



ATA

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THEOLOGICAL CONSULTATION 2023
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BRIDGING THE GAP:

THE ATA INDIA THEOLOGICAL CONSULTATION 2023

By Mrs. Kezia Kripanidhi, Executive Secretary of ATA India

Vision: The Theological Consultation was the primary attraction of the AGM of 2023. Dr. Bennet's vision for the consultation as an academician, theological thinker, and writer was to foster theological thinking and writing among ATA teaching faculty. It was also to encourage young theologians to influence today's theological world with effective and quality writing- and that [objective] was supported by the rest of the ATA team. It was with those in mind that ATA India organized the Theological Consultation well in advance.

Planning: On 6th February 2023, the call for papers was sent out to all ATA Institutions- and we are grateful to all those who responded to the invitation. Eventually, a theological committee was formed, comprised of select members who worked diligently and meticulously to review the abstracts and select articles which resulted in breakout sessions during Theological Consultation.

The actual event: Then came the days of the actual event: 22-24 August. Delegates and presenters gathered at SAIACS. The presentations during plenary sessions were on Spiritual Formation, Theological Formation, Deep Learning, Non-Formal Theological Education, Theological Education and

Media. Every plenary speaker delivered his/her paper with sincerity and enthusiasm. On the other hand, breakout sessions were planned in such a way that

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everyone may participate in the presentations of their choice. We had originally planned for 16 presenters, but that was trimmed down to 14.

In addition to these sessions, we had our partners share their ministries at the partners' table: Theological Book Networks, Bible Project, Educative Tech and Barnabas' Misson.

Delegates: There was a total of 229 delegates from 165 institutions, with a few from non-ATA institutions. Indeed, this year's Theological Consultation attracted many. Majority of them travelled a long distance, leaving their family and work, from different parts of India. It was an encouragement to see many people from different parts of India with one single goal. Among the 229 delegates, eight of them were women from various regions of India, but only one of them presented a paper. The male female ratio proportion of delegates was approximately 24:1. This begged the question of why the women representation was less than 4%. It is a question that should be addressed by everyone. ATA India hopes that more women will be represented in its theological consultations in the coming years.

Impression: Overall, the Theological Consultation brought a huge positive impact- as one of the delegates aptly says, "because of the various areas of presentations, [we have been] provided new information related to present day context that were very much applicable."

Dr Sanyu Iralu observes in his concluding remarks that "We have been conscientized afresh to ensure that deep learning is imparted to our students, than simply to teach content that inflate their head knowledge, but do not necessarily give much long-term impact in productive beneficence to our audience across all ministry fields. We have very seriously examined the yawning gap that has developed between the church and the academy as a result of the tragic imbalance between inputting sound academics and spiritual formation that has generated this distance..."

Overall, the 2023 Theological Consultation has led us to introspect as theologians and our goal in theological education. How the deeper learning and character formation interconnected in wholistic development will in turn bring a positive impact on the church, mission, and the society at large. ◆



Words of Welcome

Bennet Arren Lawrence, PhD
Regional Secretary, ATA India

Distinguished leaders of all the institutions represented here, esteemed colleagues, and dear friends,

It is with immense honour and privilege that I extend my heartfelt welcome to all of you on this momentous occasion. For several years, we have envisioned organising a theological consultation to deliberate upon crucial matters concerning theological education in our region. This dream, fostered by Dr. Paul Cornelius and our team, has now become a reality, and we are filled with joy and gratitude to witness its fruition. Let us then humbly acknowledge God's sustaining grace, which has guided us to this auspicious gathering.

Allow me to express my profound gratitude for the unwavering support and solidarity shown by each one of you. I distinctly recall numerous conversations with leaders of various institutions, during which they extended their warm encouragement, and many also came forward to collaborate in turning this vision into a reality.

In the spirit of great visionaries such as Martin Luther King, who passionately spoke about his dream, and our former President Dr Abdul Kalam, who encouraged us to dare to dream, we, at ATA India, hold a dream of our own. We aspire to witness robust theological institutions across India, offering holistic theological education that nurtures our students academically, spiritually, and in character, while equipping them with ministerial skills. Our aspiration extends beyond mere discourse on theological ideas; we seek to create an environment where our teachers, who are distinguished theological scholars and seasoned practitioners, will mentor our students for effective ministry.

With the strength of our network and with the many intended programs, we aim to be a source of blessing to our institutions, fostering a collaborative effort to strengthen theological education in this region. As we commence this theological consultation, we earnestly pray that your time here proves to be enriching and transformative.



The initial inspiration for this program stemmed from a conversation I had with Dr. David Wang during ICETE's Theological Consultation in Izmir, Turkey, in 2022. The notion of informing our leaders on non-formal theological education and spiritual formation has since evolved into the seeds of this historic gathering. We are grateful that we now stand along esteemed colleagues on this momentous occasion. Our sincere thanks to ICETE and Dr. Ortiz for standing with this historic event. In addition, we also acknowledge United World Missions for standing with us in this much-needed theological consultation.

The world around us is rapidly evolving, and the orientation of the students who come to our institutions is changing accordingly. Employing archaic teaching methods may not effectively cater to their holistic formation. We must then adapt to the changing needs and learning preferences of our students, embracing innovative teaching methodologies that resonate with their evolving orientation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to learn from one another, fostering a collaborative approach to strengthen theological education in our region. By cultivating an atmosphere of open dialogue and knowledge-sharing among our institutions, we can harness our collective wisdom and experiences to fortify the foundation of theological education, ensuring its relevance and efficacy for this generation. Our ultimate aspiration is

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to witness our students flourish in knowledge, spirituality, character, and ministerial skills, enabling them to be effective agents in the ministry of the Church. Let us unite in this noble endeavour, transcending organisational boundaries and joining hands as a cohesive community, as we strive to empower our students not only with intellectual prowess but also with a profound sense of purpose and devotion to serving the greater mission of the Church. Amen!

Thank you very much again for your partnership on this historic occasion! We pray that this theological consultation will be a great place to learn, fellowship, and build relationships in order that we may together build the Kingdom of God in India and beyond! ♦



Unpacking Theological Consultation 2023: Notable Contributions and Directions

Peter Francis Y

The focus of ATA India's Theological Consultation 2023 was to facilitate expert discussions on the "Challenges and Prospects of Theological Education at Present Times." Several speakers spoke about engaging in a dialogue between education and educators to highlight the importance of providing engaging theological education. The plenary session began with Dr. Michael Ortiz discussing Awakened Theological Education. He addressed the gap that exists between the church and theological education. He described Awakened Theological Education as "taking the God-entrusted content and using it to help with the church's needs." As a result, he proposed that Awakened theological education should address the realities of the church and its mission.

On the other hand, Dr. David Wang spoke about Spiritual Formation in Theological Education. In this, he questioned the overall impact of theological education on students' spiritual, character, and virtue development. He believes that effective spiritual and emotional formation is accomplished by providing more emphasis on the world realities of the students. Thus, he claimed, concentrating on spiritual and emotional formation would bring us closer to reality, and to clarity in purpose. Dr. Varghese Thomas agreed with Dr. Wang on several levels, particularly on the church's growth, which is hindered by a lack of commitment to spiritual formation.

Dr. Perry Shaw briefly highlighted how learning is by nature, challenging. He described the deep learning framework, and its guiding concepts in detail. He further provided indications of the psychological limitations put on the human mind's ability to learn. As a result, he mentioned that repeating big Ideas and connecting with present realities would lead to transformation.



Dr. Jessy Jaison invited everyone to think about the benefits of collaborative education for the church. Dr. Jessy addressed that theological education should be driven by the needs of the church. Breakthrough collaborations, in her words, necessitate an intersection of "theological conviction, authentic reciprocity and humble listening towards building the *ecclesia*". She suggested that a positive interaction between formal and informal theological education includes more than just teaching. This involves practising Christian virtues such as sharing, trust, vision, mutual respect, and humility.

Furthermore, Dr. Quinley's session beautifully created awareness by highlighting the current world scenario, i.e., "media is the new language of the world." He encouraged theological institutions to use this new approach to engage with the world that is more cost and time-effective, user-friendly, and has a broader scope to reach out to more people. His ideas, I believe, would increase ministerial chances "that cannot be done otherwise."

Dr. Prabhu Singh addressed the most relevant issue in the Indian context. He emphasized the main subjects that characterize India today. India is entering an Era of Global Complexity, with Increased Cultural Sensitivity, Exciting Gospel Receptivity, Alarming Religious Animosity, and Widening Economic Disparities. His proposal for Christians in India was that, every individual should be the Gospel Innovator, Kingdom Influencer, and Biblical Instructor.

In conclusion, the plenary sessions provided ideas that challenged Theological Education on cognitive, affective, and spiritual levels. The main objective of all the speakers, primarily, was to highlight the gap that exists between the church and the theological institutions. The notion of delivering an engaging Theological Education is driven by a missional desire, with the practical needs of the church at its core. ◆

A Synopsis of the Breakout Sessions

By Thawng Ceu Hnin, PhD
Dean, Hindustan Bible Institute

The ATA India Theological Consultation (2023) was conducted from 22-24 August at the CEO center of SAIACS, Bangalore, with the theme "Challenges and Prospects in Theological Education." It was an auspicious event, with scholars from different countries invited to the plenary sessions, along with national scholars and leaders from the ATA institutions in India. There were 14 presentations on the theme of the consultation and below is the summary of the papers:

Aby Alexander's work "Christian Management Studies in Theological Education: Prospects and Challenges in the VUCA World" explores the role of Christian management studies in theological education, particularly in the VUCA [Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity] world and the aftermath of Covid-19. The paper highlights four arguments for its relevance in current curricula: it provides necessary tools and practices for success in a VUCA world, transforms public life by establishing alternative management models based on Christian values, enhances churches and Christian institutions by developing leaders capable of handling administrative difficulties, and strengthens theological organizations by preparing educators to teach management courses. The study encourages readers to reconsider the importance of Christian management studies in Indian ATA theological colleges.

Rufus Samuel's paper, "Paul's Familial Language in 1 Thessalonians 2: A Study of a Relational Pedagogical Approach for Effective Learning," explores Paul's familial language as a biblical foundation for a relational pedagogical approach in theological education. Samuel uses Greco-Roman familial metaphors, such as young children, nursing mothers, fathers, and orphans, to illustrate how Paul uses these metaphors to build healthy relationships within the believing community. The paper aims to identify a relational pedagogical approach based on Paul's use of familial metaphors as

a model for effective learning in theological education today. The author emphasizes the importance of establishing strong relationships between professors and students both in and out of the classroom.

Jacob Matthew's paper, "Re-visioning Theological Education for the Church-in-Mission in 21st Century India: A Recommended Framework for Preparing Missional Leaders in India Today," sets the current political scenario of India as its context and poses a crucial question: "Within this changing scenario of 21st century India, is there an urgency for re-visioning of theological education for the church-in-mission? If yes, what are the steps to be considered and how can they be implemented?" Accordingly, Matthew considers three crucial steps: the ministry core framework of each student enrolled in the theological education – a clear call to discipleship, and following Jesus; the need for change in methodologies; and mentoring students by understanding their respective contexts. Overall, the paper re-imagines theological education in twenty-first-century India as an encouragement to keep our eyes open to India's needs and concerns, and to be God's voice and heart for the nation.

Johnson Rajendren's article, "The Role of Exergasia in Theological Education: Lessons from Peter's Speech in Acts 2," addresses the problem of delivery in Indian theological institutions. The author contends that, while theological educators in India have outstanding content, we must enhance our style of delivery. To do so, Rajendren studies the concept of *exergasia*, one of the rhetorical exercises of the Greco-Roman world. Accordingly, *exergasia* consists of four key components: synthesizing, sequencing, summarising, and analogy. The author then interprets Peter's Speech in Acts 2:14-41 using these four components. The paper challenges theological educators in India to re-think our mode of presentation of the content.

In his paper, **"The Case for Global and Cross-Cultural Online Learning Experiences in Theological Education,"** Jason George stresses the significance of intercultural learning experiences and proposes the implementation of "global and cross-cultural online learning experiences (GCOLE)" in theological education. The paper studies the concept of GCOLE, presents the existing frameworks for collaboration and intercultural online learning, and

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discusses the challenges theological colleges may face in the implementation of GCOLE.

Johnson Thomaskutty's work, "A Pedagogy of Togetherness, Transformation, and Inclusiveness: Reading the Farewell Discourses of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel," studies Jesus' farewell discourses found in the gospel of John. Methodologically, the writer uses polyvalent approach (e.g., new literary criticism, liberation hermeneutics, and the existing pedagogical principles). Thomaskutty proposes in his work that a teacher should operate as a facilitator, enabling dialogue with students; and that a teacher should develop an environment of equal platform, rather than a hierarchical model. He believes that an interactive, dialogical, and demonstrative technique of pedagogy has the power to transform today's global context. This paper urges us to rethink our role as theological educators and to practice a pedagogy of togetherness, transformation, and inclusion as we exercise our calling as theological educators.

Kevin M. Storer's article, "Owning Our Ideas: Employing a 'Seminary Quadrilateral' to Develop Self-Reflective Learning," proposes that the "seminary quadrilateral" approach can be effective if correctly implemented in Indian theological institutions. This approach focuses on four essential elements: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. He suggests that these elements should be incorporated in every class session but can be structured based on student interest. The goal is to help students own their ideas, reason wisely, and develop theological thinking skills. This approach has the potential to produce graduates who can effectively serve in ministry.

Manoja Kumar Korada's paper "Master-Apprentice Models and Their Impact Upon the Prophetic Mission of the 9th Century BC in Israel"



addresses the importance of 'mentoring' in formal theological education. To do so, he examines two key verbs from the prophetic writings of the 9th century BCE. Korada presents the unproductive state of formal theological education in India. Accordingly, some argue that theological graduates are less productive than those without formal education or those with non-formal and informal theological education. This perception is gaining traction as global mission agencies invest in informal and non-formal theological education to support ministers of all backgrounds. This



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point is an undeniable reality of our time. To address the issue, Korada poses a crucial and practical question: where has formal theological education failed despite fulfilling classroom teaching and syllabus requirements? With this question, the paper invites the readers to adopt a positive master-apprentice model of Elijah-Elisha.

Moses Boosa's "Integrating Heutagogy (Self-Determined Learning) and Digital Learning for Theological Education in the Post-pandemic World" studies the use of digital learning in theological education, integrating heutagogy and digital learning, to understand the importance and implications of these changes in India, including the Post Covid-19 pandemic. Boosa argues that theological education should foster lifelong learning, adaptability, and positive community impact. For him, integrating heutagogy and digital learning can help theological educators and students embrace the network society. Students studying theology can become more than educators, transferring knowledge and skills to improve faith communities. The next generation of theological education students should advocate for positive change.

In their work, **"Rethinking and Reapplying Spiritual Formation for the Church and Seminary," Nigel A. Kumar and C. Kadambavanam** discuss a study group led by Professor David Wang at the ICETE Conference in Izmir, Turkey, on spiritual formation in formal and non-formal contexts. The group discussed the importance of providing markers of spiritual formation beyond traditional church-based ones and the challenges of achieving and assessing these markers. Kumar and Kadambavanam added dimensions to Wang's research and contributed to the development of new markers. They reformulate a working definition of spiritual formation as a journey toward spiritual maturity and offer ways for seminaries and churches to work together to achieve these goals. This paper challenges the participants to rethink the importance spiritual formation of theological students in India. Similarly, **Sanyu Iralu's "Organic Spiritual Formation in Community"** focuses on the same subject- and it is a must read! This great paper will definitely challenge anyone serious about spiritual formation.

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Sovan K. Mallick's "Exploring the Intersection of Media and Theological Education: Leveraging Digital Tools to Transform Religious Learning and Practice" explores the integration of digital tools in theological education, examining both advantages and disadvantages. The writer encourages the readers with a forward-thinking approach to theological education in this digital age, aiming to revolutionize the religious learning experience and provide insights into the potential of digital technology. Similarly, **Stephen George's "Understanding Online Learning of non-native English Speakers through the Community of Inquiry and Critical Discourse Analysis"** investigates how Indian English learners in an Indian theological graduate institution navigate meaning and

knowledge in an ASD forum, aiming to provide a more nuanced understanding of online learning.

Taimaya Ragui's "Integrating Situated Learning with Online Theological Education," proposes the integration of situated learning theory with online theological education, emphasizing the importance of the learner's context. Ragui focuses on the Shepherd Academy's partners in Asia, Africa, and South America, highlighting the need for a contextualized approach to online theological education.

We are grateful to all our scholars who came, presented, and blessed us with their papers. These papers will soon be made available for all to learn from in the form of a book. Watch out for it! ◆

Concluding Words, Challenges, and Prospects

Dr. Sanyu Iralu

Appreciations:

We want to commend ATA for planning this very significant theological consultation. We appreciate the tireless efforts of the ATA India team, and the committees that have meticulously planned and executed this very educative consultation for us.

We also admire the great sacrifices of our resource persons from abroad who took the trouble to be here with us, and who have persuasively impacted our ministries in theological education by their very presence and compelling teachings and offering us their gracious resources.

Observations:

This theological consultation has made a very timely call for us to reconsider what we have been doing right, as motivations to move forward with greater energy and resolve; [and] what we have been doing wrongly, as aberrations that can now be corrected in time, God helping us – God will help us!



We have seen the burden God has placed on our hearts being renewed coming to this theological consultation. Theological education does not and cannot exist on its own: it exists for the good of the church, as Christ uses all the different dimensions of the

body of Christ to fulfill his purposes in and through theological education.

Impressions:

We note with great pleasure that every plenary speaker and paper presenter has done their part very sincerely and genuinely. God is gracious – we will do our services for God with great grace, always.

We note in particular, the passionate presentation Dr. Prabhu gave us last night of the ground realities in contemporary Indian culture (our immediate context) of both the potentialities and the ominous dangers confronting the Indian church scenery that we must address, and the passionate altar call given to the participants to move out of their comfort zones.

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We feel it is very appropriate for the participants to make a fresh resolution to break new ground to forge ahead with sound goals and aspirations. With new resolve and commitment, we can now, with greater energy and keen insight, participate in theological education that builds the church for God's glory.

We have been conscientized afresh to ensure that deep learning is imparted to our students- than simply to teach content that inflate their head knowledge, but do not necessarily give much long-term impact in productive beneficence to our audience across all ministry fields.

We have very seriously examined the yawning gap that has developed between the church and the academy because of the tragic imbalance between inputting sound academics and spiritual formation that has generated this distance.

Challenges:

We must earnestly work at developing serious spiritual formation that must go alongside sound academics, despite the tensions and demands very evident in our heavily engaged institutional settings.

We must ensure greater accountability to see that no stone is left unturned to propel the variegated ministries of the church, including the urgent supply chain of able, reliable pastors and missionaries to help the church grow effectively.

We foresee the challenges in collaborative initiatives between formal and non-formal theological education in terms of the deficit of trust, sharing, humility and kingdom vision. With God's help, we will overcome.

With the impetus generated in this consultation, we must urgently work towards rectifying the lapses in TE. Sincere and regular review and appraisal of our curriculum beyond meeting the 5-year accreditation requirements is needed.

Greater investment of time from teachers to facilitate better bonding between teachers and students in character formation is also a pressing need. Greater introspection for higher accountability is the need of the hour.

We need greater cooperation between those of us in formal theological education and those in the informal sector. We must shed our arrogance to think that TE done in the formal sector is the chief, highest, and the noblest.

Prospects:

Now that we have identified the need to work concertedly and collaborate together, we can intentionally work towards providing theological education for the whole people of God. We can now work at building trust, sharing, humility, and Kingdom vision.

We can explore collaborative initiatives with other agencies like ICETE to set up Regional Training Hubs (RTH) to put into practice what we have learned so far.

Sensing that too much is at stake to leave TE to itself, to do as it wishes, we see the great possibility of putting our heads together, coming together as we just did, and continuing to converse, sharing our dreams, struggles, and concerns, and seek God's wisdom in this honorable and wonderful vocation God has called us into.

All glory to God! ◆

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