

The ICETE-ATS Playa Bonita Affirmations

Panama City, Panama

November 2, 2018¹

“Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” Romans 14:9 (NRSV)

PREAMBLE

Acknowledging the importance to theological education of global awareness and engagement informed by the principles, values, and virtues of educational quality and improvement, mutual respect and collegiality, cooperation and collaboration, intentional networking and support, pluralism and diversity, and sustainability and contextuality in the light of their particular ecclesial and faith traditions and commitments—

The International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) and The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) relying on God’s grace, commit to seek God’s help, pray for and accompany each other, and continue to share their hope to be faithful to the work to which they are called: the improvement and enhancement of quality theological education in the service of ministry, to the glory of God and for the fulfillment of God’s purposes.

WHO WE ARE

ICETE comprises a global community, sponsored by nine regional associations encompassing more than 1,000 evangelical theological schools from Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Europe, Euro-Asia, Latin America, Middle East and North Africa, North America, and South Pacific, bound together by their evangelical confessional commitments embodied in the Lausanne Covenant and their educational commitments embodied in ICETE’s “*Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education*.” ICETE serves to enable international interaction and collaboration among its constituencies for mutual assistance, stimulation and enrichment, for the support and enhancement of evangelical theological education worldwide.

ATS is a membership organization of 279 schools in the US and Canada engaged in educating leadership for ecclesiastically- and theologically-diverse communities of the Christian and Jewish faiths. ATS and its Commission on Accrediting seek both to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public and to contribute to the enhancement and improvement of theological education through the accreditation of schools that are members of The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada.

OUR SHARED CONTEXTS

ICETE and ATS acknowledge that our world in the early years of the 21st century no longer resembles the world which gave birth to most of our theological schools. Innovation, change, and transformation are woven into the ecology of modern life. On the one hand, “globalization,” those processes of profound structural transformation, often disruptive of everyday life, that have gained some level of autonomy at

¹ The ICETE Board approved the joint statement at its regular meeting in Panama City held November 3, 2018. The ATS Board of Directors approved the joint statement at its regular meeting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania held May 2-3, 2019. Ralph Enlow, Riad Kassis, Paul Sanders, representing ICETE, and Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, representing ATS, served as the *ad hoc* drafting committee for this statement.

the global level and which sustain the spaces and flows of capital, people, goods, information, ideas and images are generating movements, toward integration and centralization, the discovery of a “global commons,” and a universally-oriented humanity. On the other hand, the proliferation of states, peoples, and movements, often local in orientation, as well as the growing and widespread skepticism towards the project of modernity and its institutions, are generating countervailing movements, not only towards fragmentation but to an appreciation of plurality, locality, and particularity. Today, peoples and institutions are not only “on the move,” they live in Diaspora.

ICETE and ATS also acknowledge the unevenness of our world recently articulated in the language of the “Global South-Global North” binary. This unevenness, we concede, is often legitimated by deeply-rooted historical inequities, by fiercely-held assumptions not only about theology itself, but also, of divergent understandings of community and identity. This unevenness is exacerbated by the marginalization of many faith-based communities, as well as by the long, quiet withdrawal—the secularization—of some religious institutions from societal prominence or influence.

ICETE and ATS admit that this unevenness lies not only in the different theoretical and practical contexts in which theological institutions have come to be situated—contexts which themselves are undergoing profound changes—but also in the existing patterns of distribution, re-distribution, and representation of resources: educational, political, economic, cultural, technological, with which our institutions wrestle. We understand that there are very real differences, both inter- and intra- institutionally, in the ways our institutions of higher education are organized, supported, and developed, which profoundly shape the nature and character of our work. We acknowledge the limits that arise out of the specific contexts of ICETE and ATS, including those statutory structures and processes that are animated by our values, the preferences of our constituencies, and the institutional obligations that accompany our being organizations dedicated to quality assurance and improvement. We appreciate the differences inherent in an association of accrediting organizations and an association of member schools.

We confess that we have sometimes allowed the unevenness, the differences, and the institutional obligations to separate us. But we want to maintain that both the work of our respective schools and the work we as quality assurance organizations have shared thus far have not been indifferent to the need for cooperation in the common service of theological education.

We joyfully assert that the work of ICETE and ATS are rooted in our respective calls to the ministry of theological education. We acknowledge that this call invites us as communities of faith and learning to share responsibility, for quality theological education within our respective mandates and contexts. We recognize the different gifts we bring to this work, the multiple tasks we are called to accomplish, and the challenges that need to be addressed. We celebrate how this work-in-the-midst of difference has often brought us together in the work of theological education under the *missio Dei*, God’s mission in the world. While distinct, many of the aspects of our institutional missions intersect.

We appreciate the ongoing engagement through the years of ICETE and ATS, as well as those of our respective constituencies, the extending of hospitality across institutions and constituencies, at the same time that we seek to respect and where appropriate, embrace each other’s different and overlapping histories, constituencies, interests, and accountabilities. We maintain that the diverse work of our respective organizations, as well as the diversities within our own constituencies, makes us strong and challenges us to be even more broadly and deeply faithful followers and stewards of a God who gifts us with the possibility of being co-workers and laborers in the vineyards of the Lord. We reiterate our desire to encourage one another in our respective areas of life and work, in our aspirations for theological grounding, our commitments to the holistic life of the mind and body as well as care for our

planet and its future, and our devotion to theological education oriented around both stewardship and service.

OUR COMMON CONVICTIONS

Both ICETE and ATS affirm the importance of teaching, learning, and research; of knowledge-sharing, and of mutual learning. We accept the educational value of diversity in and for theological education. We realize that quality theological education requires strategic flexibility, integrated programming, and pedagogical and instructional variety. We maintain the value of quality assurance and improvement through accreditation for our theological schools.

As communities of theological schools ICETE and ATS uphold both the necessity and desirability of engagement at all levels particularly at the global level if we are to offer relevant, accessible, flexible, innovative, and transformative quality theological education. We acknowledge the need for intentional collaboration in the work of theological education and accreditation both as everyday practice and as institutional sightline.

As communities of faith and learning ICETE and ATS recognize the value of seeking deeper mutual understanding of and appreciation for the differences between our two organizations, as well as among our constituencies, as part of our commitment to theological education throughout the world.

ICETE and ATS declare the need to explore areas of collaboration in the areas of accreditation, leadership education, research, and service. We encourage the need to identify the areas of support and opportunities for such collaboration for the benefit of our schools, our constituencies, our communities of affinity, and the publics we seek to serve.

OUR JOINT COMMITMENTS

Therefore, ICETE and ATS commit in the next five years to intentionally and systematically explore together the possibilities of a *partnership* organized around the following substantive and programmatic areas:

- discerning, developing and implementing effective bilateral and multilateral partnerships, with the understanding that quality, innovation, excellence, and relevance in theological education rest on meaningful and transformative collaboration at the local, national, regional, and global levels, which in turn depends on a comprehensive understanding of “partnerships” animated by mutuality and collegiality, shared responsibility and accountability, transparency, subsidiarity, and care;
- contributing to a conversation on theological education across our ecclesial diversities, with the understanding that quality, innovation, excellence, and relevance in theological education depend on committed, engaged, and robust discourses about theological education involving the now global constituencies of ICETE and ATS and their various publics;
- cultivating scholarly and programmatic “trade routes,” with the understanding that quality, innovation, excellence, and relevance in theological education depend on meaningful, sustainable, bilateral and multilateral, mechanisms that allow for mutually agreed upon reciprocal flows of resources, expertise, and information in the service of learning, teaching, and research; and

