastoral Counseling with Survivors of Acquaintance Rape*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003.

years in bringing churches closer to each other is under threat and undermined by this new spirit of denominationalism. How to regain the vigour and yearning for unity of faith in Jesus Christ has become an urgent quest in ecumenical theological education discourse?

Suggestions have been made that we need to renew and transform the way theological institutions network in particular regions. Traditionally, except in Europe where such networks do not exist, theological institutions have networks of theological associations most of which are involved in accreditation and standards (especially in North America, Asia and the Pacific) and the production of literature. But these networks do not necessarily delve into issues related to unity in faith in Jesus Christ, in fact some do not warm up to the idea of ecumenism. The least they do is to encourage collaboration in some areas.

Today, it is worth exploring if theological associations could be centres of nurturing the gift of unity in faith in Jesus Christ by mentoring ecumenical theological educators and theologians. Because of Information Communication Technology (ICT) there is larger possibility of developing electronic networks through websites and much more can be achieved in creating deeper understanding inter-continentially and ecumenically without neglecting the coming together for reflection, consultation and prayer. A wide variety of new courses can be offered in different institutions that are in the same networks and students can have access to them through distance learning. Mutual sharing of resources and knowledge on ICT should be encouraged and made to happen so that the digital gap in the South is overcome to ease difficulties in communication. Computer and internet literacy is becoming as important as knowing how to read and write and this should be a concern for churches and theological institutions and associations.

There is a fundamental need of mentoring one another into ecumenism and how to make a difference in an era of many divisions and hostilities despite information communication technology which connect people faster and more efficiently. A concern has been voiced that some excellent theological scholars and educators are only concerned about their own academic and professional mobility and have little respect for mentoring the younger generation and networking with others, which kills the spirit of unity in a much divided world.

Networking provides fertile grounds for advocacy, empowering one another, taking common action on matters that would otherwise go unattended and transformation of lives. Recruiting, mentoring and networking should become an important component of the life and structure of theological institutions and programmes. Theological educators as well as theological institutions should establish channels of networking, sharing and dissemination of information including inter-loan, automated libraries and websites, especially in the South. We must learn to make good use of technological and scientific knowledge to the benefit of promoting unity in faith in Jesus Christ, because these are gifts that come from God.

Conclusion: Holistic approach

More have been voiced, argued and reflected on and much more need to be said but it is fitting to remind us the collective voice that was heard in Oslo Consultation on Theological Education in 1996 that we need to embrace holistic character¹⁶ of theological education and ministerial formation, which is grounded in worship, and combines and inter-relates spirituality, academic

¹⁶ The education and ecumenical formation programme of WCC is in the process of putting together a resource book on holistic education.

excellence, mission and evangelism, justice and peace, pastoral sensitivity and competence and the formation of character. For it brings together education of:

the ear to hear God's word and the cry of God's people;
the heart to heed and respond to the suffering;
the tongue to speak to both the weary and the arrogant;
the hands to work with the lowly;
the mind to reflect on the good news of the gospel;
the will to respond to God's call;
the spirit to wait on God in prayer, to struggle and wrestle with God, to be silent in penitence and humility and to intercede for the church and the world;
the body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit (Pobee 1997: 1).

Let us seek the mind and will of Jesus and we will not go wrong as we struggle to do God's will on earth as it is in heaven of embracing the gift and promise of unity in faith in Jesus Christ. Let us renew our vigour and yearning for fullness of life in the ecumenical movement.

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**INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATION ON
CONTEMPORARY REFLECTION ON GLOBAL OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES:
A MULTI-FAITH APPROACH**

(Organized by the NCCI and the UELCI)
**Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute,
Chennai, India, 24-26th February 2003**

THE STATEMENT

CALL FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN MISSION

Preamble:

The liberation of the oppressed is an important and an inevitable challenge for the churches, all peoples and all Faiths of the world.

We, from the communities of the Dalit, Minjung, Burakumin, Sami along with members of the Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist and Adivasi communities, from different parts of India, Asia, Europe, North America and South Africa, have reflected together for three days in an international consultation on the theme: “**Contemporary reflection on Global Oppressed Communities: A Multi faith approach,**” February 24-26, 2003 at Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute, Chennai organized by the National Council of Churches in India and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India. We grappled with the problems in the context of increasing and intense forms of violence and oppression, further accentuated by religious fundamentalism and economic globalization, which through systemic deprivation and dis-empowerment have virtually eliminated the possibility for oppressed communities to live with dignity and humanhood.

We affirm that all Faiths offer human liberation and emancipation. Liberation of all the oppressed *per se* should be the missionary objective of all religious activities, especially of the Church, which receives the mandate for liberation from the Lord Jesus Christ.

We affirm that our faith compels us to be in the vanguard of the struggles for life and justice for the powerless millions all over the world. We identify the liberating power of God in an increasingly complex and hostile environment.

Call for a Paradigm Shift in Mission:

The present condition of all global oppressed communities demand an emphatic response from all Faiths treating the issue as a global communion so as to help build links of solidarity between communities that for too long have suffered in isolation and silence. All global oppressed communities share many common characteristics including the nature of their suffering, their despised status through birth and their present social structures, sanctioned by religions and quasi-religious dogma. The condition of Dalits is especially disconcerting since a total emancipation appears to be still a distant dream. All past efforts by reform movements, government legislations, direct intervention by numerous social action groups and movements, self-assertion, cultural and political mobilization by Dalits themselves, and the Church’s involvement in acts of liberation have not resulted in total freedom and empowerment of the Dalits. Indeed, recent resurgence of religious fundamentalism and globalization have begun to further marginalize, enslave and threaten their socio-economic and spiritual well-being of Dalits.

The achievement of the Church in the liberation of Dalits has only been modest. The Church was responsible for the initial loosening of the “**cruel grip of untouchability**”. However, an over-emphasis on conversion and church-growth not only restricted the liberating power of the Gospel but also did not free the ‘converts’ from caste discrimination within the Church. The Indian Church must now accept that the liberation of Dalits is a mandate from Christ himself whose ministry was one of identification with the poor and proclamation of freedom to the oppressed. This perspective is not unique to the Indian situation alone. The World Council of Churches has found the theme of liberation a catalyzing force for its ecumenical theological reflections in the 1970s when many movements of liberation emerged in different parts of the world. As the WCC dealt with a wide range of issues related to discrimination, racism, human struggle for dignity and freedom, and an understanding of “God’s option for the poor” the problems facing the Dalits was already an emerging concern in the 1980s. Oppressed people everywhere will find strength in our continuing quest to understand and challenge the structures of power, and to liberate people and offer them restorative and “transformative justice”.

We recognize the urgent need for a praxiological and paradigmatic change in the mission of the church in the struggle to liberate Dalits and other oppressed communities who have been subject to unparalleled oppression for centuries, without the reward of conversion.

Our Discernments:

Besides the inspiring morning worships, the program had four major components:

- (1) three major addresses related to the theme by Dr. Konrad Raiser, Dr. K. Rajaratnam and Dr. Richard Bleise,
- (2) responses to Dr. Rajaratnam’s theme address,
- (3) presentations on the situation of the global oppressed communities, namely, the Burakumin, Minjung, Samis and Dalits, and
- (4) perspectives on oppressed communities presented by a Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and a Sikh.

The multi-Faith community and the representatives of various social action movements were happy and appreciative of the initiative taken by the NCCI and the UELCI. The Consultation was energized by the presence of leaders from the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation and international resource agencies.

There was consensus among the speakers and participants that the response of the churches should be to all Dalits and not just Christian Dalits alone. This response must be truly ecumenical to include a multi-Faith approach based on an “unforced consensus” and should also seek support from other progressive socio-political ideologies. Dalit liberation requires a multi-faceted approach that aims at freedom from structures as well as transformation of consciousness.

The Dalits and all oppressed people will continue their own struggles. We must participate in their liberation, taking advantage of the solidarity expressed by people and movements as well as the strength derived from the efforts of various international human rights institutions including the recent resolution of the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) which concluded that descent-based discrimination is equivalent to racial discrimination. Ultimately the struggle of the oppressed people will be won through the empowerment of the local people and the internationalization of their struggles which provides them with added strength.

Act Now:

The Consultation gave a clarion call to the Churches in India to adopt the theme of liberation of the Dalits as an agenda of the Church. The Consultation was characterized by the remarkable unanimity in the understanding of the need to act, and act now.

Recommendations:

We recommend the following for consideration and action by the Churches and related institutions and social action groups:

CHURCH:

Self-definition of the Church

1. That the church define itself as the People's Movement and conceive its role as an instrument of the liberation of the oppressed. Towards this, it should make use of the political space to engage political systems, structures and policies for Dalit liberation.
2. That the Church which is predominantly a Dalit church needs to shed its stigma and start acknowledging its Dalit identity.

Mission of the Church

3. That the Dalit liberation should be the new agenda of the Church and the Church in India should struggle for the liberation of the Dalits without the reward of conversion.
4. That the local congregation be motivated to become communities of resistance and struggle to fight against untouchability, oppression, injustice, social inequalities etc.
5. That the Church as a faith community in fulfilling its prophetic responsibility should reject and condemn caste system and the continuing practices of untouchability, exclusion and discrimination and reject them as sin.

Church Order and Governance

6. That efforts be made to include the representation of oppressed communities in all areas of governance of the church.
7. That the affirmative action (reservation) for Dalits should be introduced as a priority in the Church managed educational institutions.

Life of the Church

8. That the churches explore and introduce Dalit liturgical symbolism in their services.
9. That the Churches address the issues of Dalit women and integrate them as part of the gender justice movements within the Church and society.

10. That the Church highlight and address the problems of Dalits living in rural areas with greater seriousness and urgency.
11. That the Churches engage in concrete programmes towards the empowerment of Dalit children.
12. That the church's efforts to align with all national and international networks to promote the concerns of all oppressed communities and the Dalits be affirmed and continued.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION:

Paradigm Shift in the formulation of Theology

1. *That the Theological commissions of the Church be encouraged to influence the revision of curriculum in theological education based on the struggles and life experiences of the oppressed. That representatives of these communities be involved in this process of curriculum formation.*
2. *That the experiences of the victims of oppression be emphasized and used as sources and resources for doing and articulating a theology of the oppressed and that all subjects taught in theological institutions converge on the liberation of all the underprivileged irrespective of their faith affiliations.*
3. *That the Christian education curricula and methodology of teaching should also reflect the life experiences of the poor and the oppressed. That the programmes of Christian education should equip and empower the emergence of lay leaders, lay preachers, youth workers and women leaders.*
4. *That the theological institutions in association with the Churches should develop processes by which local congregations can be equipped with the knowledge and methodology of doing theology from a Dalit/Adivasi perspective.*
5. *The Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College in particular is requested to take steps to reformulate the curriculum of theological education in consonance with Dalit liberation. The Seminaries of the Churches should also take initiatives to give importance and primacy to Dalit Studies.*

Equipping the Educators

6. *That efforts be made for the identification and training of leadership in the local congregations and communities and that programs of theological education be introduced reflecting a theology of the oppressed.*
7. *That theological institutions appoint experts from other faiths on the faculty who are committed to the liberation of the oppressed, multi-Faith relations and to establish solidarity among people of diverse faiths.*

CHURCHES AND SOCIAL ACTION MOVEMENTS:

Churches and Social Action

1. That the Churches be encouraged to work out mechanisms for effective coordination among churches' development programmes.
2. That churches engage in a continued process of societal analysis responding to the kairoitic moment in which we live.
3. That service agencies, both educational and health institutions give priority to the oppressed. That a social audit system be developed to monitor the services of Christian institutions and to ensure that members of oppressed communities be given priority for training and education, for the development of human resources, through scholarships, appointments and in the extension of services.

Churches and Social Action Groups Coordination

4. That the social action movement help the Churches with their experiences and social research methodologies to adequately understand the problems faced by the Dalits.
5. The Church and social action movements work towards the transformation of structures for the liberation of oppressed groups in society. This working together should enable the emergence of effective networking and putting our resources together for the liberation process.
6. That the churches and social action movements initiate dialogue for effective coordination and to avoid duplicacy of work.
7. That the networks between churches and social action movements take place at the global, national, regional and local levels.
8. That the Churches and social action groups involve in the process of documentation of issues and work out mechanisms for collection, collation and dissemination of information in church and society.
9. Churches and social action groups lobby for employment policies and opportunities with government and private agencies.

MULTI-FAITH APPROACH:

1. That opportunities for multi-Faith and multi-Faith dialogue be created for a greater mutual understanding among the various communities and sections of groups towards the liberation of the oppressed.
2. That the multi-Faith networking should also enable the process of working out a political framework for common agenda and joint action.
3. That the multi-Faith networking should involve in advocacy and lobbying and should also include the issues of oppression in the World Religion Forums.

NETWORKING

1. That national and global networking should be consciously built among the oppressed and to enable them to develop and progress into a united movement of protest and liberation against oppression and for the creation of a global network which will be in solidarity with the globally oppressed communities.
2. That issues of oppression needs to be internationalised involving international NGOs, social action groups, church bodies and governments. That space needs to be provided for the exchange of ideas and experiences of the oppressed communities.
3. That the setting up of an international Dalit information and research centre be encouraged including development of dissemination processes. That systematic research and analysis of national and global structures needs to be developed.
4. That avenues and mechanisms for the collection, collation and dissemination of information be developed for the sharing and exchange to provide for better networking among oppressed groups and mutual empowerment.
5. That the resource agencies and churches should support the people's movements and strengthen the national movements of Adivasis and Dalits.

CALL FOR ACTION: OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Action in implementing all the above recommendations should engage three ecclesial levels: national, regional and local.

1. The National Council of Churches in India – (National)

The National Council of Churches in India eminently representative of all the Protestant and Orthodox churches in India, should organise national level programmes of action that stimulate member churches including local congregations for constructive and positive action in the context of these recommendations.

a. National Task Force (NTF)

The immediate task of the National Council of Churches is to set up a National Task Force for implementing Dalit Liberation as mission objective of the Church in India. Therefore this Task Force should consist of all the major denominations of the church, if possible, all the member churches. This task force should meet at least once a year to hear the reports and lay down policies in relation to implementation of the agenda for Dalit Liberation.

b. NTF Working Group

In order to monitor regular programmes of action, the National Task Force can have a Working Group which can meet more often to monitor the implementation of the agenda. This Working Group can consist of at least seven Dalit activists representing member churches of NCCI, social action groups, church related social action groups and at least one representative from the multi-Faith group.

2. Recommendations to the Churches

Churches particularly the main line churches i.e., members of the National Council of Churches must appoint their own Task Force for implementing Dalit Liberation agenda at the church level and undertake programmes of study, research and action in relation to Dalit Liberation. They may even seek bilateral funding with their partners for promoting their work. They may even set up the publication and news division so that they become the pivotal level for linking the national level and the local level activists.

3. The Congregations (Local)

The implementing unit of Dalit liberation in the country should be the local congregation. All national level as well as church level programmes must aim at strengthening the local levels with necessary training and information resources considering the fact that the suffering of Dalits, as victims of oppression is experienced at the local level. So the thrust of our action programme is at the level of the congregation. Once this is attained the church is alive to its new awakening and responds in a way that church as a whole in India becomes a liberation force.

4. Multi-Faith Action

As we envisage cooperation of other faiths, it is important that all the three levels - national, church and local congregations establish contacts with other faith leaders and moderate co-elements who are prepared to extend their hand of cooperation in challenging the oppressive forces at local, regional and national levels.

5. Adivasi Representation

The Adivasi representation was also present in this Consultation and in view of the ethnic, qualitative and quantitative differences between Dalits and Adivasis, it is recommended that the NCCI organise a similar consultation on the Adivasi issues.

Conclusion:

The oppressed will always challenge the church to redefine and/or rediscover its mission and to reform its structures and revise its dogma. The response of the Church in turn will renew the Church and help generate new theologies and new models of dialogue in action. This is an opportunity that will provide the Church with many things new: dignity, credibility, meaning, vigor, inspiration, resources, purpose, integrity and excitement and above all the joy of being coworkers with the Triune and God in God's Kingdom.

Participants & Organisers of the International Consultation on
"Contemporary Reflection on Global Oppressed Communities:
A Multi-Faith Approach", Chennai, February 2003

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