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Editorial

Theological Education: Challenges

An adequate and up-to-date theological education, faithful to the revelation and tradition, but at the same time adapted to the context, has been an important concern of the Church. The challenges that theological education faces today are many: keeping scientific rigour and enthusiasm; responding to the changes and trends in the culture; keeping fidelity to the mystery of faith; integrating new scientific knowledge and methods; guarding against fundamentalist tendencies which challenge scientific methods and rigour; contextual theological education; etc.

In many countries of Asia, like some other continents, formation of future priests continues to be the main concern of theological education. In such contexts theological education is integrally connected to priestly and religious formation and priestly ministry and the demands of the triple function of the priestly ministry, namely, that of sanctifying, teaching and administering. This also implies that academic community is basically a seminary community, directly under the bishop/s or bishops' conference, or under the religious major superior. Moreover, such faculties are often under the Congregation for Catholic Education and the curriculum is structured according to the norms of the Congregation. A degree in theology (or equivalent programme) is a requirement for priestly ordination. Sometimes, these may also imply restricted academic freedom and limited possibilities of adaptations according to particular socio-cultural contexts. Besides, theology may be studied not with enthusiasm, but just as a requirement for ordination.

Today, in many countries, a good number of people who are studying theology are laity. This has brought new dimensions to theological education. In many countries, similarly, the main context of theological education has shifted from seminary to Catholic universities or secular universities. This has given a new sense of

academic freedom and enthusiasm in theological education. However, in other countries, the opportunity that the laity get for theological education and employment possibilities for them continue to be limited.

Contextualization is a challenge that theological education continues to face. Contextualization is an ongoing process since the context is in continuous evolution due to the interplay of various factors – cultural, religious, social, economic, political, etc. Asia is considered as the land of religions, cultures as well as that of teeming millions of poor. That is why FABC has called for triple dialogue, considering these three main Asian realities of life: dialogue with the vibrant religious traditions, ancient cultures and teeming millions of Asian poor.¹ In the years following Vatican II, many faculties of ecclesiastical studies have been established in Asia. Contextualization through inter-cultural and interreligious dialogue and liberationist perspectives has been an important concern of these institutions of theological education. There were challenges: for example, theological method and concepts were basically Western; scepticism regarding initiatives taken by various institutions and subsequent control from authorities; limited resources and infrastructure; new challenges posed by globalization; rise of fundamentalist tendencies; lack of recognition of ecclesiastical studies and institutions by the governments; and so on. However, these institutions have played a vital role in forming post-colonial identities in the ecclesiastical context in Asia. Another welcome development in recent decades is the collaboration with institutions and theologians from the West who facilitate the triple dialogue in the Asian context and thus become active partners in developing Asian identity of institutions of theological education in Asia.

Veritatis Gaudium, the new Apostolic Constitution on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties by Pope Francis,² deserves a special attention and study in this context. Particularly, the vision presented in its “Foreword” is insightful. ‘The joy of truth’ is the fruit of the encounter with Jesus and of experiencing him; this is the goal of

¹Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Vol. 1: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1992, 14, 15; ¹Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., (1997), *For All the Peoples of Asia: Vol. 2: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1992 to 1996*, Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997, 2.

²Pope Francis, *Apostolic Constitution Veritatis Gaudium* (8 December 2017), <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/01/29/180129c.html>. Hereafter, VG.

theological studies.³ VG points out the need of bringing ecclesiastical education up to date and to renew it in the “changed socio-cultural context worldwide.”⁴ The Pope delineates four fundamental criteria for the renewal of ecclesiastical studies: 1. “...contemplation and the presentation of a spiritual, intellectual and existential introduction to the heart of the kerygma, namely the ever fresh and attractive good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ...”; 2. Wide-ranging dialogue, that promotes “a culture of encounter, in generous and open cooperation with all the positive forces that contribute to the growth of universal human consciousness...”; 3. “Inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches carried out with wisdom and creativity in the light of Revelation...”; 4. “‘Networking’ between those institutions worldwide that cultivate and promote ecclesiastical studies, in order to set up suitable channels of cooperation also with academic institutions in the different countries and with those inspired by different cultural and religious traditions.”⁵ These criteria give orientation to further development and promotion of ecclesiastical education in the changing and challenging contexts today.

Papers in this issue deal with various aspects of theological education today, as well as its challenges. Though a detailed study of *Veritatis Gaudium* is not attempted, some of the papers in this issue refer to its vision and reflect on its implications for today’s context.

Francis Thonippara offers the history of the priestly formation in the Church, and how it was integrally related to theological education and development. Second Vatican Council has given new perspectives to the spiritual, intellectual, human and social formation of the future clergy. In particular, Thonippara gives an overview of priestly formation in the Indian Church and its development. He argues that considering the multi-cultural, multi-religious reality of India, priestly formation should become more contextual. Konrad J. Noronha discusses the relationship between secular science and theological education and shows how secular sciences can enrich theological education. Referring to *Veritatis Gaudium* he argues that studies and research today must be interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary, and asks teachers of theology to interact with responsible freedom and mutual transparency, creating networks of specialized centres to facilitate the understanding of faith from various perspectives.

³VG, “Foreword,” 1.

⁴VG, “Foreword,” 1.

⁵VG, “Foreword,” 4.

Following this we have three essays on contextualizing theological education. Judith Könemann addresses the present state and the future of religious education in Germany, where religious education is part of the regular curriculum of the public education system. It is faith-oriented and denominational, and hence there is no provision for religious education for those who do not belong to any religion. According to her, one of the major challenges is to develop a system and didactic tools that offer religious education to non-religious, in order to give basic information. This is necessary especially as religion is regaining its role in the society, and the society has become religiously plural. Joseph Mattam presents a model of contextualization in theological formation from the multi-religious context of India. Inspired by Vatican II, Jesuits initiated various regional theologates emphasising the context, language of the place, life situation of people, etc. Their basic thrust is to attempt a theology from below. According to him, such contextualized formation is necessary to form persons rooted in God and truly for others. Najju Kalambukattu offers another model of contextual theological formation from India, namely, Samanvaya theological college of the CMI congregation, where theological formation for mission is given with a special emphasis on interiorization of the values from the context. Since mission is basically incarnational, missionaries should take into consideration the existing socio-cultural and religious situations and have a genuine love and respect for all peoples, cultures and religions. For this, theological formation in the actual life situation of the people, and in constant contact with their life is essential.

Joseph Thannickal explains how andragogy as a model of formative teaching meets many of the demands of *Veritatis Gaudium*. He argues that andragogy, a method proposed for teaching adults, is more suited for transformative learning for theological education, rather than pedagogy, the methods used for teaching children. Thannickal emphasises that in the andragogic approach, the teacher becomes a facilitator rather than a content transmitter. Rajesh Kavalackal compares two approaches to theology. In the first approach, theology may be concerned with clearly defined doctrines. Here, theologians and other faithful have only a passive role. In the second approach, God's self-gift to his people which they experience and communicate in various ways through symbols, rituals, creeds, doctrines and praxis is the focus. In this approach, which considers theology basically as theological anthropology, the faithful have a positive role to play. Kavalackal argues that the second approach

must be adopted so that theology may become relevant to the actual context. Maria Lucia C. Natividad considers religious education as a form of the ministry of the word in the service of the Christian faith that requires critical thinking about faith and faith's relation to life. She proposes integration as the method to address the common problems in teaching the faith. Imagination is the key in the process of integrating Christian faith and life. Imagination sees the created reality as a sacrament and finds suitable ways to respond to the revelation of the divine in living out the Christian faith.

Klaus Vellguth highlights the importance and benefits of 'networking' among institutions of theological education. Referring to the role of Missio Aachen in initiating different networks in Asia and Africa, and explaining in detail the 'Network Pastoral Asia,' an Asian forum of collaboration, exchange and enrichment among pastoral institutes to make pastoral outreach relevant to our times, Vellguth points out that this is an excellent model of the networking proposed by *Veritatis Gaudium*. Anthony L. Fernandes elaborates upon the history, importance, and sources for the theological education of the laity. Referring especially to the work of Edward Farley, Fernandes identifies three stages in the history of theological education. In the patristic and medieval period, theology was available to all Christians, since it was understood as salvifically oriented mystical knowledge. In the second period theology becomes more of a discipline and a science, available in universities, creating thereby a certain separation between the clergy and the laity. In the third stage, with the establishment of the seminaries, theological education is practically restricted to the clergy. In the 19th and 20th centuries, with the rediscovery of the concepts of the Church as People of God and the common priesthood of all Christians, and especially with Vatican II, the relevance of theological education of the laity is rediscovered and emphasised. Fernandes argues that if the laity have to grow in holiness and influence the world, their theological education is a must, especially on account of the grave crises that we face today. Edwin B. Odulio discusses the challenges of theological education of the current generation of young people. This generation of young people is very much aware of social issues. Hence it is necessary that such issues are brought into religious education. It is equally important to offer them a hermeneutical guide that helps them appreciate the Scriptures. Odulio emphasises the importance of paying attention to the vision of young people, and the need of inspiring their vision with the vision of the Kingdom of God.

Shinto Puthumattathil George, on the background of secularism, proposes new ways of understanding God, world and human beings. Making use of Kantian, Heideggerian and Rahnerian concepts he explains how theological truths can be presented within a philosophical framework, responding to the call to read 'the signs of the times.' According to Puthumattathil, theology need to 'unlearn and relearn' the world concept not on account of its relative importance, but on account of its creative importance. Moreover, he suggests grounds on which theology and philosophy can mutually contribute. Saji Mathew Kanayankal discusses the task of theological education in the 'post-truth' era, where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. Elements of post-truth era can be noticed in different countries, but Kanayankal gives a special attention to the Indian context, the political as well as the ecclesiastical sphere. There are many events wherein facts are fabricated, truths are hidden and false information is circulated. Drawing upon *Veritatis Gaudium* and other documents of Pope Francis, Kanayankal underscores that theological education is a means to open oneself to the wider horizons of human realities that enables him/her to see and experience the truth in its fullness and to witness to it in spite of the shadows that hinder him/her.

Renewal and updating of theological studies in fact should begin with an encounter with Jesus, in whom the mystery of God and mystery of human life are fully revealed, and should lead to a more profound experience of the same Lord. Moreover, it should facilitate the relationship between theology and pastoral care, and between faith and life.⁶

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⁶VG, "Foreword," 2.