



Curriculum Theologiae

# Theological Formation in India Today

## Goals, Beneficiaries and Practical Aspects

Saju Chackalackal

<https://doi.org/10.48604/ct.129>

Submitted on: 2013-12-19

Posted on: 2013-12-19

(YYYY-MM-DD)

This content is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License \(CC BY-SA 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

### You are free to:

**Share** — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format.

**Adapt** — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

### Under the following terms:

**Attribution** — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

**ShareAlike** — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.

**No additional restrictions** — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

***Contextualising and Excellence: Challenges for Theological Formation in Today's India***

20-21 September 2013

Institute of Missiology Missio, Aachen

**THEOLOGICAL FORMATION IN INDIA TODAY: GOALS,  
BENEFICIARIES, AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS****Fr. Saju Chackalackal CMI  
President, DVK, Bangalore****1. Introduction**

The Indian scene of education is passing through a changing and challenging phase as most of the disciplines try to tune in themselves for a market-driven economy. As the society is mostly motivated and driven by economic benefits, the content and method of education of young minds seem to be taking the same route, the fallout being human and intellectual formation that comes through a longer process of being initiated into the culture and values evolving from the life lived by humanity all through the history.

Theological formation of those who take up leadership roles in Christian communities is expected to be founded in the faith experience of Christians down the centuries. Although the Church leadership has been taking every possible step to make theological formation as effective as possible, many seem to have reservations against various formation programmes, especially with regard to the context, content, and methodology adopted in various institutional settings. In attempting to respond to such reservations, over a period of last three or four decades, theological formation has undergone a lot of experiment, although their results still remain inconclusive. Unfortunately, an overreaction towards the traditional paradigm of theological formation, along with an overemphasis on practical aspects (at the exclusion of theoretical), immediate or short-sighted goals (eclipsing the final and lasting goals of Christian life), and confusion as to the beneficiaries of the entire process, has resulted in constricting the dynamics of the very formation process. Hence, there is a need to dwell deeply into the inner dynamics of theological formation, especially with a special focus on the Indian reality: the context, the people, the goal of Christian life lived out in India.

Given the context of the Year of Faith being celebrated by the Catholic Church, and as all members of the community are invited to rekindle and reaffirm the faith foundations to lead a renewed Christian life, our deliberations about theological formation should primarily focus on the faith content and its effective understanding and experience in order to reinvigorate the concerns of new evangelization, especially in the context of India. Even after long years of theological formation, if we lose the spontaneous abilities to share the Word of God and our personal experiences resulting from an encounter with Jesus, our theological training is in need of serious self-examination and the content and objectives of the theological programme must be revamped.

Hence, in this essay, I propose to dwell on an understanding of basic paradigms of education or intellectual formation in the Indian milieu and initiate a discussion on the need of revamping theological formation in view of addressing the concerns, challenges and prospects of the Indian Church, especially by focusing on the beneficiaries, goals, and some of the practical aspects of theological formation so that a more effective but practically viable

system could be conceived in order to better serve the Church at large and the Indian Church in particular.

## 2. A Perspective on Education

The Sanskrit word *vinaya* offers us a significant understanding of the process of education that we try to impart in and through our educational institutions. *Vinaya* literally means “to lead out.” That is, a method of education, *vinayasadhana*, is considered to be successful only when it enables a person to become a mature and integrated person by drawing in from the inner powers to their full potential. Although such a process necessarily involves imparting information to the students, all processes must climax in facilitating an internal process of integration within the person, whereby it would, in turn, facilitate a formation and a transformation of the person in view of being a creative contributor in the larger society. The understanding of education based on its Latin root also has the same significance. *Educare*, for example, also means “to lead out.” Hence, education, in its classical sense, is a process that enables the person to blossom from within the core of oneself, all external ingredients being facilitators of or contributing factors to this process. In its ideal form, education should, then, facilitate understanding each one’s inner self, potentialities, and possible horizons of development so that he or she could be properly prepared to face the challenges in life and make the best out of life.

From the perspective of considering education, especially as a process of learning, it becomes most effective when students live and learn in an atmosphere of freedom within which they are facilitated to discover truth for themselves, rather than being indoctrinated by the system, teachers being the last link in that structural chain. This sense is echoed in the words of Richard Shaull, who wrote in his “Foreword” to the much celebrated work of Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”<sup>1</sup> The necessary element of freedom in the process of education is also conceived in the vision of education inculcated by the Catholic Church as well. “The Declaration on Christian Education,” issued by Vatican Council II, envisages it as follows: “... children and young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual endowments so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, education basically aims at a formation of the person, who would, in turn, become integrated into the larger society, not in terms of his or her conformity to the existing patterns, but by creatively engaging in the present to bring about a transformation – within oneself and in the larger society – with the support of the critical wisdom from the generations that have been opening up new avenues in exercising their freedom, culturing oneself in an attitude of hope, keeping open to the emerging realities in the future.

---

<sup>1</sup>Richard Shaull, “Foreword” in Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, New York: Continuum, 1990, 15.

<sup>2</sup>Vatican Council II, “Declaration on Christian Education,” §1.

Looking at the emerging patterns of education from such a perspective invites us to critique the existing education institutions and the new culture of education that seems to invade the portals of all educational endeavours. As most of us function on the fundamental principles of economic capitalism, the principles of the market seem to offer us the basic dynamics of present educational institutions. As the economic benefits accrued from education count the most as far as both the providers of education and all other stakeholders are concerned, there develops a total neglect of the formative character of education, the value inculcation, and the personal transformation that each individual would experience through his or her participation in the process of education. If education has to be reinstated to its glorious position of *the* powerful transforming process, the approach of the society, in particular the present generation of education providers as well as other stakeholders must change. There is a necessity to recognize the value of education not only to develop skills but more importantly also to develop the inner potentials of the persons involved in the process of education.

### **3. Four Pillars of Education Proposed by UNESCO**

*Learning: The Treasure Within* (Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century), published in 1996, conceives of four foundational pillars for effective integrated education in the present times. These four pillars are: (1) learning to know, (2) learning to do, (3) learning to be, and (4) learning to live together. These four pillars are identified to enable both the educators and the subjects of education to ensure that “education ... simultaneously provide[s] maps of a complex world in constant turmoil and the compass that will enable people to find their way in it.”<sup>3</sup>

#### **3.1. Learning to Know**

“Learning to know” conceives of education as providing the cognitive tools required to better comprehend the world and its complexities, and to provide an appropriate and adequate foundation for future learning. We must aim at both broader and deeper knowledge so that educational systems would enable the participants to have greater chances to understand the different aspects of the environment in which we are placed. It proposes a dynamic approach to the whole process of education, where learning is expected to come not merely out of initiating a student into the available lore of information through ‘rote learning’. Although introducing a student to the existing knowledge domains is important as an initial step, learning to know envisages that the development that is brought about would include the development of the faculties of memory, imagination, reasoning, problem-solving skills, and, more importantly, the capacity to think coherently, critically, and creatively. Here the information gathered through the initial steps should invite the student to surge ahead to one’s own discovery of the truth and reality. This not only expects that the student is trained in an ambience of freedom, but he or she is always encouraged and expected to explore the reality in one’s own ways. The ability to judge a thing or an event by oneself is an important talent that each person should aim at. Apart from the discovery that is expected to take place in this process of learning, we need to additionally emphasize the need of education to facilitate a self-discovery and self-development as one of the primary goals of education. While knowledge is capable of transformation, mostly its transformative powers are celebrated in the material domains; however, its transformative

---

<sup>3</sup>Delors, Jacques et al, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Paris: UNESCO, 1996, 85.

powers are far more effectively brought to fruition when the transformation begins from oneself. 'Learning to know', though certainly important as a primary pillar of education, it may not justify itself in creating a sense among the seekers that knowing everything is possible for someone at some point. Instead, it gives us a sense of open search for truth, which will incessantly continue all through the lifetime of every person. Hence, an excellent system of education would be that which enables a student to participate in an unending search for truth, into which each one contributes a part by one's own specialised inquiry and creative involvement.

### **3.2. Learning to Do**

"Learning to do," as it is conceived by the document, provides the skills that would enable individuals to effectively participate in the global economy and society. As learning in the first pillar offers a transformation of consciousness, the second pillar calls for the need of applying the same transformed consciousness into the development of skills that would enable the student as well as the society in which he or she is placed to lead a qualitatively better life. In other words, this invites the learners to transform theoretical learning into practical skills so that life could be better facilitated for all. It also aims at developing better behavioural patterns in the life of individuals who would become, in the course of time, creative persons in the enhancement of a humane culture within the larger human society. This would mean that the aim of education is not merely development of technical skills but competence in different domains of one's life and relationship. Thus, 'learning to do' includes abilities such as communicating effectively and developing interpersonal skills, aptitude for teamwork, adaptability to change in social life and the contexts of one's profession, competency in transforming knowledge into innovations and job-creation, a readiness to take risks and resolve or manage conflicts, etc.<sup>4</sup>

### **3.3. Learning to Live Together**

"Learning to live together," the third pillar, calls for exposing individuals to the values implicit within human rights, democratic principles, intercultural understanding and respect and peace at all levels of society and human relationships to enable individuals and societies to live in peace and harmony. The first two pillars culminate in this third one so that all that is ideally conceived in them would gradually lead us to the establishment of a society in which all members would find their being in peaceful coexistence. This would call for developing abilities for self-analysis and other capacities which would enable one to tune in oneself into the larger society. The focus of 'learning to live together' is more on an existence of oneself emerging from an understanding of one's interdependence. For example, from this perspective, my individual existence must proceed from my being rooted in the family and society, of course, myself being a unique and irreplaceable component of these larger units. Understanding one's 'being' in the context of interdependence opens up the avenues to better understand and appreciate differences that exist in our human societies and communities, where despite differences there are opportunities for better communication, collaboration, and coexistence. In this regard, enhancement of interpersonal relationships, quest for ongoing dialogue, caring for the wellbeing of the other, readiness to work towards the realization of common goals, etc., would become important goals of education.

---

<sup>4</sup>Zhou Nan-Zhao, "Four 'Pillars of Learning' for the Reorientation and Reorganization of Curriculum: Reflections and Discussions," at <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/cops/Competencies/PillarsLearningZhou.pdf> (accessed on 15 August 2013).

### 3.4. Learning to Be

“Learning to be,” the fourth and final pillar, provides self-analytical and social skills to enable individuals to develop to their fullest potential psycho-socially, affectively as well as physically, for an all-round ‘complete’ person. This pillar expects to take root from the first three pillars with their emphasis on the development of a consciousness leading to transformative practice, facilitating a living together for the greater good of the whole creation. It is not enough that one amasses a lot of information and gathers a number of skills; both of these must contribute into the making of one’s being, where one has to learn to exist both in one’s personal space and also in one’s social space. This, then, calls for humanizing oneself in the best way possible by taking into account the development of one’s personality with its intellectual, moral, cultural, and physical aspects. It leads us to an understanding of education as an unceasing process – from birth to death – that must contribute to the complete development of the person from physical and intellectual to moral and spiritual dimensions. These, I hope, will enable a person both to get rooted in the given context and also to open up oneself to other communities and cultures so that in being oneself, there would be ample space to branch out in freedom of thought and expression, access to opportunities, and recognition as human beings without the restrictions of any limiting factor contributed by the existing structures or systems.

As it is obvious from the above paragraphs, these four pillars are not to be understood as existing and functioning in isolation; they complement each other in such a way that all of them together offer us an opportunity for conceiving an integral or holistic education. Indeed, they are interdependent pillars, which contribute in the making and enhancement of a better educational system, aiming at the transformation of human persons and the human society at large. If these four pillars are taken seriously into account in the planning of educational institutions and the programme of education (including the curriculum and method), all stakeholders in the context of education would benefit, not only in terms of the enhancement of the economic and social life, but would offer a stronger matrix of education which would take the humanity to greater levels of *humane* existence.

As the very title of the UNESCO’s report indicates, *learning is conceived to be a treasure within*, a treasure that is already present in one’s own self, which would get firmly founded on these four pillars. Taking cue from what was proposed earlier I find that UNESCO does not lay too much emphasis on the imparting of the information but the processing of the same leading to the inner transformation of the person, which would then become the source of personal as well as societal wellbeing. Thus, any process of education has to begin with the acquisition of information – about oneself, others, and the rest of the world – and would climax in an authentic existence through the practical application of what is being learned for the good of oneself and all and, thus, creating a better society to live together.

## 4. Four Pillars of Theological Formation

Theology is traditionally considered to be “faith seeking understanding.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this basically emphasises the rational dimension of the content of theology and the process of theologizing, although certainly there is, at the same time, a greater emphasis on the divine dimension in the whole enterprise. Along this line, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles, and Criteria*, a document issued by the International Theological Commission, in 2011, holds

---

<sup>5</sup>“*Fides quaerens intellectum*”: Anselm, Prosligion, Proemium (in S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera omnia, ed. F. S. Schmitt, t.1, p.94).

that “theology strives to understand what the Church believes, why it believes, and what can be known *sub specie Dei*. As *scientia Dei*, theology aims to understand in a rational and systematic manner the saving truth of God.”<sup>6</sup> This document offers a succinct understanding of theology and highlights twelve important criteria that the Catholic theology should not miss. They are the following: (1) recognition of the primacy of the Word of God (§9), (2) taking the faith of the Church as its source, context and norm (§15), (3) accepting theology as the science of faith (§19), (4) drawing constantly upon the canonical witness of Scripture and promoting the anchoring of all of the Church’s doctrine and practice in that witness, since ‘all the preaching of the Church, as indeed the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture’ (§24), (5) fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition (§32), (6) striving to discover and articulate accurately what the Catholic faithful actually believe (*sensus fidelium*) (§36), (7) giving responsible adherence to the Magisterium in its various gradations (§44), (8) practising theology in professional, prayerful and charitable collaboration with the whole company of Catholic theologians in the communion of the Church, in a spirit of mutual appreciation and support, attentive both to the needs and comments of the faithful and to the guidance of the Church’s pastors (§50), (9) being in constant dialogue with the world by reading the signs of the times illuminated by the light that comes from divine revelation, and to profit from doing so in its life and mission (§58), (10) giving a scientifically and rationally argued presentation of the truths of the Christian faith (§73), (11) attempting to integrate a plurality of enquiries and methods into the unified project of the *intellectus fidei*, insisting on the unity of truth and the fundamental unity of theology itself (§85), and (12) seeking and being delighted in the wisdom of God which is foolishness to the world (§99). All these criteria offer us a direction as to how a theologian in the Catholic Church should theologize; in fact, they indicate certain key factors that are to be kept in mind in planning for the theological formation as well.

Late Bishop Jonas Thaliath, the visionary behind the planning and establishment of Dharmaram College, without giving up the traditional understanding of theology aiming at greater understanding of faith, has offered a more integral understanding of what theology should aim at in the contemporary times. According to him, “theology is faith seeking harmony of life.” Here the search for and attempt to seek harmony of life expects an ongoing attempt on the part of a faithful person and community to understand the content of faith, all understandings gradually leading to an ultimate harmony of life anchored in the person of Jesus Christ experienced and celebrated in a community of the faithful.

Taking the above two positions on theology into account, it becomes clear that theology is not merely an isolated speculative exercise, but the application of human reason in order to make our Christian faith deeper and meaningful in the given context of a practising Christian community. Accordingly, theologians are those members of a faithful community of Christians who would closely look at the faith content with the tool of reason so that their personal and communitarian faith can be deepened and strengthened by bringing their Christian faith in close contact with the living context of a community. Theological formation, then, is a process of inducting members of such a community for the sake of initiating them into the art and technique of applying reason to the received faith content with the intention of arriving at greater clarity and deeper understanding in view of

---

<sup>6</sup>International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles, and Criteria*, Vatican: Editrice Vaticana, 2011, §19.

enabling them to be the instruments of harmonizing enlightenment within the context of a practising Christian community of faithful.

As the aim of this paper is to highlight the nature and prospects of theological formation in India with a special focus on the practical aspects, goals, and beneficiaries, it is essential that we develop a better understanding of theological formation in the Catholic Church. It is true that most of the writings in the Church on theological formation are made in the context of priestly formation, as for many centuries theological formation was considered to be an essential requirement exclusively of the clergy; however, as we approach the issues related to theological formation, though we may not restrict ourselves to the dynamics of priestly formation, it would be prudent on our part to take such sources seriously so that a proper understanding of theological formation relevant to the contemporary times could be made. Such an approach is pertinent especially as the domain of theological formation is no more restricted to the clerical candidates, but to the wider Christian community; in fact, it must be seen not only as a contingency plan to address the lack of clergy to manage the sacramental and administrative needs of the Church, but principally as an attempt to inculcate deeper Christian faith and, thus, to develop a proper Christian outlook among the faithful. From this viewpoint, every Christian is a prospective candidate for theological formation with the hope that the faith received in baptismal grace by the faithful of the Church could be further catered to by way of enabling them to make it more intelligent through the application of the God-given powers of reasoning so that all of them would succeed in constituting a more harmonious Christian community, anchored in the person of Jesus Christ and reaching out to the wider human society.

The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* ("I Will Give You Shepherds: On the Formation of Priests in the Circumstances of the Present Day," 1992), along with *Optatam totius* ("Decree on the Training of Priests," 1965), and *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* (1970 and 1985), in article 42, gives a succinct understanding of the vital dimensions that are to be attended to in priestly formation. They are human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. Although the Apostolic Exhortation goes on explaining various aspects of these from the perspective of priestly formation, I propose that they could, at the same time, be considered as the four pillars for a harmonious or holistic theological formation of the Christian faithful. For, though priestly formation and theological formation could be distinguished from the point of view of ministerial priesthood, the necessary connection between basic Christian vocation and theological formation cannot be denied. In other words, theological formation cannot be properly offered unless we take these four pillars or dimensions into account.

#### **4.1. Human Formation**

As theology is seen as faith seeking harmony of life, application of theological method on the content of faith within a given Christian community presupposes that the person who undergoes formation has been established as a proper and harmonious person. Someone who has not developed one's own human potentials would not be in a position to engage in a proper and harmonious application of one's understanding upon the content and practise of Christian faith. This calls for the need of basic human formation – in normal human powers, in the ability to perceive and develop sound value consciousness, in facilitating emotional maturity, etc. – leading to the possible level of human perfection, before anyone undertakes serious theological engagement and formation. For, one's engagement with theology is not merely for one's own sake, especially as any Christian vocation is placed



within the ambit of the community of faithful, but a formation that should prepare one for a meaningful insertion into the faith-community. Unless one is properly developed as a human being, the very purpose of theological formation cannot be achieved. Naturally, this lays an important emphasis on the need, at least, for general education in arts and sciences that would offer the necessary tools for the due development of one's natural capacity to understand the realities of this world and the signs of the times, both of which would come quite handy in connecting the Word of God and the realities of the mundane world. Development of human abilities, including a sound moral conscience, emotional maturity, and communication skills, etc., is naturally considered to be a source of making oneself effectively available to the larger Christian community. Knowing the depths of the human heart, perceiving difficulties and problems, facilitating meeting and dialogue, creating trust and cooperation, expressing serene and objective judgments, etc., on the part of a person who undergoes theological formation would enable that person to make more meaningful and relevant theological synthesis that would have a true bearing on the contemporary Church and society (see PDV §43).

#### **4.2. Spiritual Formation**

While human formation would set the base-stage for the development of human potentials, theological formation has its goal in terms of facilitating a grasp of divine realities and their relationship with the concerns of the mundane world. This calls for a deep and lasting spiritual orientation in the person who undergoes theological formation. For, unlike other human sciences, Catholic theology cannot be seen as an abstract science; it is a science that would make sense only if the person who participates in the process of formation is a committed Christian having his or her conviction in the presence and working of the Spirit in each person and in the whole of creation. This calls for ability on the part of the person who undergoes theological formation to have a sense of and orientation towards transcendental realities, especially to the person of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Triune God in oneself and in the community of faithful. The decree of Vatican Council II, *Optatam Totius* holds that "Spiritual formation ... should be conducted in such a way that the students may learn to live in intimate and unceasing union with God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit" (§8). It is suggested that an abiding communion with the person of Jesus Christ would enable a candidate who undergoes theological formation to experience a lasting transformation whereby one would get established in the Christian community.

Christian way is an ongoing search for God in and through the person of Jesus Christ; this would climax only in establishing a lasting personal communion between the seeker and Jesus Christ. As a Christian is expected to be united with the mystery of God revealed to us in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, borrowing an India expression, we could say that during theological formation every person should undergo *sravana*, *manana*, and *nidhidhyasana*, meaning listening to the Word of God, reflecting over the same, and getting transformed so that one would not only acquire information about the mysteries of God's intervention in human history, but would personally relate and, as a result, would begin to abide in them. Therefore, processes such as prayerful and meditative reading of the Word of God (*lectio divina*), prayer in silence (§47), wholehearted participation in the Eucharistic celebration, regular access to the sacrament of penance (§48), practising charity by being closer and committed to the people of God, especially the poor, the sick, the marginalized, etc., with whom one would be ready to share oneself generously and freely (§49), and

availing oneself unconditionally for the other (§50) are considered to be integral part of spiritually forming oneself in understanding and practising theology. Although many of the above practices are highlighted for the practice of the clerical candidates, it must be borne in mind that, fundamentally, they are all Christian spiritual values, which every Christian is expected to practice in one's ordinary life. Hence, their practice in the life of a person who would undertake theological formation cannot be overemphasized.

### **4.3. Intellectual Formation**

As one gets established through human and spiritual formation, he or she would begin to employ one's intellect to participate "in the light of God's mind" and to seek to acquire a wisdom which, in turn, opens to and is directed toward knowing and adhering to God (*Gaudium et Spes* §15). Intellectual formation is quite significant as it would supplement the human and spiritual, especially in view of articulating one's Christian faith experience in relation to the vicissitudes of our human existence. Theological formation, in particular, calls for a deeper understanding of the Christian mysteries so that a theologically trained person would be able to articulate and explain the content of faith to anyone who seeks it; moreover, just as every Christian is an active agent of evangelisation, a theologian has to respond to a greater call in making himself or herself available for reaching out to those who either have not heard about Jesus Christ or those who are in need of better understanding about mysteries of Incarnation. In either case, an intellectually equipped person would be in a position to serve the needs of such people better.

Another important role that theology plays is to connect the Word of God with the contemporary realities by employing the powers of human reason. Although the divine mysteries cannot be completely and exhaustively understood by any human person or human system, an incessant attempt with regard to better grasping those realities is always a necessity. This can be properly fulfilled only by employing our intellectual faculty. Hence, the role of intellect in theological formation cannot be overemphasized. As human intellectual powers are to be employed in understanding and responding to the Christian mysteries, there is a need to develop a "critical discernment" (§51) on the part of a person who undergoes theological formation; for, only if one is trained in this critical discernment, he or she would be in a position to apply one's rational powers properly in relation to the understanding and articulation of the Word of God placed in the context of the world.

Given the uncertainty resulting from the postmodern status of the intellect and all that could be established by the intellectual processes (altogether addressed as a *postmodern drift*), there is an increasing loss of definitiveness with regard to various positions being adopted by ideologies and systems. This postmodern flux is certainly affecting the central theological positions of the Church as a whole. As this uncertainty is found to be increasing, theological formation has to emphasize on the importance not only of the intellect but also to place the same intellect at the service of the Word of God. In this context, care must be exercised in the process of learning to theologize as it must be animated and restricted by the Word of God, community of the faithful, and the teaching authority of the Church. *Patores dabo vobis* states that "the living magisterium of the Church and theology, while having different gifts and functions, ultimately have the same goal: preserving the People of God in the truth which sets free and thereby making them 'a light to the nations'" (PDV §55). Such a careful approach would equip someone who is initiated into theologizing to not only to know the Word of God and its role in the life of an ecclesial community, but would also be able to bring the best from different streams of life such as other cultures and

traditions and make an organic integration of the same without in any way endangering the centrality of the Word, need of the community, and the role of the teaching office of the Church.

#### **4.4. Pastoral Formation**

Although, in the present context, theological formation is no more directly or exclusively associated with the formation of the clergy, a theologian should necessarily develop a pastoral sense in and through the study of theology, and should spontaneously develop a readiness to reach out to the ecclesial community and wider society with an attitude of an ever available shepherd, ideally trying to emulate the example of Jesus Christ himself, who “did not come to have service done to him but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for the lives of many” (Mk. 10:45; Jn. 13:12-17). The emphasis on this pastoral dimension determines the importance of the human, spiritual, and pastoral formation that a candidate of theology must assume; in fact, the pastoral formation could be seen as the summit of the proper and integral formation – with all the three aspects preceding and percolating it – that is expected in the whole of theological formation itself.

Pastoral formation does not merely mean that those who aspire to learn theology should be given a chance of apprenticeship in pastoral activities; though some monitored initiation will be a welcome practice during theological formation, what is aimed through pastoral formation is the cultivation of an attitude among the theologians that would be in tune with the attitude of Jesus. In other words, the intellectual depth that one gathers in theological discourses and the practical skills in sacramental administration, personnel and institutional management, etc., would become ultimately conducive to a person who receives theological formation only to the extent he or she is capable of assuming a pastoral role in the ecclesial community. There should, therefore, emerge a pastoral inclusiveness or a sense of community and the necessity of making oneself available for others, leading to the understanding of another dimension of developing a sense of mutually recognizing and respecting different vocations within the ecclesial communion. Whatever be the ministerial role one assumes, everyone – be it a cleric, religious, or lay – is important and has a unique role to play in living, celebrating, and perpetuating Christian faith.

These four pillars of theological formation, if taken in their proper context and mutual relationship, would make both theology as a science and theologian as a member of the ecclesial community an integral part. Instead of discharging a specific task in the community, theological formation would become an essential mission, a mission that would enhance the life and vocation of everyone else. For those who aspire to undertake theological formation, within the ambit of an existential Christian community, receive their mandate not for themselves but for the sake of the whole Christian community with a specific call to be available for the enhancement of the faith and life of the whole church.

Theological training – with all its context and content and method – should enable a person to attain a transformation in faith, with firm foundation in the person of Jesus Christ and a dynamic commitment to the faith community, i.e., the Church (see *Pastores dabo vobis* §§53-54). This goal is more communitarian and collective than individualistic and, hence, everyone who participates in theological formation, whether in an institutional setting or otherwise, should be able to immerse himself or herself in the context of a community that experiences living faith in the person of Jesus Christ and the communion among themselves. This would need an ongoing theological learning, reflection, resulting in a proper theological formation of the individual that lasts a lifetime. Naturally, then, theological

formation will strive to meet the challenges and expectations of the Church and the society by offering depth and breadth in the theological education imparted with an integral approach.

The discussion in the two sections above has shown that there are two sets of pillars: one offered by the Church, the other offered by the UN. Both of them have highlighted two important domains and the goal is the formation of a person who would become an integral part of the human society with its specific focus on the community of Christian faithful. If these two sets of pillars are firmly established, and the education imparted to those who aspire to be trained in theological sciences with an integral sense with its due emphasis on human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral aspects, we could be assured that those who come out of theological training would not only be integrated human beings, but also integrated pastors who would have the readiness, ingenuity, and skills needed to cater to the needs of the Christian faithful in India today.

### **5. Some Fundamental Concerns of Theological Formation in India**

As Indian Christians take pride in the fact that India has the existence of Christian communities dating back to Apostolic times and as Indian subcontinent has a dynamic presence of three Churches in the Catholic communion, it is clear that theological formation in India has not only a longstanding history but also a very vibrant and extensive network covering the whole subcontinent and reaching out to its varied nature of Christian communities. Although the nature of theological formation imparted in earlier centuries is not well known, there are indications that the *Malpanate* system that was practised by the Eastern churches in India adopted the Indian *Gurukula* system in an adapted way, where the candidates – certainly candidates who aspired to be ordained priests – were given theological formation through a prominent and well-acclaimed priest in the locality; in this system, the candidate lived with the senior priest who offered formation, mostly by initiating the candidate through a learning of both languages and the sacred sciences, principally covering the Sacred Scripture and the liturgical practices. Although this system had the advantage of a very personal contact of the candidate with the teacher and the ongoing accompaniment, it had the disadvantage that the whole process would be limited to the learning and life vision of the teacher himself. Yet, it was considered to be an effective method in olden times, where the education system of the rest of the society also was more or less of the same stature. Due to the changes that have already come about in the domain of education and the development of theological sciences, today such a model seems to be almost difficult, especially as proper theological formation would depend on more personnel and other resources in order to facilitate a holistic development of the person who undergoes the formation.

Although most of the studies available about theological formation in India also deal with it in the context of priestly formation, we come across with ample material on the essential aspects that are to be taken into account in this regard. It is true that theological formation in India continues to be offered mostly through the portals of seminaries and other theological centres of learning and research; yet, we see that over the years, after the Vatican Council II, theological formation was renewed both in content and method and its access has practically been opened up to the larger community of faithful. Hundreds of religious sisters and a few lay persons have not only been introduced to various disciplines in theology, but India has already a number of non-clerical experts in theology who have completed their formal education in various theological disciplines.

India has not only offered the world a number of major religions, but has been capable of grooming a thorough religious attitude among the people. In spite of the onslaught of many irreligious ideologies and secular approaches, either initiated by prominent individual thinkers or schools of thought, or the state functionaries themselves, they have not been able to destroy the strong foundations of a religious ethos among the people of India. This strong religious approach shall be a wonderful ambience for theologizing in India. Theological formation, then, must take this religious reality into account and enable the candidates to understand the dynamics and respond to it basing themselves on their fundamental faith in Jesus Christ and the teachings offered by the Church.

As no theology can be made in a vacuum, formation in theology should make a synthesis between universal and parochial approaches; as Catholic theology by itself is universal in its outlook and content, theological formation should have its primary focus on those aspects; however, in order to make theology more meaningful and attuned to the context and realities of India, we must have a theology that concretely develops from the Indian realities and its ethos. According to Kuncheria Pathil, "theological ... formation ... must be given in the context of actual life, [i.e.] in an encounter with the world outside, with the actual problems, questions and challenges of today."<sup>7</sup> India's existential reality is very complicated due to various reasons, such as plurality of religions and cultures, ethnic and linguistic divisions, presence of a large section of poor people and the inequality in resource management, the every widening gap between the rich and the poor, problems resulting from the millennia long practice of caste system and its aftermath of injustice and degradation of people from the lower strata of the society, violence resulting from communal and religious conflicts, etc. Although some regions in the country may not experience all these, the larger social reality of India is very much affected by them; hence, Christian theology, to be meaningful and effective in its attempt to incarnate the Word of God amidst the Indian people, should develop its content and methodology in relation to these down-to-earth Indian realities that glare at the face of anyone. "Priestly Formation," a document issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (1989) proposes that "at every stage of [theological] formation, [they] ... should be in touch with societal, cultural and religious realities in which they are to become a 'life-giving' principle by proclaiming Jesus Christ and the values of the Gospel of the Kingdom. They need to be particularly aware of the many to whom the Gospel is yet to be proclaimed and of the poor and the downtrodden with whom their ministry will be largely concerned" (§9.1).

The social reality of India is so glaringly marked by inequality and injustice. This is particularly visible in the case of the still prevailing poverty of the masses, in spite of the glittering development that India has made in different segments of manufacturing and business. Although some of the economically backward classes and members of the lower middle class have moved up on the economic ladder of the nation, there is an increasing number of people who are impoverished through a series of measures adopted by the state to enhance or boost the economy. This becomes a conspicuous problem when we realize that economic globalization has contributed to the widening of the gap between the poor and the rich in India. Along with the issues of unequal distribution of wealth and access to the resources, there still exists continued practice (theoretically and practically) of certain unjust structures such as caste system. Although such social evils have been theoretically

---

<sup>7</sup>Kuncheria Pathil, "Editorial," *Jeevadhara* 14 (1984), 153-154.

eradicated by legislation, through the reluctance of the people and their leaders, justice has not yet been made accessible to many millions of subaltern people, such as dalits, tribals, adivasis, and women. Unfortunately, some of the systems that have been put in place by the governments have turned out to have opposite impact both on the consciousness of the people and in the civil practices; in a way, the system which should have protected the marginalized from the injustices in society has created new systems (regrettably with constitutional provisions, which are manipulated for the benefit of those who are already in power) to perpetuate the same old unjust practices in their new avatars. As these issues glare at us and do not show any sign of improvement, theological formation in India has to take them seriously into account. Any theology in India, if it does not care of the poor and the marginalized, those who are meted out with injustice and whose cry for justice is not heard and supported, will not be worthy to be called a Christian theology, as it, then, fails to place the Word of God and the faith in Jesus Christ in relation to the existential realities that those people face on a daily basis. Theology in India has to be contextualized in such a way that a Christian theological approach should make the life of those who subscribe to such a theology more meaningful and relevant.

Another important ecclesial dimension that needs to be taken seriously into account in theological formation in India consists of two aspects: the presence and vibrant life of three Churches (or Rites) in the Catholic communion and the presence of many other churches, including the ever increasing Christian denominations in the ecumenical context of the Christianity in India. As earlier attempts to reduce the individual Rites in the Catholic communion have met with failures and as such attempts are not considered to be justified given the understanding of the Catholic communion with its acceptance of particularity and universality, India needs to have not only an ecumenical thrust in theology, but also an emphasis on the necessity of developing a theology that would understand and accept the reality of the individual churches and their rich traditions for the holistic growth of the Catholic Church in India. Instead of remaining as closed entities, they need to create a sense of belonging to the one larger church of Christ, and the larger human society, all members of which are in a constant search for meaning through mutual availability and sharing. This would invite more lasting pastoral collaboration among the different churches in India. As those who are trained in theology would eventually take up leadership or animation roles in different particular churches or in the offices that would require reaching out to all Christians it becomes imperative that all are given basic understanding not only about the communion of churches but also about the particular churches; for, it is through these theologians the Church in India would develop a more coherent and catholic understanding of the church and the possibility of mutual collaboration and a sense of complementarity.

Of equal importance is the multi-religious reality of India, where all Christians put together will be less than three per cent of the total population though their total social impact is greater and rather well recognized due to the services rendered through the educational, healthcare, and social uplifting institutions. As every Christian in India has to live in proximity with people of other faiths, some of them with friendly approach and some others being very antagonistic to the Christian presence and our evangelization thrusts, it becomes imperative for our theological formation to take stock of such a situation and equip the candidates to face the prospects and challenges emerging from religious pluralism. It is not only a question of coexistence of the people of other faiths; it is an issue of better understanding other religions and enabling a Catholic to theologize his or her faith by taking into account the realities that surround every attempt to live the faith. For example,

theological formation would be far more effective if the institutes would offer them opportunities to understand the dynamics of other religions and look at their faith from a proper Christian point of view. The CBCI document on "Priestly Formation" states it as follows: "In the context of vibrant pluralism of faiths in our country and the mandate given by the Church for interreligious dialogue, training in dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies should be provided. Both experience of dialogue and a theological reflection on it should form part of the theological programme. A theological understanding of religions in relation to the salvific work of Christ is an important dimension of theological formation. This goes with theologising in a situation of ecclesial religious and cultural pluralism" (§8.11). Thus, in the course of theological formation, these candidates should be enabled to engage with the members of other faith in a true ambience of dialogue, with a sense of mutual respect and acceptance of their differences without diluting their commitment to the person of Jesus Christ and without disregard for the ecclesial communion from a Catholic position.

Above all these existential concerns that warrant a proactive approach in theological formation in India, we have a very firm foundation in the Indian thought itself that calls for a creative involvement on the part of the faithful in seeking more light on the content of faith. That is, India is land that is known for the incessant quest not only to know and experience God but also to articulate that experience in reasonable terms so that those who cherish the faith and others could be assisted in understanding the faith perspectives. The age old religious texts, whether accepted as the orthodox religious scripture or not, vouchsafe to the fact that for long Indians had cultivated a *Brahma-jijnasa*. Following the great ancient Indian tradition, we see in India among different religions a continued interest and incessant quest for acquiring knowledge through self-study, learning in informal and formal settings, attending scholarly discourses and debates, etc. This trend indicates that Indian mind is greatly interested in pursuing theological speculation. Such an intense quest for depth in understanding religious realities and teachings necessitate, on the part of Christians, to involve in deeper understanding of their own religious teachings and an intelligible sharing of the same with the vast majority of Indians who do not yet have a clear understanding about Christian faith and doctrines. This would call for a thorough theological formation among Christians.

Theological formation, to my mind, could be better facilitated in India as most of the candidates who participate in it come from Christian families which consist of active and practising Christians. My attempt in drawing on this reality is not to imply that, therefore, everything is fine with such families and Christian communities. On the contrary, when a person aspires to be initiated into theology hails from a practising Christian family, he or she has an added advantage of having been initiated into the faith that is alive and vibrant; such a family offers the required healthy ambience for the reception of the Christian message and its theological reflection. A young member of a Christian community gets spontaneously and informally initiated into the faith of the family, which sets a very strong foundation for a faith life; as experience of practising faith is stronger in forming basic and lasting convictions, better and sound theological reflections would eventually ensue from such persons who would be offered theological formation, thus, opening up the avenues for enhanced theological reflections and articulations for the good of oneself and the larger ecclesial community.

## **6. Goals of Theological Formation in India**

In the above paragraphs, we have dealt with theological formation at length. In our discussion on the four pillars of theological formation and some fundamental concerns in offering theological formation in India, we have already had an understanding on the goals of theological education. However, particularly in this section, we shall try to dwell exclusively on the goals of theological formation in India.

As theological formation offered in India aims at equipping individual Christians and Christian communities, its goals must primarily emphasize and revolve around these aspects. While personal empowerment of one's faith life and satisfaction in being and becoming a mature Christian are significant for the wholehearted commitment and investment by individual Christians in theological formation, success of theological formation would depend on the ability and orientation of such individuals towards ecclesial life.

Taking cue from the four pillars of theological formation that we have dealt with in the previous section of this essay, we could say that the goal of theological formation could be succinctly expressed by transforming these pillars into goals. Then, we could say that theological formation aims at developing a person into a truly human, spiritually established in the person of Jesus Christ, knowledgeable about the faith realities as well as mundane issues, thus, developing a true Christian pastoral attitude leading to a readiness to avail oneself completely for others.

Theological formation cannot be offered in a vacuum; it takes place in an individual person who, normally, hails from a family that is rooted in a Christian vision of life. As such a family must have offered the basics in human, spiritual, and intellectual formation, what must be taken care of by theological formation is the next level of development in these areas and, thus, to assist him or her to take up serious pastoral roles in the ecclesial community. This latter, though is considered to be one of the chief goals of theological formation mostly attended by seminarians, would be realized only in proportion to the enhancement of the first three levels of formation, namely, human, spiritual, and intellectual.

As far as the goal of attaining perfection in the human level, theological formation should offer insights into the theological basis for developing human qualities. For, without being strongly founded on human qualities and values, which every human being should cultivate to be a member of the human society, be it a Christian or otherwise, there is no point in aspiring to excel in the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral dimensions. So, humanization as a fundamental goal of education, which has been amply emphasized by the UNESCO's four pillars of education, is certainly an important aim of theological formation as well.

Theological formation is also a spiritual formation offered to the candidates in radical Christian living. This does not mean that, therefore, theological formation would consist only of spiritual practices. However, it does mean that along with all other means adopted in theological formation spiritual development of the person will be an important goal. Accordingly, theological formation should not be limited to classroom learning, particularly focused only on intellectual understanding, but should also be seen as covering the entire personal life, especially his or her investment in developing a very personal relationship with the person of Jesus, facilitated by making use of the already available mechanisms such as participation in daily Eucharistic celebration, personal meditation, prayer in the community consisting of the staff and students, spiritual direction, etc. Thus, theological



formation would look forward to enhance the spiritual person along with all other aspects. As theology is also understood as harmony of life, a Christian spiritual outlook is expected to enable the person to develop the attitude of Jesus himself, whereby it would be possible for a trained person to get immersed in the spiritual ambience of the Christian community.

Aiming at human and spiritual formation, although of fundamental importance from a Christian perspective, should also take into account a proper and well-balanced intellectual development. As theology is a science that aims at a better understanding of the faith content by employing one's reason, it is necessary that theological formation aims at the integral development of one's intellectual abilities, particularly by tuning itself for understanding faith realities. From this perspective, theological formation is aiming at not merely the excellence of one's intellectual powers, but also one's orientation to apply one's intelligence to understand the divine revelation received in the person of Jesus Christ and carried on through the ecclesial communion of the Catholic Church. It aims at not only a personal understanding and acceptance of the Christian mysteries, but also an ability to communicate the same in a reasonable manner to both people who already belong to Catholic faith communion and to those who have not yet been initiated into it. In other words, theological formation should enable a candidate to articulate one's faith to invite and establish others into the ecclesial communion to which he or she fundamentally belongs.

Another important goal of theological formation is to prepare the candidates to undertake pastoral roles in the ecclesial community. It is of common knowledge that the ecclesial community consists of members offering a variety of services depending on their abilities and formation. As various services are considered to be essential for the development and maintenance of the community, those who have already received theological formation should ready themselves to adopt a pastoral role in view of the good of the ecclesial community and the larger society. The human, spiritual, and intellectual goals of theological formation would equip a candidate to identify one's vocation as to what role he must play in the community. Depending on the role undertaken, some may need greater competence in theological disciplines, and such persons must continue with their deeper and higher levels learning and research in theology. While all would agree on a basic level of theological formation as essential for all members of the ecclesial communion so that they would be able to meaningfully discharge their Christian mission, there must be insistence that those who aspire to undertake more lead-roles in the community must show better theological competence, making their pastoral availability rooted in better understanding of the Christian doctrine and greater ability to interpret the Word of God, and the Christian tradition that has dwelt on it, in relation to the existential reality of the contemporary society.

We must admit the fact that even today theological formation is received largely by seminarians who prepare themselves for ordained ministry in the Church. Of course, there is an increasing number of religious sisters and lay persons (though this latter category is numerically still very less) taking up theological formation. Given the fact that theological formation is largely focused on training future ministers and leaders of the Church, it must equip them for a quality ministry in the world of today. As a Christian religious community, Church is looking for persons in the leadership role those who are committed Christians, deep in their faith experience, ever ready to make themselves available for the humanity. Then, the goal of theological formation must primarily be forming true Christians who would avail themselves for enhancing the lives of others based on their Christian commitment. This would mean that those who undergo theological formation in seminaries

and other institutes must have, as part of their own programme of studies and training, provisions for deepening their faith experience. Promotions, then, will not only consist in the completion of an academic programme but would be primarily revolving around the issue of a candidate getting rooted in the person of Christ and his or her availability for the people of God.

Along with the above-mentioned general goals of theological formation, which are of course of paramount importance to all Christians wherever and whenever they undergo this formation, there are a few specific goals that such a formation should accept when it is carried out in India. As theological formation should enable a person to meaningfully immerse oneself into the socio-political reality of the people, one of its important goals would be the ability of theology to sensitize them to the social realities from a thorough Christian perspective. This would mean that although the curriculum of theology may mainly focus on the Word of God, Christian doctrines and Christian life, there must be ample space for bringing into theological discourses the relevance of the same in relation to the existential reality of India. For example, the issues such as discrimination in the name of caste, colour, or gender, and the injustice prevailing in the social stratification, denial of human rights to many subaltern people, disparity in the distribution of resources and access to opportunities, etc., which constitute the glaring reality of the India that is not yet 'shining', should become part of the content and context of theologizing. Certain extent of guided exposure to the candidates of theological formation to the existential reality of India (like exposure to the poor, marginalized, communal problems, caste issues, etc.) would develop their Christian sensitivity. It would enable the candidates of theological formation to understand and respond to such realities based on their fundamental Christian point of view and also enable the ecclesial community to look for ways and means to abolish such situations and create alternate Christ-inspired healthier practices and social patterns.

As it is generally perceived by all who are familiar with the Indian reality, India has its uniqueness in terms of home for a number of living religions and varied cultural contexts. Although these may occasionally create unrest in the social situations, they must be seen as strength of India and, accordingly, must be seen as an important element in theological formation. Hence, it should aim at the formation of the candidates in a healthy understanding of different religions, especially about the religions of those people with whom Christians have to live in close proximity. Understanding about their religious scriptures, their traditions and liturgical practices, their approach towards other religions and their teachings, etc., is necessary for a member of the Catholic Church in India; lest such a person, although excellently trained in Christian doctrines, may turn out to be a misfit in the Indian context. In other words, theological formation in India must enable its candidates to be equipped with those tools with which they would be able to relate with members of other faiths in a healthy manner. Moreover, development of a positive attitude towards other religions and their members would enable a Christian to reach out to the members of other religions in a more meaningful manner. Given the proximity with which Christians live with members of other religions, Catholic Church has to equip its members, especially those who are in leadership and in animation roles, to be available to the wider society along with their availability and readiness to serve the members of the ecclesial communion. In fact, the Catholic nature of Jesus Christ and the Church could be lived out more concretely when theological formation would positively equip its candidates in developing a proactive approach to members of all other faiths.

Further, along with other religions, India is also home for many churches. As more denominations get established the plurality of churches and Christian practices is on the increase and, sometimes at least, it creates more confusion in the minds of ordinary faithful as well as the public. In this context, another important goal of theological formation must be the development of ecumenical sense and sensitivity. The proposal is not to eclipse the differences in the nature of different churches or their practices and orientations. However, as all form part of the wider church of Christ, despite the differences, Christians must be able to live with a minimum sort of understanding and alliance. Even when there are doctrinal differences and misunderstandings, it would be possible for the members of different churches to involve in some common projects which would be beneficial to the people at large. So, one of the goals of theological formation in the Catholic Church shall be the development of a healthy ecumenical approach. This should also take into account a sense of appreciation, collaboration, and mutual acceptance of the members of different churches (Rites) in the Catholic communion. This goal could be realized by providing more truthful information about various churches and their historical origins and the differences that are perceptible in their teachings and practices. As different churches could be seen as more complementary than contraries or contradictories, a true catholic sense could be cultivated. This can certainly be made a reality in the Catholic Church if theological formation would include courses of the sort and offer possibilities of closer contact and interaction between Catholics and members of other churches. Closer they come together during the training period (for example, for learning of theology, participation in liturgical and para-liturgical celebrations, occasional joint-involvement in social uplift programmes, etc.), in the context of proper initiation and healthy monitoring, better would be the prospects of understanding and collaboration in the larger horizons of the Church.

Given the thrust of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, there is a need to set another goal for theological formation in view of preparing the candidates for new evangelization. Although the documents issued by the Church dwell more in this regard about the situations prevailing in the West, practically the need of new evangelization is felt in all established Christian communities. Some persons and communities that have already received Christian faith for generations seem to have lost sense of the treasure that they have received (or are losing!). As this has become an important concern of the Church as a whole, theological formation in contemporary India must set a goal in terms of preparing all candidates to proactively respond to the problems and prospects associated with new evangelization. Equipping them with regard to the dynamics, problems, and possible approaches and solutions should become a priority goal in theological formation in India.

Although we take pride in the fact that India, though had received many missionaries over the past few centuries from different parts of the world, has turned out to be the most missionary sending country. From this point of view, theological formation should also keep in mind the needs not only of the local churches but of the universal church. Cultivation of a universal bend of mind, without losing touch with the local Christian communities, is a necessity to prepare and avail oneself for any mission that would eventually need the support of anyone. Moreover, if a candidate joins theological formation after having made up his or her mind to join a particular mission (other than that of one's own community), provisions must be made to prepare that person in view of the realities and dynamics of the people there. In the globalized world of today, it would not be too difficult to keep an open mind and to get more information about any mission across the

world, which would enable the candidate not only to develop a theological frame of mind, but it would get gradually attuned to the needs of the mission that is awaited.

Thus, theological formation in India should have a plurality of goals which would enable the candidates to attain a mature Christian attitude towards their Christian faith and life, both personally and in the community of the faithful and the larger society. However, the plurality of goals should not choke the fundamental goal of theological formation as it is establishing a Christian faithful in radical discipleship of Jesus Christ. As every Christian is called to lead a radical life of ongoing conversion, every step in theological formation must fundamentally aim at facilitating such a radical Christian commitment, which would make him or her basically an open and outgoing person who would always be a totally life-giving agent after the model of Jesus Christ himself.

### **7. Beneficiaries of Theological Formation in India**

Going by the position that theological formation is open and should be accessible to every Christian, I consider that the primary beneficiary of it is the ecclesial community itself. For, when its members are initiated into theology, it prepares the whole community to deepen its faith by making it better grounded and capable of intelligible expressions serving both the person who undergoes this formation and the larger ecclesial communities in India. Moreover, if we set the goals of theological formation as we have already articulated in the previous section, then the fruits of such formation will not be limited to the ecclesial community, but would be naturally extended to the society at large, although the latter may not have anything directly to do with it. For example, a better grasp of the social reality of India by those who undergo theological formation, including its poverty, social stratification, cultural diversity, etc., would pave the way for better social integration and creation of more meaningful opportunities to proactively respond to such problematics. A true Christian response, if it were to come through the process of theological formation among its participants, towards the socio-cultural and political reality of India would contribute significantly towards the enhancement of social cohesion of the Indian society, and the creation of more citizens with an other-orientation and the readiness to reach out to the others in their need would certainly be advantageous to India as a nation.

However, as theological formation in India is largely received today by those who aspire to undertake ordained ministry in the Church, from a numerical point of view, its largest direct beneficiary seems to be seminarians. Although we experience a dwindling of vocations in the recent past in certain pockets, by and large the numbers remain relatively stable across the Indian Church. The present system of considering two years of philosophical and three or four years of theological formation as a necessary component to be promoted to the Orders continues to attract more youngsters to theology programmes. At this stage, although the total number of seminarians attending theology programmes seems to be really impressive, many ask serious questions as to the effectiveness of theological formation received by them. For, there is a growing tendency to consider philosophy and theology as a structurally inescapable requirement and, as a result, wholehearted investment of time and energy and facilitation of theological formation with the goals that have been highlighted above seem to be almost an ideal that has nothing to do with the majority of the participants who enter the seminaries in view of ordained ministries. So, the process of theological formation would become effective only if these participants from among the seminarians – who would form around 75% of the total – consider it not only as a mere requirement but also as a process of formation that is essentially required to make their

ordained ministry more effective and meaningful, especially in developing their Christian ability to respond to the contemporary realities of faced by the Indian Church.

The next target group of beneficiaries of theological formation consists of men and women religious. It is heartening to see that, after the Vatican Council II, there is an increasing insistence on theological formation among the religious. As most of the clerical congregations are bound to follow the instruction on theological formation, religious congregations of men and women which do not aspire to undertake ordained ministries in the Church also have shown greater interest in offering their members at least some basic theological formation. While it is praiseworthy that the portals of a number of theological faculties and seminaries were opened up to men and women religious, the establishment of institutions like Vidya Deep College (CRI Brothers' Institute in Bangalore) and Mater Dei in Goa, etc., aim at playing a pivotal role in bringing quality theological formation to the religious. It is also worth-noting that many religious congregations of women have made at least a one year initiation into theology as a necessary component of their religious formation before their members would be admitted permanently into the community. As religious continue to play an important role in the Indian Church, both in terms of the Christian services, institutions, and opening up and maintaining of the missions in remotest corners of India, availing theological formation to all religious, particularly to women religious, should remain an important concern of those who assume offices in the Indian Church.

Although a lot of interest to understand theology is seen among the laity, especially in the post-Vatican II scenario, the number of those who have undergone professional theological formation is not many. However, the earnest interest among the laity has borne fruit in the sense an increasing number of the laity have started to invest their time and sources for the private study of the Bible and other sources related to Christian faith. Unfortunately, in India, the Church leadership seems to be a bit lax in initiating measures to engage the laity into theological formation, probably due to the rather stable number of ordained ministers in various local churches. Moreover, the clergy seems to be more comfortable with a laity that is not yet technically equipped to understand and theologically interpret the Christian sources; for, otherwise, the 'sacred' domains which are exclusively handled by the clergy would easily become accessible to the laity, if we would go by the quality of the training and the competence in a number of fields. Despite the increasing interest among the laity, one serious difficulty that they face in undertaking formal formation in theology is the lack of quality time, as almost all of them are fully engaged in their professional duties apart from their commitment to the family. Now, as an informed church is a healthy church, the Catholic Church should make provisions either within the already existing institutions (like seminaries and faculties) or start new centres at the regional and national levels to focus on imparting theological formation to the laity. As they may not come to the classroom (due to various other unavoidable engagements), the Church should create systems whereby theological formation would reach them wherever they are and whenever they would be available. In the context of advanced learning facilities, we need to open up facilities such as online and distance education mode of theological formation, although this may not completely match with the theological formation offered in a formal setting. What is urgently needed is the attention of those who are engaged in planning and execution of theological programmes to seriously to form the laity, offered either in informal contexts of a parish or local institutions, or by establishing theological institutions at the diocesan, regional, and national levels.

Although Christian professionals would naturally form part of the above group of lay persons, I would like to stress especially on the need of offering theological formation to Christian professionals. For, both because of their technical educational and professional qualifications and their standing in the overall society, offering theological formation to Christian professionals must be a priority of the Catholic Church. As theological formation would equip them to understand the deeper intricacies of their Christian faith and its better and coherent application in various domains of life, if offered proper theological formation, these professionals would turn out to be a very effective force not only in disseminating Christian values in their workplace and the larger society, but would also become true and vibrant witnesses of the Church. So, the Church leadership should initiate processes and structures to streamline the professionals within the Church and bring them together to better equip them with a deeper understanding of Christian faith and life vision.

Before I close this section on the beneficiaries of theological formation, I would also mention in passing that the portals of our theological facilities and institutions must be opened up to anyone who would approach us for a deeper understanding of Christian faith. Given the religious plurality in India, if someone from another religion approaches us to participate in theological formation, we must be in a position to make our facilities accessible to them. As they may not share the faith of a Christian faithful, the modalities of facilitating their access to theology could be differently handled; yet, we should welcome them to understand Christian theology so that they may become effective instruments to build bridges between their religion and Christianity.

Additionally, if foreign nationals wish to participate in theological formation offered in India, especially with a view to understand and experience the reality of Indian church and society, it also must be encouraged. For, they would offer opportunities for other candidates pursuing theological formation to have an intercultural encounter, which would in turn open up the horizons of the candidates and their mission. Moreover, from a catholic point of view, theological formation will be enhanced further with the openness of our facilities to the universal church; such openings would become avenues to oxygenate and enhance the Catholic theology being developed and transmitted in and through the Indian theological institutions and facilities.

## **8. Some Practical Aspects of Theological Formation in India Today**

### **8.1. Developing a Theological *Habitus***

As theological formation is a formation for life, a formation that should transform the inner recesses of a person who is committed to Jesus Christ and the ecclesial community, learning to theologize cannot be equated with other forms or disciplines of education. Taking into account the anticipated goal of a life transformed in the Word of God, theological formation should instil not only information on theological concepts and theories, but it should basically cultivate a *habitus* among the candidates. That is, each one should develop a habit of theologizing so that one's own personal as well as that of the ecclesial community could be made more meaningful and relevant to the contemporary situations of life.

Development of a *habitus* would happen only over a longer period of time, as formation of any habit cannot happen overnight. Hence, theological formation should make room not only for learning a set of doctrines and theories (although that is also important, especially at the initial stages), but should also accompany them on a regular basis in imbibing the theological message in tune with the Good News brought to us by Jesus Christ himself. This calls for developing a method of doing theology in the context of India, in

which an engagement of the Word of God could be made with the existential realities of our contemporary life. As a habitual theological orientation founded on the Word of God is developed, it would become the basic attitude and approach of a person who has undergone theological formation and that would stay back with him or her all through life, as the basic frame of mind or perspective of life. It would, then, become the view of life as well as way of life of a Christian faithful who has undergone theological formation. Thus, theology would merge with life, and would enhance the life of the candidate as well as the lives of the members of the ecclesial communion and the society at large.

## **8.2. Theological Curriculum with a Focus on Indian Reality**

Theological formation is expected to enable the candidates to acquire better understanding about the Word of God, the development of Christian tradition, doctrinal content, etc. While this remains an important goal of theological formation, it would become more interesting and effective if the curriculum is fine-tuned to the Indian reality. It would be possible to treat the traditional but essential theological courses if the theological discourses could show their connection with the existential realities of Indian Christian communities. Just as the traditional mode of learning the Sacred Scripture by way of the historical criticism, for example, is important, lessons on various books of the Bible should be able to show the connection between the struggles of the people of God recorded therein and the existential struggles that our present generations are made to experience. For such a vantage point, it could be said that biblical theology could be better handled by incorporating, along with the traditional approaches, a subaltern reading, dalit reading, feminist reading, etc. to make the content of the Sacred Scripture better understood and its implications being affirmed in the lives of those who participate in theological formation as well as in the lives of those whom they would eventually reach out through their ministry.

An important area of focus during theological formation shall be equipping the candidates to understand the systemic injustices prevailing in the society and to work towards their abolition, as these injustices prevent many from experiencing human dignity, equality, and access to resources, which are basically required to live as human beings with minimal human aspirations. As Pope Francis repeatedly asserts, the Church of Christ is the church of the poor, and the Church should explicitly make a fundamental option for the poor, which must be reflected in all her affairs, including theological formation of the young members and all those who would eventually undertake ministerial roles in the Church. Hence, those who undergo theological formation must develop a sense of solidarity with the poor and the marginalized of the Indian society and should tune in their lives to address the issues of poverty and injustice faced by the people of God. As theological formation is undertaken to understand and assimilate Christ's liberating message in its depth, every candidate has to eventually become an instrument that would strive for the establishment of the Kingdom values by attempting to bring about a society that has provisions for respecting human persons and letting them live a life with basic human dignity, freedom from all forms of exploitation. It means that theological formation should enable the candidates to do whatever is possible for the realization of such a society.

Although this expects a periodic revision of the curriculum of theology programmes, what matters the most is the teaching faculty's intellectual as well emotional openness rooted in the ever new and powerful Christian faith, their theological updating from both a technical and existential points of view, and the enrichment of the required facilities, including the library. A revision of the curriculum could be made by taking expert support

from outside; however, in order to facilitate or offer a programme in theological formation what matters the most is the availability of the faculty who would animate the candidates not only with their expertise in abstract theological doctrines but also through their familiarity with the existential reality, which could be brought to the instructions and would bear its stamp on the content of theology.

Just as the academic freedom of those who teach a theological course is important, the required periodic revision of the curriculum and the needed updating and readiness on the part of the individual faculty are to be emphasized. As it cannot be left to the discretion of the individual faculty, there must be measures to ascertain this, and periodic external assessment of the curriculum and its effective practice.

### **8.3. Preparation of the Faculty Attuned to the Indian Church and Society**

As theological formation is to be imparted without losing sight of the Indian reality, it is very crucial to develop the faculty who are well-versed not only in abstract theological subjects, but are familiar with and, if possible, rooted in the existential realities of India. In order to facilitate this familiarity, it would be ideal that at least a part of their higher theological formation is undertaken in an Indian institution. Moreover, even when theological researches are undertaken elsewhere, it must be possible for them to immerse in deeper theological speculations without losing touch with the Indian reality; practically, it would mean that those who undertake theological studies in foreign universities should undertake researches in such a way that it would have a direct bearing on Indian life. They must create a learning environment that would resound the dynamics of the communities and societies to which the theologically educated have to finally return and serve.

At this juncture it must also be said that undertaking theological studies in India by itself need not bring about any substantial transformation in theological thinking of the faculty until and unless a positive attitude towards the existential realities of India is maintained. Here, two things are important: (1) Selection of the future faculty should see to it that the criterion shall not only be their intellectual abilities but also their abilities to connect with the life of the people and their ability to interpret the existential realities in the light of Christian faith; although theological formation will certainly enhance such capabilities, it would not make it if there is not even a rudimentary presence of such capabilities. (2) Those who undertake their higher levels of theological formation in India shall see to it that their researches are fine-tuned to dwell on the Indian realities; their theological analysis on the Indian realities must be both critical and creative in their engagement with the Indian Christian realities.

As many of the teaching faculty in institutions of theological formation are involved not only in academic activities but also in their administrative responsibilities, most of them do not get opportunities to update themselves in the area of their specialisation after their doctoral research. Although some of them continue to involve in restricted research projects, proper immersion in such full-fledged academic activities is beyond their normal reach. This, in fact, has a handicapping effect in their professional expertise as theologians or as philosophers. Given the context of India, hence, I propose that there must be mechanisms to assure that these faculty members get enough opportunities to update themselves in their respective area of specialisation. Such opportunities would also open up the avenues for more specialised study on theological subjects in relation with Indian realities with more depth and maturity. As institutions offering theological formation in India do not yet have such provisions, it is important that they begin to plan along this line, by way of opening up



post-doctoral courses or research programmes, if possible with required funding support internally or externally. Such provisions for advanced research would not only contribute towards equipping individual faculty members, but would contribute a lot in the development of a mature indigenous theological outlook.

The teaching faculty at the theological formation centres experience a real struggle between the necessity of academic excellence and keeping abreast with the developments in research areas and the necessity of exposure to actual missions or pastoral field. In many cases, although those who undertake pastoral administration along with their academic work seem to bring a lot of pastoral expertise to their theological deliberations, they tend to lose chances to keep themselves abreast with the developments in their respective field of theological expertise. Similarly, those who are devoting themselves for the academic excellence and invest themselves totally for the formation of candidates at theological centres seem to miss the practical experiences from the actual field of mission. As both of them have their advantage, what is advisable in this regard is to make a creative synthesis of both, making sure that a reasonable balance is maintained in view of the good of the ecclesial community.

#### **8.4. Regional Theologates and the Aftermath**

Introduction of an Indian emphasis in theology started to appear in Indian theological institutions after the Vatican Council II; however, those initial steps were made with a lot of reluctance and apprehension. Later, more of an insertion has taken place in this regard, especially by the introduction of the regional centres of theological formation, mostly for the diocesan clergy and religious congregations of men. Although some assessments have been made on this experiment from different angles, and many acclaim the positive impact in connecting with the local reality of the people and bringing those dimensions to the theology classroom, there is a general impression that slowly a kind of compromising is done with regard to the intellectual content in theological formation. For example, a regional centre may not have the required number of experts and will depend mostly on visiting staff, who also are quite busy as they are in high demand in different parts of the country. As most of theology courses are offered under the crash course mode, practically, most of the candidates just complete the courses for the sake of completion; they do not get ample space and time to internalize the themes or theological issues that are being initiated in the discussions. Moreover, as field visits are considered to be an essential component of theological formation, including regular pastoral visits, practically the time available for library work, personal reading, theological reflection, etc., is minimal. Naturally, in such an ambience, we cannot expect any deeper intellectual theological formation to happen.

Indeed, context-sensitive programmes would enable the candidates of theological formation to connect the content of theology with the existential context of the churches and their faithful. If it is facilitated, candidates who come out of such programmes would be more proactive and effective in reaching out to the people of the locality.

While the concept of regional theological formation is an ideal one, care must be taken to see that the candidates get ample opportunities to connect themselves with the larger ecclesial community of India with all its variety and complexity as well as the broader outlook needed for tuning oneself to the universal church. As the development of a catholic approach is essential in theological formation, restricting their horizons exclusively to the regional realities may handicap them in their later ministry and their much needed insertion in the ecclesial community. So, be it a regional seminary or a national institute, it is

important that the settings and the programmes offer chances for the candidates to immerse themselves both in the local ecclesial reality and the facilitation of a broader, universal, and catholic outlook, which are essential for a successful Christian mission. Better the understanding and broader the horizons, greater would be the ability of the person to make meaningful contributions in the building up of a truly Christian community.

### **8.5. Equipping the Laity through Theological Formation**

The earnest interest shown by some laity in receiving theological formation, the significant contributions made by some of those who have already had formal initiation into theological formation, and the great potential that the laity could offer in dynamizing Catholic theological discourse, etc., indicate the necessity to open up the portals of institutions of theological formation to the laity. In order to capitalize this opportunity to the best, in some instances at least, the mode of imparting theological formation to the laity needs to be conceived differently from the fulltime structure; opening weekend programmes, distance education or online education mode, etc., would certainly be conducive to attract more laity, including the professionals, to undertake theological formation. Along with the training facilities being offered to the laity, the clergy needs to be trained in sharing the ecclesiastical responsibilities with them, and better recognition must also be offered to those who are trained in theological sciences by incorporating them in ecclesial bodies and the training of the faithful in various activities at the local, regional, and national levels. We could expect more of the laity joining theological formation programme if we could design them by respecting their commitment in the family, professional circles, etc.

Although I have appealed to make special provisions to facilitate theological formation of the laity, I do not think that it would be ideal to offer theological formation to the laity as a separate block. The above proposal was made only to make sure that theological formation is made available to the laity when they are not in a position to participate in a regular programme designed mainly in view of the candidates for ordained ministries. To my mind, it would be unhealthy to plan for separate theological programmes for the seminary, religious, and laity, as they would only continue to create an unhealthy sense of competition and rivalry among these groups and would only accentuate the divide, which is already doing enough damage to the church as a united whole; instead, if all would participate in the same theological formation, of course, making special provisions for those who would undertake specialised ministries in the church, it would provide a healthier ambience for the faithful, including the clergy, as all of them are called to serve the same ecclesial community in and through various but complementary ministries, thus, facilitating the realization of the Kingdom of God that is aimed at by all.

### **8.6. Formation for New Evangelisation**

Every Christian is called to preach the Good News so that its announcers as well as hearers could be invited to true conversion (*metanoia*), leading to the establishment of the Kingdom of God here and now. As theological formation is aimed at equipping Christians to understand and live out the Good News in a deeper or radical sense, all those who undergo training should become instruments that would facilitate *metanoia* and the establishment of the Kingdom of God; it is this process of radical discipleship that is basically referred to as evangelisation, which is a fundamental duty of every Christian. Thus, participating in theological formation expects the candidates to be true evangelizers who would invite

others to share in the radical discipleship of Jesus Christ by sharing one's own lived experience of the Good News in the community of disciples, i.e., the church.

All the three Popes, Pope Blessed John Paul II, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis have repeatedly invited all Christians to participate in a drive for new evangelisation, aiming at reaching out to those Christians who have already received the Good News, but do not live the life of radical discipleship either due to neglect or due to ignorance. In either case, every member of the ecclesial communion has a responsibility to earnestly attempt to bring them back to the Good News not only by verbally announcing to them the Word of God, but by letting them experience the beauty and goodness that result in one's own personal Christian life. In fact, be it evangelisation or new evangelisation, it would be more forceful and effective when the announcement of the Good News is made through the life of those who have already become members of the community of disciples. Although verbal announcement of the Kingdom could be easily made, its effectiveness would be hundredfold when the effect of radical discipleship can be experienced in the life of each person claiming to be committed to the person of Jesus Christ in the ecclesial communion.

### **8.7. Emphasis on Intellectual Training**

As theology is fundamentally an attempt to make a deeper understanding of the Christian faith – to make sense of it both in one's personal life and in the life of the Christian community – it presupposes that those who involve in the process of theological formation are better equipped to employ their intellectual abilities upon the faith content. From this perspective, better theological formation could be offered to (and better theological output can be expected from) those who also invest in developing their intellectual abilities. In order to enhance the intellectual capacity, theological formation itself should put great emphasis on a rigorous intellectual disciplining of the candidates. The time invested for theological formation must be optimally productive. The programmes should include more exercises that would expect bettering of intellectual capabilities. Those candidates who are not of high intellectual calibre should be supported by theological institution so that they could also eventually enhance their abilities and perform better to understand and theologically interpret the faith content in relation to the existential realities.

In general, across India, there is a tendency to downplay the importance of intellectual engagement during theological formation. This is a dangerous tendency, especially against the background of the general public and Christian laity being better equipped in terms of their academic and professional training. If the Church continues the careless attitude towards the intellectual performance of those who undertake theological formation, it would be a sure sign of the downgrading of the future of the Church as a whole.

Hence, not only we must insist on a basic level of intellectual capacity at the time of inducting someone into theological formation, but also should see to it that they are continuously offered opportunities to intellectually empower them better so that they would make more effective and meaningful theological contributions to the ecclesial community. Otherwise, it will not only be the downgrading of their own personal human and Christian lives, but also of the Christian community in India as a whole.

### 8.8. Need to Reemphasize Philosophy

Another dangerous tendency is to eclipse, eliminate, and distance philosophy from theological formation. The time-tested approach of Catholic theology is to insist on a philosophical component at least as a preparatory step. Accordingly, even *Sapientia Christiana* maintains that at least there must be a two years of full-fledged philosophical formation offered to clerical candidates before they undertake their theological formation. Although this still remains the official position, there seem to have developed a lot of serious reservation on investing a two year period of time for learning philosophy. There are some ecclesiastical and religious superiors who think that philosophy must be restricted as much as possible so that they would have their candidates ordained as full-fledged ministers as soon as possible. While this may be admitted as a universal phenomenon, the tragedy is that many who lack basic philosophical education do not seem to be doing well either in their theological formation or, later, in their teaching and articulation of the Word of God and the Christian doctrine. The situation has worsened after the Congregation for Catholic Education has issued a decree (2001) instructing all institutions offering philosophy programmes to offer a Bachelor of Philosophy degree only after completing a three year full-fledged training programme; with this decree the two year programme could be continued (as a prerequisite for theology), but without having the provision to issue a degree in philosophy. As a lot of reservation has been shown to undertake a three year programme in philosophical formation, many have opted to continue the two year programme, even if it would not be awarded with a degree. Moreover, there are instances in which a total apathy for philosophy formation is seen from among both the candidates and their superiors. While the plan of the Congregation for Catholic Education in insisting on a three year programme for a bachelor degree in philosophy is meaningful and loaded with purpose, it seems to have sent out a wrong signal to many as a result of which those who undertake the basic programme of two year training in philosophy seem to be lacking in the required rigour in philosophical formation. It is hoped that the present attempt of upgrading philosophical studies (after another bachelor's degree from a university) as a two year on-campus programme with its first year culled out from the university degree, would hopefully bring back the required rigour in philosophical formation. The intellectual formation that is insisted upon both by the UNESCO and *Pastores dabo vobis* calls for a serious study of philosophy, which, it is hoped, would directly contribute to an enhanced understanding of theology.

While we see a decreasing interest for philosophy even among the traditional group of seminarians pursuing theology, many candidates who come from among women religious and the laity seem to be intent on equipping themselves with theology but without having readiness on their part to undertake any training in philosophy. Many who have a serious interest in pursuing theology seem to miss the importance of philosophy and consider their investment for philosophy as a waste of time. However, as Catholic theology is very much connected to philosophy, particularly western philosophy, understanding theological concepts presupposes a familiarity with and expertise in philosophy. Apart from the expected familiarity with western philosophical traditions, in India, it would be an excellent but essential addition also to have a better understanding of Indian philosophy, as the candidates who pursue theological formation in India are expected to interact with and reflect upon the Indian reality and also to make sense of the Christian faith content to the people of India for which one will have to meaningfully employ philosophical concepts that are familiar to the Indian people.

### **8.9. Generation and Sharing of Academic Resources**

Offering theological formation in the contemporary society requires a lot of resource mobilization. As the candidates are exposed to a variety of sources and possibilities, especially electronic sources, institutions that offer theological formation are very much in need of equipping themselves with such resources. As such sources are known to be quite expensive and beyond the means of most of such institutions, Catholic institutions, at least in certain specific localities, should develop mechanisms to share the resources that each one is able to procure. This would include the library, e-journals, other electronic resources, etc. Sharing these resources will not only enable the candidates to have access to much more resources than that these institutions could afford, it would also prepare the ground for enhanced understanding and mutual collaboration in many other fields among such institutions. As developing a catholic approach even in sharing the resources is called forth, the candidates pursuing theological formation will have access to more resources, which would have a positive impact upon their learning and formation of theological perspectives.

The formally trained personnel for theological formation within the Catholic Church in India are really impressive. Although no specific study has been made on these personnel and their contributions, a good number of research projects are undertaken by them (despite the fact that many get entangled in administrative works than in academics or formative assignments). They come up with publication of the results of their studies and researches either in the form of books or articles. There is an increasing number of publications, including scientific journals, coming out of ecclesiastical formation centres in India. Making provisions to share these resources among the theological institutes would be a significant step in enhancing the resources and mutual respect for those trained personnel. It is high time that some institutions in India take lead in forming an electronic database or a web portal on the formally trained personnel for theological formation and their research interests and publications.

### **8.10. Need of Affiliation and Accreditation**

Although theological formation is basically an in-house programme of the Catholic Church, recognition of a formalized formation programme in ecclesiastical disciplines is a need of the contemporary times. It is true that quality would be spontaneously recognized; however, when the institutions of theological formation are left to themselves for their curriculum development, training, and evaluation, there are chances to compromise quality, which would naturally be questioned by external agencies. The Congregation for Catholic Education, Rome, calls for proper mechanisms in recognizing different institutions and programmes, especially of theology. They are taking every possible step to assure that the quality intellectual training offered in ecclesiastical institutions is maintained and recognized both by the faithful and by the national and international accreditation agencies. From this point of view, it is necessary that Catholic institutions that impart theological education take every step to assure that they are properly accredited under the umbrella of the Congregation for Catholic Education by affiliation, aggregation, and/or incorporation, and, if possible, also under the civil accreditation agencies such as University Grants Commission (UGC) in India; attempts to join the IGNOU programme in philosophy or the possibility of mutual recognition of the courses by ecclesiastical and civil faculties (Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram-Christ University in Bangalore and Satya Nilayam-Loyola in Chennai), etc., are also praiseworthy. As both these involve a lot of complicated processing, taking collective steps in this regard may be helpful. The recent formation of the Conference

of the Catholic Faculties in India (CCFI), involving all the eight faculties recognized by the Congregation for Catholic Education, is an initial but right step in this regard.

## 9. Conclusion

As it is stated in the opening paragraphs of the *Pastores dabo vobis*, the ministry of theological “formation is a continuation in time of Christ’s own work, which the evangelist Mark illustrates in these words: ‘And he went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons’ (Mk. 3:13-15)” (PDV §2). Fundamentally, then, theological formation is a mission of the Church in which the willing faithful are given an opportunity to know the person of Jesus Christ in depth and transform one’s own life in tune with the values that he had cherished in the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Following this fundamental approach, in the contemporary world, which experiences a crisis-ridden postmodern drift in identifying and subscribing to any definite choice, theological formation is considered to offer a proper and lasting grounding to the candidates, who, in turn, would be capable of enlightening and convincing others as to the importance of a commitment to the person and values of Jesus Christ, which is enshrined in the community of faithful, the Church.

Our understanding of education as an ongoing process that continuously transforms a person and inducts himself or herself into a community matrix and enables the blossoming of oneself and all others, along with the four pillars of education endorsed by UNESCO and the four pillars of theological formation proposed by the Catholic Church, gives us a clear direction as to how theological formation should function. It has an inherent mission of deepening of the Christian faith of the person who undergoes theological formation as well as the faith of the ecclesial community. As the ecclesial community provides the matrix for an individual faithful to blossom in one’s faith life, the individual who transforms himself or herself has a basic responsibility to do theology in relation to the community; for, a Christian theology done in isolation from the ecclesial community cannot be qualified as a Christian theology at all. That clearly has a bearing on theological formation offered in India: it is to facilitate the ecclesial life of the people of India, especially for those who have accepted the person and message of Jesus Christ as the anchor and foundational matrix of their lives. Accordingly, theological formation in India must be made more Indian-context-related without losing the perennially valuable aspects of Christian faith as they have been transferred from community to community and from tradition to tradition. Such a theology will be truly Christian and catholic and would not only be related to the context and life of the people of India, but would certainly be instrumental in transforming the lives of the people – both those who have accepted faith in Jesus Christ as their ground of life and, through them, the entire people of India.

It is hoped that those who undergo such a theological formation would not only become agents who would fulfil their institutional roles but would also assume a variety of ministerial roles in the community of faithful with a true pastoral outlook after the model of Jesus Christ. Every person who comes out of theological formation must ideally become more and more attuned to the mind of Jesus, with a readiness to lay his or her life for giving life to many, the life in abundance. This would mean that, in the context of the life of India’s majority, who are the exploited lot, the marginalized, those who are the victims of systemic injustices from which they do not seem to have a way out, a Christian faithful who are given formation in theology should be able to dedicate one’s life to uplift them from their sad but

desperate plight. Theology would be true to its Christian foundations only when a theologian would become an effective and prophetic instrument to transform a society which is loaded with injustice and hopelessness.

This transformation has to begin with the personal life of every individual who undertakes theological formation. The capital of personal integrity in the life of a Christian theologian is of immense value and great potential in being an effective catalyst to bring about a lasting Christian transformation in the society. As there is an increasing outcry about the widely prevalent allegations of corruption in various church-related institutions, even if they pertain to other churches and denominations, everyone who undergoes theological formation, especially to undertake various ministerial roles in the ecclesial community, must consciously establish greatest possible personal integrity in every sphere of life.

The depth of faith that is brought about by theological formation would facilitate all that is needed on the part of a person to make him or her an effective instrument within the ecclesial community. Those institutions of theological formation which, without fail, perform this fundamental task in the Church could be qualified a *porta Fidei* or “the door of faith,” taking cue from the title of the Apostolic Letter of Pope Benedict XVI (2012). Along the same line, those candidates who seriously undertake their pilgrimage in faith through theological formation, when they are truly transformed in Christian faith through their committed study and research in theology, could be allegorically qualified as *lumen fidei* or “the light of faith,” following the sense communicated by the Apostolic Letter of Pope Francis (2013). Even if all do not fully succeed in this ideal, it is important that both theological institutions and those persons who undergo theological formation aspire to become the door of faith and light of faith, respectively, and then the Catholic Church would succeed in being a meaningful existence by assuring that its attempts to offer theological formation ultimately would bear lasting fruits in the lives of the people of the subcontinent of India.