



Curriculum Theologiae

## Contextualization and Excellence for Theological Formation in India/Asia Today

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# CONTEXTUALIZATION AND EXCELLENCE IN THEOLOGICAL FORMATION IN INDIA/ASIA TODAY

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**Excellences, dear participants in the conference,**

**I welcome you as the Director of the Institute of Missiology, which organized the conference in collaboration with FISU. I thank you all for coming and specially FISU for hosting the conference.**

**Why did we wish to have this conference? There are two reasons: one is more global and one is based on the relation between the Institute and theological Institutes in India.**

**The first reason:**

**In 1998 Raül Fornet-Betancourt, the then collaborator of the Institute of Missiology, made a worldwide survey on the question what are the challenges for theology and philosophy in the new millennium. Responses from all over the world gave an interesting insight what important theologians and philosophers from different cultures and continents saw as a challenge for and consequently the task of theology and philosophy in this millennium. The answers needed to be discussed and a series of conferences was started in different countries on the question of “How to teach theology/philosophy today?”. There were conferences in Asia, Northern and Southern America, in Asia and the Middle East and in Europe. The proceedings of most of these conferences are published.**

**Becoming director of the Institute of Missiology in 2009 I insisted to continue this discussion in the area of theology when the institute had to concentrate on the post-graduate formation of future teachers of theology in Africa and Asia. I think the responsibility of the Institute can not be limited to the financial aspect that is the provision of scholarships for Master and especially for doctoral studies. The donor of a scholarship has also a certain responsibility of the way, the place and the content of the studies. The Institute is responsible to the donors for the purpose for what is financed. Thus we are**

interested in theological formation programs, their impact and outcome, as well as their development.

In 2011, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Institute of Missiology we hold a conference in Bonn / Germany with the topic “Relevance and Excellency. Contextual theologies in a globalized world”. The participants came from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. Though we discussed also the aspect of theological formation in Africa, Latin America and Asia, the formation program in Europe was focused in a special way. As students from all continents come to European universities in order to write their doctoral thesis, the question arises how these doctoral theses can be contextual. Does the university staff have enough specialists to supervise thesis on problems which has a specific context in another culture? What and how has the theological faculty in Europe to teach so that the formation in Europe is relevant to the African, Asian and Latin American context. Should the accent be on methodology or on content? I had the impression that most of the participants tended to accentuate the methodology rather than the content. Beside scholars teaching at different theological faculties we listened also to students from other continents doing or having done their thesis in Europe. Most of the contributions are published on [www.curriculum-theologiae.org](http://www.curriculum-theologiae.org).

During this conference the wish was expressed to continue the reflections on these questions, what we do today with a special focus on Indian faculties and Indian context. But it is not limited to India. Participants from other continents are participating. We hope for their input, but they hopefully will also benefit from this discussion for reflecting their own context. Furthermore I am convinced that today real contextual theology must be in dialog with other theologies as there is a permanent interaction between the different parts of the world and an exchange of ideas and world views. To avoid a nostalgic view on the own “good old” tradition, I am convinced that contextual theology today has to participate in a global dialog.

The second reason why we wanted this conference lies in the changing of the conditions of our work in the institute of missiology. The context of our Institute is changing.

**Christianity and churches in Europe are losing their traditional place and importance and have to look for their future. This has as one of the consequences the decreasing financial possibilities. Already today the Institute of Missiology cannot support all good and important activities it is asked for and in future it will be even less. We have to choose initiatives which we can still support and institution with which we can continue to collaborate. In order to have a better basis for our choice we did some evaluation of institutions of higher theological learning, among them a number of Indian ones. We wanted to have answers to the following questions: how developed the institutions with which we collaborated in the last years? Did the investments lead to a high quality formation with impact on the local church and society? For the Institute as well as for missio we wanted to know which promising, but still developing institution continue to need financial support and which institution is so developed that we can recommend the studies in this place. We had a deeper interest in the field of specialization of that institution and their specificities. It is this field of specialization and specificities which is important for the contextuality and the inculturality of the theological teaching to be discussed in this conference. The concrete teaching is the background and the target of our discussion.**

**You are all invited to reflect together on the way theology is taught in India today and what are the challenges, the short comes, the achieved results.**

**India itself presents to us a multi-religious, multi-cultural country with a complex social structure and an industrialization which transforms the society as a whole. How do and how should respond the institutions in charge of the theological formation to these challenges? Teaching other religions is one possibility to increase the knowledge, but would the self presentation by a religion's representative not only increase the knowledge but also initiate a possible dialogue? Under which condition is it possible and desirable? Can it be done with Muslims and Hindus? Is it also possible with tribal religions or do we need other forms of dialog?**

**Similar questions arise with the multi-culturality. Let's take the language as a cypher for the culture: there are hundreds of languages in India. English is a national and international language and teaching in English can be understood in all seminaries. In**

English you can keep the contact to the Anglophone theology – not to all the other foreign theologies. It is just one branch. But what's about local languages. If theology must become relevant to the people and with a preference to poor, it must be taught also in the local language. Theology in local language is not only important for the clergy and religious, but also for the empowerment of the lay people, especially in the church and for their social commitment. The question is whether those who are theologizing in local language, do they have enough readers? Finally the challenge is to do both, to be a bridge between the local and the outer world.

Another important question seems to me: Are those who leave these institutions with a diploma well prepared to answer the questions concerning religion, human life and society? Does theology have any impact on those who are not belonging to the clergy? If theology is only important for clergy and religious, then it is only important for preservation of the church administration, power structure and top down pastoral. Since Vatican II we know that the lay people are not only objects of pastoral work, but full members of the church. Theological formation should empower them and in the church and in the society. That does not mean that they should get the same formation, but an adequate formation for their service in the world. That does not mean a theology light for lay people and sisters, but other aspects of theology should be focused.

If the seminary is the specific institution for the future clergy, the faculties in State universities, or Chairs of Christianity may be the place for the formation of the laity. It is necessary to take into consideration how theology is taught in these institutions and what is taught. In order to see the relevance of these studies, we have to look at those who are doing studies at these chairs and what they are doing afterwards with their knowledge. They need not necessarily be employed by the church. The studies can be relevant for other occupations. However it seems to me important that there is a dialog and an intensive exchange between seminaries, or faculties of theology and those chairs of Christianity. This dialog may increase the impact of theology on the society.

Without going into details I just want to raise the question of dialog and cooperation with non catholic theological institutions, human rights groups and civil movements. They all may be partners in the services to the world and especially to the poor.

**The results of this conference should be some suggestions how to improve theological teaching and what help is needed and desired. But we should be aware of the duration and the workload of theological studies. We cannot put everything into the curriculum which seems to be important, good and necessary. Theological studies are already long, many people say even too long. In practice this means that we have to choose and diversify the studies. I know that Rome decrees many of the aspects of the curriculum but the space for own ideas should be used. Space for ideas and suggestions is very wide though the place for their realization may be small.**

**With this in mind I wish us all a fruitful and lively discussion.**