

## **14 Reasons for global solidarity in ecumenical theological education**



**Communication Initiative for the WCC Program  
on Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) in Geneva**

## 14 reasons why it is vital to support ecumenical theological education today:

- 1) Theological education is **vital for the transmission of Christian tradition from one generation to the other**. Theological education is essential for the renewal and continuity of the church and its leadership. Theological education is a matter of survival for an authentic and contextual mission of the church in contemporary contexts.
- 2) Theological education is **crucial for the interaction between church and society** where many issues demand for a sharpened stand and position of Christianity. This has become a commonly held conviction both in western and eastern Christianity, in both the churches of the South and the churches of the North.
- 3) Theological education is **deepening biblical knowledge and the capacity to distinguish and to assess the different powers and spirits** and to discern God's working in this world. More knowledge and awareness in the basic understanding of Christian faith is a vital contribution for the identity of Christian churches today and the lay involvement in church and society.
- 4) There are grave differences in the accessibility and quality of theological education programs in different parts of the world. In some countries there are more institutions of theological education than a decreasing number of theological students can fill. In other countries despite fast growing local congregations only one or in some cases non theological colleges is available to offer BD, Master of Divinity or even Doctoral programs in theology. There is a need for a major step forwards in terms of **bridging the divide between churches and countries with extremely different standards and availabilities of theological education programs**.
- 5) Ecumenical theological education and broad based ecumenical formation is a vital priority for Christianity in the 21st century and the continuation of the ecumenical movement - this was affirmed again by the last assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre 2006. **Without an increased commitment in theological education for ecumenical dialogue and cooperation, the unity of the church, its holistic mission and service in today's world and dialogue with people of other faiths, we might see an increased fragmentation of world Christianity**. Growing trends of religious fundamentalism and a severe lack of properly trained Christian leadership in many fast growing churches in the southern hemisphere demand for more investments in infrastructure and programs of theological education.
- 6) Theological education is not only serving the building up the church, but also is **creating social awareness, political discernment, social involvement and Christian participation in transformation processes of societies**. Thus investing in theological education is a direct investment also into social and political development and transformation of society and the raising of its educational levels.
- 7) **The only proper remedy against religious fundamentalism is investment in education**. Lack of education and theological formation often is one of the root causes for ignorance over against other cultures, religious traditions and special social contexts. Churches which take theological education of both laity and ordained seriously and support all its different levels are better equipped to counteract trends towards religious fundamentalism and communal tensions in their own regions and worldwide.
- 8) In quite a number of churches women do not have equal rights and access to theological education and can enter into the ordained ministry of the churches. Ecumenical theological education since long has particularly promoted the **theological education of women in theology, for ministry and various fields of pastoral work within the church**. A renewed and transformed of the community of women and men in the church and their mutual enrichment in the different ministries of the church can be greatly enhanced by theological education programs.

- 9) Globalization and acceleration of technological and communication progress as well as deteriorating standards of human rights and Christian ethos in many issues of the global world today is demanding for **more theological and ethical expertise in a number of crucial ethical areas**. It is only theological education which enables churches as well as Christians in civil society to face new challenges and social demands of the churches in the context of globalization and radical ethical challenges. Many issues like bioethics, ecology, migration or inherited patterns of social discrimination of marginalized groups demand for forms of interdisciplinary knowledge and expertise for which high-level forms of interdisciplinary dialogue and quality theological education is vital.
- 10) Theological education is the one of the key answers of global Christianity to the **growing longing for new value systems and ethical standards in a globalized world**. Without reflected knowledge of the immense sources of Christian spiritualities and ethical values in Christian tradition there cannot be any proper communication and spread of ethical and spiritual values, which are vital for supporting communitarian and egalitarian orientations in a world fragmented and torn apart by many anti-humanitarian forces.
- 11) Churches and Christians should be aware of the fact that Christianity – in different degrees, but both in the protestant, roman-catholic and orthodox traditions - had a strong historical inclination and heritage to support and nurture theological education (theological faculties often have been the centre around which secular universities later grew). But investments in theological education have gone down in a number of countries both in the West and also in the South and some churches consider theological education as only important up to the lower degree levels (BD) in order to secure input of new ministers. The abilities of Churches however to strengthen their own leadership, to prepare a new generation of well-trained theological educators and to remain attractive for younger generation of intellectuals still to a large extent depends on **investments and an increased sense of ownership and responsibility of churches for higher (postgraduate) programs of theological education**.
- 12) Christianity might be losing its initiative and leading role in higher education in some settings if one realises the growing importance of highly equipped and well-funded Muslim institutions of higher and academic education worldwide. Facing growing and considerable investments of some Muslim governments and private organizations in Muslim universities, colleges and faculties of religion it is vital for the Christian family not to renounce its own tradition of a strong commitment to higher theological education. **The future of Christian-Muslim dialogue needs well-educated pastors and well-trained lecturers of theology and religions in institutions of theological education**. The future of many Christian minority churches in Muslim countries also depends to a considerable extent on the educational level of their leadership and their ability to enter into qualified dialogue with Muslim neighbours.
- 13) The **consequences of global migration for the future of theological education** are far from being sufficiently reflected and thought through. In several countries there are growing ethnic minorities (minority churches) which do not have access to the established systems of academic theological education and demand for new forms of adapted models of theological education for their churches (African diaspora churches in Europe; Hispanic churches in the US). Investing into new models for ethnic minority churches is an urgent need for the future interaction and positive integration of immigrant churches in several countries.
- 14) **Investing in theological education is a strategic investment in the future of Christianity** as a whole and the growth of the ecumenical cooperation between churches. All churches in some ways or other are challenged to develop a balance between the need for becoming open to the challenges of the globalized world and the need for vital interaction with and inculturation in the local cultures in their own context. All churches are challenged to become “glocal” in their own identity and capacities for dialogue. The proper means to assist in this process is theological education. Thus investing into theological education is a vital contribution to world peace.

## Goals and Agenda of ETE/WCC program:

Since the late 50s the World Council of Churches has facilitated the promotion of renewal of the church, strengthening the unity of the church (ecumenism) and social transformation through theological education and ministerial formation. In its 50 years of history the programme on theological education which began 1958 as Theological Education Fund in London, later was called Program on Theological Education (PTE) (from 1977 onwards) and since 1992 is Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) in its present form has contributed greatly to the contextualization of theology and theological education in the churches of Africa, Asia, Latin America, Pacific and Eastern Europe, to strengthening faculty development in colleges and universities and to promoting networking and exchange between theological education institutions of different contexts.

The work of ETE is committed to the following strategic goals

- to continue support for faculty development programmes and to facilitate accreditation mechanism regionally and worldwide;
- to continue and broaden library development programmes regionally and worldwide;
- to deepen, inspire and nurture contextualization of theological education, theological curricula and theologies;
- to strengthen ecumenical networks and ecumenically owned institutions of theological education;
- to organize interregional ecumenical exchanges between theological students, educators and professors;
- to facilitate intercontextual exchanges between various associations of theological schools and research networks in Missiology, Ecumenics and Interreligious Dialogue;
- to continue schemes of empowerment for women, indigenous people and people with disabilities in ecumenical theological education; and

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