

**“Theological Education in World Christianity”**

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<https://aqueductproject.org/conference-room/>

## SUMMARY:

Joshva Raja opened this conversation by briefly introducing the book, *The Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity* (Wipf & Stock, 2010) [2]. He described trends in global theological education in the decade following the publication of that book. First, he noted that there has been a growth in both demand and supply of theological education in the global South [3]. At the same time, in the global North, theological institutions have been closing [4] or merging their programs into ethics and religious studies departments [10]. Within this context, Raja noted that there has been a trend toward using online tools for theological education, such as is demonstrated by the growth of Theological Education by Extension [6, 8]. In part because of the use of such digital tools, institutes for theological education are reevaluating their basic teaching models and outcome goals [4, 7, 9].

After surveying some of the major trends in theological education, Raja went on to discuss what action steps may be taken to advance theological training. First, he noted the idea of possibility compiling another handbook on theological education [11]. Second, he called for an association of accrediting bodies to bring together theological training in the East and West [11]. Finally, he noted that there was a great need for aid in faculty development in the global South [12]. Raja then opened the panel for discussion [13].

Throughout the panel discussion, there were four reoccurring themes: (a) the need for ecumenical theological education, (b) the role of women in theological education, (c) the development of digital tools for use in theological training, and (d) the assimilation of theological training into the larger university system.

First, it was observed that, in the last decade, denominational theological education has been emphasized over ecumenical theological education. Isabel Phiri noted that this “challenges the issue of sustainability” because many small denominations cannot provide the resources necessary for robust theological training [16]. Christoph Stückelberger commented that, as a result, this reality has led to the closure of many denominational schools [21]. Dietrich Werner added that “a new model of ecumenical sharing of resources is urgently needed,” and called for a global conference to meet that need [31, 33–34], a sentiment that was echoed by Raja [57]. David Samuel posited that Theological Education by Extension is one successful model of ecumenical theological training [44].

Second, a major topic under consideration was the role of women in theological education. Phiri and Samuel noted that a particular advantage of Theological Education by Extension was the opportunity it provided for many women to seek theological training [18, 42]. Stückelberger added that, because of the growth of the number of women seeking theological education, opportunities for women to serve the church also ought to be considered [26]. Raja replied that, because of limitations in many denominations, many women have taken a growing role in theological training in India [27]. Nevertheless, Parush Parushev commented that, in other

contexts, opportunities for women to teach in higher theological education also needed to be opened up [39].

Third, the panel considered the development of digital tools in theological training. Stückelberger warned that a particular challenge for online theological education is a reduction in quality [24]. David Field responded that quality in online theological education can be reached if various theological institutions are working together to pool their resources [28, 29, 49]. Parushev reaffirmed this conclusion, adding that a regional accreditation association may be able to provide the necessary guidance to maintain quality standards [40]. Prashad Phillips later described the Global Institute for Leadership Development as such an example [53]. Samuel added that support from western institutions may be able to have the same effect [43].

Fourth, the panel further discussed Raja's point that many theological programs have been absorbed into religious studies departments in major universities. Phiri commented that, in many cases, schools originally founded as theological training institutes develop into universities and, as a result, eventually marginalize theological education [17]. For Stückelberger, this is an opportunity for theological faculty to have an impact and a voice in a broader setting [22–23, 56], a conclusion seconded by Phiri [56]. Rhio Altnurme added that this trend has also helped to promote a more ecumenically oriented theological training [46–47]. Nevertheless, within this setting, Werner maintained that Christians must work to preserve a place for independent, Christian theological reflection within the university setting [32].

Raja closed the conversation in prayer.

## TRANSCRIPT:

[1] **Jonathan Armstrong:** Today, it's our delight to be hearing from Joshva Raja, who is one of the co-deans at the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life and also one of the co-editors of *The Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity* (Wipf & Stock, 2010), which was released 10 years ago in 2010. Dr. Raja, we're extremely grateful to be hearing from you today.

[2] **Joshva Raja:** I would like to share my screen with you and I'll just introduce a few things, what I think from my limited experience of both editing and theological education that can lead to a discussion today. When we started this book, it came up in an accident, or with God's providence I should say. We did bring this together as the first venture and printed it out in 2010 and released it at the Edenborough conference. Since then, four publishers have published it and now it's available in a PDF file free of cost by Regnum. And we succeeded in many ways to bring worldwide authors across a wide range of denominations and experience and topics as well. But we had also limitations. Many of the people who sent articles were not up to the mark, or some of them did not respond, and so we put together what was available at that time. And so since then, what? As I have highlighted in my write-up, I would just like to highlight a few things.

[3] We have an enormous growth of theological institutions in the global South in many parts of the world. Recently we have started that research center in Myanmar. We ourselves from the Oxford Centre funded that research center through the Association for Theological Education in Myanmar, along with the FTESEA [Federation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia] and ATESEA [Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia] and 36 colleges. But they are also able to serve another 30 colleges under the Asia Theological Association. So there's a growth of theological institutions in many parts of the world. And they are demanding that there's a lot of need for faculty development and other areas, a library, etcetera.

[4] Now there are wild and there are also sad stories that we hear in the global North. Recently, one of the very interesting colleges in Nottingham, which is to serve a large constituency of Evangelical churches in Europe, sadly had to close down. And so this is a challenging season. We are hearing this story regularly of the closing down of colleges in the Western side of the theological education. And then some of the colleges are quickly shifting to non-residential programs or mixed mode or part-time training. And lots of words are coming up because they see that residential programs are increasingly expensive and it's very difficult to maintain those things. Some of the churches have seen being a resident and being trained in the residential theological formation is the only way to form a person, particularly in terms of mentoring, in terms of their attendance in chapel, and all sorts of things. But now they had written a completely different way of doing this ministerial and theological formation.

[5] And the other thing I just want to repeat is that Pentecostal and Evangelical churches are mushrooming. That's also one problem when it comes to sustainability and survival of some of these colleges. And the way they teach is also challenging. For some of them, it is difficult to draw the line between the cults and theology. The World Communion of Reformed Churches asked me to come, and they had this theology conference in Africa recently challenging some of these theologies, and that was quite fascinating.

[6] So for me it's also very important that now there's a lot of interest in Theological Education by Extension. That's becoming quite popular and I have seen number of theological colleges in the West... I'm sorry to divide these Western lines, if you don't mind. But there's a lot of increase in Theological Education by Extension. And how effectively what we do works is under question, but we are all trying. We have started a Ph.D. program and all that works to some extent very well. So in that sense it seems to be working in many cases.

[7] And for me, it also brings a lot of challenges with the learning and teaching models. Many of the theological institutions are emphasizing the placement based or experience based reflective journey. Particularly, many of them begin to look like it's the journey for the meanings of being a good disciple, of life, and of God in particular contexts with experience and action based models. I think it is also not experienced in your own particular context, even cross-cultural, other-culture, other-church and other-context. And that brings you more wisdom in terms of keeping oneself wider. And these are some of the things that have recently emerged, I suppose, in my observation. I also should tell you that I have borrowed some of these ideas from the whole analysis that my colleague, David Esterline, has done through his survey around the world. He has been in touch with me. I should ascribe some of these things to him as well because some of these things come from his own study. He was one of the colleagues in this book. But I'm happy that many of theological institutions are just referring to it from time to time.

[8] The one other thing I like to say is that using technology and all the resources bring more hermeneutics, new ways of doing theology, new convergence, and new participation, which is challenging our regular way of learning and teaching. This is very interesting because, for people that you may know better than me who have this new technology, it provides a new challenge. And one of the interesting points that we are facing nowadays is "theology for all." How do we develop theology for all? And that is very important. We have developed something called the Global Institute for Leadership Development here in Barnabas Fund along with my colleagues. And my colleague, Dr. Prasad, is leading it. And he is developing courses for everyone in the church from certificate to diploma to Bachelor of Ministry. We sought to translate this present structure into more flexible and non-formal ways so that we can reach out not only to the ordained, but even to the preachers, Bible study leaders, and some of the very grassroots level leaders. I'm happy that Prasad is here also onboard. So it's quite an interesting challenge that it brings. I think that we should think about it even within the current theological institution. I know that many of the colleges are already doing this.

[9] Just to highlight what I said, we are in the tension of vocation versus profession. This is the old question being asked again, this is not a new question of this generation. Is it professional skills or are we emphasizing ministerial and missional of formation? And again, residential versus non-residential, classroom based and praxis oriented, fixed curricula or can we go for flexible curricula? Because, you see, we are training people in Bangladesh who are mainly converts from Islam, so it's going to be an interesting challenge for us without going to a proper college and without following a proper, structured curricula. How can we develop a flexible curricula for them, so that they could lead the house group and the invisible churches in Bangladesh? That's a very interesting challenge.

[10] I am also noticing some very interesting phasing in universities where I have been, such as Birmingham University and the Free University of Amsterdam where I have been teaching and supervising. It is quite fascinating to see that the Western theology departments are slowly merging into religion, philosophy, and ethics departments in many places. And that is really challenging. And in the East, we struggle with accreditation and affiliation to the universities. One of the questions being asked from time to time at the Asia Theological Association is who recognizes these universities? Suddenly people asked, and then we are in difficulty. So this is one of the areas that we are really discussing and trying to find a way out. And in the West, of course this is my criticism, we moved some time ago from academic exercise to ideological driven and emotionally related studies. And sometimes it is hard for the writers from the developing nations to get their writings published. It's a bit hard, so we are looking at some support from the West. Even though we have published, some of the emerging writers are really finding it hard.

[11] I am just going to think about what we can do in order to address some of these emerging issues after the 2010 book. I'm thinking of trying another edited monumental work on new emerging trends and context, especially focused on Theological Education by Extension. There's lots and lots of people like TEEN in Nepal, TEEP, in the Middle East, and we have TEE emerging, and in North Africa we have it. So that may be something that we can put together. And also I'm thinking of networking an accreditation application, whether the West and the East can come together as a global body of Christ in order to cherish and nourish our theological education together as part of our calling and mission. And sustainability of theological education is one of the major challenges that we have.

[12] And I think one other final point I'd like to make is faculty development in the South. We need help. Actually I should remind you of an old missionary call, we need friends. So in those days we used mission minded friends in the global North who helped us to come and finish our Ph.D. and go back home. I'm not saying that we should depend completely for our faculty development on the North, but we are already developing South to South collaborations. Now many of our students are doing research in South Africa in Pretoria and we are even developing a network with Cameroon and a few others. But in spite of that I would still say that we would like to have some faculty developed in the West to keep that body of Christ ruling together in a more mature way through theological education.

[13] You know, in my humbleness, I should say I have highlighted a few things about it. There are few areas which I have not highlighted, the learning methods and other things, but I think I will leave to others to add or you know raise any issues in this presentation. It is nice to see many friends around. I hand it back to my friends, there are people like Henry Wilson, who is a very well experienced professor, and Christoph and Phiri and others, all of the experts. Please add to my little knowledge that I brought to the table and I humble myself that it's a privilege to sit on this video with you guys. Please bring your wisdom to the table.

[14] **Jonathan Armstrong:** We should first thank Dr. Raja. Thank you so much Dr. Raja. This is an open time now for us to isolate the issues reflecting on the things that Dr. Raja has presented. Who would like to speak first?

**[15] Isabel Phiri:** Hello, my name is Isabel Phiri. I am one of the editors of *The Handbook on Theological Education in Africa* (Regnum, 2015), which was a follow-up from your handbook because we found it very inspiring and we thought we needed to do one for Africa, which we completed in 2014. And the issues you have raised are the same issues that we faced in Africa. And I'm really glad that you are thinking of another publication that will address the current issues.

**[16]** One of the issues which I want to highlight is ecumenical theological education because one of the problems that I see happening in Africa and in most of the other countries that are visited on behalf of the World Council of Churches is that we are moving away from ecumenical theological education and we are now emphasizing denominational theological education. For me, this is a loss, really. One, it challenges the issues of sustainability because many denominations, like the ones I know in Africa, would be small and they still want to have their own theological education with limited books and limited faculty. And, therefore, it becomes difficult to get them accredited because it's a small institution and it does not meet the national educational standards. So it's a huge challenge which we need to address.

**[17]** And the second one, which is also connected to that one, is the issue of turning theological colleges into universities. So you'd have, let's say, the Presbyterians. In Malawi, because I come from Malawi, they have their own theological institution, which used to be ecumenical. We had the Anglicans coming and the Baptists and the Church of Christ, and now each one of them has got their own. And they are also turning their theological seminaries into universities, and by so doing they are marginalizing theology and emphasizing other subjects that will attract more students like law, medicine, and all these others. And what I see is that we are destroying our own theological institutions. So if the churches cannot prioritize theological institutions, the government is not going to do it for us. So this is an area which I feel so passionate about, encouraging churches to take theological education seriously, but also not just the denominational one. I challenge churches to consider ecumenical theological education so that we can put our resources together and improve the quality of what we are offering out there.

**[18]** I'm also one of those who promote a Theological Education by Extension, not only because it offers opportunity for women to study theology because we still have theological institutions that are limited to ordained pastors, male. So for most women to study theology, you either go to Theological Education by Extension or you go to government universities. So Theological Education by Extension needs to be extended and we need to emphasize the education of the laity through Theological Education by Extension. For the time being, I would want to offer those and then give opportunities to others to speak as well.

**[19]** I can come back later, because I also wanted to emphasize the theological education of the grassroots preachers. When I was at University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, we had a program for theological education of pastors from Pentecostal and African Independent churches, and we had a huge response because it offered the grassroots preachers an opportunity to come together to prepare a sermon for the next Sunday together. So you had a team of people preparing together, and that improved the quality of the theologies that are being preached out there. And this is something that I would like to see developed. Thank you.

[20] **Joshva Raja:** That's wonderful comment. You're very affirming. And I think, if I may say, it's important that the church takes up somehow the responsibility of supporting theological education. I like the point.

[21] **Christoph Stückelberger:** Thank you very much, Joshva and Isabel. I can continue in line with what both of you said and would like to raise in the first round six points and then others later. The first is this observation of denominationalism, which is really in my view one of the big challenges and also bottlenecks. I had a chance now to teach in Basel University with the theological faculty. I'm teaching in Nigeria, in China, in Russia, and in Leeds Beckett, UK. So I can compare a bit, and this denominationalism leads to really a weakening, because too many small institutions are competing with each other, not recognized. And I think we should address that really proactively. I'm sure a number of these denominational seminaries will close and have closed, some of them.

[22] The second point is the question of speed. I observe and I work now a lot with the universities, both private and state universities, and I see a slow development or slow decision-making procedures in some of the theological education institutions. Where us in the secular, so to say, in the state or private university world, the speed counts, and I think we should find a mechanism and also talk to the church leaders about how we can speed up decisions and developments. Because we lose ground by the fact that for each decision we take five years, ten years. I exaggerate, I know, but I would like to highlight this speed factor. I'm in Geneva in the same building as Isabel in the ecumenical center and I attend a lot of conferences now on AI and ethics, AI and new technologies, AI in education. It's just unbelievable what's going on in the technology world. And when I am in as one of the only theologians normally in these conferences, I feel that we are cut off from this kind of world. Of course, I exaggerate.

[23] The third point is that I would also underline what is said about university accreditation and these procedures. For financial reasons, of course, there is a need to have paying faculties, management, medicine, economics, and law. And I say it when I teach, but also in my alma mater, St. Paul's University in Kenya, I see the challenge for theology. And I think while it can also be a chance, it's not only a challenge. The chance is if we have a Protestant university, for example, or an ecumenical university, or Catholic university, how can the theological faculty play a role to cross the faculties? So a kind of missionary approach, if you like, where the theological faculty may be small, but it can have an outreach within these institutions. And I also see that the willingness, with exceptions, of course. India is a different case at the moment with all the nationalist Hindu movements. But in many other countries, theology is still welcome, and ethics is very welcome across the faculties. So there is a chance, but we have to kind of reorient our focus. Pastors' education is very important, but also how can we have the necessary faculty members who are able to dialogue with medicine, bioethics, technology, and ethics and theology, and all the rest?

[24] My fourth remark is on online. That was mentioned by Joshva also, and it's true that distance education is, of course, on the move. But I see also, and I talk with a lot of Vice Chancellors on different continents, I see a growing hesitation. So it's not the end of the story, I think, because of quality issues. I was in Moscow with the president of the association of private universities and he told me that after 1990 to 2000, 600 private universities were created in



Russia, mainly online, but 500 in the last two years were closed because the government said quality was not reached. They cannot allow low-level online universities, so there's a pressure for online teaching to have good quality. And I think we can reach that in theology, but we need to be aware that online is not just easy, you put a MOOC online and it's done.

[25] My fifth remark is about Europe and EU and US. I think in the North, we have the challenge that (I may speak from the Swiss perspective, but I think in other European countries it's similar) that the theology is almost no more present in public life. So theological faculties are seriously educating pastors and so on, but where is the theological voice in the public debate, in the media and whatever you imagine? So, how can we encourage theological faculties and theological education to be more present in public life and debates? I think the Pentecostals and the Evangelicals do it better than the mainline churches. I suffer from my own university in Basel. I mean this is almost not present in the public life.

[26] My last point for this round is women, and you as a well mentioned it. I observe that the percentage of women in theological studies is quite high, at least in those institutions where I'm attached to, but the challenge is then related partly with women's ordination. So, what next? To have women in theological education is good, but there are so many frustrated, excellent women who would like to serve in the church as pastors, as bishops, but they are hindered to do that. So we need also, when we talk about theological education, we need to talk to the leadership in order to give them the respective place and voice. Thank you.

[27] **Joshva Raja:** I think those are good points which you made. I should say that in India we have many women who have come to theological education and have gone without jobs from the northeastern part of India. They have gone for higher qualifications, but now most of the theological instructor jobs are filled by them, so we have many women from northeast part of India. But the Baptist's do not ordain them back in the northeast, sadly. But then they got the theological instructor. All the Baptist pastors have to learn under them now. That's a good sign.

[28] **David Field:** I wanted to pick up some comments about online education, which is my particular area of interest. Yes, I agree with Christoph that issues around quality are important, but I think also online education has huge potential for linking up institutions and colleges where there is a lack of resources. One of the projects I'm working on at the moment is linking up colleges in East Africa where you have small, Methodist theological colleges with two or three faculty and maybe 60 students working part-time. And the potential of online education is to link together these various colleges, offering combined courses and pooling resources. And then I think online education has potential when used with good quality control and with good technological support. It has a potential to overcome a lot of the difficulties, particularly in countries in the global South. With the development of 4G mobile phone technology, a lot can be done over mobile phones, for example, with high quality software. So I would just want to emphasize that online education is not everything, but it certainly has a contribution to make. Perhaps also to know that I think there's certain elements of theological education which I don't think can be done online: there's a mentoring process, a process of spiritual formation that really requires personal and pastoral interaction.

**[29] Joshva Raja:** Yes I think I support that as well. At the same time we also tried to provide online resources through our program called Global Institute for Leadership Development. I know that Global Ethics, which Christoph does, also provides quite a large range of resources online, but we are buying things like JSTOR and EBSCO to provide at free of cost to those who cannot have access. So it would be quite good to use such facilities. I think Dr. Prasad is here, and we have already been making it available to the people who cannot afford to buy these things. And we are happy indeed to share that. And also, we need to publicize and popularize Global Ethics much more to the students in the global South, which they can access free of cost. Besides, that also helps online learning alongside. We just bought one more software, which is called Bible Museum, which is very good to learn. So we are providing it free of cost to anybody who learns online. We have got the copyright outside America to anybody around the world, so we would like to make it free of cost. The only problem is we want to see it being used and not sold. I think Dietrich Werner is here. He is one of my colleagues who gave input into this book, and he would bring a good input into it.

**[30] Dietrich Werner:** So, warm greetings to everybody. It's exciting that I meet so many friends and colleagues from former periods as we have been working in WCC [World Council of Churches] as Director of ETE [Ecumenical Theological Education] program. Just three additional perspectives which are very close to what Joshva Raja and also the other friends Isabel Phiri and Christoph and others have shared.

**[31]** First, we are facing dramatic demographic challenges in terms of the needs for global theological education. Churches in the North Atlantic are shrinking, usually populations in Western countries are growing older like myself. And if you look at the numbers of those who are enrolling for theological studies, you will see that the vast majority of younger candidates for theological studies are in the global South, whereas the vast resources for theological education in terms of teaching staff and also library resources are still located in the North. I think a new model of ecumenical sharing of resources is urgently needed and demands for a world conference. Because we look back into the famous periods of theological education and it was more than forty-five global mission agencies who came together to engage at that period, in the early period of decolonization in an exercise of ecumenical sharing of resources. The situation has become so dramatic with the demographic shifts in the composition of world Christianity, that I would recommend for a broad initiative to bring together major players from WCC circles, from Evangelical circles, as well as from charismatic and independent church circles, to seek for a new future of theological education and sharing of resources, which includes faculty development programs. Because I feel pain in my soul if I get letters from young, very gifted scholars from Asia, Latin America, and Africa, all demanding support for theological education for doing M.Th. or Ph.D. work, but there are no proper sharing mechanisms available.

**[32]** The second item: secularism, de-Christianization and theological education. A leading scholar on African Christianity, who worked also in Aberdeen, once has talked about the 20th century as a period of the biggest excess accession of world Christianity and the biggest recession of world Christianity. And that refers to the dramatic growth of African Christianity and Southern Christianity on the one hand and the biggest recession, which means withdrawal and diminishing of Christianity in countries the global West. This also is reflected in a different mindset in secular universities. We had once a big Oslo conference on theological education,

where the general secretary of WCC had delivered a major speech on the future of theological education in Europe. One of the key observations, as Joshva has indicated, is a transformation between theological education towards religious studies. So I'm not arguing here at all against religious studies. That is, I would still keep the position that is theology proper, which means confessional theological reflection is a vital and independent part of the university setting, not only in Europe but in the whole of the globe, and we should stand up for a common defense of the discipline of proper Christian theological reflection in the future of Western and global universities. That is not to be taken for granted because we swim against the tide.

[33] The last point, and very briefly I will stop, we need a new coalition towards wider ecumenism in theological education. We have a diversified composition of Christianity: charismatic churches, Pentecostal churches, independent churches, quite a lot of AICs, as we call them in Africa, have come up. And they also present a significant contribution to the witness of the church and to social ethics and social witness of the church, but they lack theological training. Although the younger generation of their leaders is very eager to study theology also in mainline church settings. I think we should listen to the task to come over to Macedonia and help us. This call nowadays is mentioned as being articulated by these minority churches, which are to some extent outside the Christianity mainstream and also, in some cases, often outside the existing ecumenical networks. But I think we should listen to these churches. While being critical about some trends on Christian fundamentalism, which we have in many denominations as well, we ought to listen to those who would like to do proper and highly reflective and advanced theological reflection from these churches. And a new act of a broader coalition ecumenism in theological education in the future of world Christianity is urgently demanded.

[34] I don't know whether you have talked about the forthcoming assembly of WCC, because I was cut off when Isabelle Phiri was speaking. But I hope that the new assembly of WCC, which is intended to take place in Karlsruhe next September [September 8-16, 2021] will make space available for discussing future strategic priorities for theological education, including the collaboration with something which is designed now that is a new project for the World Council of Churches assembly. Thanks a lot for listening and thanks a lot for joining this very exciting panorama. Thank you.

[35] **Joshva Raja:** Very good. I think it was very good input. And I should say that even though we grow old, we have not lost our enthusiasm. You come with the same spirit. Very good, well done. I should say that this one to you, that we had two conferences on the funding agencies that we brought together, one in Birmingham and one in Hamburg, remember. So I think we must think about that also as one of the possibilities in the future, the funding agencies of theological education coming together for strategically thinking along with the people from the South. Make their voices heard.

[36] **Parush Parushev:** First of all, I want to thank you for the helpful mapping and valuable points that you have made, Dr. Raja, on the state of theological education, which I can confirm with my own experience, but somewhat implicitly in a sense that I'm particularly interested and I'm representing several institutions involved in doctoral level education and studies. I am the senior supervisor in University in Amsterdam, in the International Baptist Theological Study Center in the London School of Theology, and in Acadia Divinity College in Canada. And, at the

same time, I am leading as director an evangelical institution in Sofia Bulgaria. But I'm speaking from Moldova, where the current third doctoral colloquium of countries of the post-soviet space came together to establish a center of doctoral training of their own constituencies.

[37] And these are nine countries with more than fifty-six educational institutions who are pulling their resources together to develop a Ph.D. and Doctor of Ministry program for Eastern Europe. And this is a fascinating development in an area talking about secularization, where for seventy-five years theology was taken off any kind of curriculums. And even today in Russia, it is not seriously considered as a part of academic curriculum. Happily, in Ukraine, it is not the situation. So the context is quite different. There is an amazing company here for training doctoral students. Why is it so interesting to us? I am also representing Langham Partners scholarship team or scholarship program that provides funding for doctoral studies of majority world candidates. And from year to year we are getting more and more applications for doctoral studies, and by that I can confirm that there is a very active academic life on the grassroots in different countries that needs a very serious faculty development which can be provided only by giving additional support for doctoral development and faculty development in these institutions.

[38] And an interesting doctoral trend that I observe is the development of regional centers. In the past, we used to send our doctoral candidates to United Kingdom, to the United States, to Australia so that they could get a proper education there. But today, there are incredible institutions in Francophone Africa, in Anglophone Africa, in India, and in Eastern Europe. So we are very much interested in developing regional centers rather than helping a particular person to achieve a doctoral status or get a doctoral degree.

[39] And one issue that struck a chord with me is Isabel's and Christoph's concern about women in theological education. Yes, there are women here and there. They are actively studying. In the institution I'm a guest at, at the moment more than half of the students are women. But when you looked at the faculty makeup, there are none, or they are very few. So what kind of efforts can we put up to encourage the faculties and theological institutions to make the best use of these talented women to get into the teachings of theological education, not just being recipients of theological education? So these are just several points that I would like to make.

[40] I like what Christoph has mentioned about the situation in Moscow and the online and private university education that inflicted this country in the past. Now the Russian government is taking quite serious measures to require a certain level of quality or quality assurance of theological education. Some look at it as an attempt politically to suppress especially evangelicals, but because it is cross-denominational, my Russian-speaking colleagues were telling me that it's not a political action. But it is an attempt to raise the level of the delivery of theological programs to measure up with those expected from the state universities, which raises a very serious issue about cross-border accreditation or regional accreditation of theological programs. There are a number of theological programs around, but very few can claim that they're solidly accredited by credible accreditation bodies. In Europe, we are trying through the European Council of Theological Education to lift up the standards of accreditation of evangelical theological education by alining with the standards of European networks of quality assurance agencies and to become one of those recognized by this network so that we can provide credible accreditation and quality of the programs that are given by institutions in the

Middle East, in North Africa, in Central, Eastern and Western Europe. These are some observations.

**[41] Joshva Raja:** Very good. I think in the name of quality some of the teachings can be controlled. That's quite a challenging thing. While we all want quality, but not to restrict some teachings. That's a very interesting point you make.

**[42] David Samuel:** Thank you, Dr. Josvua. Thank you for that presentation. This is my first time attending a zoom conference, and I'm happy for this opportunity to hear from all of you. I have been involved with Theological Education by Extension primarily in India for several years, so many of the things that you said are relevant to us. Thank you again for this interest in Theological Education by Extension, which reaches out to local churches and those who are traditionally not able to get the opportunity to study theology. And interestingly many of the church members tend to have very folk theology and interpret Scriptures sometimes with superstitions. So I think theological education at the local level, especially with the emerging churches, becomes a priority. And we have been offering these courses. Last week, we had a graduation for about 600 students. Again next month, we will have a graduation for another 300. So you are really reaching out to evangelist, catechist village preachers, and Bible men. And particularly our lower-level programs, like the foundational and certificate programs, reach out to these men. In fact, more women students study these programs. Of the 12,000 students we have maybe about 7,000 are men. But, of course, in the higher-level programs like B.Th., M.Div, and M.Th., we have more male students.

**[43]** There is something, especially about these higher-level programs, where concerns about accreditation and affiliations that your raise are important issues. We initially offered some courses validated initially by Oxford University and then by Wales University and then we tried to do some with Fuller, but all these have not succeeded. So if any effort is made in which universities from the West and theological institutions from the West can really accept these sort of programs, which we have difficulty within the Indian context itself because of the situation of the church, it will be very helpful. Because from the West, there are a lot of possibilities. We have some experience of running these things, but Theological Education by Extension is still considered not very academic.

**[44]** One of the other things I want to emphasize is that developing study materials continues to be a challenge. In India, as it is the system, there is a lot of denominational fragmentation in terms of theological education, but at least Theological Education by Extension India is not fragmented so much. It continues to be a major organization for most of the denominational churches. But with the help of missionaries from the Western countries - UK, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries – and with the Indians within India, we are able to develop courses. But such partnerships are now less and less because courses developed in India are now used in Pakistan, in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and others close by. So some effort in developing course materials would be good. But also race is important as changing circumstances calls for changing curriculum in the same sort of ways by which all the things that you have raised: grounding in Bible, theological responsibility, contextual sensitivity, context relevance, spiritual formation, and character formation. How all these can be integrated and offered at different levels continues to be a challenge.

[45] I am very grateful for this opportunity to here from all of you and I hope some of these discussions that happen through your initiative will bear fruit in different parts the world and also in India. Thank you very much.

[46] **Riho Altnurme:** Thank you. I was also one of the authors of the book and after ten years I'm no longer Dean of the Faculty of Theology, but our institution is now called School of Theology and Religious Studies. So it shows the development which is also in Estonia as a part of Eastern Europe is very common with the Western part of Europe. And I think mergers between institutions has been one of the processes that has taken place during the last ten years. And my experience is that it has actually helped for ecumenical cooperation because, in some cases, during the harsh accreditation process, the different confessions had to cooperate in reorganizing the theological education in a way that some of the education could be made together. So we have less institutions now, and we have less students now. That's the result of the accreditation from one side and also the demographic processes.

[47] But I can say that we have avoided probably the stress of denominational education in that way. But we can also say that, of course, the secularization has also worked a lot on education and the trend of education, so that religious studies is more favored in this way. But I think the cooperation is one of the key words: cooperation between different confessions and also cross-border cooperation. Still, the difficulty is, in Slavic states, for example, different languages. Some students are still very keen to use our native language. The study of foreign languages is still not on the level that it could be expected. So I think that cooperation between different institutions and different confessions is the solution in a situation of recession, which was described in Europe particularly. Thank you.

[48] **Joshva Raja:** I think Christoph would like to speak.

[49] **Christoph Stückelberger:** Thank you. Yeah, just the first action: I think from the side of Global Ethics, we continue to look at offers for online teaching and materials. So the online library, which we just shifted to a new technology platform in terms of improving the visibility, so that is still an offer we should use. As you said, Joshva, free access to theological material is very important, and I'm very thankful to Henry Wilson and also David field and others in the round who support that very substantially.

[50] The second action: I think it would be good to have a course across theological institutions, which we are working on, which is on asset management. We know that many pastors have the responsibility for huge assets sometimes in the church, but are not trained as such. They do not need to become an accountant, but they need to understand what asset management is. And we published *African Church Assets Handbook* (Globalethics.net, 2018), with a support of Bread for the World. We had now four years of trainings. The African church has its handbook where we also have a curriculum of 12 modules for theological students on asset management, but also with theological reflection behind. I think that would help.

[51] Another one is that which several of you mentioned: the whole funding issue. We know that funding from the North is no more available as it was, but we need to shift from donation based

also to investment based. Now the challenge, and I'm breaking in another foundation in Geneva, on now faith-based investments. And that means how to bring, for example, church pension funds to, say, investing in a theological seminary or in a university as part of your mission. Instead of investing it at the stock market and losing money in New York, why don't you invest it in India or in Africa or wherever it's needed in theological education? Now that's not easy, we know, but it's feasible. I could bring a number of concrete examples. So together with the All Africa Conference of Churches, we are discussing an ecumenical fund, which would allow not only for theological seminaries, but broader churches and church related institutions to get access to investments. I will just leave it with a keyword: it's not easy. But I think we have to maybe also have a special workshop on that. We had a conference in January together with WCC on the topic of faith-based investments and I think that could also be helpful for theological institutions.

**[52] Prasad Phillips:** Thank you, Dr. Joshva, for your paper. Thank you for the many other contributions. I have been an excellent listener, but I thought I should share something, the journey that I have gone through personally as a part of what David Samuel was sharing and now with GILD. Dr. David Samuel forgot to mention those four A's which he regularly says, and I think I need to say it. Theological education needs to be, first of all, affordable. It needs to be well accredited. It needs to be applied. And it has to be academic. I think these are the four A's which have to be strong, especially in the global South.

**[53]** GILD is an initiative called Global Institute for Leadership Development, which we started sometime last year as a point to bring a network, to bring people together, theological colleges and institutions, who are involved in three things: addressing the gaps in theological education, secondly providing theological online resources, and thirdly building grassroots level training. This is the initiative. So what we have done from March last year is we have come to a point of what we call is consortium, what some of you been saying about South to South. So within South Asia, we try to bring major partners who are accrediting together so that we would be able to offer some courses. Along with it, we have TAFTEE [The Association for Theological Education by Extension], an interdenominational body, and also other Pentecostal churches. The second thing, as I said, is that we are trying to provide online resources. That's an action plan that we have already started, especially in the global South where they do not have access to it. The third area that we have initiated, and it's very important, is what we call addressing the gaps in theological curriculum.

**[54]** This is what we are doing now. I want to share what possibly needs to be done in the future. I think in the in the past we had very, very categorized learning. When you have classical ways of understanding theology, ethics, history, and religion, these are excellent ways of learning. But I think the future is we need to have an integrated learning environment, and also interdisciplinary courses, which is more important because not many of them would be wanting to do huge number of courses, but a select number of courses, which is able to deliver what is required. And another area is, especially in the global South and what we have heard is, curriculum development workshops. Because the majority of them do not have the skills, especially in developing and emerging churches. I think this is another area which needs to be addressed. And fourthly, as some of you rightly highlighted, is that resources are limited, but I think we need to look into opportunities for what we call sustainable theological teaching

methods and institutions where they could be able to sustain themselves. That is the idea that I had. I'll leave it with you, and thank you for this opportunity. Thank you for all the effort.

**[55] Jonathan Armstrong:** Thank you, Prasad. In the interest of respect for everyone's time, let's see if we can close within the next five to seven minutes. And Dr. Raja we will continue to leave it in your hands as to how we negotiate those last minutes. Thank you.

**[56] Isabel Phiri:** Yes. I wanted to speak to the issue of remaining academic, but also socially relevant. Because one of the things we have discussed is the absence of theological language in public discourse. For me, I think it's very important that as we concentrate on being academic, we also read the signs of our times so that our theological reflection is interacting with what's happening in the global world. One example is the sustainable development goals. How are we including sustainable development goals in our theological education? Because we need to develop theologians that are relevant in the society that we live in.

**[57] Joshva Raja:** Perfect. Would anybody else like to say anything? You know, we had a very interesting network around the world. I think David Esterline is trying to pull it together. He said he will ask to be part of the next meeting next year. But I think there's an absence of networking around the world, and somewhere we can find a space. Maybe WCC's something to think about. We'll be very happy to be part of and partially support some of the activities to reach out to a wider ecumenical group, like Pentecostals and Catholics, besides all the WCC members. That is that is what I am thinking. If you pull together, we will be very happy to be part of, or even to host them. And for me, I will be very happy to even think about producing the next book on TEE, which is finding a large-scale increase globally. This is a space which is absent now. I would like to pull that together somewhere and we have a good deal of excellent scholars in Africa and Europe and Asia and even in South America. We can pull together a book on that if WCC comes. We would be happy to be part of it, and I think there are a number of agencies.

**[58] Tobias Menges:** Right. I am as I'm a student of Dr. Bernhard Ott, and I'm here in Germany. And it's the first time I've joined a call like that. I'm busy writing my dissertation that also looks at theological education against a background of changing world Christianity, the decline in the West and growth in the Majority World. I am just listening in and I am very pleased to see some faces of people that I've read about or read from.

**[59] Joshva Raja:** Wonderful. Thank you. I will hand it over to Jonathan. Thank you very much, Jonathan, for hosting this. This is an excellent thing which gives a new idea for us.

**[60] Jonathan Armstrong:** Thank you, Tobias, for joining us, and please greet Dr. Ott for us. We're extremely grateful to Dr. Raja for capably leading us and presenting those stimulating ideas. Thank you very much for joining us. We're hugely honored to have all of your time and availability for this. This is an extremely rare opportunity for us and we respect and greatly value your time. Dr. Raja, would you close us in a word of prayer please?

**[61] Joshva Raja:** [Closes in Prayer]



## **SPECIAL GUESTS:**

**Joshva Raja (Presenter)**, Co-Dean at the Oxford Centre for Religion & Public Life

**Riho Altnurme**, Vice Dean for Research of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and Professor of Church History at University of Tartu

**David Field**, Coordinator of Implementation for the Methodist e-Academy

**Parush Parushev**, Senior Research Fellow at the IBTS Centre and Rector at St. Triveliuss Higher Theological Institute

**Prasad Phillips**, Distance Learning Coordinator and Tutor at Oxford Centre for Religion & Public Life

**Isabel Phiri**, Deputy General Secretary at World Council of Churches

**David Samuel**, Director at the Association for Theological Education by Extension

**Christoph Stückelberger**, President of GlobalEthics.net Foundation and Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology & Ethics at the University of Basel, Switzerland

**Dietrich Werner**, Program Executive for Ecumenical Theological Education at World Council of Churches