

# **Global Theological Education Survey**

## **Joint Research Project on Current State and Future Trends of Theological Education in World Christianity (2011-2012)**

Supporting bodies:

- The Institute for Cross-Cultural Theological Education, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago (Dr. David Esterline)
- Centre for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, (Dr. Todd Johnson)
- World Council of Churches, Program on Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE), (Dr. Dietrich Werner)

### **Background**

Since the famous empirical study on the role and challenges on theological education in so-called mission fields which was presented during the World Missionary conference in 1910 little if any empirical research has been done on trends, developments and major challenges in the area of ministerial formation and theological education in the Christianity of the South on global scale. Individual institutes have published some regional research, but there has not been a coordinated attempt to do an international research project on recent trends and developments in theological education on world scale although many hold the conviction that it is theological education which is a key factor to the development of World Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Global Atlas of Christianity which was published in 2010 provides impressive data on regional and global developments of world religions and particularly on Christianity, but leaves out data on theological education. The Handbook on Theological Education in World Christianity which was also published in 2010 (Regnum, Oxford) presents an impressive first world Handbook with regional and denominational surveys on history and some developments of theological education, but could not be accompanied by a proper empirical research. The Global Study Report on theological education which was published by ETE/WCC in 2009/2010 again provides proper criteria, parameters and categories to discuss theological education in ecumenical perspectives but did not provide much empirical data as there is not yet much what could be referred to. The Cape Town meeting of the Lausanne meeting in its final new declaration devoted a specific chapter on the relevance of theological education, but also evangelical circles did not provide much empirical research yet on recent developments in theological education.

It was at the occasion of the WOCATI global conference on quality in theological education in Johannesburg in July 2011 that the idea was born to explore the feasibility of an international research project which within a limited time frame (probably December 2011 until June 2013) would gather more empirical data on recent trends in theological education the result of which could be made available both for the WOCATI assembly in 2013 and the WCC assembly in Busan as well as to some other important global and regional meetings and occasions which are emerging.

### **Goals**

The International Working group of ETE already in its February Commission 2011 report had commissioned ETE to get engage in some empirical mapping and research project on recent trends and specific challenges in theological education. Other institutions such as Institute for Cross-Cultural theological education in Chicago and the Centre for the Study of Global Christianity added their interests to this.

As the result it is proposed that a global research project on theological education will be started for a period of 12 to 18 month, beginning in October 2011 which

- aims to provide some empirical data on current developments, challenges and major trends in theological education in World Christianity by sending out qualified questionnaires to relevant partners, both individual theological educators as well as institutions for theological education and providing a qualified evaluation of results turned in a first phase until end of 2012
- combines an empirical data related part based on a set of quantifiable questions sent out with a questionnaire (empirical data dimension, evaluated with statistics) with a qualitative interview part based on questions to be responded to in writing (narrative report dimension, evaluated by analytical tools of written answers provided), (both contained in a common overall questionnaire with different sections)
- would be addressed to six different groups representing a mixed cohort
  - a) representatives of regional associations of theological schools which are in contact with ETE/WCC and/or with WOCATI
  - b) representatives of the Global Christian Forum Meeting in Indonesia in October 2011
  - c) representatives linked to Evangelical and Pentecostal networks of theological education regionally and globally
  - d) contact persons in regional forums of associations of theological schools which have been created in Latin America, Asia and Africa
  - e) experts in theological education which have contributed to the Handbook on Theological Education in World Christianity

- f) individual experts in theological education as well as major institutions of theological education which are in touch with ETE or one of the institutions supporting this research project.
- The research project which formally is owned by the three signing institutions will be assisted by a network of regional contact persons and cooperative research centres in different major regions in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Pacific as well as the European and the American context which will assist in getting the questionnaires around and could also provide some additional specialized research data from their region according to a commonly agreed working plan,
  - The research project would technically be facilitated by a common research project website as all partners and persons submitting data or filling in questionnaires would do this electronically so that the project can rely on automated registration and evaluation of the data provided during the process.
  - The research project is financed by means made available from the three supporting institutions. Additional financial means are applied for with American and Asian Foundations which are interested in empirical research on theological education.

## Content

The content area of the global study project would be limited to a number of rather simple and basic issues, research interests and key questions which however have fundamental importance for the future of World Christianity and have come up again and again in the international discourse on theological education. In the following a draft version of the broad categories is presented which in its final stage is included in the electronic questionnaire which is available on the internet under:

<https://www.research.net/s/JRQ996B>

### 1) *Accessibility, availability and regional spread of resources and institutions of theological education*

- how many institutions of theological education are there in a certain limited region?
- is the number increasing or decreasing and why?
- how is the number of facilities and programmes related to the needs and growth of churches? Increasing or decreasing?

- is the recent trend more to denominational, interdenominational, church-owned or state-run theological institutions?

2) *What are trends in the composition of the student body?*

- where are students coming from (mainline, evangelical , charismatic?, migrant?)
- what is the development of the age of students?
- what do students do with theological degrees and what is the preference in the spectrum of theological degrees?

3) *churches and theological education*

- what do churches expect from theological education?
- Which churches articulate more or less demand for theological education?
- What is the relation to evangelical and Pentecostal churches in theological education?
- What is the preferred primary venue and place for theological education (residential schools, local churches, regional courses, e-learning)?

4) *Intercultural and interfaith theological education*

- What is demanded for or emerging in terms of intercultural theological education?
- How often in what forms is interfaith theological education being offered?

5) *Quality in theological education and accreditation*

- Are schools accredited by governmental agencies, church-related accrediting bodies, regional or international accrediting bodies?
- What are the most important forms of quality assurance in theological education?
- What are core elements in the understanding of quality in theological education?

6) *Sustainability, financial stability and the future of theological education*

- Can theological education be regarded as stable, stagnant, in crisis or in a new vibrant peak in the related context at present?
- What are the most important factors to add to financial stability or financial crisis in theological education at present?

7) *The role of regional and global bodies in dealing with theological education*

- What is the most important expectation from regional, or global bodies dealing with theological education at present?

- What is the most urgent task to be taken up in terms of securing proper theological education in the future?

The results of the study will be made available late autumn 2012 for both WCC Central Committee and other partners involved in the study and research process.

Dietrich Werner, WCC-ETE, September 2011