

Edinburgh 2010 and the future of theological education in the 21st century

Report of parallel session on theological education – Edinburgh 2010

1. The parallel session on theological education on 4th June 2010 affirmed the general findings and recommendations of the international study report on theological education which were summarized and presented by members of the international study group on theological education¹ in the beginning of the session:

Theological education – understood in broad perspective – supports the whole of Christian mission through 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 weary and 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 to be silent, to intercede for the church and the world;
 - the body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit.
2. While the plea of Edinburgh 1910 to develop contextualized forms of theological education in the Asian churches was partly answered by many indigenous models of theological education which were established in the 20th century, Western patterns and concepts of theology continued to be exported throughout the Global South, so that the task of Edinburgh 1910 was only gradually and very incompletely fulfilled. Therefore an urgent need remains in many places for culturally and linguistically appropriate programmes and resources of theological education.
 3. The interlinkedness of Church, Christian mission and theological education was highlighted by many authors and studies in the 20th century, but the concrete implementation of this vital interrelatedness remains a constant task for all churches and institutions of theological education. The process of theological education both reproduces and reflects existing ecclesial and denominational realities, but should also

¹ Presented by David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, Dietrich Werner and Joshva Raja (UTC Bangalore history)

challenge the existing realities of both the church and the world from the perspective of the Kingdom of God and his love for all creation.

4. New discourses in contextual theologies have also had a profound impact on the understanding and practice of theological education. These new discourses include feminist theologies, postcolonial perspectives, ecumenical perspectives, and theological responses to postmodernity, religious plurality, globalization and ecology. The rise of Christian fundamentalism and the frequent lack of understanding of the values of the ecumenical movement present a serious challenge for theological education and its task to promote a proper and holistic understanding of Christian witness, service and unity.
5. Among the most important challenges for reshaping and strengthening theological education and missionary training for World Christianity in the 21st century are the following factors:
 - a) Disparity in the availability of resources for theological education between the North and the South and within several regions
 - b) The tremendous rise in the number of higher education students in the South in general and the rise in applications for theological study programmes in particular
 - c) The growing interest of Pentecostal churches in theological education programmes
 - d) The urgent needs prevailing in many contexts to create more space for women in theological education, theological leadership and in the ministries of the church
 - e) The lack of common quality standards and mutual recognition between theological schools of different contexts, denominational background and theological orientation
 - f) Denominational fragmentation of the international landscape of theological education institutions
 - g) The grave lack of scholarships and grants available for higher studies in theological education and the increasing difficulties of churches to fund their institutions of theological education
 - h) Changing structural conditions of theological education (the move in some contexts away from church-related seminaries towards state-funded departments of religious studies)
 - i) The fundamental implications of global migration movements and changing and increasingly diverse constituencies for programmes of theological education
6. The session listened to additional important perspectives from regional consultative processes and transversal themes by representatives coming from Roman Catholic, African-Feminist, Evangelical, Japanese and Australian backgrounds, including those

offering perspectives on children's ministries and their relevance for theological education.²

7. In discussing both the report and the additional inputs the working groups of the parallel session affirmed some common issues and highlighted some additional perspectives which are summarized in the subsequent paragraphs: The concern for Christian education, theological education and ministerial formation which has been a key task throughout the history of Christian mission from its very beginning, needs to be reaffirmed and identified as a strategic task of common action for all Christian churches in the 21st century.
8. We can say together: Educating the whole people of God is a key to mission and Christian mission should be the organizing focus and reference point of theological education. As Christ's mission has had a deep concern for children, any mission-minded theological education in the 21st century needs to have concern for children's ministries and children's theology in order to give visible expression to the fact that children represent 30% of world Christianity while still being marginalized in theological curricula. We are called to an expanded definition of theological education as theological formation begins at a very young age, and does not happen not only in schools and churches. Children should be seen at the center both in church life as well as in programmes of Christian education and theological formation. As most theological education for children is still left to women, theological education institutions are called to support theologically-sound role models of both sexes today. The lack of properly trained Sunday School teachers is a very serious challenge for the future of all churches.
9. New ways of doing theological education are needed that encourage a holistic approach in methodology involving the entire human being, openness to interdisciplinary work and moving beyond compartmentalization of theological disciplines. Theological educators should also aim for the integration of academic learning with spiritual growth and the development of pastoral identity, the development of gender sensitivity and inclusiveness towards marginalized groups, the contextualization of teaching resources and language of instruction and an interaction between lay theological education and ministerial formation.
10. While the development in much of the 20th century was towards institutional centers of theological education copying patterns of residential colleges of the West, new realities and challenges in the past decades have given emphasis to the strategic role of non-formal and non-residential forms of theological education and training for ordination which are often more viable and affordable to churches. To develop a proper balance between formal and non-formal, residential and non-residential forms

² Presenters included Fulata Mbano-Moyo, Anthony Gittins, Wendy Strachan, John Hitchen, Ken Myamoto, Julie Ma and Mikhail Goundiaev

of theological education is one of the key tasks for many churches in the early decades of the 21st century.

11. Reading and studying the Bible as the Word of God should form the basis and undisputed primary resource of any theological education. Immersing oneself into the rich treasures of its symbols, narratives, images and stories can serve as a common ground between different Christian traditions and also as an inspiration for alternative ways of theological reflection beyond critical reasoning. For all Christian traditions in the 21st century there is the challenge to re-evaluate the role of the Holy Spirit in both illuminating the Scriptures and also in seeing God at work in the lives of people and in this world. Theological education needs to be inspired by a new hermeneutic of the work of the Holy Spirit.
12. Both the ecumenical and the global dimensions need to be strengthened in theological education programmes so as to give sufficient attention and scope to burning issues of Christian unity and common witness in the rapidly changing landscape of world Christianity. The Gospel is a Public Truth and not a private matter, therefore theological education needs to equip people for reclaiming the public space for theology and for Christian witness by facing the burning issues of today's society.
13. Bridging the gap between theory and practice, between serious theological work and critical reflection or reasoning and pastoral competences, spiritual and ministerial formation should form an undisputed goal of theological education in all Christian denominations as all affirm the holistic nature of theological education to serve the mission and pastoral work of the church in today's world. The spiritual life of the teacher often is the model which may influence students more than what is formally taught in the classroom. As the academy, college or university model of theological education appeared late within the history of Christianity it can learn from and be complemented by other models of theological learning and teaching which have an even longer history (wisdom model of theologizing; discipleship model of learning theology; monasteries and worshipping communities as place of theological education).
14. While all theologies have a contextual nature and there is no universality of any type of theology which can be imposed on others, there is a universal and common basis of all theological education in the Holy Scriptures and Christian tradition. Therefore a balance needs to be maintained between the need for common standards and common criteria in quality of theological education and the need for contextualization of its curriculum and content.
15. New spaces need to be created – both in physical and digital dimensions - for more interchange of resources for theological education, teaching staff and students, online-materials for theological education, curriculum models and courses between the continents and within regions. This will allow for more mutual benefit and

strengthening of international partnerships in theological education. Text books for theological education which are often out-dated need re-editing with the help of persons assisting from other contexts. A worldwide Online Network among theological educators of diverse theological traditions could help to enhance open and frank discussions, to nourish mutual understanding and to correct theological perceptions and prejudices over against other traditions.

16. Theologies related to gender, children, minorities, refugees, marginalized people etc often are not integrated into the core of systematic theology or biblical studies. There needs to be a clear understanding of how catholicity and contextuality in theological studies are balanced with each other in the definition of what belongs to core, compulsory and additional and voluntary courses of theological studies. Voices of the marginalized and subaltern populations need to be heard and have equal participation in theological education. "Theological education in the presence of the other" is the key word for the future of theological education in the 21st century.
17. Churches should have more concern for the support and development of general Christian education both in universities and in private or public schools. The lack of basic Christian education which is spreading in many countries poses a serious challenge to the future of both the Christian presence in society as a whole and the future of theological education. Many people in secular universities in Asia, Africa and Latin America are open to the Gospel, but have few opportunities within these institutions to learn about Christianity. Many young people in urbanized and increasingly secularized regions do not have appropriate Sunday school education any more.
18. Increasingly candidates from Pentecostal and emerging churches join ecumenical and denominational theological training to obtain their theological degrees. This creates new ecumenical spaces for the Christian churches. The plea was made to include at least one representative from Pentecostal churches in the decision making bodies of ecumenical or interdenominational colleges to allow for mutually benefiting experiences. There is a need for strategic alliances with the Pentecostal and newly emerging churches in terms of ecumenical theological education without losing the theological, academic and contextual rigour.
19. Churches wherever politically possible should engage with governments in order to secure the future of theological education in university settings. There is a move from denominational seminaries to studying in university faculties of religion. This means that many of the theological seminaries are at risk of closure or the dimension of ministerial formation has been weakened. This also risks a disconnect from the international communions of various Christian traditions. Also inter-denominational theological seminaries have been closed or are threatened in some contexts. While the insights of "secular" education are of their own value to the theological enterprise and theological education should not be isolated from other realms of human knowledge, emphasis should be given to the need to bring theological perspectives to bear on the task of defining the distinctive goals and character of theological education. Increasing tendencies of universities to integrate on theological education under Philosophy and Religion departments put pressure on churches to look for their denominational

oriented training centres. In some cases denominational houses of studies within university contexts have proved a good alternative and complement. Ecumenical institutions find it hard to survive both due to the monitory expectations of the universities and also due to the increasing secularization of theological education in university contexts. While working under a lot of academic and financial pressure ecumenical theological colleges need to deliver the ministerial training expectations of the churches without losing their contextual emphasis. In this sense such ecumenical institutions of theological education need to be encouraged worldwide.

20. In much of Europe a general decrease of the number of students in theological education is evident, partly because the job market is constraining the usefulness of this type of education for future employment or also because church membership is dwindling as a whole. Churches need to rethink how the study of theology can be attractive for future generations and proper jobs for pastors, evangelists and missionaries can be maintained and financed. Churches might need also to think of a new kind of apologetics of Christian faith to be developed in facing highly secularized contexts. In European countries also the growing independence of the state in its role for funding, accreditation and general resourcing of theological education is a reality with which some churches have to come to terms with.
21. Across the diversities of the Church the need is felt for deep education and mentorship in spiritual as well as intellectual dimensions. The churches are called to prioritize such spiritual competence both among educators and among their students of all ages, both within the traditional settings of seminaries, universities, and churches, and also throughout all the life contexts in which learning takes place. Enabling continued theological education for its ministers is a strategic task for all churches.
22. There is also an urgent need to reconstruct the educational programme *for theological educators*. Who educates the theological educators? To whom are they accountable and how are they supported in their task? Theological educators need continued education, spiritual accompaniment and a reasonable time for new research and learning in their fields of competence so that they can grow in theological expertise and pedagogical skills as well as in spiritual mentorship.
23. As stated in the global study report the issue of language remains a strategic issue for the future and accessibility of theological education. The lack of proper indigenous resources for theological learning and instruction leads to exclusion of vast sectors of world Christianity from advancement in theological competence and Christian leadership. The hidden cultural factors involved in a situation in which mainly English materials and texts are recognized, published and circulated internationally need to be critically reflected.
24. We also need new and authentic models of international partnerships between institutions of theological education in the North and the South, East and West. As it is a known fact that most of the Christians are in the South and most of the educational

resources are in the North it is not acceptable that those who are in control of the inequity should attempt to solve this crisis with “tokenism” by making unilateral decisions about who comes and who does not, rather than giving up some of their privileges and developing models of mutual sharing and decision-making. The richest seminaries of this world, rather than becoming the “experts” on the communities of the South and importing select southern students to kneel at the altar of accredited education, should contribute to credible and authentic models of authentic partnership with theological colleges and faculties in the South.

25. Facing the rapidly growing needs for theological education in the southern hemisphere a new global fund for promoting theological education in World Christianity should be considered as a visible expression of mutual solidarity between churches in order to continue the work which was started by the Theological Education Fund (TEF) in 1958.
26. An international working group for theological education should be considered - or explored to be established as working group within IAMS - which would bring together representatives of *all* Christian confessions beyond all present divides and which would serve as a continuation committee of this session of Edinburgh 2010 to explore common synergies and joint action in support of theological education for the mission of the Church.
27. The integrity and authenticity of all the diverse streams of World Christianity in the 21st century can be maintained and deepened only if we move beyond a situation in which Christianity seems to flourish where theological education does not and vice versa, but where instead innovative forms of theological education are emerging which are life-giving, renewing, participatory and relevant for the growing charismatic renewal movements in the South and for the renewing churches in the North.