

Theological education in the changing context of world Christianity: An unfinished agenda

Global and ecumenical perspectives from the Edinburgh 2010 process and beyond¹

Dietrich Werner is the Director for Ecumenical Theological Education Desk for WCC, Geneva. This paper was presented through a powerpoint in the joint conference on Theological Education Funding by Selly Oak Centre for Mission Studies, Queens College and WCC, ETE in April 2011.

1. The early beginnings in Edinburgh 1910 – a vision for global ecumenical cooperation in theological education and missionary training

2010 marks the year in which we commemorated 100 years of Christian mission after the 1910 world mission conference in Edinburgh which commonly is regarded as one of the most important key events, if not the unparalleled caesura in the history of World Christianity and the ecumenical movement in the 20th century.

There are two major sections of Edinburgh 1910 which dealt with issues of education, namely commission III on “Education in Relation to the Christianization of National Life” and commission V on “The Preparations of the Missionaries” both of which in some of their thoughts and ideas – though with all their limitations in terms of the colonial worldview of the outgoing 19th century – are of significance and of surprising actuality still today.²

Without going into detail here some five major points should be recalled from Edinburgh 1910 which referred to theological education and missionary training:

- a) Edinburgh 1910 highlighted the **strategic importance of (theological) education** as an indispensable element of any Christian mission both in the past and in the future: Bishop Gore, Chairman of Commission III stated:
*“The subject of education in missionary work is of special and far-reaching importance. No one, who knows the history of missions, can doubt that missionaries were pioneers of education wherever they went, and it is hardly possible to exaggerate the debt of gratitude which is due to them for their labours in education, nor can it be doubted how important a part of education has played in the process of evangelization.”*³
- b) Edinburgh 1910 attempted to develop an **empirical world study and survey on the state of Christian education and theological education** by collecting reports from all regions at that time – an ambitious goal which led to a final report of commission III

¹ This is a shortened version of the first two parts of a public lecture delivered at Philadelphia Lutheran Theological Seminary, 5 October 2010 at the occasion of the meeting of the Board of the Foundation for Theological Education for South East Asia (FTESEA); complete version: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1634/promoting-theological-edu.html>

² See for the details: David A. Kerr, Kenneth R. Ross: Edinburgh 2010. Mission Then and Now, Regnum Books 2009, p. 87ff and 155ff

³ Bishop Gore, Chairman of Commission III, in: World Missionary Conference, 1910, Education in Relation to the Christianisation of National Life, Report of Commission III, Edinburgh&London, 1910, p. 6

with 455 pages (with appendices).⁴ We would be grateful if any empirical research on recent developments in theological education could be presented and done also today, at least in some major regions like Asia and Africa. But there is not much of a comprehensive historical survey and research until now.

- c) Edinburgh 1910 called for a **massive quality improvement in training of missionaries** which according to the report of commission V should be drastically upgraded in academic level and enlarged in terms of both a) language studies, b) history of religions and sociology of mission territories and c) in general principles of missionary work. *“The missionary should have the highest possible professional qualification in the relevant field.”* – an early foretaste of the contextualization-debate in the later 60ies.
- d) Edinburgh 1910 called for intentionally moving beyond denominational lines in theological education and promoting the **establishment of centralized mission colleges** jointly supported by different denominations and mission agencies. Theological education of missionaries should take place mainly in „central missionary colleges“⁵ (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 – an early foretaste of the concept of ecumenical theological education and ecumenical learning which was developed decades later.
- e) Edinburgh 1910 finally argued in favor of a deliberate move towards **theological and Christian education in vernacular languages**: Commission III Report stated: *“In the work of training the native Christian Churches, and in particular those who are to be the leaders of the Churches, the greatest possible care will have to be taken to avoid the risk of denationalizing those who are being trained. In particular, we lay the greatest emphasis on the importance of giving religious teaching, not only of the elementary kind, but as far as possible throughout, in the vernacular. We feel certain that those of our witnesses are right who believe that religion can only really be acclimatized in the heart of the natives of any country if it finds expression in their native language – the language of their homes.”*⁶

Thus it was the very early phase of the missionary movement which launched a movement and a concern for sound Christian education and quality theological education involving missionary and ecumenical cooperation long before the established churches were ready to consider this paradigm change in their own ministerial formation programmes. It 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. Edinburgh 1910 left behind the legacy and fundamental obligation of the international missionary movement to set theological education at first priority in any sober mission strategy:

As it is stated in Commission III Report: *“We wish to lay it down that we believe that the primary purpose to be served by the educational work of the missionaries is that of the training of the native Church to bear its own proper witness. And inasmuch as the only way in which the native Church can bear its own proper witness, and move forward toward the position of independence and self-government in which it ought to stand, is through native leaders, teachers and officers, we believe*

⁴ Edinburgh 2010, Mission Then and Now, p. 87

⁵ World Missionary Conference 1910, The Training of Teachers. Commission V Report, Edinburgh&London, 1910, p. 300

⁶ Quoted from Commission III Report ‘Education in Relation to the Christianisation of National Life’ in: Edinburgh 2010, Mission Then and Now, p. 88

that the most important of all ends which missionary education ought to set itself to serve, is that of training those who are to be the spiritual leaders and teachers of their own nation.”⁷

2. From missionary vision to joint action for theological education – The Theological Education Fund of IMC and subsequent PTE/ETE programmes in WCC

Though the whole process of implementing some of the visions and dreams of Edinburgh 1910 was severely delayed due to two world wars and the new world order which unfolded itself in the process of decolonialization it is remarkable that the passion and energy of joint action for mission and theological education was kept alive for decades despite all setbacks. The deep commitment for joint action in theological education was renewed again and found its visible expression in the famous process which led to the creation of the Theological Education Fund (TEF) during the Accra Assembly of the International Missionary Council in 1958.

The three decisive marks and main concerns of TEF’s work were

- *Quality* combining intellectual rigor, 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.

TEF was a remarkable enterprise and example for high level international cooperation in funding and promoting indigenous institutions of theological education and textbook programmes for churches in the South. Limited and particular interests of individual mission boards and churches were set aside to achieve the common goal of international cooperation in promoting joint action in theological education. In its three mandate periods TEF achieved a lot, just to briefly mention only

- a) support for local faculty development programmes in all major regions;
- b) strategic support for a crucial number of interdenominational “centers for advanced theological study in the third world”⁸;
- c) an advanced theological textbook programme in regional languages (many of which were translations of western theological books into Asian and African languages, an impressive collection of which still can be seen in WCC archives);
- d) the formation of a first limited number of associations of theological schools in different regions (ATESEA for instance was formed 1957 in Singapore with its first executive directors John R. Fleming and Kosuke Koyama - from 1968 onwards - had close working relations with TEF);
- e) the launching of the whole debate and programme on contextualization of theology and theological education by Shoki Coe (from Tainan Theological College who spent 14 years as staff and Director of TEF) which led to the emerging of liberation theologies in many churches and colleges in the Southern hemisphere⁹;

⁷ Quoted from Commission III Report in: Edinburgh 2010, Mission Then and Now, p. 89

⁸ See TEF staff Paper on “Centers for Advanced Theological Study in the Third World: A Survey and Evaluation of Developments”, in: Learning in Context. The Search for Innovative Patterns in Theological Education, TEF London Bromley, 1973, p. 155ff

⁹ See Shoki Coe, Recollections and Reflections. Introduced and Edited by Boris Anderson, Second Edition, 1993, Formosan Christians for Self-Determination, particularly: Contextualization as the way towards Reform in Theological Education, p. 270-275; see also: by J. Gordon Chamberlin, Contextualization: Origins, Meaning and Implications: A Study of What the

- f) the encouragement for alternative models of theological education such as theological education by extension;¹⁰
- g) the stimulation of a debate on appropriate partnerships models of theological education in the West/North which are properly geared to serve theological education in the South;¹¹

It is not possible here to go into details with regard to the rich and diverse history both of TEF and the subsequent programme of PTE, as it was called after the integration of the TEF in WCC in 1977.¹² There is a fascinating concluding report from the last meeting of the TEF Committee in Bromley 1977 in which Shoki Coe as TEF-Director stated in his evaluation that TEF really has served as “an ecumenical symbol of (common) concern for the advancement of theological education in the Third World” which was “motivated by an ‘ecumenical vision’ of mission which questioned the denominational approach of Modern Missions”¹³ and as a common working instrument which did spend roughly some 13 million dollars for its programmes in the three Mandate periods (1958-1977) with more than 100 donor agencies and mission boards participating. The innumerable archive boxes of TEF and PTE’s history which are located in the Ecumenical Center in Geneva still wait for several PhD research projects on the history of theological education in Asia, Africa and Latin America to find their rich material base. Shoki Coe however also emphasized that equipping and qualifying theological education in the churches of the South in many aspects remains “an unfinished task”¹⁴, particularly because the TEF “as an ecumenical agency could not and should not try to cover everything which is the normal responsibility of the Schools and the Churches”.¹⁵ He also made a prophetic statement concerning the future of WCC’s involvement in the area of theological education in emphasizing, that *“regionalization is a missiological necessity and welcomed practically everywhere, but its role, function, and its structures need careful mutual consultation and it is my conviction that the effectiveness of the new PTE will depend on its ability to evolve this healthy relation between the regions and the PTE”*.¹⁶

When in 1977 TEF was formally integrated into the WCC and the new Programme on Theological Education (PTE) was formed under its first Director Aharon Sabsezian this was with the common understanding of all sides, that the WCC had undertaken some obligations for the years to come so as to secure a proper future and continuity of this core programme of the international missionary movement within its own structures and to maintain a continued commitment to bring together key partners and agencies to collaborate in the advancement of theological education although the forms of this programme might change.

Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches Originally Understood by the Term "Contextualization," with Special Reference to the Period 1970-1972. William P. Russell, Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta della Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1995. Pp. 515; [David J. Hesselgrave](#), [Edward Rommen](#): Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models. 2003

¹⁰ Ross Kinsler, Extension: An Alternative Model for Theological Education, in: Learning in Context, p. 27-49; Ross Kinsler: Diversified Theological Education. Equipping all God’s People, William Carey International University Press, 2008

¹¹ See the case studies on Missionsacademy University of Hamburg, in: Learning in Context. The Search for Innovative Patterns in Theological Education, TEF London Bromley, 1973, 132ff

¹² For the history see: Christine Lienemann-Perrin: Training for a Relevant Ministry. A Study of the World of the Theological Education Fund, Madras/Geneva 1980; Dietrich Werner: Ministerial Formation, ETE, Jubilee Issue on the history of PTE/ETE in the World Council of Churches, No 110, April 2008; also: ETE Jubilee Issue of International Review of Mission April 2009, 388, p. 1-214

¹³ Shoki Coe, Director’s Report for the last TEF Committee Meeting Bromley, July 1977, TEF Archives, Box 35 (1977), WCC, p. 15f

¹⁴ Shoki Coe, Director’s Report for the last TEF Committee Meeting Bromley, July 1977, WCC, p. 17

¹⁵ Shoki Coe, Director’s Report for the last TEF Committee Meeting Bromley, July 1977, WCC, p. 16

¹⁶ Shoki Coe, Director’s Report for the last TEF Committee Meeting Bromley, July 1977, WCC, p. 10

3. Where are we with theological education at the beginning of the 21st century? – signposts of crisis and new opportunities from the Edinburgh 2010 process

Edinburgh 2010 provided a first chance to reflect on the dramatic global changes in the landscape of World Christianity which hundred years ago nobody would have dreamt of. The new Atlas of Global Christianity which was published by Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth Ross¹⁷ provided a chance to have more details on the well known shift of the center of gravity in Christianity. As this is vital as a general background for looking into the situation of theological education in today's world let us remember some of the key trends and figures:

- a) While 66% of all Christians lived in Europe in 1910, by 2010 only 25.6% Christian churches in Europe. By contrast, less than 2% of all Christians lived in Africa in 1910 skyrocketing to almost 22% by 2010. The Global North (defined as Europe and Northern America) contained over 80% of all Christians in 1910 falling to under 40% of all Christians by 2010. However the overall percentage of Christians in World Population did not change much (what tempted Dana Roberts in her brilliant opening speech in Edinburgh 2010 to the remark: "A century ago the participants at Edinburgh 1910 complained that only one-third of the world was Christian. Today we rejoice that one-third of the world are followers of Christ."¹⁸)
- b) Seen as Christian percentage of the population per region the shift becomes even more obvious in Africa: While Africa had less than 10% Christians in 1910, its population was nearly 50% Christian in 2010, with sub-Saharan Africa well over 70% Christian.
- c) While Christianity remains a minority religion in most of the Asian countries there still has been is an overall increase of Christian population in Asia between 1910 and today from 2,4% to 8,5 % which pushed the Asian Christian population to over 292 million today, with a particular increase of Christian populations in South East Asia (from 10,8% to 21,8%), but also a sharp decrease in Western Asia from 22,9% to 5,7%). More specifically Christianity in Asia will grow particularly in countries like China, India, Nepal and Cambodia.
- d) It is well-known that the general projection concerning the developments until 2050 is that Christianity will still grow in the Global South (particularly Western Africa, Middle Africa and Eastern Asia (China) and South East Asia, but will also sharply contract in the Global North (particularly in Europe).

While Edinburgh 2010 made available the new Atlas of Global Christianity and hereby provided some updated and revealing data concerning general trends in the landscape and composition of World Christianity, there are not yet similar exact data available yet on how these changes in World Christianity were reflected (or contradicted) in terms of the availability and numbers of theological colleges, faculties of religious studies and Bible schools worldwide. Neither the Atlas of Global Christianity nor the World Christian Database offer reliable empirical data on this essential element of mission and education history.

We certainly know some of the regional developments, for instance that the number of ATESEA member schools has grown since 1957 (Singapore meeting) from 16 to 104¹⁹ or that theological

¹⁷ Atlas of Global Christianity, ed. By Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth Ross, Edinburgh University Press, Center for the Study of Global Christianity, 2009

¹⁸ Dana Robert, "Witnessing to Christ Today": Mission and Unity in the "Long View" from 1910 to the 21st Century, Edinburgh 2010 Opening Lecture

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Association_for_Theological_Education_in_South_East_Asia#History

colleges in the Senate of Serampore system have grown to 54 since 1910²⁰. It is also known that theological schools in China have experienced a remarkable new development with the reopening of Nanjing Theological Seminary in 1981 and in the period between 1981 and 2009 some 10,000 theological students graduated from the 19 theological seminaries in China.²¹ Probably we have around 2000 or more theological colleges and Bible Schools in World Christianity today²² thus certainly presenting some tremendous increase in the past hundred years. However secular statistics on world developments in higher education investment, library and internet access and scholarly publications in the different countries²³ point to a reality of sharp contrasts and growing un-equality in the area of tertiary education in general between the North and the South which certainly is not without impact and parallel phenomena in the area of higher theological education. Many indicators point to the picture that accessibility and numbers of programmes and institutions of theological education vary considerably between the regions and the standards and stability of theological education still is extremely different between the global North and the global South, in several aspects more polarized than 100 years ago.

The Edinburgh 2010 process had encouraged the formation of nine international study groups to work on the different sub-themes of Edinburgh, one of which was dealing with theological education. Despite the absence of a comprehensive data-base in terms of global developments in theological education, the group came forward with some new surveys and empirical observations concerning the developments in theological education on world level. It belonged to the contributions of ETE within the Edinburgh 2010 process and the newly formed international study group on theological education²⁴ that – based on some earlier publications and papers from ETE²⁵ - some important new publications and research papers were made available which include the following:

- the 100 pages global study report on theological education: “Challenges and Opportunities in Theological Education in the 21st century. Pointers for a new International debate on theological education” which was published in November 2009 and introduced during the session on theological education in Edinburgh June 2010²⁶;
- the 800 pages “Handbook on Theological Education in World Christianity” (edited by Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, Joshva Raja) which was released during the Edinburgh 2010 centenary conference;
- a report on the two sessions and major issues raised during the Edinburgh 2010 centenary conference which will be part of the final conference volume;
- a major publication on the “future of African theological education” which was developed after the Stellenbosch conference on the future of theological education in Africa in November 2009 (published in *Missionalia*, SAMS, vol. 38 (2), 2010);

²⁰ <http://www.senateofseramporecollege.edu.in/>

²¹ Yilu Chen, Major Developments and Challenges for Theological Education in China, in: D. Werner et al.: Handbook for Theological Education in World Christianity, Regnum Books International 2010, p. 431

²² The International Directory of Theological Colleges which was published in the 90ies had listed more than some 2000 theological colleges worldwide: Alec Gilmore, An International Director of Theological Colleges 1997, PTE, WCC Publications, 1996

²³ data are available in special graphic presentation from worldmapper.org (see tertiary education expenditure trends in various countries and on world level)

²⁴ The group was moderated by Dietrich Werner and Namsoon Kang, composed of representatives both from historical churches and their institutions of theological education, evangelical organizations and Pentecostal educators.

²⁵ See: theme issue: Theological Education in Mission, IRM Vol. 388, April 2009; Jubilee Issue of Ministerial Formation on 50 years of work of PTE/ETE in the WCC, MF No 110, April 2008

²⁶ Paper available from: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/education-and-ecumenical-formation/ecumenical-theological-education-ete/edinburgh-2010-international-study-group-on-theological-education.html>

- in addition a major “resource book on women and mission in world Christianity” which was initiated in 2009 with a project group²⁷ will be published in 2011.

Some of the results of these publications are important for reviewing the changing situation of theological education in the 21 century and therefore should be briefly referred to in 6 points²⁸:

1) Accessibility gap in theological education (the challenge of unequal distribution)

The *absolute majority of resources for theological education – both teaching staff, scholarship funds, theological libraries and publications – are still located in the North*, whereas the majority needs and demands for theological education, in a situation marked by a remarkable shift of the center of gravity of world Christianity, are in the Southern hemisphere. There is a tremendous gap between the availability of resources and programmes for theological education and the growth of Christianity in various regions of the world. Both do not correspond properly.²⁹ The dramatic *increase in demands for general higher education* due to younger and dynamic populations in Asia and Africa which is reflected also in *growing demands for theological education* and theological study programs is not answered yet by a similar increase of opportunities in theological education. In Nepal for instance where the number of Christians has grown from zero to 900.000 only within the past fifty years, many pastors have only a rudimentary 5-month training program which enables them to read the Bible and to pray, but no common BD course is offered yet. There is an enormous zeal to serve God, but an enormous lack of well-trained pastors and theological educators and still no M.Th. course is available within that country. More than 50% of all Southern African church leaders (African Instituted Churches included) do not have any formal theological degree because degree programmes of theological education are not accessible or affordable for them. The crisis of world economy in past years has deeply affected theological education systems, both in endowment based theological colleges as well as in state funded departments for theology or religious studies. There is a widening gap between state-funded or endowment driven theological colleges in the North and the smaller, highly vulnerable church based theological colleges in the South. In contexts where the monthly average salary is below 30 USD it is difficult to come up with expenses for a “normal” theological book of 60USD or for access fees of electronic theological journals which are demanded by some commercial providers. There is a grave lack of scholarships and grants available for higher studies in theological education in almost all theological colleges of the South and several churches in the South are facing increasing difficulties to fund their institutions of theological education. The predominant bilateralism and voluntarism of donations for funds supporting theological education has weakened international or centralized regional structures to support faculty development in theological education. Thus the *“most important of all ends which missionary education ought to set itself to serve, that is of training those who are to be the spiritual leaders and teachers of their own nation”*(Edinburgh 1910, commission III) seems not to be met yet in a satisfactory manner.

2) Contextualization gap in theological education (the challenge of cultural dominance)

²⁷ Moderated by Christine Lienemann, Atola Longkumer, Afrie Songko Joyce.

²⁸ The following points are also referred to in: Edinburgh 2010 and the future of theological education in the 21st century. Report of parallel session on theological education – Edinburgh 2010 (will be published in final Edinburgh 2010 conference volume)

²⁹ Global Study Report on Theological Education, a.a.O., p. 82, Section 24) Bridging the divide in terms of unequal accessibility of theological education

While the plea of Edinburgh 1910 to develop *contextualized forms of theological education* in the Asian churches was partly answered by some indigenous models of theological education and contextual theologies which were established and worked out in the 20th century, Western patterns and concepts of theology continue to be exported throughout the Global South, so that *the task of Edinburgh 1910 was only gradually and very incompletely fulfilled*. Theological research and publications from Europe are present in African theological libraries, but theological research from Africa to a great extent is absent from African theological libraries. Voices from Africa and Asia point to a decline in the commitment for contextualized theologies and declining numbers of books published on Asian or African theologies. Instead there is an increased trend to create affiliated programmes of American, Asian or other Western theological colleges to operate as branches in countries of the South, so that some voices speak of ambivalent trends of Koreanization or Americanization of theological education in Asia or Africa. Models and curricula of theological education from the West have often been coined and formed within a Constantinian or post-Constantinian church setting. Once they are transferred into contexts in the South (which in most cases have a pre-Constantinian setting) without much adaptation problems and unsolved challenges for contextualization of theological education in the churches of the South are becoming obvious. Much of what is happening in and through the rapid spread of evangelical or Pentecostal theological education today also reflects the unresolved needs of pre-Constantinian church settings for contextualized teaching materials and curriculum plans. Visiting theological libraries in smaller theological colleges in Asia or Africa and checking what is available in terms of theological books written from indigenous perspectives sometimes is a revealing experience. The challenge for contextualization also holds true for centralized theological colleges in Asia or Africa which operate in English medium: Do they really serve the contextualization of the Gospel and of church ministries or do they – unintentionally – also serve the de-contextualization and westernization of theology in Asian or African contexts? Do candidates who have benefitted from their programmes, often located in urbanized areas with different modes and chances of communication, feel motivated and equipped to go back to parishes in rural areas where different needs are at stake? Looking around one cannot but state that many urgent needs remain for culturally and linguistically appropriate programmes and resources of theological education. The plea of Edinburgh 1910 to establish theological literature and education programmes in vernacular languages was overshadowed by the historic development which has given preeminence to English as the new global colonial language outside the realm of which it is still difficult to find international recognition and chances for communication for indigenous theological knowledge production and related publications.

3) Diversification gap in theological education (the challenge of migration and pluralization)

While contextualization of theological education is at stake also *trans-contextuality and diversification of theological education* have become an issue in many contexts both of the South as well as in the North. As the world is shrinking and global migration brings different cultures, religions and denominational identities from isolated pockets into close and vibrant neighborhoods the need of theological education to address different identities, cultural milieus and social spheres within one context has become imperative: Malaysia having to address thousands of Philippino and Chinese immigrants, African nations like DRC or South Africa having to cope with thousands of refugees or migrants from war-driven neighboring states, American colleges having to open up for Hispanic or Afro American communities as a result of decades of immigration, the realities can be amply studied alongside Germantown Street in Philadelphia. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) the

number of international migrants increased by 45 million – an annual growth rate of about 2,1%, adding some 10 million of migrants each year.³⁰ The fundamental implications of global migration and changing and increasingly diverse constituencies for programmes of theological education are probably not yet fully spelled out. And there is a need not only for higher degree programmes of theological education, but more often needs for informal and extension like programmes of theological education. If we compare the resources invested in residential and degree oriented theological education programmes with resources made available for informal and lay theological education programmes there often is an imbalance. But in many churches there is a great need also for informal theological education for catechists, Bible women, lay preachers and lay preachers as they bear the greatest burden for mission and evangelism today. Diversification of theological education is needed in terms of making available affordable and accessible courses for theological education for those groups carrying the key tasks for mission and evangelism today. Diversification of theological education is experienced as one of the key features in American theological colleges in the past decade. It holds true for many other contexts as well what Daniel Aleshire from ATS has stated in his challenging address to the last ATS/COA Biennial Meeting: “The shifting center of gravity in global Christianity invites North American theological schools both to consider their contribution to a wider world and to embrace the intellectual contributions that the world brings to them.”³¹

4) Unity and credibility gap of theological education (the challenge of disintegration and fragmentation of World Christianity)

The single most remarkable trend however in World Christianity today is, that the degree of *denominational fragmentation in the international and regional landscape of theological education networks* and institutions is as high as never before in the history of Christianity. The number of different Christian denominations has climbed to astronomical numbers³² which in 1910 nobody possibly would have dreamt of – particularly due to the rise of the so-called Independent Churches from 1,5% in 1910 to 16,1% of all Christians in the world in 2010 which is only one of the indicators.³³ Just to take the example of Africa: The missionary enterprise in Africa led to the creation of predominantly ethnic churches in Africa – ethnic identities aligned with denominational identities. There are about 2600 ethnic groups in Africa. In many countries – like Kenya, Nigeria or DRC Congo - there are thousands of different Christian denominations and churches today (Kenya: 4000 denominations, Angola: 800 denominations).³⁴ Every major denominational family nowadays tends to have its own theological college or Bible school, tends to build up for its own Christian universities and undertakes strong efforts to strengthen its own denominational identity (and less associations of schools if interdenominational character). There are different denominational world families of associations of theological schools (WOCATI/ETE as the ecumenical family, WAPTE as the Pentecostal family, ICETE as bringing together schools from evangelical background) and financial streams of support do not any more join together into one global or one regional programme like it was the case with TEF in the 60ies and 70ies of the 20th century, but follow

³⁰ Henry S. Wilson/Werner Kahl, Global Migration and Challenges to Theological Education, in: D. Werner, et. al. Handbook on Theological Education in World Christianity, 76ff

³¹ Daniel Aleshire, The Future has Arrived: Changing Theological Education in a Changed World , Adress to ATS/COA Biennial Meeting June 2010, accessed at:
<http://www.ats.edu/Resources/PapersPresentations/BiennialMeetings/Documents/2010/2010Aleshire-FutureHasArrived.pdf>

³² The World Christian Data Base lists 9491 Christian Denominations on 380 pages, see:

<http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/esweb.asp?WCI=Results&Query=211>

³³ Atlas of Global Christianity, a.a.O., p. 70

³⁴ Details come from André Karamaga, GS of AACC, Nairobi 2009

denominational and bilateral lines of funding and support thereby creating complex multi-parallel and often rivaling systems of theological education, accreditation and degree-giving. Denominational identities are reinforced through separate and isolated systems of theological education, sometimes even in polemical or exclusive attitudes over against each other.

Even the newly emerging splits within denominational families or across denominational boundaries which are related to different positions in the understanding of Biblical hermeneutics, authority of Biblical tradition and to human sexuality or women's ordination to a major extent are either caused or at least co-influenced by certain trends and shortcomings in organized systems of theological education. As a consequence of this isolation and fragmentation there is a general lack of common quality standards and mutual recognition between theological schools of different contexts and denominational orientation which again leads to weaker positions over against requirements and challenges from governments or secular accreditation bodies.

The vision and hope of the fathers and mothers of Edinburgh 1910, that cooperation in Christian mission would also lead to more unity and solidarity in theological education obviously was disappointed in major segments of World Christianity some hundred years later.

5) Ownership gap of theological education (the challenge of long-term viability of theological institutions and associations of theological schools)

Financial viability of theological education after the world's financial meltdown is an issue not only within the US, but even more so with many theological colleges in the South. The support and financial commitment of churches to their institutions of theological education has not increased but instead even crumbled in several regions – a perennial problem particularly in Asia³⁵. Growing churches and struggling Christian communities are facing increasing difficulties to get a sufficient number of well-trained ministers and pastors and to financially maintain their theological colleges. Sometimes difficulties of churches to pay their pastors and ministers in turn have led to a decreasing number of students enrolled for ministerial formation programmes (South Africa). Although it might be argued that unlike hundred years ago the majority of financial resources for theological education are today raised from local sources in the South, there still remains a large number of theological colleges in Asia and Africa which continue to depend on external support from partners and the fragility of financial support and threatened long-term stability of interdenominational as well as some denominational theological colleges is a topic which is discussed almost everywhere. Thus the *sense of ownership* and the *interlinkedness of Church, Christian mission and theological education* which was highlighted by many authors and studies in the 20th century, seem to be endangered and even threatened at the beginning of our century.

Several churches in the South had to reduce or withdraw their support to interdenominational theological colleges, others have put a lot of hope in becoming part of Christian universities or transforming former church related theological colleges into departments of Humanities in larger Christian universities and getting them financed by state resources – which reduces the influence and sense of ownership of churches and also can diminish the role these institutions can play for ministerial formation. Thus the concrete implementation of this vital interrelatedness remains a constant task for all churches and institutions of theological

³⁵ See Wati Longchar: in: Partnership in Training God's Servants for Asia. Essays in Honor of Marvin D. Hoff, ed. by Sientje Merentek-Abram, A. Wati Longchar, ATESEA 2006, Jorhat, p. 54f

education. The global study report on theological education therefore has called for improved Churches support and sense of ownership for institutions of theological education.³⁶

There are some positive signals from REOs (AACC, CCA and CLAI) for a growing concern for networking with associations of theological schools and - with the help of ETE - to work out new models of regional cooperation in theological education: AACC has installed an advisory commission for theological education which aims at the revitalization of theological education and the creation of a major African theological education Fund (we would need an equivalent of FTESEA for the African continent, a Foundation for Theological Education in All Africa (FTEAA) which still is missing to provide some additional financial and moral support). CCA has agreed to create an Asian Theological Education Fund and to work together with an Asian Forum on Theological Education (AFTE). In Latin America CLAI has agreed to a Latin American Forum of Theological Education which brings together all major associations of theological schools in Latin America and will include the building up a Latin American Theological Education Fund. - But all of this is still a new and rather fragile development, because REOs themselves often are not fully supported and financially and in terms of staffing equipped by their member churches. In this area we urgently need more international support, more visible ownership of churches for theological education and more strategic networking between funding organizations and different partners around the world.

6) The plausibility gap of theology within post-modern university trends (challenge of a new kind of secularism in politics of science)

A last and often underestimated factor are the *changing political and university related structural conditions of theological education* which are becoming obvious in several contexts: While the academic discipline of “theology” and its role for theological education historically belonged to the formative elements of medieval universities in European in the Middle Ages and “theology” could for centuries present itself as the “crown of all science” times have changed tremendously in post-Enlightenment and post-Christendom societies in Europe as well as in several other regions: The plausibility and legitimacy of ‘theology’ (as a confession bound distinct academic discipline) in a secular university context is questioned. In several contexts there is a trend to move away from theological faculties and to give priority to departments of religious studies in state-funded universities. Reports from both Great Britain, Scandinavia and Germany indicate a decline in research projects and teaching positions in theology proper and a shift towards projects and positions in the field of religious studies.³⁷ The Third Consultation of Theological Faculties in

³⁶ Global Study Report on Theological Education Section, Section 26) Churches support and sense of ownership for institutions of theological education, p. 84f

³⁷ Vidar Hannes from MF Norwegian School of Theology reports: “Several of the theological faculties in Scandinavia have gone through external evaluations and benchmarking processes and some have merged with other faculties and institutes. The threats are not so much on quality as of economy, resources and critical size. There is a great need for research and education in religion and society, but this – on the other hand – is a threat to research and education in theology proper. There is a growing interest in the study of Religion in general, but no parallel interest in the study of Theology. In most of the Scandinavian faculties, positions in classical theology are replaced by positions in religious studies. It is difficult to fund theological projects, while in all the Scandinavian countries there are research programs in Religion and Society, funded by research councils.”(Vidar Hannes, *Academic Theology in Scandinavia: Research – Education – Formation*, p. 2. Contribution to the Third Consultation of Theological Faculties in Europe, Graz, Austria, 7-10 July 2010, unpublished paper). In a similar way Peter Stilwell from Portugal describes the situation of theological education in Latin Countries in Europe: “How can we justify the existence of Theology in a university setting? We are under fire from those who think the study of religion should be handed over to Cultural Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, History, Philosophy and possibly even Literature, supposedly neutral in their methodologies and with identifiable epistemologies. Only these are considered

Europe which met in Graz, Austria July 2010 therefore made a strong plea to recognize the validity and importance of theology within the European university context and stated:

“The move to Religious Studies is in part a response to a decrease in student numbers, in part a reflection of an interest in the religious pluralism of Europe. However, the inevitable result is a decrease in the number of faculty in traditional theological disciplines. We recognize that Theology and Religious Studies can be complementary disciplines in a faculty.”

The final statement therefore emphasized the *“urgent need to make the case for the importance of theology in the context of universities in Europe. The case for theology taking its place amongst the humanities (and indeed the sciences) needs to be made by University teachers, church leaders and Christians with influence on the authorities. Reasons for the ongoing significance of theology include the rich history of theology in the Universities from their birth, the growing importance of religion in European and world politics, and the postmodern critique of any claim to an ultimately non-confessional worldview”*³⁸

In a similar direction also the concluding report of the session of Edinburgh 2010 conference observed:

*“There is a move from denominational seminaries to studying in university faculties of religion. This means that many of the theological seminaries are at risk of closure or the dimension of ministerial formation has been weakened. This also risks a disconnect from the international communions of various Christian traditions. Also inter-denominational theological seminaries have been closed or are threatened in some contexts. While the insights of “secular” education are of their own value to the theological enterprise and theological education should not be isolated from other realms of human knowledge, emphasis should be given to the need to bring theological perspectives to bear on the task of defining the distinctive goals and character of theological education. Increasing tendencies of universities to integrate on theological education under Philosophy and Religion departments put pressure on churches to look for their denominational oriented training centers. In some cases denominational houses of studies within university contexts have proved a good alternative and complement. Ecumenical institutions find it hard to survive both due to the monitory expectations of the universities and also due to the increasing secularization of theological education in university contexts. While working under a lot of academic and financial pressure ecumenical theological colleges need to deliver the ministerial training expectations of the churches without losing their contextual emphasis. In this sense such ecumenical institutions of theological education need to be encouraged worldwide”*³⁹

Conclusion

Coming to a conclusion and *preliminary summary evaluation of the relevance of the centenary conference of Edinburgh 2010 for the area of theological education* it can be stated that

- Edinburgh was successful in that for the first time in this century it brought together all major streams of World Christianity to again be in dialogue with each other on key questions of Christian mission including the perspectives of theological education. The

to raise the study of religion above ‘mere catechetics.’”(Some Notes on the situation of Theological Education in Latin Countries”, p.2)

³⁸ THE 3RD CONSULTATION OF THEOLOGICAL FACULTIES IN EUROPE 7TH – 10TH JULY 2010, GRAZ, AUSTRIA “Jeopardised or in demand? Academic Theology in Europe between Education, Science and Research”, see: http://www.uni-graz.at/grazerprozess/tagung2010/Final_Statement_2010_en.pdf

³⁹ Edinburgh 2010 and the future of theological education in the 21st century. Report of parallel session on theological education – Edinburgh 2010, p. 5

“common call” which was issued at the close of the conference also presented *some common language to define a broad common basis for the understanding of mission.*

- Edinburgh 2010 was also successful as a *study conference* due to the commitment of all nine international study groups under the inspiring leadership of Kirsteen Kim. There is some major work and material available for research of several generations of missiologists and experts in World Christianity from this conference.
- The concluding report of the session on theological education from Edinburgh 2010 rightly states: *“The concern for Christian education, theological education and ministerial formation which has been a key task throughout the history of Christian mission from its very beginning, needs to be reaffirmed and identified as a strategic task of common action for all Christian churches in the 21st century.”*⁴⁰ The problem is that this remains more a passionate claim, than an actual common practical commitment, because unlike Edinburgh 1910 the centenary conference in June 2010 was neither designed nor able to enter into a further stage and to move towards *common action and international new joint practical commitments* for mission in the area of theological education. Edinburgh 2010 thus was weak in terms of strategizing for new models of real international and inter-denominational cooperation. Might be that with only four main days of conference meetings and only two very short 90 minutes sessions on each of the nine study-themes Edinburgh 2010 did not have the structural and time-related preconditions to achieve a similar depth and sense of commitment than the world mission conference brought about 100 years ago.
- But the problems may even lie on a deeper level: The sad fact that Edinburgh 2010 fell short of expectations of many which would have liked to see a clearer follow up strategy and some real commitment for joint action on theological education worldwide also reflects the enormous fragmentation of World Christianity and the weakening of the ecumenical spirit and international solidarity for this key area of the missionary task of Christianity in the beginning 21st century.

It can be argued therefore that the famous statement of the Tambaram world mission conference 1938: ***“The weakest element in the enterprise of Modern Missions is theological education”***⁴¹ which two decades later had led to the formation of the TEF programme, to some extent still holds true under the different historical conditions of our time. The historic success or strength of protestant Christian mission was to a large extent based on the famous tri-polar concept of mission which held together evangelizing, education and health-care, and with it a fraternal relationship between faith and critical reasoning, spiritual or ministerial formation and sound intellectual and academic reflection of theology. The changing landscape of World Christianity which sees a stagnation or slight decline of Protestant churches in the past hundred years (from 18,8% of the global population in 1910 to 18,3% in 2010)⁴² over against a sharp increase of Independent (Charismatic churches) (from 1,5% in 1910 to 16,1% in 2010) will not automatically continue that Protestant tradition of higher theological education. It will not automatically give priority to a type of theological education which is based on this Protestant heritage and gives prominence to sound Biblical and historical education. Some deliberate efforts are needed for this protestant tradition of theological education not to become marginalized within the context of World Christianity in the coming centuries. Or as the Edinburgh 2010 report on theological education has stated:

⁴⁰ Edinburgh 2010 and the future of theological education in the 21st century. Report of parallel session on theological education – Edinburgh 2010, p. 2 (will be published in the final Edinburgh 2010 conference report)

⁴¹ Shoki Coe, Director’s Report for the last TEF Committee Meeting Bromley, July 1977, TEF Archives, Box 35 (1977), WCC, p. 15

⁴² Atlas Todd M. Johnson, Kenneth R. Ross, Atlas of Global Christianity, p. 70

“The integrity and authenticity of all the diverse streams of World Christianity in the 21st century can be maintained and deepened only if we move beyond a situation in which Christianity seems to flourish where theological education does not flourish and vice versa, but where instead innovative forms of theological education are emerging which are life-giving, renewing, participatory and relevant for the growing charismatic renewal movements in the South and for the renewing churches in the North.”

4. Pointers and open questions for possible priorities for joint action and solidarity in cooperation for theological education in the 21st century

In this concluding chapter we can only tentatively formulate some pointers to new priorities and some key challenges with regard to strengthening international cooperation for theological education in the changed contexts of World Christianity today:

a) Attention to the needs of newly emerging churches in the contexts of poverty – avoiding a new apartheid in theological education

Mission agencies and churches worldwide have to be more attentive to the *needs of newly emerging churches and their needs for theological education, particularly with churches which are growing in contexts of poverty and in societies which see rapid changes, marginalization and poverty.* Nobody could have imagined hundred years ago the changes and political openings which have come about in countries like China, Nepal, Cambodia, Laos and growing churches in several African countries. We live in different stages and epochs of church history in the context of World Christianity in the 21st century. For those churches which are in a very early stage concerning their short history careful attention, support and accompaniment is needed to develop contextualized systems and materials for theological education without which an organic growth and holistic Christian mission in their context cannot take place. Churches which have some 500 or 200 years of history need to listen to the authentic needs of churches which have only 80 or 50 years of history and are in a quite different stage of development. Churches in a context of affluence need to overcome their cultural captivity and develop a sensitivity for newly emerging churches which come from completely different backgrounds. It cannot be allowed that churches from established and affluent backgrounds look down on indigenous churches (like AICs) due to some of their peculiar theological trends or features while at the same time practically denying their rights for more and sound theological education. There are several emerging churches in Africa, which have grown significantly during the past two decades numerically, but have not grown theologically and this is insane in long-term perspective. The unity and inner coherence of World Christianity in the 21st century to a large extent is dependent from joint international efforts to make theological education accessible, affordable and meaningful for all. Otherwise World Christianity will see increased inner fragmentation with growing inner conflicts tearing it apart and with a growing massive loss of relevance over against booming Muslim higher education systems in the world of the coming century.

b) International cooperation for strengthening regional associations of theological schools and regional funds for faculty development

The unprecedented denominational fragmentation and isolation between the different networks of theological education is not vital for the future and for the common witness of Christianity in interfaith contexts and over against the general public of society. We need to

explore the creation of *proper new mechanisms of international cooperation between agencies and churches of different denominational orientation both on the international and on the regional level* to be more effective and to respond the needs of theological education both structurally and theologically.⁴³ The most important tool and platform for transformation in theological schools are the regional associations of theological schools, but unlike in ATS these entities are still very fragile, dependent on external support or are even non-existing like particularly in the African continent. As the ETE programme in WCC which at present is supported only by three major funding partners and churches is changing its role from becoming more relational in its global networking role and less directly involved in operational (grant giving) work in the regions, it certainly is interested to explore chances to bring about a new global platform of cooperation within the area of theological education to mobilize more support for associations of theological schools in networking with REOs. Without dominating or intending to recreate something like TEF some regular form of international exchange might be helpful with a number of key partners in order to identify development goals for theological education in different regions which are shared by several partners. The setting up of regional ecumenical funds for theological education has been proposed and ETE has initiated processes around these goals as one of the strategies in Africa, in Asia and in Latin America inviting other partners to join, though it is not yet clear how far this strategy can be sufficiently supported by the churches from the respective regions. It was in the consequence of Edinburgh 1910 that for a limited period a strategic global alliance of mission partners was formed to build up for theological education in the South. Perhaps it should be a consequence of Edinburgh 2010 that a strategic alliance of ecumenical partners and churches should be reinvented to support the creation and building of regional funds for theological education particularly in Africa, Asia, Latin America and particularly in China which are the areas in which fast developments are taking place and improvement in theological education is urgently needed.

c) Stimulating proper empirical research on regional developments, quality and financial viability in theological education

Another area for joint action and cooperation for the advancement in theological education is needed refers to *proper theological research on changes and trends in theological education*. We definitely need more in depth empirical data and historical and substantial theological research on recent trends, financial viability and developments in theological education in Asia and Africa as the landscape is changing rapidly but there are none or very few agencies investing to get proper research and a sound survey on recent developments done and made available in this area. Associations like ATESEA or Senate of Serampore, not to speak of associations in Africa, would be helped if somebody could do substantial research on what has been the impact on curriculum BD reform on church ministers or on financial viability and church support for theological education in Asia throughout the last decades. Similar research would be needed on the impact of theological scholarship programmes of different providers in Asia and Africa.

d) Raising a common voice for the future of theology within university settings

⁴³ The concluding report of Edinburgh 2010 session on theological education noted: “*An international working group for theological education should be considered - or explored to be established as working group within IAMS - which would bring together representatives of all Christian confessions beyond all present divides and which would serve as a continuation committee of this session of Edinburgh 2010 to explore common synergies and joint action in support of theological education for the mission of the Church.*”

Reports from both Europe and some other countries in Africa have underlined that in some countries colleagues in theological education interpret the situation as a state of emergency in which time has or will come to stand up in order to defend and *fight for the legitimacy of theology as a discipline in public universities*. Secularization, De-Christianization and also trends in research funding seem to move into a direction by which it is less likely to get support for a theological faculty and for proper theological research then it is possible to get funding for projects in the area of religious studies. While religious studies do form an important part of theological education, warning signals have been sent out by some over against a tendency to replace theology as a discipline by religious studies in principle. Churches need theology as a confession bound discipline of academia to claim its place and role in the public sphere and in the university context of post-modern societies. The value decisions and the role both of religions and spirituality which are at stake in society still need serious theological reflection from a theological discipline which is bound and guided by positional statements of faith as rooted in the catholic heritage of the universal church;

e) Defining ecumenical standards for quality in theological education

Churches in dialogue with theological seminaries and faculties need to come to some common guidelines developing a common framework for *understanding and defining of quality of theological education*⁴⁴. As national and international accreditation agencies will continue to question theological institutions which cannot give sufficient answers with regard to their quality standards it will be important for churches to come together in order to define some common standards for quality theological education and for minimum requirements for entering into the ministry (as Protestant churches in Europe and also a network of theological educators in Latin America have worked on already⁴⁵);

f) Strengthening the disciplines of missiology, World Christianity and Ecumenics

In the context of World Christianity in the 21st century which is full of unexpected and decentralized examples of “mission from everywhere to everywhere” theological education cannot fulfill its task without *disciplines or fields like missiology and World Christianity* playing their vital and indispensable part in the whole of the theological enterprise. The tendency to cut teaching staff positions in field of missiology, ecumenics and interreligious dialogue should be countered by deliberate attempts to securing the interrelatedness of theological education and missiology/mission concerns and issues of World Christianity and interreligious dialogue. Carrying on the ecumenical memory within the ecumenical movement cannot be taken for granted anymore. It needs to be seriously considered whether the WCC as the primary catalyst and agent of the ecumenical movement should create and support a specialized theological scholarship programme focused on PhD programmes and MTH programmes on ecumenism, ecumenical missiology and ecumenical interfaith dialogue in order to safeguard and enhance new ecumenical theological leadership in these key areas without which the ecumenical movement can easily die out from amnesia or gradual oblivion.

⁴⁴ See: Towards International Standards of Quality in Theological Education - ETE Reference Document 2009, in: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/education-and-ecumenical-formation/ecumenical-theological-education-ete/wcc-programme-on-ecumenical-theological-education/towards-international-standards-of-quality-in-theological-education-ete-reference-document-draft.html>

⁴⁵ See Michael Beintker, *The Study of Protestant Theology in Europe*, in: D. Werner et.al., *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity*, p. 556ff

g) Building bridges of synergy and exchange between Diaspora and homeland communities of theological educators

The implications of global migration for theological education have not yet been fully realized and explored for the international networking of theological education. It is very promising that FTESEA has put plans for more interaction between Diaspora communities of Asian theological educators and theological education systems in the Asian home countries as one of its top priorities and that the newly formed Association of Asian Theological Educators in North America (AATENA) will play its role in enhancing theological teaching in Asian colleges.⁴⁶ Similar models are also to be worked on with regard to African networks between African Diaspora churches and institutions of theological education on the African continent;

h) Overcoming mutual isolation and polarization in theological education - encouraging interdenominational schools and joint projects with Pentecostal theological education

The growing interest and self-confidence of Pentecostal churches in theological education programmes should be taken up and listened to carefully by theological colleges from mainline churches instead of following the path of separate development and reinforced denominationalism. There is a growing international community of highly qualified academic Pentecostal theological educators which have recently formed their own international network (WAPTE), demanding for a more visible role of Pentecostal schools of theology in the international landscape of theological education, better prominence given to theological education within Pentecostal churches themselves and higher emphasis to be put on Pentecostal denominational identity over against other networks (to some extent also with openness to relate to other networks and institutions of theological education)⁴⁷;

i) Joining forces in creating one global portal for a multilingual digital theological library

Theological knowledge transfer had taken the shape of theological text book programmes within the TEF period some 40 years ago. While the need for proper and contextualized theological textbooks continues today the means of communication have changed in the 21st century. An immediate priority for today is about working out new systems for a more just model of theological knowledge transfer between North and North, East and West which makes use of internet facilities. A project group in Geneva has worked on a “*Global Digital Theological Library*” – *Project* which does have a proper software and tools for harvesting machines already by being linked to the existing Globethics.Net Library system⁴⁸, but needs more support in terms of theological libraries and agencies cooperating and funds to allow for a major quantum leap in making available proper theological information in all kinds of direction, particularly South – South and South to North. The new developments in communication technologies open up better chances for programmes of theological e-learning and a global digital theological library networking system which can be promising for the future.

⁴⁶ Report of Network of Asian Theological Educators Meeting, jointly organized by the Asian Theological Summer Institute of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia and FTESEA, LTSP, June 5-7, 2010

⁴⁷ See their website: <http://wapte.org/> and the scholarly papers of the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education (WAPTE) consultation 2010 in Stockholm, 23-26 August 2010 (in cooperation with European Pentecostal Theological Association (EPTA) (conference folder)

⁴⁸ See website: <http://www.globethics.net/>

j) Developing common guidelines or standards for international ecumenical partnerships between institutions of theological education

A final point: WCC and its programme in Theological Education since Mexico City 1963 stood for a six-continent approach in theological education which – however one is counting the continents – implies that all regions of the inhabited earth should be in vital contact and proper partnership relations with all other regions with regard to enabling each other for the task for theological education. We do think that we could benefit from a *new understanding and new models of authentic and participatory cross-cultural partnership in theological education worldwide*.⁴⁹ What are our standards, our expectations and our criteria for proper and authentic ecumenical partnership in theological education with institutions and networks from other regions of this world? Are there specific experiences or guidelines on standards for ecumenical partnerships in theological education which can be shared with others? It would be beneficiary for many associations of theological schools like ATS or those from other continents if some guidelines based on recent expectations and experiences could be worked out which would pave the way for a more participatory, broad and future-oriented approach to partnership in theological education in global perspective – this is vital for theological Education in the changing context of World Christianity today – an unfinished agenda.

⁴⁹ The Concluding Report of the Edinburgh 2010 session on theological education had some provocative phrases on this issue : “*We also need new and authentic models of international partnerships between institutions of theological education in the North and the South, East and West. As it is a known fact that most of the Christians are in the South and most of the educational resources are in the North it is not acceptable that those who are in control of the inequity should attempt to solve this crisis with “tokenism” by making unilateral decisions about who comes and who does not, rather than giving up some of their privileges and developing models of mutual sharing and decision-making. The richest seminaries of this world, rather than becoming the “experts” on the communities of the South and importing select southern students to kneel at the altar of accredited education, should contribute to credible and authentic models of authentic partnership with theological colleges and faculties in the South.*”