

Starting Small, Standing Tall: The Encouraging Advancement of ATA



By Dr. Joseph Shao, ATA General Secretary

This inaugural address was delivered at the ATA General Assembly held in Manila on August 7, 2007.

that in Asia the pluralistic contexts of faith make each nation unique from the other nations.

The pluralistic and rich contexts of religions make Christianity's claim to uniqueness difficult to proclaim. And yet, we evangelicals, who carry the *evangelion*—

message of the Word of

God, should proclaim the uniqueness of Christ amidst pluralistic faiths. Jesus Christ is still the only Savior of mankind. May we have the boldness to proclaim Jesus is Lord! And, may we clearly impart the distinctiveness of our message within our own context!

The Unified Coalition in Our Detached Culture

Ironically, with the advancement of internet and mass communications, individuals living in a nation could still be detached from people. Many youth may spend more time in front of a computer, chatting with unseen in the world. In one sense they are connected with many people, but on the other hand, they have become very detached from those around them. Such trend could infiltrate theological education as well.

The Asia Theological Association, in its existence for more than 20 years, has fought against this trend. It believes and promotes unified coalition between colleges and seminaries in our detached culture. It also established Asian Graduate School of Theology (AGST) in various regions, thus, training Asians in Asia—a viable option to train faculty in our detached nation and society. With the triennial meeting at various important cities, many networking can come into fruition.

Conclusion

ATA can only be successful with your involvement. As each seminary puts in its best for the glory of God by upholding the Word of God, the Word of God will continue to receive its proper role and place in the teaching and preaching of the Church. As we continue to creatively convey the uniqueness of Christ, the pluralistic context will come to understand the most important message of God's love. As we network through ATA, we shall continue to be a unified-coalition force, serving as witness to the detached self, society, and nations!

Asia Theological Association (ATA), although small in its inception, grew to its lofty state as an association of evangelical Bible schools and seminaries because of several able leaders. Dr. Bong Rin Ro guided ATA in its earlier years under the guidance of Dr. Ken Gnanakan and Rev. Derek Tan, the General Secretary of ATA respectively. Since 1970 the association has raised to another level of excellence with more than 200 members, with geographical influence from Middle East, East Asia, to the continent of Australia and New Zealand. We started small, but now we are standing tall! Thus, the future of ATA is very optimistic and encouraging!

The Unchanging Word in Our Changing World

In this ever changing world, we—as evangelicals—need to remind ourselves that one thing remains constant: Our Scripture. Thus, the message from God's Word remains as the key to transform our changing world. In this post-Christianity era, we need to meditate the Word to find the significant message for today. Evangelicals who believe in the inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God are to be the carriers of God's message to this world in relevant and insightful ways.

The Uniqueness of Christ in Our Pluralistic Context

Asia is the center of spiritualities in a materialistic world. As such, it is the Asians who can guide the world into spiritualities—the world that is searching for “the meaning of life” in a post-modern world. In the material world, we live in a “global village” where the distance between east and west is getting shorter, and the clear identity of civilizations is beginning to blur. In the spiritual world, we live among the nations that are situated in the eastern part of the world, nations that foster pluralistic faiths. Thus, although the social scientists have begun to consolidate all the Asians together as one body and called them, “the Asian race,” we know

Prophetic Voice of the Gospel in Contemporary Asia

A report by: **Dr. Siga Arles**, Director, Indian Institute of Missiology Research Centre, Bangalore, India

"Prophetic Voice of the Gospel in Contemporary Asia" was the theme of the ATA Triennial General Assembly that brought together about 100 delegates from Japan to Jordan. The conference was held at the Legend Villas in Metro Manila, Philippines on August 6-10, 2007.

Dr. Brian Wintle, the Acting General Secretary, welcomed the delegates in this occasion. He served in this capacity due to the sudden demise of our beloved General Secretary Pastor Derek Tan. A collection of essays and tributes titled "The Pastor and Theological Education" was printed in memory of Dr. Tan. The first copy was given to Wilson Teo, Derek Tan's successor at the Theological Center for Asia, Singapore. A team of Filipino singers led the worship and sang through the session in which Dr. Sang-Bok Kim delivered an inaugural address.

Dr. Nomer Bernardino, a pastor from the Philippines, led the morning devotions. Papers about this year's theme were presented. The following are the topics and speakers:

Dr. Vinay Kumar Samuel – *"Shifting Paradigms in Theological Education"*;
Mr. Benjamin Pwee – *"Globalization and Its Impact on the Church in Asia Today"*;
Mr. David Wang – *"Theological Education in*

the Context of Persecution";
Dr. Joseph Suico – *"Social Concern in Theological Education"*; Dr. Wong Kim Kong – *"The Role of Christians in the Task of Nation Building in Multi-Faith Contexts"*;
Dr. Quek Swee Hwa – *"Theological Education for the Marketplace"*; Dr. Calvin Chong – *"The Use of Technology to Promote Learning in Asian Theological Institutions"*.

These papers will be published in the Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology 15:2 on December 2007.

Reports of Dr. Brian Wintle (Acting General Secretary) and Dr. Michael Shen (Treasurer) were given during the Business Meeting. Dr. Wintle said: "We have grown over the last three years, from 168 member institutions in 2004 to 196 institutions this year. We have 124



The G.A. in session

	Group A	Group B	Group C
Application Fee	60*	60	60
Associate Member Fee			
Association/Organization	265	265	265
Institutions	215	215	215
Accreditation Fee			
Undergraduate	465	365	215
Graduate	515	415	265
Post Graduate	565	465	315
Doctoral Level	615	515	365
VET Fee			
Undergraduate	450	350	200 up to 3 programs
Additional/Program	45	35	20 each program
Graduate	500	400	250 up to 3 programs
Additional/Program	50	40	25 each program
Post Graduate	550	450	300 up to 3 programs
Additional/Program	55	45	30 each program
Doctoral Level	600	500	350 up to 3 programs
Additional/Program	60	50	35 each program

* US \$

accredited member institutions, 72 associate member institutions, and 2 affiliates. At present member institutions span 26 countries." The assembly approved the proposed increase in membership fee (see table above for the new schedule of fees).

Editor's Note:

ATA News will come out with quarterly issues published in January, April, July, and October. It will feature articles and news from different regions. We have appointed regional representatives to facilitate this. You can send your ministry updates including photos, prayer requests, and other information you want to share with the ATA family.

The first issue focuses on the last ATA Triennial General Assembly. It features the inaugural address of the new ATA General Secretary, Dr. Joseph Shao; Dr. Bruce Nicholl's reflections on the papers presented; Dr. Siga Arles' detailed account of the General Assembly's activities; and some photos of the memorable event.

Get connected to the ATA family through the ATA News!

Dr. Theresa R. Lua
AGST Asia Dean
Asst. Accreditation Secretary

ATA news

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The new ATA officers and committee members were welcomed and commended to God's grace. See the complete list on page 6 of this newsletter.

The current issue of the Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology 15:1, June 2007 and a collection of essays titled: Striving for Excellence: Education Ministry in the Church in honor of CAED Secretary, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Narendra John, were released. These are now available to all member institutions and for wider readership.



The installation of the new General Secretary, Dr. Joseph Shao, President of the Biblical Seminary of the Philippines was well celebrated. Dr. Bong Rin Ro introduced Dr. Joseph Shao. Dr. Sang-Bok David Kim, the outgoing chairman gave the charge to Dr. Shao.

Heavy rains spoil the visit to the local seminaries in Manila but we managed to see the Biblical Seminary of the Philippines (BSOP) and the International Graduate School of Leadership (formerly International School of Theology-Asia).

Dr. Bruce Nicholls reported that nine volumes of Asia Bible Commentary series are already available and the rest are still under production. Dr. Siga Arles introduced the Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology and invited member institutions to submit articles and reports. Discussion on issues concerning Curriculum Development and Academic, Accreditation and Education was led by Dr. Narendra John bringing input from the various members of CAED.

-  Installation of Dr. Joseph Shao, the new ATA Gen. Sec.
-  The new ATA leaders

Dr. Paul Sanders discussed the role and place of International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE). On the other hand, Drs. Manfred Kohl and Ashish Chrispal talked about the ways of partnership and support from Overseas Council International (OCI).

The Assembly ended in Holy Communion led by the outgoing and incoming chairpersons. The new General Secretary Dr. Joseph Shao delivered a short but memorable message.

The ATA General Assembly marked new challenges for all members to develop and work towards a more effective and relevant theological education for the twenty-first century.

A quarterly newsletter of ATA will be published through the leadership of Dr. Theresa Roco-Lua and the partnership of Dr. Wallace Louie, Dr. Siga Arles and other regional representatives. We believe that this will help in providing information, developments and information services to ATA family.



What they say about **ATA Triennial General Assembly**

"Great time for learning, fellowshiping and networking!"

"Good opportunity for the leaders of Theological Education throughout Asia to come together... The study and sharing were innovative and would certainly benefit us in the future."

"What a great opportunity to be with such incredibly gifted/experienced group of colleagues in Asian theological education!"

"Each session was helpful and thought-provoking!"

"Good discussions and relevant issues were raised."

"There was a lot of in-depth interaction."

"I appreciate being an accredited member of ATA."

"It helped me understand the work of ATA better."

"Special thanks to the performers for the cultural evening— a high class effort!"

Reflections on the ATA General Assembly

By Rev. Dr. Bruce Nicholls, Editor, Asia Bible Commentaries

I was privileged to attend the ATA General Assembly held in Manila on August 6-10, 2007. I have been involved with ATA since its founding year in 1970 and have attended every General Assembly. Nearly one hundred representatives of our 196 member colleges took part in the Assembly. I was assigned to release the four more volumes of the Asia Bible Commentary series (Ezra-Nehemiah, Acts, I Timothy and I Peter). This makes nine volumes so far. I hope to publish six more by the end of 2008. The ATA Executives want the fifty volume series completed by 2013. This daunting task can only be accomplished by His grace and the commitment of all writers.

The theme "Prophetic Voice of the Gospel in Contemporary Asia" focused on the many paradigm shifts in theological training that are taking place as Asia becomes the future power house of the world. The challenging issues raised by speakers and discussed in sessions included the following:

1. The Impact of Globalization

Contemporary Asia is changing at an ever increasing rate. **Benjamin Pwee**, the Managing Director of an Asia wide company demonstrates how globalization in the economic and social dimensions is impacting the cultures and the lives of Asian people. The rich are getting rapidly richer and the poor getting poorer and in between an emerging middle class are becoming the decision makers of our societies. This is

especially true in China and India. Globalization as a social dimension is the deepening connection between communities and nations, redefining values and converging purposes. The market place is becoming a process rather than a place in which we either progress to true humanity or degenerate into dysfunctional units of society. Globalization is challenging the churches of Asia to show the relevance of the Gospel for our restless and stressed market places while offering an economically prosperous and socially transforming society. Old communities are giving way to new ones, which are no longer defined by ethnicity or language or nationality but by markets, industries, employment and job mobility. Globalization is also resulting in the "clash of civilizations," religious conflicts and terrorism, and control of power by the few.

2. Globalization is a Battle for the Future

This paradigm shift in economics and culture is calling theological colleges in Asia to pool their resources, develop market place theologies, and offer theological education to Christians in positions of power, enabling them to influence society for good. Theological research that is practice and action-based has become a new priority in our missiological task. Globalization in Asia is a battle for the future of humanity as individuals, families and communities.

Dr. Vinay Samuel of India emphasized the need to balance biblical knowledge with the

new priority of the Christian practice of discipleship and mission. He also emphasized the importance of experiencing the spiritual life, of seeing the miraculous as the norm not the exception and of addressing the "spiritual powers" that keep unbelievers in spiritual darkness. In the words of Eugene Paterson we are being called to "recycle Scripture" and proclaim the divinely given gospel in new and relevant ways for the sake of the present community, combining kerugmatik faithfulness to the Gospel with pastoral sensitivity.

Dr. Quek Swee Hwa of Singapore in his address "Theological Education for the Marketplace" challenged theological educators to devise ways of promoting Christian living in the market places of our communities. He urged that colleges balance their required courses of biblical foundations, biblical hermeneutics, Christian doctrine and educational ministries of the church with elective courses designed to meet the specific concerns of the people we minister to. These include marketplace theology and ministries, war and terrorism, tent making in mission, leadership in mentoring and coaching, vocation, work and ministry, and ethics for witness in the marketplace.

Dr. Wong Kim Kong of Malaysia argued that nation building is part of the biblical mandate in proclaiming the full counsel of God. He called the Christians of Asia to be both citizens of the Kingdom and nation to



Dr. Joseph Shao & Dr. Akio Hashimoto giving plaque of appreciation to Dr. Michael Shen, the outgoing treasurer



Dr. Shao & Dr. Hashimoto honoring Dr. Sang-Bok Kim, the outgoing chairman

the glory of God and to the glory of the nation. But he also warned us of the danger of turning nation building into nationalism and unbridled patriotism that becomes idolatries. In nation building we are called to uphold justice, protect human rights and guarantee freedom. While affirming the role of democracy, he urged that governments be limited in power and kept small.

Christians are exhorted to nurture “mediating structures” between governments and voluntary societies, including the church. The many spheres of human activity in society are interdependent. This is also true of the church’s mission in evangelism, compassionate service and social justice. Christianity is both a life affirming and community affirming religion. Truth and righteousness, justice and freedom, equality and mercy are the essence of the church’s mission in the world.

In emphasizing these values **Dr. Joseph Suico** of the Philippines traced the growing recognition of the interdependence of evangelism, social service and social action since the Lausanne Congress of 1973. Modern urban society is looking for mediating institutions, such as the church, which can relate individual persons and the large body politic of communities. Our

educational institutions need to balance this relationship in their curriculum building. **David Wang** of China discussed new forms of theological education in the context of continuing persecution.

To meet the needs of training leaders for marketplace ministries, **Dr. Calvin Chong** stressed the role of modern technology in theological education. Distance learning which combines on-line technology, printed materials and face-to-face sessions for widely dispersed students is seen as the new challenge in training leaders for the new industrialized society and for the mushrooming house churches in cities, towns and villages. This calls for a shift from teacher-driven content to student-oriented experience in the context of community living. This paradigmatic shift in theological education will always be balanced by the

continuing of traditional residential training for those with financial resources.

If the churches of tomorrow are going to meet the emerging challenges of a changing Asia as it becomes the center of global power, then the ongoing research in “recycling the Scriptures” to meet the challenges of globalization is an urgent priority. I would welcome ATA in developing and supporting a small core of well staffed and financed research centers across Asia, each with their own specialization and practical testing in the new plurality of Asian societies. This emergence will need a steady flow of monographs, teaching texts and guides and the creative use of the contextualized Asia Bible Commentary series designed for preaching, teaching and pastoral care throughout Asia.



Dr. Jung-Sook Lee & Dr. Ng Peh Cheng enjoying the fellowship



Dr. Dick Hart interacting with Dr. Vinay Samuel & Dr. Michael Shen



Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music Choir



Dr. Bong Rin Ro, Dr. Joseph Shao, Dr. Theresa Lua, Dr. Brian Wintle, and Dr. Narendra John



Cultural presentation



Dr. Bong Rin Ro, dancing during the cultural night



Dr. Michael Shen trying the bamboo dance

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Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology 15:1 (June 2007)

Striving for Excellence: Educational Ministry in the Church

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Edited by Siga Arles & Brian Wintle

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