

## **Ecumenical Learning in Global Theological Education – Legacy and unfinished tasks of Edinburgh 1910**

**Or: Contextuality, Inter-Contextuality and Ecumenicity as key mandates for ecumenical theological education in the 21st century  
10 historical and systematic aspects<sup>1</sup>**

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### **1. Introduction: The relevance of Christian education and theological education in church history and individual biographies**

There are two sets of starting questions on Christian education and theological education which can be used easily in any group to engage in a creative dialogue on the relevance and importance of theological education in different contexts:

A) - How did we become Christians? By what persons and institutions our Christian and theological identity was formed in our biography? What was the most influential educational institution which has contributed to our living as Christians today?

B) What consequences does our own experience in terms of Christian nurture and education have for concepts and practice of the different forms of theological education today?

- How do we learn and teach theology?

- Where is the most important place and context for theological education?

- For whom and with whom are we learning and reflecting theologically?

Questions like this have been dealt within the history of Christian churches and the ecumenical movement for centuries. We might remind ourselves that early Christianity being deeply rooted in judeo-palestine tradition had an intrinsic commitment to education right from the very beginning. We can read already in the Gospel of . Luke that Christians had a high sense of responsibility for passing on the „tradition of the Apostles“ to the next generation (Acts 2,42 and Acts 1,1-2). Christianity in the very first years was a learning and teaching religion, as the sources of faith were not just inner emotional feelings of the individual but a complex tradition transmitted in liturgy, in narratives and later in creeds which could be memorized and had to be reappropriated in each generation anew. It is very significant that Timothy for instance is exhorted „to continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from what you have learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ“(2 Tim. 3,14-15).

But how do people learn to become and to remain Christians today?

And how do Christians learn to be Christians together with one another in unity and in mission for this world, i.e. how do they learn ecumenically?

And how are those who ought to enable others to learn in both dimensions (becoming a Christian and being Christians together) equipped to equip others ecumenically, how are they trained to train others, how are ministers prepared to minister to the learning processes of others and not to hinder them?

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These are some fundamental questions which have kept primary attention of many generations for many decades in the ecumenical movement.

We might briefly remind ourselves that there are strong elements of different forms of commitment to Christian education and theological education in almost all the major Christian denominations which would be worth unfolding in more detail:

- For the Orthodox tradition the very early founding of the catechetical school of Alexandria in Egypt has marked and initiated a long history of deep commitment to education and promoting intellectual life within the Christian church. There were different concepts about what relationship should exist between the specific realm of Christian knowledge and tradition and pagan philosophy and general knowledge. But the decision in the West to see the study of the seven liberal arts as the best preparations for higher studies in Christian theology as well as the best way to protect the church against non-Christian polemics and attacks from outside can be seen as a firm commitment not to dissociate Christian education from general education and philosophical knowledge as a whole.

- For the tradition of Luther's Reformation it was even more striking to what extent his whole movement can be seen as a revolution in terms of educational principles, because his understanding of the church as a community with the priesthood of all believers made him a strong opponent of any elitist understanding both of ministry and education in general. He was a pioneer in launching educational reforms and demanding better qualities of schools and universities. As he believed that all members of the Christian congregation should understand their faith he developed the small catechism for children and the large catechism for adults as means of proper Christian education. The subsequent attempts of Melancthon to develop the „Volksschule“ and later on John Amos Comenius (1592-1670) to pioneer an educational theory can all be seen as a result of the fundamental coalition between faith and critical reasoning and education which was very strong in the history of protestantism and remains to be a mark of protestant churches up to present.

- Also for the catholic tradition there is a strong component in terms of teaching and education, which is rooted in the role of monasteries and religious orders for deepening and broadening education and research – a tradition without which the enormous influence of a tradition like the Jesuits, the Dominicans or also some of the congregations of women, like the Ursulines (very active in education and research) would not have been possible.

- Both Pietism in the 18th century as well as Movements of Awakening in the 19th century to a large extent can also be understood as renewal movements for the education of the masses, of marginalized groups, of neglected children (remember Franckes Schools for Children in Halle). Conversion to Christ, improvement of the social conditions and the education of the humankind and intellect always were seen as working hand in hand in these movements. And it is important to mention this precious heritage because it is the spirit of pietism and awakening which has coined broad sections of protestant missionary movements outside Europe in the 18th and 19th century thereby planting the zeal and commitment for education also in many countries and churches in the South. Protestant missionary movements in many cases can be described as triangle movements which brought together an *evangelizing or church-planting dimension* (building and sustaining churches and congregations), an *educational dimension* (founding schools, colleges and later universities) and a *healing dimension* (founding hospitals and later primary health care movements and services) in their holistic mission work.

## **2. Clarification of terms: Theological education – Christian education – ministerial formation – lay formation - Key concepts, distinctions and overlapping areas**

If one enters the ecumenical debate on education one first might be puzzled by the fact that sometimes several key notions seem to operate which are not always defined clearly and also have some overlapping areas though there are also distinctive connotations at work with each of them.

- *Christian education* certainly is a general umbrella term which refers to all kinds of education endeavors and institutions trying to contribute to processes by which individuals and groups are nurtured and sustained in their being or becoming a Christian. The area of Christian education thus would reach from family-based religious education to church-owned kindergartens and Sunday School Programmes to religious education in schools.
- *theological education* is another general term which is more concerned with Christian education for adults who are able to develop a certain sense of a reflected Christian identity and are enabled to reflect critically on the relation between their own Christian identity, church tradition and other Christian traditions as well as its relation to the world.
- *ministerial formation* is a more narrow concept which refers to programmes and institutions which on a more formal basis offer courses and training programmes for future ordained church ministers to be fully theologically, liturgically, pastorally and catechatically trained and equipped for their ministry
- *lay formation* is a concept which focusses on theological training for lay people thus making explicitly clear that theology never can be regarded as the prerequisite or exclusive property only of ordained ministers
- *theological education by extension* is a key term which refers to new forms of alternative lay training programmes which are not based in a residential school, but would allow for a high degree of involvement in the local context while at the same time studying theology in evening classes, regional working groups and distant learning courses in order to be equipped for the ongoing mission and social ministries of the church.

It has become clear in the ecumenical debate that all these areas are closely interrelated. A church cannot invest only in ministerial formation without at the same time looking into lay formation as well, it cannot invest only in regional TEE-programmes for lay people without at the same time also equipping those who could be leaders and enablers of training courses for these regional and local catechists and lay preachers. Where do we put our priorities? What do churches invest in their diverse theological education programmes and why do they invest where? To what extent does a sense of ownership exist on the side of the churches for their institutions of theological education? And to what extent are existing institutions of theological education reflecting the ecumenical perspective and precious traditions of the global ecumenical movement? How are curricular concepts taking notice of burning issues from the ongoing global ecumenical movement?

These are pertinent questions immediately coming up in even dealing with the different understandings and concepts at work in using these key notions of the ecumenical debate on Christian education and theological education.

## **3. The legacy of Edinburgh 1910 – moral education of the nations of this world as the key to global civilization and Christianization and the birth of ecumenical learning in „central missionary colleges“**

As we are approaching the centenary of the first world missionary conference in Edinburgh 1910 it might be helpful to briefly look at the heritage which can be seen in these ancient roots of the ecumenical movement. Edinburgh 1910 can be seen as the culmination of the optimistic spirit of the great missionary enterprise of 19th century Christianity in the North-Atlantic. The assumption being that a goal like „evangelization of this world in one generation“ could be a common, feasible and practical short-term aim and „Christian forces“ around would be enough to be assembled for that purpose. It also was the still unchallenged assumption that countries in the East and the South had to gradually adapt and be upgraded to the system of civilization, Christianization and education which were developed in the „Christian west“ (remember two different messages were issued in this first ecumenical conference, one to the „Christian nations“, and one to the non-Christian nations). It is interesting however that people present in Edinburgh had a sense already of the very ambivalent character of Christianization working hand in hand with modernization and westernization. People were afraid of promoting a onesided and purely technical way of transmitting and exporting western achievements and standards to other countries of the world. It was just against the dominant technological and culturally destructive side of westernization that participants of Edinburgh hoped for a counter movement and counter-balance in the shape of what they called „moral education of the people of the South“. By Moral education they referred to the religious and spiritual education of the masses in the South which only by education could be safeguarded against the negative sideeffects of the encounter with western modernization and technological revolution for their understanding. People – guided by the tradition of liberal theology and an understanding of gradual progress as an inherited dynamic in all the world’s developments – were inspired by a tremendous hope religious education could play as the decisive means for counterbalancing the ambivalent side-effects of western modernization in countries of the South. „One of the striking phenomena of the present hour is the worldwide recognition of the necessity of the moral, if not the religious, element in education – a recognition by no means confined to Christian nations, but found also among the Hindus of India, the Confucianists in China, and the statesmen and educators in Japan trained in the precepts of Bushido... With due recognition of the many elements of truth and value in the non-Christian systems of religion and ethics, we should nevertheless be faithless... if we did not at this time reaffirm our conviction that the education of the world demands for its highest and best developments of those elements of truth which are the peculiar contribution of Christianity to the world’s thought and life.“(EW III, 368). Or also: „The impact of western civilization upon the peoples of Africa, with the disintegrating and often demoralizing influences that seem to accompany it, imposes on Christian nations, who have accepted responsibilities in relation to the native races, a binding obligation to provide a new, moral and religious foundation for social life in place of the old sanctions which have been destroyed.“(ebd. S. 379)

What is striking in historical formulations capturing the spirit of the 19th century such as these is the following

- the broad conviction that it is education which needs to critically accompany the encounter between the West and the South which could easily develop a new identity for the peoples and countries of the South in the process of colonialization;
- the awareness that modernization is a very ambivalent, though unavoidable phenomenon;
- the assumption that it is education which would pave the way and „provide a real basis for human fellowship between East and West“ (here the ecumenical dimension of education is mentioned indirectly for the first time!)
- the assumption that an easy transfer of western concepts of education would answer the needs,

- the complete absence of any major consideration of what education actually would mean for other contexts than Europe and North America.

But we see that with Edinburgh the topic of education – though still unchallenged by the earthquakes of later world wars provoked by Christian nations and the uprising of colonized nations against colonial rule in the period of decolonialization in the 50's - was firmly put on the agenda of the emerging missionary and ecumenical movement which would have consequences in the International Missionary Council which was founded later in 1924.

There is even a much more direct recommendation coming from Edinburgh 1910 concerning the establishment of new forms of centralized and 'ecumenical' education of future missionaries. Commission V in the Edinburgh 1910 world mission conference had to deal with questions of the „preparations of the missionaries“. Until Edinburgh 1910 the majority of missionaries were trained at seminary level, only in exceptional cases like Danish-Hallesche Mission in the 18. century missionaries were they also trained at an academic level. In reviewing existing mission seminaries and facilities for training, Edinburgh 1910 came to the conclusion that the education of missionaries needed to be drastically improved in terms of both a) language studies, b) history of religions and sociology of mission territories and c) in general principles of missionary work. Interdenominational cooperation of mission agencies for common training programmes for missionaries was seen as the priority for the future in Edinburgh 1910. Missionary training programmes were recommended to be upgraded academically to post-graduate levels and to take place mainly in „central missionary colleges“ (not as before just in regional denominational mission seminaries) which were to be foreseen in places like Shanghai, Madras, Calcutta, Beirut and Cairo and should be open to missionaries of all Christian denominations. These plans were visionary and revolutionary in their understanding of Christian education and theological education in particular. Without using the terminology yet this can be seen as the birthplace of a global initiative for centralized places of academic ecumenical theological education in various key centres mostly outside the western world. It was clear that the plea was for more academic excellency as well as for more interdenominational cooperation and ecumenical perspectives in theological education. The very early phase of the missionary movement thus launched a movement and a concern for academic ecumenical learning in theological education long before the established churches were ready to consider this paradigm change in their theological training programmes. It thus was in missionary situations that the pressing needs for ecumenical learning and interdenominational cooperation in theological education gained their first and most obvious support and evidence. It is interesting to see that only very small steps of what Edinburgh 1910 had envisaged in terms of central ecumenical places of theological education was achieved, but it should be noted that an institute like Missionsakademie of the University of Hamburg which was founded in 1957 was referring directly to the recommendations Edinburgh 1910 had made (comp. Günter Volz, Missionsakademie an der Universität Hamburg. Die Geschichte ihrer Entstehung, Hamburg 1961)

#### **4. The Sunday School movement and the emergence of the World Council of Christian Education**

It might be surprising for some but there is another stream and source of commitment to Christian education and interdenominational perspectives which reaches back to Britain. It was the commitment to Christian education and development for the neglected youth and urban unschooled poor which has led to the formation of Sunday Schools in England in the 1760s, the first being founded by Hannah Ball in High Wycombe, England. In 1780 it

developed into the Sunday School Movement which was pioneered by Robert Raikes of Gloucester. This movement spread very soon around the world, national Sunday School Associations were established not only in Britain but in many other countries of the world. And already in 1889 a World Sunday School Convention (later named World Sunday School Association in Rome 1907) was founded which developed programmes and materials for Christian education in many countries of the world. It is a very impressive story to see how intensely this convention in its early stages was already seeking cooperation beyond the denominational lines and was bringing Christians together from quite a varied number of Christian churches. In 1947 it was renamed *World Council of Christian Education* in acknowledging that the scope of its activities reached far beyond the area of Sunday School programmes but had developed into each area of general Christian education as well. Its activities included providing resources for effective educational leadership and programmes as well as ecumenical curriculum developments for church education programmes and Sunday school movements in all continents. One of its largest member associations was the International Council of Religious Education (ICRE) which mainly brought together representatives of Christian education from the United States and Canada and also in 1946 and 1952 was responsible for instance for producing the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament and the Old Testament. In 1971 the World Council of Christian Education was integrated into the WCC.

Certainly even before this integration the concern of Christian education and ecumenical formation was strong also in other areas of the WCC.

Already in 1946 the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey was founded as a privileged place and tool to work for Christian education and ecumenical formation for future leadership development in the Christian churches (comp. *Ec Review* Vol, 48, October 1996). When Visser't Hooft addressed the Institute in the inauguration ceremony he explained: „The Institute’s programme has three main subjects: the Bible, the world and the church universal“. These can be seen as key components of a holistic concept of ecumenical education and formation up to the present.

It is still worth recalling Visser't Hooft's introduction to Hendrik Kremer's lecture on the opening of the Ecumenical Institute as it refers to the understanding of ecumenical learning in theological education at this very special time in the ecumenical history:

„The idea to create a centre of ecumenical education (*formation* in French) has its roots in the increasingly clear awareness of the inability of the church to respond to the challenge of the modern world, of its powerlessness to fight against a growing secularization and paganization. This concern for a radical spiritual reconstruction, beginning with the church itself, was constantly present during the conversations which led to the elaboration of a concrete project... From the beginning it was agreed that the Institute should place the main emphasis of its teaching on the foundations of Christian faith and especially on the Bible. Moreover the Centre should have an explicitly missionary character; just as the missionaries study the religious customs of the field assigned to them, so the students of the Ecumenical Institute must become thoroughly acquainted with the main tendencies of the thinking and life of the modern world. Finally the institute must have a truly ecumenical character. It should be the place where men and women of all member churches of the ecumenical movement learn together, receiving and giving, learn to struggle one for the other, and where they thus accept the tension between truth and unity which is at the basis of any true ecumenical community. The programme of the Institute, therefore, has three main subjects, the Bible, the world and the universal church...“ (in: *Ec Rev* Oct 1996, p. 442!)

The WCC had already established its own office for Education in 1969 following a broad debate on the needs for reorientation of educational patterns and structures during the Uppsala assembly of the world council of Churches on the theme „Behold I make all things new“. It might be mentioned that someone like Paulo Freire was a consultant to the Office of Education between 1969 and 1980 and someone like Ernst Lange who was director of the Office for Ecumenical Action in WCC at the same time. It was the time of revolutionary transformations and urgent calls for a new approach to ‚conscientization‘ and a ‚pedagogy of the oppressed‘, reviewing earlier elitist approaches. It was also the time when ‚developmental education‘ was becoming a primary focus in countries and churches of the North. The glaring discrepancies between North and South in the so-called development conflict were in urgent need of an educational and pedagogical answer – that was the predominant mood of that time. One of the crucial reports of that period was of the conference on ‚Seeing Education Whole‘ in Bergen, Norway, in 1970 which highlighted some of the most critical trends and issues of that period, when the following principles were laid out:

- a critical analysis of schools as systems and a new priority of non-formal education combined with alternatives to school education;
- The recognition that there is no neutral school education and a need to understand the contribution of church education either in terms of liberating or domesticating people
- the urgent call to churches to renounce religious education only as a tool for self-preservation
- a broader participation in educational decision making
- a rediscovery of the global and ecumenical dimension of the Christian faith and the need to overcome confessionalistic and nationalistic attitudes
- a basic reconsideration and reformulation of the concepts of leadership-formation in the church and the reappraisal of the concept of equipping all God’s people for mission

### **5. Theological education as a priority demand of the International Missionary Council for the „Younger Churches“ in their struggle to self-supporting, self-governing, self-spreading“ - the Foundation of the Theological Education Fund (TEF) 1958 and the subsequent debate on contextualization of theological education**

If we come to theological education and ministerial formation in a stricter sense it is important to realize that there is a distinct history on ecumenical involvement in the area of theological education which had already started in the Missionary Movement much earlier. It was the missionary movement that first established the poorly equipped colleges in churches and countries of the South. It was the International Missionary Council (IMC) – and not Faith and Order which was regarded as the stronghold of all theology in the ecumenical movement - which had first taken a step to structure the concern for theological education programmatically. Very early, some of the missionaries like Charles Ranson, the former British Methodist Indian missionary and later General Secretary of the IMC developed the conviction that it was essential for the future of the younger churches to train indigenous persons for ministries and teaching responsibilities. He was the one who initiated the first important study on the situation of theological education in churches of the South which then was received by the Ghana Assembly of IMC in 1958. This Ghana Assembly also was the one creating the so-called TEF as a major global fund to promote theological excellency (at this time still understood in terms of Western standards) and to promote creative indigenous leadership in the churches of the South. It was by a major grant of J.D. Rockefeller by the way – the same man who had donated for the founding of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey – that

the creation of TEF was achieved as he donated 2 million US\$ on the condition that within two years mission societies would raise the similar amount. The three decisive marks of TEF's work were

- *Quality* combining intellectual rigour, spiritual maturity and commitment
- *authenticity* involving critical encounter with each cultural context in the design, purpose and shape of theological education
- *creativity*, understood as promoting new approaches of the churches obedience in mission.

In its three Mandate periods it has promoted different goals all related to the major aim of an indigenous or contextualized theological education in the churches of the South. Just to give an overview:

- Mandate period 1958-1965: emphasis on indigenous and interdenominational places and institutions for theological education in the South
- Mandate period 1965-1970: emphasis on new curricula developments for the churches of the South and new teaching materials written by leading theologians from the South
- Mandate period 1970 to 1977: critique over against western concepts of theological education and major calls for contextualization of both forms of ministry and forms of theological education in the South.

If one reads the fascinating history of TEF which was published by Christine Lienemann one cannot easily overestimate the role which TEF and its subsequent institutional forms have played for developing highly qualified institutions of theological education of the South. As it is well-known in 1961 the IMC was integrated into the WCC thereby also making TEF a structural component of the programme on mission (CWME) of the WCC. In the year 1977 the programme was called PTE and was transformed so as to less becoming a funding agency but more a programmatic activity issuing innumerable studies and major publications about innovative themes in theological education like theology by all God's people, spiritual formation, interfaith formation and new frontiers of theological education in general. The recent theological biography of Samuel Amirtham can serve as an excellent account of this exciting period of PTE in the WCC (ref: ).

After the assembly of Canberra the programme was renamed ETE in order to underline the specific nature of emphasizing ecumenicity in theological education. The famous World Conference on theological education in Oslo 1996 led to the decision of a certain principle of *regionalization of ETE* which in principle is continuing to be valid until today but also has made it less easy to secure internal continuity, programmatic cohesion and common strength as a lobbying facilitator. Therefore it is not yet decided whether regionalization of ETE (which to a large extent was also due to costs reducing pressures in WCC) has led to a strengthening or to a weakening of ecumenical theological education programmes in WCC. In TEF times the programme still had five full-time executive members (Shoki Coe, James Bergquist, Ivy Chou, Aharon Sapsezian, Desmond Tutu), in times of PTE four executive staff were still resident in Geneva (Samual Amirtham, Ophelia Ortega, John Pabee, Judo Poerwowidagdo). After Harare only one full-time staff executive position remained in Geneva (Nyambura Njoroge until early 2007) accompanied by three to four regional consultants of ETE in the various continents most of which only financially budgeted as 50% positions.

There were several most important study processes in the history of this programme which might be mentioned at least in outline in order to draw the attention to essential dimensions of the debate on ecumenical theological education which still is relevant and continuing today.

a) There has been a major study on 'Patterns of Ministry – Theological Education in a changing world' which was worked out and presented for the WCC Assembly in Uppsala 1968 and published by Steven G Mackie. Which forms of ministry are applicable and relevant

to what kind of church and social context? Do we have to develop complementary alternative forms of ministry alongside the traditional full-time professional model of a residential pastor which not all churches can afford to have as the dominant model?

b) There secondly have been major studies around various aspects of 'contextualization in theological education' – a key concept in the 70's ('Ministry in Context', 'Learning in Context', 'Viability in Context'). This is also the birthplace of the new concept of Theological Education by Extension (TEE) which was first introduced in the PTE publication on 'Learning in Context – the search for innovative patterns in theological education' in which Ross Kinsler reported about concepts of non-residential grass-roots theological education programmes for lay leaders and theologians in Guatemala (see Ross Kinsler new publication on 'Diversified Theological Education' to be published late 2007 with William Carey International University Press).

c) There thirdly was a major study around the theme of 'viability in theological education' prior to the Oslo world conference on theological education in Oslo between 1993 and 1996 which found important regional contributions many of which were also published (also in Germany by EMW).

There are three essential convictions which lie behind all these studies and continuous attempts to inspire and promote contextual theological education for the churches in all the different contexts of the world:

a) Theological education is the most essential key and strategic factor for the renewal of the churches life and mission. Without proper and relevant theological education the very future of the Christian church, its dialogue with society and its participation in the daily struggles and longings of ordinary people is endangered; the less churches and their leaders are investing in theological education the more the future of Christianity will be left to those who give a distorted image of Christian identity and endanger dialogue and co-existence with other churches as well as other religious traditions;

b) the role of theological education is never limited just to training Christian ministers. With all legitimate attention and emphasis on ministerial formation the road and inclusive approach emphasizing theological education as a process of renewal and formation for all God's people needs always to be kept in mind;

c) a church which has to face growing challenges from accelerated globalization and wants to critically deal with the burning issues in a globalized information society urgently needs highly equipped and capable theologians able to be in dialogue with people involved both in complex issues of bio-ethics, climate change, agro engineering or HIV/AIDS pandemic – or in other words: a church which is neglecting theological education can easily fall back into the position of an inward looking sectarian group;

d) contextualization in theological education was and still is a cry for self-determination and self-reliance in theological education of churches in the Global South or broadly speaking in the churches of the marginalized which cannot view themselves as a mere prolongation of the same models and standards of theology and theological education which had been offered for long by the churches of the west. Christianity in the Global South has conceptualized itself as a Christianity with an hermeneutical disruption (EATWOT), a certain rift and discontinuity with the traditions of its mother churches. Therefore the established institutions of theological education in the West cannot see themselves any more in the role of the global authorities and

master-models compulsory for everybody but much more in the role of those now being asked for themselves how they view their own relevance and their specific contextuality in their own environment.

### **6. strategic actors and coalition partners in the international debate on theological education: the regional associations of Christian schools and colleges - ATESEA and the „critical Asian principle“ as an example**

It was due to the work of TEF and PTE that in many contexts of the world regional associations of theological schools and colleges emerged in the 50's and 60's as an umbrella organization, as accrediting organizations for theological schools and as a trend setter in different areas of innovative curriculum developments.

It might be interesting to highlight just two examples from Asia as most of the theological colleges/seminaries of mainline churches in South Asia are nowadays coming under two theological associations, the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore Colleges (BTESSC) and the Association of Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA). ATESEA just celebrated its 50th birthday and Golden Jubilee in November 2007 in Singapore.

ATESEA was founded in Singapore 1957 with 16 member colleges of mainly Protestant church backgrounds at that time and has grown to an impressive network bringing together some 104 theological colleges and universities in 16 countries of South-East Asia today presenting all denominational backgrounds. ATESEA today is a prominent example of an umbrella organization in which – unlike many similar organizations in Europe – not just organizational, funding-related and technical aspects or theological education programmes are shared and discussed in inner circles, but attempts are made to relate to burning issues of contemporary Asian societies and to agree on a common thematic agenda and priority issues and contents for theological education in this context. Colleges in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Philippines, and also New Zealand and Australia belonging to that organization try to follow similar standards and also agree on a common thematic frame of orientation. ATESEA has created a common platform and organizational network of mutual support for post-graduate research projects which is called South East Asia Graduate School (SEAGST), in which many colleges and universities cooperate in Master and Doctoral programmes. Since 1972 as a guiding orientation frame the notion of a „critical Asian principle“ (CAP) was accepted as a leading vision for ATESEA which aimed at

- promoting an Asian orientation in theological education and to become liberated from western dominated forms of theological education
- identifying and deepening what can be understood as Asian in different forms of contextual Asian theologies.

This „Asian critical principle“ clearly bearing the mark of the 70's in which it was formulated – has been reviewed and rewritten for the Golden Jubilee Celebrations Nov 2007. An agreed new set of „Guidelines for theologizing and theological education in Asia“ was prepared and published in the new ATESEA Handbook (comp. Chou Yeow Lak (ed.), ATESEA Handbook 2007/2008) which is remarkable as it highlights new and uncommon challenges in Asian contexts such as

- the increased awareness of gender justice issues in theological education
- the spread of materialistic and secularist values and orientations also in Asia and decreasing spiritual vitality in some of the Asian churches
- the increasing denominationalism which endangers the unity of Christian churches and ecumenical cooperation in theological education.

- the increased need to be in dialogue with traditional sources of wisdom in Asian cultures and with interreligious dialogue.

The new „Guidelines for theologizing and theological education in Asia“ from ATESEA do represent a very important example of how contextualization of theology in Asia is understood today. It can also serve in other contexts and regions to spell out more clearly what other regions understand as guiding principles of contextualizing theological education in their contexts (see further debates around these guidelines below).

In India it is the BTESSC which is the most respected umbrella organization for theological education in this huge part of Asia. Its roots are with the most famous India missionary William Carey, the founder of Serampore College. The Senate of Serampore College became a reality due to his vision already in 1918. Today BTESSC constitutes the major representative body of Churches legally constituted and administering theological education for the majority of theological colleges in India.

In 2006 BTESSC has launched a national process of reviewing theological education in many of its colleges because despite an enormous leap forward in terms of contextualized theological education in the 70's in India meanwhile new challenges and also many difficulties have emerged such as:

- the different streams for contextualized theologies (for instance Dalit theologies, tribal theologies, feminist theologies, ecological theologies etc) have led to the tendency of overloading the curriculum as well as teaching capacities because all of the specialized concerns demand another degree of specialization and additional courses again while at the same time basic theological disciplines like biblical theology or church history and pastoral theology sometimes lack equal attention, funding and qualification programmes for future theological educators;
- churches demand for more spiritual and pastoral formation - how to keep a proper balance between spiritual formation and social-political formation?
- many new colleges were founded without accreditation at BTESSC from charismatic and Pentecostal or evangelical backgrounds – thereby weakening the few existing interdenominational colleges) which in future raises questions with regard to the unity and ecumenical cooperation in theological education;
- the problem of brain drain of theological educators from India to the West and mostly US-related colleges and the problem of the very low salaries of theological educators in the Global South still is not yet solved.

Being aware of these new and partly unprecedented challenges, the need for national and intercontextual cooperation and mutual advice and/or new guidelines and strategic goals for strengthening ecumenical theological education becomes ever more visible in this context. This affirms the need for reformulating a proper new vision for key elements and a new agenda for ecumenical theological education in Asia as well as in other parts of the world at the beginning of the 21st century. ATESEA and BTESSC are two major players which can contribute to the reformulation of a global agenda on ecumenical theological education for the 21st century. But they are not alone. In other regions there are other regional associations at work which function as accreditation instruments, review boards and platforms of mutual learning for theological institutions and innovative curriculum developments (a list of associations of theological education is available with ETE/WCC). The only world forum in which these regional associations regularly meet is called WOCATI – the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions - which has its own structure and presiding board. WOCATI will have its next world conference in May/June 2008 in Greece jointly prepared with ETE Geneva. To bring together a new mandate and consolidated vision for ecumenical

theological education in the proposed new draft document „Charta Oecumenica on theological education for the mission of the church in the 21st century“ probably will be one of its key tasks.

### **7. What is „ecumenical“ in ecumenical theological education? – an introduction into the history of the concept of „ecumenical learning“**

People often use the term „ecumenical“ in order to describe either what they have experienced in personal intercultural learning situations or what they would like to promote in terms of opening the churches educational agenda to the world. In some cases the term ‚ecumenical‘ is also used for referring to specialized disciplines in theological curriculum, namely missiology and ecumenics and/or the interdenominational composition of a teaching faculty. But in many cases the term is not used in a concise manner and many also do not know about the history and different levels of meaning of this key word and the concept of „ecumenical learning“ which already has a history going back to the 50’s and has also key documents which one might need to be aware of and refer to.

The development of the concept of „ecumenical learning“ cannot be explained without mentioning two pioneers of Christian education who both have served as executive staff in WCC ‚Division on ecumenical action‘ in the late 60’s and early 70’s, namely Ernst Lange and Werner Simpfendörfer. Lange was always afraid that developing an ecumenical consciousness of the worldwide church in all its variety and inner unity could remain a privilege of a few ecumenical insiders separated from the masses of ordinary believers. He strongly believed that there is no future for the Christian church without an ecumenical, namely worldwide orientation. What is at stake in ecumenical learning for him was the overcoming of „parochialism“, the narrow minded tendency to view only one’s own limited church tradition as the only church tradition legitimate and existing, overcoming the isolation from dialogue with the world, which is due to missionary incompetence and spiritual stagnation of a church not really engaging with a world which has come of age. As the mental structures of ‚parochialism‘ – the older term used to describe what we could call also fundamentalism today – begins very early in childhood, for Ernst Lange there need to be radical changes in religious education from the earliest days onwards. The church can live out its full potential only if it is experienced and lived actively as an ecumenical reality from the earliest stages onwards. Therefore Ernst Lange untiringly has asked questions like

- how can the people of God and local communities participate in the ecumenical experience?
- how can people while remaining rooted in a specific denominational and cultural background become ecumenically committed and share the experience of others and the worldwide church?
- how can we become both global and local in our thinking and acting as only in this dual existence the true nature of the church being both local and universal is sufficiently reflected?
- what are obstacles towards engagement in ecumenical learning, what are the reasons for structural parochialism, the preoccupation of churches just with themselves and their limited own context today?

Questions like these were linked with the heritage of the WCC Laity Department which goes back as early as the Evanston Assembly of the WCC 1954 („The Laity: The Christian in his Vocation“). The Laity department served as one of the most pushing promoters of church involvement with the world and an „ecumenical“ understanding of its mission. It was the Laity department which was responsible for a first series of discussions on „ecumenical education“ between 1955 and 1957. These led to a statement adopted by the Central

Committee 1957 in which it was emphasized that ecumenical education could no longer be limited to „teaching programmes about the history of attempts to reunite churches or the growth of ecumenical organizations. Ecumenical education essentially means fostering understanding of, commitment to and informed participation in this whole ecumenical process“ (quoted by K. Raiser, *Fifty Years of Ecumenical Formation*, Ec. Rev Oct 1996, p. 445). For those reading carefully it is very obvious that the notion ‚ecumenical education‘ had the inbuilt strategic interest not to create another separate discipline of accumulated knowledge and specialized informations, but was understood as a qualitative dimension of all theological education, i.e. also that all theological disciplines should enable students to become active participants in the ecumenical movement. Ecumenical education thus in these early studies was already understood as essential to the mission of the church and indispensable for the church being truly the church.

Two poles in the understanding of education here will always be in tension and need to be balanced – a tendency which can be observed in many later documents on ecumenical learning in WCC as well.

One tendency is describing learning in terms of a more church-related educational process by which people are introduced into the traditions and norms, the apostolic heritage and the theological standards of a given community (a certainly valid dimension as well)

Another tendency describes learning more in terms of being equipped for the mission of the church in the world, thus emphasizing the ecumenical agenda as the world’s agenda in which God’s mission needs to take place – thereby placing all different major issues of peace, justice, integrity of creation and global ecological problems on the educational agenda as well.

The tension between the two poles or dimensions probably is unavoidable because it is reflecting an inner tension in the notion of ‚oikoumene‘ as such, this Greek word for long centuries used to pertain both

- to the ecumenical nature of the church in referring to all that was confessed, believed and forwarded as apostolic tradition to the next generations for centuries (‚sensus ecclesiae‘: what each and always and everywhere was confirmed to belonging to the core of the apostolic tradition)

- to the ecumenical arena of the mission of the church, the whole inhabited earth – also then leading the the world’s agenda and its most burning problems and social challenges.

Thereby the tension within the concept of ecumenical learning reflects an ecclesiological tension which belongs to the very essence of the church in each of our denominational ecclesiologies because for every Christian tradition it is affirmed that the *church is both one and catholic* – in unity in diversity – and also a missionary church related to the whole inhabited earth, i.e. an apostolic church, a sent church.

There is a long debate on the concept of ecumenical learning in religious education science in Germany and in other countries, the EKD has issued a major study on the concept of ‚ecumenical learning‘ 1985 and people like Simpfendörfer have deepened the understanding of the interrelatedness between ecumenical and ecological learning which still is valid for many contexts today.

Two of the best definitions of ecumenical learning are found in two major reference documents which could serve as a key text resource for any course or class in theological education to develop a proper understanding of theological education in ecumenical orientation today.

One is the Vancouver assembly 1983 in which Philip Potter described in his famous major address as General Secretary the „church as a learning community“ in taking up the image of the church as a house (oikos) with different living stones (1. Petr. 2). „The ecumenical movement is the means by which the churches which constitute the house (oikos) of God, try to truly live and give witness before all peoples in a way, by which the transformation of the whole oikumene into the household (oikos) of God through the crucified and resurrected Christ and the life-giving Spirit of God can become a reality.“

The Vancouver Assembly has described ecumenical learning thus as a „constitutive dimension for the church as church“ and has enumerated several characteristic marks of ecumenical learning

- „a) it *transcends barriers* – of origin and biography, individual as well as community limitations, because it responds to the exhortation of the word of God and the far-reaching horizons of God’s promise
- b) it is *action-oriented*, not satisfied with information but seeking to enable Christians to act in order to learn, to be right with God and with one another, in word and deed
- c) it is *done in community*, in which people are asked to establish relationships with one another and also with those who are far away and with what is unfamiliar
- d) it means *learning together*, detecting the global in the local, the unfamiliar in the context of one’s own environment, in order to become aware of one’s own limited horizons and implications
- e) it is *inter-cultural*, promoting the encounter of different cultures, traditions and forms of life because only a widening of perspectives will bring about experiences of the riches in creation in nature, in history and culture
- f) it is a *total process*, *social and religious learning are not separated from each other* but constitute a unity“.

The programme guidelines committee of Vancouver already identified ecumenical learning as crucial for the coming years and as a priority for all WCC programmes (Gathered for Life, p. 256).

There is a CD-ROM produced by the former EEF unit which serves as a good starter in deepening this concept of ecumenical learning (ECU-Learn).

The other key document I would recommend as key text for deepening the understanding and concept of ecumenical formation is the famous (but unfortunately almost forgotten) joint study document on „Ecumenical Formation“ of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC from the year 1993.

This statement and study documents begins with the remarkable confession of failures and shortcomings in terms of ecumenical formation on all sides:

„That for long periods we have been disobedient to the ecumenical imperative is a reminder that the spirit of ecumenism needs nurturing. Ecumenical Formation is an ongoing process of learning within the various local churches and world communions, aimed at informing and guiding people in the movement which – inspired by the Holy Spirit – seeks the visible unity of Christians.

This pilgrimage towards unity enables mutual sharing and mutual critique through which we grow. Such an approach to unity thus involves at one and the same time, rootedness in Christ and in one’s tradition, while endeavoring to discover and participate in the richness of other Christian and human traditions.“ (par. 9, Joint Working Group Document on Ecumenical Formation 1993).

It is obvious in reading this document that the emphasis in this joint study is put on the unity aspect of ecumenical learning and that consequently the attention is directed to issues like the promotion of an ecumenical spirituality in theological education, even to the point that repentance and conversion is demanded for from each church participating in ecumenical formation programmes. ´

„Having ecumenical spirituality in common prayer and other forms as the underpinning of ecumenical formation invites all to conversion and change of heart which is the very soul of the work for restoring unity.“(par. 15)

This can be understood as a counter-balance in the understanding of ecumenical formation which focusses more on the other pole of ecumenical learning, namely contextualization for the mission of the church in the world and its dialogue with the pressing demands of its social contexts. Both aspects are an intrinsic component of a holistic understanding of theological education. This needs to be deliberately reflected in each church context of theological education in which a balance is maintained between the two poles in the understanding of ecumenical learning in theological education.

### **8. reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement and new challenges for ecumenical theological formation at the beginning of the 21st century – contextuality, inter-contextuality and ecumenicity/catholicity of theological education a key imperatives for the future**

Churches have come together at the beginning of the 21st century – much beyond the official constituency of the WCC (in the Global Forum initiative) in order to seek new common grounds in a global context with unprecedented challenges. One might ask whether time has come to formulate a new global mandate to safeguard and to continuously promote ecumenical theological education under conditions which are far from conducive to the goals originally associated with the long movement for ecumenical theological education which started some fifty years ago.

The WCC has launched a process on the „Reconfiguration of the Ecumenical Movement“ and even has as one major project working for models of „ecumenism in the 21st century“ in which the dimensions of theological education up to now do not seem to play a major role, despite the fact that there are many indications of increasing urgency, challenges and potential conflicts at hand in this area:

- despite all the fifty years of hard work on strengthening institutions of theological education in the Global South there continues to be a grave and increased shortage of properly trained and theologically informed and ecumenically minded church leadership as well as theological lecturers and teacher for the increased numbers of students who seek admission in today's Global South Christianity ;
- prognostic estimates concerning growth rates of Christianity in different regions of the world shows that Christianity in Africa will most probably increase in the next 20 years with another 100 millions and Christianity in Asia (just China, India and the Philippine) will increase by 124 millions. The systems of theological education which are available up to now do not seem sufficiently prepared to minister to the emerging needs . In other countries – like Germany - the rapidly decreasing numbers of students in general and theological students in particular puts increasing pressures on theological faculties to merge and to cooperate with each other.

- the strength and number of major interdenominational places for theological education is not increasing but might even decreasing in the years to come as there are growing difficulties for financial support and sufficient equipment for ecumenical colleges
- the increasing number and mushrooming of all kinds of different new theological schools and bible colleges in many churches of the South which are supported by charismatic movements and Pentecostal churches pose a question to ecumenical cooperation in theological education;
- the increasing ideological polarization between what is called „the Christian West“ and the „Islamic East“ on world level is putting increasing demands on the abilities of Christian leaders as well as theological educators to fully engage in interfaith issues and to be informed in Christian-Muslim dimensions – a demand which can not always be met;
- migrant churches in western countries develop their own systems of theological education as many theological colleges and faculties are not sufficiently equipped for serving the cultural mindsets and social needs of immigrant churches of different color and language;
- the religious resurgence and increased religious longings in many countries of this world demand for a greater degree in spiritual formation and pastoral competences.
- strong associations of theological schools are functioning only in a very few regions of this world, thus leaving theological education with a serious lack of coordination and lobbying network for financial support on global as well as regional levels.

Thus a new agenda for global ecumenical theological education is being formed and needs to be better articulated in cooperation with the existing associations and networks of theological education.

It has become clear that contextualization alone will not answer sufficiently the new demands and challenges of theological education at the beginning of the 21st century while at the same time remaining a crucial and important component in many regions concerned. But at the same time the pressing needs for more inter-contextual exchange and the whole dimension of inter-contextuality in theological education is gaining a new importance. In many countries different cultural groups are coexisting with each other, as majority/minority balance or in situations with high rates of immigration by refugees and migrants. The question of inter-contextuality in theological education is one of allowing oneself to be exposed to more than just one realm of conceiving the world, God and theology. It becomes ever more important that theologians are bi-lingual – not only in the literal sense, but also bi-lingual in terms of their capacity to react and communicate in at least two different settings of world-view, cultural mentalities and different forms of spiritual and denominational traditions as well in order to give flesh to the understanding of a church and ministry which truly is multi-faceted and „pentecostal“ in the original sense of the word, that is guided by the spirit enabling the understanding of a totally different mindset in the spirit of Love and truth of Christ.

A new global study process on theological education could well focus on the three key dimensions of contextuality, inter-contextuality and ecumenicity/catholicity of theological education for the mission of the church in the 21st century so as to bring the different dimensions together in an integral concept which have an inseparable relation theologically and also historically though in certain phases in the history of the ecumenical movement one pole was more in the forefront than the other.

## **9. different worldviews and cultural settings and the role of academic excellency – or: church and science in theological research and education**

There is a recent publication from German theological circles and church leadership of the Protestant churches focussing on the relation between church, theology and science (EKD-Texte 90: Kirche, Theologie und Wissenschaft). The background certainly is a specific context of Germany with its partnership between church and state by which there are state faculties of theology and theological education and research intentionally based in the secular context of state-related universities in order to maintain a Christian witness in the realm of secular science, reasoning and education and also in order to enable future church ministers as well as religious teachers to relate to questions and concerns coming out of a genuine encounters with secular reasoning and the general public debate in science and research in a context which is shaped by the Enlightenment. The political background of this study certainly has to do with the Bologna-process and the enormous restructuring which is taking place in theological education in state related faculties due to the European concepts of forming study programmes according to the Bachelor and Masters-programme, known in the Anglo Saxon world. At the same time this study also reflects the specific context and heritage of the German – or even Western-European – system and tradition of theological education which certainly has engaged itself for several centuries, namely the context of the *universitas litterarum*, with the realm of independent science and research.

While affirming and appreciating the intentional reflection of the interrelatedness and openness of church, theology and science in a Western or German context, it is remarkable that the very fact that there are different worldviews around the globe and that there is an increasing demand for dialogue between modern scientific worldviews and other worldviews, for instance spiritual worldviews, which are relevant both outside Europe as well as inside Europe with people from different language and culture, does not yet play a major role in reflecting the contextual conditions of theological education in Germany.

There are obviously two extreme positions which need to be avoided in order to maintain a carefully balanced approach to the question of theological education within or outside the predominantly scientific western worldview. Moving to one of the extreme positions, one might tend to focus only on intellectual excellency, dialog with the scientific community thereby rejecting other approaches to theological education as inferior or less legitimate. This kind of attitude can result in a certain self-isolation of the academic type of theological education practised in many western countries. Trends like these are favored also by secular debates on needs for new elitist university and very high competition between universities measured only in academic output in terms of high profile dissertations and academic excellency. The other opposite extreme can surface in an ideological trend to reject everything which appears to be interested in dialogue with the scientific community as not being committed to the cause of the poor and marginalized, of compromising itself automatically to western styles thereby putting a hermeneutic of suspicion around everything which might be „western“, too intellectual and too academic, out of an anti-colonial affect which is more than legitimate but which does not always understand the different context-boundedness and inner rationality of academic approaches to theological education.

When recent publications speak of „diversified theological education“ we think that also the legitimacy of different approaches and worldviews at work within major orientations of theological education need to find recognition and mutual understanding – not in order to create a hierarchy of values and any judgmental attitude over against certain types of theological education, but to more fully appreciate and understand the different roles and specific contributions different worldviews and epistemological orientations can play in the one overarching theological process and renewal of the church worldwide. It may well be that a system and approach to theological education which is mainly oriented towards primordial

wisdom traditions in Asian indigenous cultures has a very valid, precious and unique role to play with regard to paving the way for a more inculturated church in some Asian regions. At the same time, it might be maintained that an approach to theological education which is concerned about the dialogue with masses of post-enlightenment and post-modern people in some western contexts which have an atheistic worldview that no longer has any preconceived idea of a supreme being is also a legitimate approach though it will take a totally different road altogether and cannot be measured by an approach to theological education developed and suited to a cultural situation totally different from such a social context.

It would be an enormous advantage if in global Christianity an understanding is growing of the mutually complementary and substitutional role different approaches to theological education with their related worldviews and different cultural mindsets can have and exercise versus each other. Thus different approaches and understandings neither are viewed judgmentally or are being put in a pejorative hierarchical frame of measuring nor are they excluding each other in principal. Instead, different predominant worldviews and „hermeneutical contextualities“ can see each other as complementary, mutually enriching and also open to mutual correction and critical interrogation. This would constitute a truly intercontextual as well as ecumenical orientation in the plurality of approaches to theological education worldwide.

**10. In conclusion: deepening contextualization, exploring intercontextuality, strengthening ecumenicity, supporting least developed countries and investing into financial self-reliance of theological education as key mandate areas for the future of ETE/WCC in the 21st century**

Reviewing the legacy of Edinburgh 1910 and the subsequent 100 years of debate on ecumenical theological education one cannot but see both major achievements and yet also major shortcomings and ongoing burning needs in the area of ecumenical theological formation for the next working period at the beginning of the 21st century. It might be worth sketching at least five key areas for sharpening the distinct role and revised mandate which ETE can play as a vital pioneering programme within the newly formed Programme 5 of the WCC bringing together ETE, Ecumenical Institute, WCC Scholarships, Lay Ecumenical Formation and Library and Archives of WCC in its present format.

1) The first issue for future ETE agenda is on *deepening contextualization in theological education*.

Being aware that the earlier version of the ETE programme was called Theological Education Fund (TEF) and focussed on contextualization of theological education as a key concept developed in the third mandate period well into the 70's and challenging theological education to be thoroughly rooted and connected to the socio-political contexts of suffering people in non-western contexts it needs to be stated today that contextualization certainly is an unfinished process and remains on the agenda in many contexts of global Christianity. The ecumenical debate on theological education has continuously broadened the concept of contextualization so as to also include dialogue with living cultural traditions, with religious symbols and non-verbal ways of communicating through arts and music. Much of this is also reflected in the new formulations on the Critical Asian Principle (CAP) of ATESEA which presents itself anew in the shape of the new Guidelines for Theologizing and Theological Education in Asia. What is important for ETE/WCC in terms of deepening the understanding of contextualization at the beginning of the 21st century is the key role of understanding and

relating biblical spirituality to people's spiritualities today. It has been argued at several places that the accelerated space of globalization today is giving rise to a countertrend of people searching for their own roots, finding strength and hope in their own (or other) religious identities again, spirituality becoming a key word for the religious longings and inner protests against several negative side effects of globalization in our time.

Contextualization of theological education in the 21st century thus cannot be satisfied in only interpreting the socio-political realities correctly or in relating to the cultural traditions of a particular context, rather it should go much deeper in understanding and communicating to the religious longings and spiritual expressions of people in a given context. Only ministers and pastors who can understand and communicate to the spiritual aspirations of the people will be able to 'minister' to their real needs as seen in the light of the Gospel of Liberation and Reconciliation. Spiritual contextualization will never see itself as contradiction or the alternative to social and cultural contextualization, but with the increased turn of the suffering and poorer sectors of many populations in two-thirds countries to spiritual renewal movements, it remains an urgent task for ecumenical places of theological education to also ask more pertinently how and whether the spiritual longings and aspirations of suffering people are answered by the churches and how they relate to the root elements of biblical spirituality as well as the Christian spirituality lived out in Christian communities and the liturgies and worship life of the visible church in given contexts.

2) A second issue for a new ETE working agenda is about *exploring new ways and models of intercontextuality in theological education* today.

Without leaving aside what generations before us have developed as precious insights in contextualization of theological education we also have to move beyond mere contextualization at the beginning of a new millennium. In coining „*intercontextuality*“ a new key phrase to be explored in global fields of theological education I want to draw our attention to the fact that we are – even if we have developed very proper models of contextualizing theological education in our own environment – by no means self-sufficient and only self-relational in our understanding of theological education. Theological education always is concerned about the whole church, truly universal, related to and given flesh in a large variety of different contexts today. What is a remarkable contrast in our world shaped anew by the enormous forces of globalization is the fact that totally different contexts increasingly become very close neighbours and even simultaneously present within one context. The countries related to each other within ATESEA have a great degree of intercontextuality together already, i.e. they are (or could be even stronger) related to each other in terms of partnerships between institutions of theological education and also exchange programmes and projects of learning from each other. But ATESEA member schools are also part of a wider global Christian family of theological education. And increased emphasis should be devoted also to the concern to develop innovative models of partnerships and exchange programmes between ATESEA member schools and theological education institutions in other parts of the world. The envisaged programme around SEAGST with Asian scholars from the US is an important step in that direction but should be further explored and enlarged in other areas of the global network in theological education.

How can we develop innovative patterns of mutual learning and partnership between theological colleges and schools in one part of the world to theological schools and theological education institutions in other parts of the world, i.e. Latin America, Europe, Africa and/or the Pacific? This is a basic question for an ecumenical orientation in theological education which is a key concern for a global programme such as ETE is and has been from its very beginning. How are we training future theologians and theological educators to be open, related and sensitive to the mindset, cultural conditions, patterns of thinking and key

concepts of theologizing other than those of their own context? In many contexts today we no longer have *one, monolithic* cultural, ethnic, or national set of conditions but we will have *several* settings and terms of references coexisting and simultaneously present - which in future will demand pastors and ministers to become bi-cultural, multi-contextual, multi-lingual and pluri-hermeneutical in terms of their own theological languages, their ability to understand and to communicate theologically. An ordained pastor in a West-European (or East-Asian) country for instance could be challenged to minister simultaneously to a group of native British (East-Asian) inhabitants, but at the same time also to a group of Asian immigrants and to several groups of African refugees in his immediate neighborhood. Phases and structures of education providing for organized periods and phases of intercontextuality to be experienced, reflected and deliberately built into processes of theological education will nurture and stimulate this kind of intercultural and multicultural theological competence which we are needed for preparing future Christian leaders for the 21st century.

3) A third key issue for the ETE agenda is about *strengthening the ecumenicity and catholicity of the church in theological education.*

The concern for church unity and/or more ecumenical inclusiveness in programmes of theological education might not be surprising for somebody representing the WCC which certainly from its inception stood for church unity in the multifaceted understanding of this key concept. The concern for the whole church presented and participating in theological education is not just about a rhetorical formula or just an additional course on concepts of church unity within the Faith and Order tradition. It is a vital concern for theological education in a unique phase of the ecumenical history at the beginning of the 21st century. Just a couple of weeks ago a second global consultation of the Global Christian Forum took place in Limuru, Kenya. A number of churches, organizations and networks not yet institutionally belonging to the WCC, were present and throughout this event comments were shared that the efforts to widen the circles and to reach out to Christian churches and networks beyond the present membership of WCC should be increased in each region of global Christianity. It has become clear that ecumenism in the 21st century cannot proceed, progress and unleash a new dynamic and release new energies if it remains limited and confined to inner „ecumenical circles“ – On the other hand it should be clear also, that an enlarged understanding of ecumenical solidarity and networking should not forget and bypass the results of the earlier historic phases of the institutionalized ecumenical movement and so be blind to the achievements and common grounds that have been laid down by earlier generations of ecumenical pioneers. Otherwise the future of ecumenism becomes endangered by ahistoric and superficial attitudes not informed about the history and achievement of the ecumenical movement so far and will not have a longlasting effect on the future of visible church unity in global Christianity. The implications of the new process of the Global Christian Forum for global theological education are far from being spelled out in detail though there are some very important and relevant consequences which need to be taken into consideration. It is known not only in the African, but also Asian context that for some 20-30 years there has been a process by which many new colleges and smaller Bible Schools have been founded which are no longer supported on an interdenominational basis and oriented towards an ecumenical understanding of theological education, but many of which are inspired and financed by evangelical networks, charismatic churches and Pentecostal renewal movements outside the ecumenical circles. Thus in some contexts one can even say that the number of colleges affiliated to evangelical and charismatic networks is larger than the number of colleges and faculties affiliated to ecumenical networks and accrediting institutions like ATESEA. But if organizations like ATA and ATESEA will continue to co-exist parallel to each other without much mutual involvement we could end up with a situation of ‚structural apartheid‘ in theological education systems in Asia (as well as in many African

contexts) in the future. The issue of church unity in theological education is a question addressed both to our curriculums but also to our networks and the spirit of cooperation in theological education. To what extent are we able to cooperate and build bridges to theological education networks beyond the WCC constituency – without lowering our own standards and without giving up some of our essential convictions which we have learned in decades of the ecumenical debate on contextualization of theological education?

In this regard despite my first words of congratulations to the well-formulated and carefully designed new „Guidelines for theologizing and theological education in Asia“ – which is a tremendous step forwards in terms of contextualizing theological education in Asia – I cannot but offer also a little critical observation to the new guidelines in this regard. While in the section on the major contours of a paradigm shift regarding contextual challenges for doing theology in Asia the concern for church unity is still referred to once (but put alongside ‚people’s ecumenism’ in the Asian concept of a wider ecumenism with people of all faiths, comp. par. 8 in: Guidelines for doing theology in Asia, in: ATESEA Handbook 2007-8, p. 89), in the section containing the eight guidelines for theologizing and theological education in Asia (p. 90) the concern for ecumenism and church unity as a key criteria to be promoted by theological education is not any more mentioned explicitly or seems submerged in the inter-faith dialogue concern of theological education (point 5: „Interfaith dialogue as well as intra-faith communion and communication for the fullness of life and the well-being of society“, p. 90). With all due respect for the need to develop a wider understanding of ecumenism in the context of Asian’s minority church situations one nevertheless might still wonder whether specific issues like church unity, history of ecumenism, models of church union, biblical fundaments for church unity, practical forms of church unity, should receive more explicit reference in prominent guidelines for future theological practice and research in Asia. If future church leaders trained by SEAGST have not received a proper introduction into ecumenism in the specific sense of the word how will the inner coherence of Christian ecumenism be enhanced and safeguarded in future generations in that context? Christian ecumenism has its own distinctive character, foundation and specific realm of theological competence which cannot be submerged to the general concern for solidarity and dialogue with people of all faith. The way in which a college teaches about other Christian traditions, the way ecumenism is introduced and offered in Master Courses, the availability of teaching positions and departments for ecumenism and ecumenical missiology, the degree to which theological libraries contain recent and relevant WCC publications and an update understanding and reference collection for a basic introductory course on ecumenism – all these concerns point to vital questions which should remain on the agenda in further interpreting and working with the Guidelines of Theologizing in Asia. The reference point to church unity was still there in the „Thrust and Guidelines for the Advancement of Theological Education“ which were influential at the beginning of ATESEA. Because there it was clearly stated that „Theological Education is seen to be advancing when

1. it brings absolut mutually creative relationship, between the theological schools and the supporting churches and among theological schools;
2. It fosters a lively sense of the oneness of Christ’s body, the church.
3. It enters into dialogue with the world – its cultures, ideologies and religions.“(Yeow Choo Lak, ATESEA Celebrates its Golden Jubilee, p. 189).

4) A fourth issue for future ETE agenda certainly has to do with *supporting so-called „least developed countries and areas in ecumenical theological education“*.

It is very obvious that there are vast differences in terms of developing proper standards and sufficient facilities in theological education between various countries and regions concerned. Often Western funding agencies have preferred long-term partners for funding in certain areas but have difficulties in establishing new relations in areas and countries which are further

back and less eager and experienced also in preparing proper theological colleges development plans and asking for funds to be processed to them. There are countries which have experienced a tremendous church growth in recent decades but still suffer from not having any major institution of theological education, nor sufficient guidance, proper company and professional help in developing proper long-term development plans for qualified institutions of theological educations. ETE/WCC has the unique role of both identifying urgent priority areas in this regard, building networks of support with other partners for minority churches in these least developed countries and providing expert knowledge and professional company to create key centers of theological excellency and ecumenical formation in cooperating with existing regional associations of theological schools where no other body can exercise this vital midwife-like assistance role. At present pioneering programmes are explored with regard to Nepal, Buthan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. An important role in this played by the regional committee of the Solidarity Endowment Fund of Theological Education in South Asia.

5) A last issue is about *investing into financial self-reliance of theological education both globally and regionally*.

Since Herbert M. Zorn's early study on the financial viability in theological education which was written as a result of a 2 and ½ years in depth study on ministerial training and theological education in almost all major regions of the world – the study was published under the title „Viability in Context“ in the third mandate period of TEF - according to my understanding no major global study was undertaken since with regard to the problems of financial viability and vitality of theological education systems in the churches of the Global South. The study at that time already had highlighted the enormous dependency of theological education institutions in the South on external funds, their vulnerability to changes in donors policies, exchange rates and the financial weaknesses of indigenous supporting churches. Since then much positive change has happened but at the same time the question of financial stewardship and a sense of ownership on the side of the churches for their institutions of theological education remains a top priority for the future.

The topic of the financial situation of theological education in many countries of the South came up briefly again during the Oslo World Conference on theological education 1996 when Cheo Lak, the general secretary of ATESEA at that time, sharply commented on the growing signs of financial crisis in interdenominational college systems, well-established institutions of theological education as well as umbrella organisations such as regional associations of theological schools. We need to draw attention to well-known facts such as the drop in giving faced by many Western donor agencies, the serious reduction in church membership and church income faced by most of the mainline churches in Western Europe as well as in the US and also the unfavorable exchange rates which usually are to the disadvantage of scholarship and grants receivers in countries of the South. One might add today the role of rising energy supply costs which heavily influenceS both travel between institutions of theological education as well as the budgets for libraries and journals which underlines the growing financial crisis and major economic shortcomings in the area of ecumenical theological education.

Cheo Lak goes on to ask a pertinent question:

„It is very expensive to provide medical training, for which universities/teaching hospitals and qualified professors are required. But if we do away with this training, we may end up with poisoning, maiming and destroying precious lives. Which of the two is more expensive? If you think education is expensive, try ignorance. The same sentiment can be expressed for theological education: If you think theological education is expensive, try heresy.“(in: John Pobee, *Towards Viable theological education*, WCC Publications 1997, p. 96f).

Today the situation in many regions is even worse than was felt to be 10 years ago. Today 80% of the funds for the WCC come from donor agencies, and only 20% come directly from member churches. Out of 32 long-term funding partners of the WCC only three support Ecumenical Theological Education continuously at present. The vast majority of donor agencies with their supporting-donors however are driven by interests and priorities which emphasize urgent social needs and crisis response, development projects and emergency assistance programmes – a sample of priorities which is supported also by the supporting audience and fund-givers in the western market of fund-raising which is increasingly marked by competition. Theological education and its institutional systems do not have that publicity, are unfortunately not seen as a vital component of development - which in fact they are – and therefore still lack a global network of lobbyists and a stronger network of continued financial support.

But what is going to happen if Christianity fails to recreate the inner core of its pastoral, theological and ministerial strength and academic theological excellency? What is going to happen in the long run if denominational and interdenominational colleges of Christian background continuously lack sufficient financial means to sustain high-level programmes of theological education for students as well as which attract the theological leadership elite to stay and remain committed to the cause of theological education and research in their context rather than to feel attracted by offers from outside place which easily can be conducive due to much higher standards of financial equipment and salary levels?

We wonder when the time will come or is now already when WCC/ETE together with some of its closest strategic partners in the regional associations on theological education should issue and formulate an emergency call for the financial situation of global theological education in interdenominational colleges worldwide. If the situation continues as it is we will not by any means keep up with the heavy investments in education and university training facilities and programmes which are taking place in other parts of the world, namely in many Muslim countries. The global situation of Christianity in relation to other world religions is also to a large extent dependent for its investment in, its commitment to and its orientation towards education. Churches neglecting financial support and stewardship for high level institutions of theological education in many instances will in future not be sufficiently able any more to prepare and to create the kind of high level intellectual and pastoral leadership in the long run which is vital for a church alert and well fitted for dialogue with a globalized world. Any further programmatic neglect of the funding of ecumenical theological education will endanger the future of a holistic and lively witness of the Christian church in future. Severe and structural lack of financial resources for theological education is neither a natural nor a neutral situation, rather it is an emergency situation showing an underdeveloped sense of ownership for institutions of theological education by the churches as well as lack of commitment of Western donor agencies to recognize the importance of theological education for long-term social and educational development. Lack of funds for theological education therefore cannot be regarded as irrelevant, on the contrary it will directly contribute to another full swing towards strengthening those sectors of Christianity which in the long run can easily (again) fall prey to religious fundamentalism, anti-ecumenical attitudes and self-isolation which in turn will endanger both church unity and also proper social development and peace with justice in many regions of this world. Thus it needs to be strongly affirmed that we need to critically challenge the priority systems of ongoing global funding strategies as well as priorities in church related budgets and demand a new act of global ecumenical solidarity towards safeguarding the future of ecumenical theological education. Any investment in this sense – though it is costly – will pay back – as the beneficiaries of well

equipped and properly trained theological and religious educators and pastors will be many people who in their daily witness have to face growing challenges because of the accelerated pace of globalization.

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