

# Program for Theology and Cultures in Asia

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*The following is a draft communique of the recently established Program for Theology amid ("Cultures in: Asia (PTCA), prepared during the recent inaugural meeting in Kyoto. As the program takes further shape we hope to keep our readers informed of this important amid creative project.*

Our aim, affirmed by the Inaugural Consultation in Kyoto, July 7–11, 1987, is “to strengthen through concentrated joint efforts the formation of living theology and to facilitate the growth of a creative theological community in Asia.” In Doing Theology with resources in Asia, we are firmly committed to the cause of peace and justice in the region.

In order to realize this aim we are committed to:

1. Helping to equip younger theologians and church leaders, women and men, lay and clergy, in a theological re-orientation for their various ministries.
2. Recovering our own cultural and spiritual resources in Asian countries and making these available for the doing of living theology in Asia.
3. Promoting creative, indigenous theological writing within the concrete experiences and heritages of Asian area.
4. Facilitating active theological interactions within Asia and between Asia and other parts of the world.

The Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia is not designed to establish a new organizational structure, but

- to strengthen a network for theological efforts and partnership;
- to provide a base for a mobile programming;
- to stimulate imagination for new patterns and methods for doing theology locally;
- to serve regional associations of theological schools and seminaries, to stimulate common efforts among Christians in Asia to be effective agents for the mission of God in the region and in the world;
- to facilitate the emergence of theology from women’s perspective;
- to bring about theological expressions from minority groups; and
- to discern and draw insights and aspirations of people in struggle.

### *The Asian Setting*

The Asia region is certainly not a homogeneous entity but made up of diversified racial, linguistic, and cultural heritages and historical backgrounds. But there are also some distinct elements unique in the region. Christians in this area have for so long, looked to the West for leadership and for theological insights, neglecting their own resources in culture, history, and spiritual expression.

With an extensive ground work laid before the Inaugural Consultation, which was held at Kansai Seminar House in Kyoto, Japan, 7–11, 1987, the Program for theology and Cultures in Asia has awakened among the participants the awareness that God has always worked and is still working in Asia today, providing gifts of resources for discipleship and theological dynamics for mission. It was affirmed by the gathering that it is important to be aware of this fact and to be imaginative in cultivating the resources we have so that there will be an authentic living theology finally rooted in concrete life of Asian societies and history.

### *Doing Theology in Asia*

The phenomenon of Asian ways of doing theology is not a recent one. There were signs of unique theological thinking and exploration in the past. But the dominant influence of Western theologies has created a blockade to an indigenous theology work and at times hampered creative efforts for living theology in their own ways, style and method. Theological minds in the area were not meeting other thoughts and realities within the area, but tended to look westward for growth, for appreciation and stimulation.

The ground work of the Program can be traced to 1983 when the first theological seminar workshop was held in cooperation with the Ecumenical Study Centre at Tao Fong Shan in Hong Kong, in search for ways of doing theology with Asian resources. Another workshop the following year focused its attention on doing theology with folk literature. The third workshop was held in Kyoto on doing theology with people's movements. The fourth workshop dealt with doing theology with the religions of Asia. In each case participants prepared papers beforehand and worked intensively upon them during the seminar-workshop. Selections were later published in the East Asia Journal of Theology (EAJOT), and Association for Theological Education in SouthEast Asia (ATESEA) Occasional Papers.

These workshops provided participants with opportunities for in-depth study and sharing of experiences in the realities of Asia today. There were also opportunities for finding new comrades and partners in Christ for future interaction and theological grappling. The almost 100 participants are now dispersed over many parts of Asia, engaged in doing living theology locally.

### *Related Partners*

Ecumenical bodies and organizations are thus important bases for this Program. Involved in the Program at this stage are

South East Asia Graduate School of Theology  
School of Theology, Dōshisha University  
Pacific School of Religion  
Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA)  
Korean Association of Accredited Theological Schools (KAATS)  
Kansai Seminar House (Nippon Christian Academy)  
Council for Mission and Ecumenical Cooperation (NZ)

Working relationships are being established with the Christian Conference of Asia, the Northeast Asia Association of Theological Schools, the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of the Serampore College (India), as well as other ecumenical bodies. Thus the catalytic function of the Program will be important not only for Asian countries and churches but also for the Pacific and other regions.

### *Future Work*

The Inaugural Consultation called for bold and extensive cultivation and exploration of Asian cultural heritages and resources in order to appropriate the freshness and imaginative approach of Jesus Christ to people in response to their needs.

Some 50 people from 15 countries, lay and clergy, women and men, Catholic and Protestant, were present at the Inaugural Consultation. One of the joys shared by the participants was the arrival of Korean delegates on time for a full presence, at a time of the people's struggle for democratization.

The future programs will include annual seminar workshops, the first of which will be held in Jogjakarta, Indonesia, May 29–June 12, 1987, with the theme, "Doing Theology with People's Symbols/Images in Asia." This begins the Second Series. Other theological seminar workshops will deal with spiritual life and empowerment history and mission, creative forms of preaching, the Bible, and so on. Smaller work groups will be involved in research and writing projects. The Program also hopes to offer Consultative services.

A fresh beginning has been made, let us work together for a creative theological community in Asia.