

## Listeners' Report

### Consultation on Faculty Development and Formation for higher Theological Education Manila, September 25-28, 2022.

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The presentations reflected a strong yearning for and commitment to exploring relevant, innovative, distinctly Asian (Pacific included) methodologies and mechanisms.

The information and insights shared during the presentations are summarized under the following five areas of concern for further reflection:

#### **1. Re-imagining Faculty Formation**

Holding together research, teaching, community engagement (including with people in the struggle for life and justice), capacities for curriculum development, and pedagogical skills seems necessary in the distinct terrain of theological education in Asia.

Maintaining a creative and critical balance between academic excellence and theological vocation.

While recognizing the inevitable and perhaps necessary connection between theological academia and the church, we must set new parameters so that theological education remains not only in the service of the church but also as its pathfinder and catalyst.

We recognize the need to ensure that more women are supported for higher theological education and recruited as teachers.

#### **2. Challenges and Opportunities of Digitalization of Education**

Revolutionary changes have been taking place in the education field, offering various learning tools and methodologies. The experience during the pandemic has also reinforced that online learning offers new possibilities and more access to information and knowledge sharing.

However, it also has its limitations, particularly in theological education. These are about accessibility to gadgets, technological skills and facilities, experiential learning and contextual engagement. Theology is a discipline shaped by and engages with the lived experience of people in concrete situations of life.

How, then, do we use the opportunities of information technology in ways that do not overwhelm the distinct character of a discipline such as theology?

Online writing and publication in English and local languages may be easier and hence may be encouraged.

### **3. Asian methodologies and sources for higher theological education.**

Western theological academic standards and approaches continue to be normative for theological education in Asia. Theological disciplines and approaches remain within the contours of western ecclesiastical and theological parameters.

Even though Christianity now has a global face, in fact, a southern face, our methodologies continue to remain unchanged. We have been talking about decolonizing and contextualizing theological education for a long. It is high time that we launched concrete alternatives. In fact, Asian Christianity and Asian theologies, emerging out of extremely diverse and multifaith contexts amidst complex existential challenges and realities, have the capacity to offer alternatives not only to Asian theological institutions but also to the increasingly diverse and complex world.

What, then would the content and methodology of a truly Asian theological academic research look like? Some first steps could be: i) More Inter-disciplinary approaches, especially social sciences; ii) research in collaboration with people's knowledge systems and/or in conversation with people's experience; iii) collaboration with Christian social action initiatives, civil society organizations, etc.; iv) develop intra-regional research centers; and v) encourage exposure and study opportunities within Asia or the South?

### **4. Dialogical interaction with the religious and cultural traditions of people in context.**

Contextualization of theology is not merely about adapting to the context nor imitating dominant religio-philosophical systems, cultures, and traditions for appeal and acceptance, but engaging with the concrete contexts to transform and be transformed and to enhance possibilities for life.

Dialogical approaches are not merely to be intercultural, but to learn to be appreciative of diversity and to appropriate the reality of the interconnectedness of life – an approach that doesn't often seem to be the case with many a western theological tradition.

### **5. Theology in service of social transformation and as an instrument of God's mission**

The scope of Christian theology is for the whole people of God, not just for Christians and their communities.

With our methodologies set as per western parameters, the research content is often conditioned by the traditional fourfold approach for theological education: Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, History, and Church ministry.

Engagement with issues of life and people is often considered not important. But Asian life and context are conditioned by the dynamics of religion and culture and aggressive political and economic pursuits. Religious fundamentalism, cultural nationalism, economic injustice and crisis, political repression, criminalization of dissent, military coups and militarization, climate change, cultures of domination and discrimination and hatred and division, forced migration,

human trafficking and violence against women (patriarchy), and many more overwhelm our lives and relationships. Should we not embrace these as subject matters, not just for social sciences but also for theological reflection?

Following the presentation of the report as above, the consultation worked on four specific areas as below, making recommendations to FTESEA and the participating institutions:

**1. Faculty formation that responds to the distinct needs of the theological institutions in Asia-Pacific – ministerial, ecclesial, pedagogical skills, and curriculum development.**

Identify and accompany institutions/schools which have the potential to be hubs for faculty development and formation. These hubs could offer trainers training so alumni can develop faculty formation in their places.

Encourage the schools/institutions to include provisions for exchange and exposure in their budget.

Continue to organize faculty development/formation consultations and cooperate with national and other regional associations.

Develop a concept of accompaniment as a lifelong learning process to take away the pressure of timebound study plans.

Sustain formation while ensuring adequate time for learning, teaching and pastoral engagement.

Faculty development and formation, whether in university or seminary settings, must be conscious of the contextual realities and needs, such as in majority and minority settings.

Schools may be encouraged to have an intentional faculty development concept/project as part of their vision and mission, with components of mentoring and immersion in community life.

Such a formation helps the candidates to hold various tensions between church and theological education, academic training and ministerial formation, and teaching and research in creative tension.

**2. Imagining distinctly Asian methodologies for higher theological education.**

Initiate studies/debates on the relevance of the content and orientation of western theological education research methodologies.

Launch concerted processes for the exploration of methodologies built on and respond to Asian realities, resources and challenges.

More contextual engagement in order to draw on not only contextual experiences but also knowledge systems and traditions of prudence.

Research on and exposure to various Indigenous resources – pedagogies and other knowledge systems built on people's lived experiences.

Build on the distinct history, presence and contributions of Christian presence in a multi-religious and multi-cultural Asia.

### **3. Engaging with issues of life and people to ensure that theological education is liberative and transformative. (Focus on content and purpose)**

Any distinctly Asian method of theological education has to be responsive to the context and facilitate the liberation of the peoples and the transformation of societies. Therefore,

- Assert and build on concepts of life that hold forth its essential interconnectedness and interdependence, a feature common to most Asian worldviews. This calls for more intentional rejection of anthropocentric concepts of life, world and God;
- Affirm the diversity of creation as a positive theological resource;
- Engage with the resources of people of all living faiths, including scriptures, stories, and traditions; and
- Promote the Eleven Propositions in “Guidelines for Doing Theology in Asia”, ATESEA’s 2014 Handbook document.

### **4. Enhancing knowledge systems and resources – responding to the challenges and opportunities of digitalization of education and knowledge production**

The appointment of a theologically literate professional IT consultant may be considered. This person may advise and assist research centers in making the best use of online education platforms.

Consolidation of resources in collaboration with the Forum of Asian Theological Librarians.

Set up an online Asia-Pacific library portal.

Bring different resources and networks together by launching an Asian- curated site with standard copyright laws.

Translation of and Videos on classic Asian theological texts/works from different regions as resources for teachers and scholars.

Knowledge prioritizing seems necessary in our attempts to decolonize knowledge systems. This may include more inductive and experiential studies; selection of resources that are critical and useful in each respective context; and exploration of grants to encourage and support studies in contextual Asian theologies

Explore alternatives to western blind peer review to ensure research is assessed in a way that is faithful to Asian contexts.

