

## How Our Suffering Contextualizes Theology and Bible



By Dr. Federico Villanueva,  
ABC General Editor & Publications Secretary



I write this article at a very difficult time in my country (Philippines). Typhoon Yolanda (international name *Haiyan*) has just devastated our land, shattering the lives of many of our people. It is not easy to write without being affected. This article is supposed to be about ATA publications. But how can one speak about theology, write articles on missions, or publish commentaries in the face of such monstrous disaster. How can one see the value of theological or biblical publications at such a time like this?

It is not easy. This is not the time for preaching, exhorting, or even giving advice. Rather, this is the time for listening, reaching out, being present with our people. Remember, the friends of Job were a blessing to

him when they were quiet. Speaking too soon usually does not help.

At the same time, we also need to provide guidance for our people at some point. They, as well as we, need to try to bring some sense to our experiences. And it is here where teachings, theology, and contextual biblical interpretation are needed. One of the things that came out as a result of the recent disaster is the need for a more holistic and long term response to suffering. While material goods do certainly help, more and more people are acknowledging the importance of the psychological and spiritual aspects of healing and restoration. Restoration will take time. And when CNN and all the international media are gone, we will be left on our own

to pick up the pieces and figure out for ourselves what the next steps should be.

This is where the importance of teachings like biblical theology of suffering comes in. We do not give guidance when the person is already suffering. Somebody said that the book of Job is not for people who are already suffering. They may not be able to appreciate the book, nor understand it in the first place. We need the book of Job when we are still OK to prepare us so that when the time of suffering comes, we would know how to respond.

One of the things that came out as a result of the recent disaster is how much unprepared we are in responding to grief and suffering.

*Continued on page 2*

It took a few days before some of the religious leaders called for a day of mourning. There is little space for such experiences in our teachings and theology. As a result we do not know how to react. Part of the reason for this is that most of the teachings we receive originate from other lands. Most of our books and materials that we use in church are from the West. They may be good, but because they arose out of different contexts, they are not relevant to us. That is why there is a need for writings from our own contexts. The Bible has to be interpreted contextually so that it is able to address our lived experiences.

At ATA we seek to produce publications that reflect and respond to the different realities in Asia. For the past 43 years of its existence, ATA has produced monographs that deal with relevant issues in our contexts. We also have the *Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology* which showcases writings from our contexts. Since year 2000 we have been trying to write the Asia Bible Commentary series. There are now eighteen of these that have been published. More than thirty commentaries have yet to be finished.

We cannot underestimate the value of this commentary series. Presently, most commentaries are written by westerners. That made sense a hundred years ago when 70 per cent of Christians lived in the West. But now that Christians are evenly distributed around the globe, we also need to interpret the Bible within and for Asian contexts. There is a great need to make the Bible relevant to our contexts. This is because Christianity has not been a part of many countries in Asia. In fact, Christianity is viewed in some countries as western. The good news is that even though Christianity has not been part of many Asian countries, many of our realities and experiences share commonalities with the Bible. Suffering, spirituality, strong sense of community – these are realities in the Bible which resonate with our own experiences. We hope to make this clearer and bridge the gap between the Bible and Asia. May the Lord help us!

## ATA Member Schools in the Philippines Reach Out for Typhoon Yolanda Victims



*IGSL faculty and students helping pack thousands of relief package with school president, Rev. Tom Roxas*

On November 8, 2013, the strongest typhoon ever to hit the Philippines and the world struck indiscriminately along the coast of nine regions in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. Four million people were displaced, thousands lost their lives, emotional toll has no reckoning, and the financial toll is in billions—and still counting. For the most part, many relief agencies and individuals including Christians and other people of faith reached out with generosity that seemed to know no bounds. Included were member schools of ATA and AGST who joined hands in relief operations to reach out victims of typhoon Yolanda.

The International Graduate School of Leadership (IGSL) with CCC-Southeast Asia, Philippine CCC, and GAIN Philippines have more than 200 staff on the ground coordinating efforts to provide medical and relief services to the affected areas. The joint effort dubbed “Project Yolanda” has adopted 4,000 families in Tacloban and 500 in Ormoc and nearby areas. Staff and volunteers put together packets of necessities like canned goods, rice, enough food for five days, bottled water, underwear, blankets, towel, sleeping mat, used clothes and toiletries. IGSL was able to send relief goods via C-130 and distribute these through their military contacts. These packets are an incredible way to minister to typhoon victims who are hurting and reach out to them with the love of Jesus Christ.

After the Philippine Evangelical Disaster Response Network (PEDRN) distributed relief goods, the Asian Theological Seminary (ATS) sent five teams of counselors to Visayan provinces such as Ormoc, Aklan, Carigara and Dulag to provide psychosocial processing for survivors of typhoon Yolanda. These provinces were badly hit by the typhoon but not often reported since the focus has been on the worst hit Tacloban. ATS has done trauma counseling previously in past Philippines disasters and feel this is the best way they could be of help toward more holistic recovery for our countrymen. ATS has been asked by churches in this region to help alleviate the people that had been affected by traumatic events and situations. The counselors composed of ATS professors, alumni, staff and students who went to those provinces have been challenged by the psychosocial trauma of the victims who have witnessed death and destruction in their homes and communities. The conversations of survivors with other survivors led by the ATS counselors helped release the sadness that they feel. Being with the same group helped them feel that they were not alone with what happened, that there also other victims suffering but still chose not to give up in life.

In Tacloban (largest town featured most in the media), the Nazarene Disaster Response team conducted psychosocial counseling and stress debriefing. Since it has been asked by the government to train other local providers, the Nazarenes are leading the charge in providing this much needed trauma counseling in the community. The M.A. students, who speak the local language, have been deployed from Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (APNTS) to Tacloban, to assist in the training programs. The assessment teams of the Nazarene continue to seek out those who are in remote areas and who have yet to be reached. In just the last few days, their teams came upon new areas in the north of the island of Iloilo who had not yet received any assistance. The





*Stress debriefing of adult in Banga, Aklan*



*Psychosocial processing training of church leaders in Numancia, Aklan*



*Stress debriefing of children in Numancia*

Nazarene Disaster Responders are leaving their mark of love and compassion across the region. Lives saving relief supplies have been provided, many families have been ministered to medically, and now they are focusing on the longer term process of restoration.

The Biblical Seminary of the Philippines (BSOP) family also did immediate involvement to extend help to typhoon victims. Some relief goods were delivered and distributed to Tacloban residents through their alumnus, Jerry Yaokasin, who is the Vice Mayor of Tacloban City. Some faculty members were sent to do “debriefing counseling” to parents and students who survived the calamities. Their wider community will be involved later in the on-going “debriefing training.” Some help were also offered to six workers whose houses were blown away during the typhoon. Financial assistance was also given to

the Mangyans in Mindoro who were also affected by typhoon Yolanda.

Other ATA and AGST member schools such as Alliance Graduate School (AGS), Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS), Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS), Asian Seminary of Christian Ministries (ASCM), Koinonia Theological Seminary (KTS) and Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) have extended help as expressions of their love and care for typhoon victims. The one-month collection during Chapel services of AGS and PACT (Philippine Alliance College of Theology) was offered for the ongoing relief and rehabilitation efforts. Besides material help, ASCM offered a very timely and special training on “Mitigating Psychological Trauma after a Major Crisis” for their better understanding and service of people who have lost their loved ones, lost their properties, and suffered from hunger. KTS volunteers went to the Visayas to bring relief goods and do counseling. They partnered with a group in Cebu City to go to places that have not been reached by the relief supplies until now. APTS and PTS professors, staff and students also saved money for the relief operations of their schools to help people in the areas badly affected by this disaster. Undoubtedly these act of kindness and generosity of our brothers in Christ are making tremendous impact in the lives of the victims of typhoon Yolanda.

### Visit to Vietnam Good News Theological School



*Dr. Theresa Lua, Dr. George Capaque, Dr. Le Van Thien with the leaders, faculty, and students of VGNTS*

The Visiting Evaluation team consisting of Dr. Theresa Lua, Secretary of Accreditation and

Educational Development; Dr. George Capaque, Dean, Discipleship Training Center, Singapore; and Dr. Le Van Thien, President, TEE Vietnam, visited Vietnam Good News Theological School (VGNTS) in Vietnam on October 8-11, 2013. During the four-day visit the team went to the campus in Ho Chi Minh and the extension campus in Hanoi. They were warmly welcomed by the VGNTS community led by its president, Dr. Doan Trung Tin.

VGNTS is a product of the ministry of Vietnam Good News Mission (VGNM) which was established in 1973 and had grown into a large church planting network. It became a denomination known as Vietnam Good News Mission Church (VGNMC) and established Vietnam Good News Theological School (VGNTS) in 2007. Currently, the denomination has 664 churches in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, with more than 35, 427 members, and 387 workers. The call to equip Vietnamese Christians to effectively go out and plant churches and disciple Christians has always been its ethos and driving force. VGNTS offers Diploma, Bachelor of Ministry and Bachelor of Theology.

### Visit to Malaysia Evangelical College



*Dr. Theresa Lua, Dr. Ng Peh Cheng, and Dr. Sunny Tan with the leaders and faculty of MEC*

The ATA VET consisting of Dr. Theresa Lua, ATA Accreditation Secretary; Dr. Ng Peh Cheng, Associate Secretary of Accreditation and Educational Development; and Dr. Sunny Tan, Academic Dean, Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary, visited Malaysia Evangelical College (MEC) in Miri and Lawas, Malaysia on October 23-26, 2013.

The history of Malaysia Evangelical College is tied to the history of Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB) which was started by the Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM), a mission organization started by three students of Melbourne Bible College who came to Sarawak in 1928. Currently, the denomination has 670 churches, 430 pastors and around 95,000 members. SIB churches realized the need to train local workers when during the war all the foreign missionaries were interned and the churches were deprived of being fed with the Word of God. When the missionaries returned to SIB churches, the local leaders requested BEM to train selected local young people to serve in the churches. Thus, the Bible School in Lawas was started. As the SIB expanded other training schools were started. In 1968 the Lawas Bible School started an English stream. In 1972 this English stream was moved to Miri and was named Miri Bible College. In the early 1980s, with many students coming from Sabah and West Malaysia, Miri Bible College was renamed Malaysia Evangelical College.

Four years ago, Dr. Eddy Ho was appointed as principal and specifically tasked to prepare MEC for accreditation with ATA. Two years ago he became very sick (heart and kidney problems), but he remained focused on his goal to have the MEC programs accredited. However, a month before the scheduled visit, he underwent heart surgery and died a day after. MEC is grateful for his hard work and excellent leadership. ATA commends Dr. Eddy Ho, a faithful servant of the Lord. He also served as VET member in several ATA accreditation visits in the past. MEC offers the following programs: Certificate in Child Studies, Diploma in Theology and Bachelor in Theology.

## ATA VET VISITS THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS IN KOREA

### Chongshin University and Seminary



*Dr. Theresa Lua, Dr. Bong Rin Ro, and Dr. Hung-Ho Chong with Dr. Kil Sung Kim (Acting President) and several administrators of Chongshin University*

The VET consisting of Dr. Bong Rin Ro, ATA Senior Consultant; Dr. Hung-Ho Chong, Dean of the Graduate School of Intercultural Studies at ACTS; and Dr. Theresa Lua, ATA Accreditation Secretary, visited Chongshin University and Seminary in Seoul, Korea on November 5-6, 2013.

Chongshin University and Seminary was founded in 1901. It is the official institution of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Hapdong), which has three million members, 11,000 churches in 150 presbyteries and 2,600 missionaries (plus their spouses) serving in different countries.

Graduates of eight regional Hapdong denominational seminaries come to Chongshin to study in order to be ordained into the Hapdong denomination. Chongshin annually selects only 400 students out of 1,000 applicants. The seminary is the biggest in Korea. The Master of Divinity program alone has 1,538 students.

Chongshin University and Seminary has nine departments in College: Theology, Christian Education, English Education, History Education, Early Childhood Education, Church Music, Child Studies, Social Works, Liberal Arts and Teacher Education. There are six

graduate schools: General Graduate School, Pastoral Ministry, Mission, Education, Christian Social Work, and Biblical Counseling. Both campuses have 122 full time professors. The school offers Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, Master of Divinity/Master of Divinity Equivalent, Master of Theology, Doctor of Theology, and Doctor of Philosophy in various concentrations.

### Westminster Graduate School of Theology



*Dr. Theresa Lua, Dr. Bong Rin Ro, and Dr. Jin Sup Kim with Ms. Dong Sook Han (Chairperson), Dr. Hyung Yong Park (President), and several faculty of WGST*

The VET consisting of Dr. Bong Rin Ro, ATA Senior Consultant; Dr. Jin Sup Kim, Vice President, Baek Seok University; and Dr. Theresa Lua, ATA Accreditation Secretary, visited Westminster Graduate School of Theology (WGST) in Yongin, Gyeonggi-Do, Korea on November 7-8, 2013.

Westminster Graduate School of Theology pursues God-centered, Bible-centered, and Church-centered education on the basis of the Reformed Evangelical Theology. It aims to produce pastors and Christian leaders, who can boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, faithfully serve His church, and transform the culture for the glory of God in Korea and around the world.

WGST was established in 1967 by Rev. Dr. Robert Rapp, a missionary of Westminster Biblical Missions in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. and a Korean partner, Rev. Dalsaeng Kim. It was first



known as Korea Presbyterian Seminary then changed to Westminster School of Theology in 1984. In 1996, when the Ministry of Education accredited the school as a graduate-level institution without a college section, the name was changed to Westminster Graduate School of Theology. The institution belongs to the Westminster denomination which has 500 pastors. This Westminster denomination recently joined with another smaller denomination, Presbyterian Church of Korea, which has 350 churches.

WGST offers the following programs: Master of Divinity, Master of Christian Studies, Master of Social Work, Master of Arts, Master of Theology (Biblical Theology, Systematic Theology, Historical Theology, Christian Ethics, Missiology, Christian Education, Preaching, Spirituality), Doctor of Theology (Educational Ministry and Practical Theology), Doctor of Biblical Studies, Doctor of Philosophy (Biblical Theology, Systematic Theology, Historical Theology).

### Baek Seok University



Dr. Bong Rin Ro and Dr. Ng Peh Cheng with Baek Seok University President, Dr. Gab-Jong Choi, Vice-President, Dr. Wui-Won Kim, and Academic Dean, Dr. Chan-Ho Park in front of the university white plate

The VET consisting of Dr. Bong Rin Ro, ATA Senior Consultant; Dr. Jung Sook Lee, Vice President, Torch Trinity Graduate University; and Dr. Ng Peh Cheng, Associate Secretary of Accreditation and Educational Development visited Baek Seok University (BU) in Bangbae-Dong, Seocho-gu, Korea on November 11-12, 2013.

Baek Seok University was founded in 1976 as a small Presbyterian seminary (Korean Gospel Seminary), and changed

its name to Christian Theological Seminary in 1994. It was in 2006 that the name was changed to its present name. Rev. Chang Jong-Hyun, founder of BU, has been the key person who has developed the seminary into two campuses in Seoul and Chun An with some 30,000 students. This is the largest Christian university in Korea.

The original denomination of BU was the Presbyterian Church of Korea (United Orthodox) with 3,200 churches but joined with another Reformed Church of Korea which has 800 churches and changed the name of the denomination to "Baek Seok Presbyterian Church of Korea" in August, 2013. Each of 10 large churches in this newly established denomination has more than 5,000 members. Most churches in this denomination are small churches.

### Torch Trinity Graduate University



Dr. Bong Rin Ro, Dr. Hung-Ho Chong, and Dr. Ng Peh Cheng with some international students of TTGU

The Visiting Evaluation Team consisting of Dr. Bong Rin Ro, ATA Senior Consultant; Dr. Hung-Ho Chong, Dean of the Graduate School of Intercultural Studies at ACTS; and Dr. Ng Peh Cheng, Associate Secretary of Accreditation and Educational Development visited Torch Trinity Graduate University (TTGU) in Yangjae-Dong, Sucho-Gu, Korea on November 13-14, 2013.

TTGU's mission remains centered on world mission, "to reach the unreached

peoples of the world," by training evangelical leaders for the global church and society through the teaching of Scripture and theology with a view in application and relevance. Its vision is to become a global center for evangelical theological education in Asia, leading the theological education world in change and relevance. With this vision, Korean churches and TTGU joined hands to offer the Torch Strategic Mission Scholarship (TSMS) to a limited number of qualified applicants, especially from unreached people groups. The scholarship has been awarded to about 200 students as of July 1, 2012. TSMS is a distinguished scholarship given to Christian leaders, who possess outstanding academic and ministry potential, from missionally noteworthy regions.

TTGU currently has 612 students. It is an international seminary with overseas Koreans (Korean Americans) from U.S.A (52 students) and Canada (6 students). There are also 25 students from Asia, Central Asia, Africa, Latin America and other nations. Torch Trinity Graduate University offers the following programs: Master of Arts, Master of Divinity, Master of Theology, Master of Theological Studies, and Doctor of Philosophy in Intercultural Studies.

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Future issues of the Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology will include lists of recent doctoral dissertations successfully defended by Asian evangelicals.

If one of your faculty members or former students has recently completed his or her doctorate, please contact the editor, Dr. George W. Harper ([gharper@alum.mit.edu](mailto:gharper@alum.mit.edu)), with that information.

## KETS Invites ATA Leaders as Keynote Speakers in their Conferences



Dr. Joseph Shao and his wife, Dr. Rosa Ching Shao, with Dr. and Mrs. Pak Ung Kyu of KETS/ACTS

The ATA Chairman, Dr. Takanori Kobayashi, and ATA General Secretary, Dr. Joseph Shao, were invited as keynote speakers at the 62th General Conference and the 4th International Conference of Korea Evangelical Theological Society (KETS) on October 18-19, 2013. The said KETS conferences were held at the Asia United Theological University (Yangpyeong Campus). This year's theme was "Creation Theology and the Mission of the Church." Both of them presented papers at the plenary session which was held at the new chapel of the school. Dr. Kobayashi presented a paper entitled "Suffering with Christ and with the Creation for Completion of Cosmic Salvation (Romans 8:18-30): Paul's Utilization of the Notion of Friendship in His Apocalyptic Eschatology." Dr. Shao's paper was "An Old Testament Theology of Creation Care." These ATA leaders also presented papers at the breakout sessions.

Dr. Rosa Ching Shao, the wife of Dr. Shao, also presented a paper at the breakout session on "Emotions: A Key to Understanding One's Self." KETS was well prepared with a bilingual book (printed in English and Korean) for the participants to easily follow all

the sessions. Aside from plenary sessions, there were 9-10 breakout sessions with presiding leaders.

The Asia Bible Commentaries and other publications of ATA were introduced to the theological educators of KETS. With such involvement, the vision and mission of ATA is beginning to be known to the Korean churches and theological schools.

## ACTS Celebrates Mission Week With the Theme, "Awake Missions!"



Dr. Joseph Shao during the Mission Week of ACTS

Dr. Joseph Shao was one of the speakers in the ACTS (Asia Centre for Theological Studies) Mission Week held on October 22-24, 2013. This year's theme was "Awake Missions!" There were numerous institutes presenting the current needs of various nations. Since its founding years, ACTS has been actively pursuing missions through recruiting and training of various nationalities, using English as the medium of instruction. With many Koreans now educated in the West, English as a medium of communication is well accepted in Korea.

Dr. Shao gave his presentation on "Missiological Theme of the Book of Malachi: Serving the Unchanging God." He presented his talk to the international students of ACTS on October 23 and he also gave a congratulatory message on October 24. Dr. Young Ook Kim is the president of the Asia United Theological University and ACTS, and also a member of ATA Board.

## The New International Executive Director Presents Strategic Plans of ICETE



Dr. Shao and his wife with ICETE leaders

As one of the founders of International Council on Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), Dr. Joseph Shao attended its annual meeting in Beirut, Lebanon. The meeting was held from October 13-17, 2013 at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Riad Kassis, the newly installed ICETE International Executive Director, presented his strategic plans for ICETE.

Important decisions were made at the Board to respond to the bigger challenges of ICETE. During the annual meeting, the Middle East Association of Theological Education (MEATE) was accepted as a new member of ICETE. MEATE caters to the needs of schools in the Middle East. Some schools hold dual membership with ATA. With this development, there are now nine theological associations that cover the whole world. ICETE is very active in pursuing excellence of theological education in all member associations.

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