



## Theologians Journeying Together into the World

by Dr. Federico Villanueva, Publications Secretary, ATA

// ... let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD." (Jer. 9:23-24, ESV)

Just recently I was reading the verse above and while doing so, I was struck by the words "in the earth". As theologians, educators, biblical scholars, knowing God forms the central core of our calling. We want to know God and work towards making Him known. Yet we sometimes forget that it is "in the earth" where the God we want to know and make known is at work. We get distracted by so many things we no longer have the strength left to engage with the world around us. Our focus becomes confined to the small corners of our classrooms and offices that we fail to discern what God is doing outside. But that is where Jesus is sending us - "into the world" (John 17:18). What matters is not so much what we do or talk about in academic forums or conferences, but how what we did and talked about in the latter impacts our society and the world we live in. Our calling is not primarily to publish books, articles in

prestigious publications, though this has its own merit; rather, it is to turn our works of scholarship into a prayer, that being, "Let your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven."

One of the important things that came out of the ATA Theological Consultation was the emphasis on public theology. For the past two hundred years secularism has dominated the western world and as a result of colonialism, so much of Asia has embraced that influence. But religion is back. There is now recognition that religion and theology have something to contribute towards the common good.

It is no coincidence that the ATA consultation was held in Manila. Here, the Bible is at the center of political life. It has been used by a senator to defend death penalty. The head of the police used the words from Romans 6:23 to justify the extra-judicial killings: "For the wages of sin is death" - even my barber mentioned this verse and told me it is just right that drug addicts are killed. The nation's President, Rodrigo Duterte, in his 2016 State of the Nation Address, cited from Ecclesiastes, and just recently, he mentioned

the first chapters of Genesis in one of his speeches. With such incidences, I can't help but ask "where are the biblical scholars?" The Bible is right there in the public square, but not so the biblical scholars. The question now is how can the Church, the seminaries, theologians, Christian educators, biblical scholars contribute towards a meaningful engagement in the public square?

That is the challenge in this post-secular period. We all know we cannot do the work alone. We need a hermeneutical community where theologians and biblical scholars work with social scientists and other practitioners towards meeting a particular need. We tried to model this during the consultation by coming up with a specific need and then asking people from different disciplines to work together to address the issue. We presented the result of this multi-disciplinary endeavor during the consultation. We are still very much at the beginning stage. We still need to work harder at communicating with one another. Yet more importantly, the very people we are trying to help have to understand what we are doing and saying. But I do believe that we are moving in the right direction.

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But how do we continue down this path?

Well, it seems apparent that we need to overcome two obstacles before we can proceed.

The first one is overspecialization. This is the tendency to focus too much on our own discipline that we no longer want to explore other disciplines. While it is without a doubt easier to just remain in our comfort zone, we do know that whatever area of expertise we are in, it is but a drop in a sea of knowledge.

To be more effective, we need to understand our discipline in consideration of

the other disciplines and more importantly, in light of life itself. It is good to go out of your own house every so often. That way you'll be able to see your house from outside. You may begin to appreciate your house more as you see how beautiful it is. But you will also observe that there are other houses- and there are many of them. This can be discomfoting at times, but at the same time, humbling too. But that is precisely what is good when we consider other disciplines; it makes us more humble. It makes us realize we cannot do the task alone. We need one another.

The second obstacle is related to the

first, or more precisely the second is rooted in the first – self-centeredness. Historically, theologians do not speak with biblical scholars and vice versa. Those involved with pastoral ministries are also wary about interacting with the previous two since the conversations could lead to what we Filipinos term as “nose bleed” (an expression synonymous to the expression “it’s Greek to me”). But we know that it is only as we learn to interact with each other, live together for the sake of the Kingdom of God that there will be any progress in this journey.

May we encounter the God who sent us into the world as we try to journey together!

## Responding to the Call: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Doing Theology in Asia A Recap

Last year, 80 participants from different parts of Asia and the Pacific wrested with the calling of the Asian Biblical Scholar/Theologian. This year, we embraced the calling and responded. Thus, the theme of the 2018 theological consultation- “Responding to the Call: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Doing Theology in Asia.” 103 people from 17 countries gathered last 31 July to 03 August at the BSA Twin Towers Hotel in Manila, Philippines to grapple with what it means to do theology across disciplines in Asia.

The consultation had a very festive kick off as it began with the launch of two new publications, both an addition to the Asia Bible Commentary (ABC) series. The two new commentaries are, *Leviticus*, written by Dr. Ming Him Ko; and *Numbers*, written by Dr. Mitchel Modine, who likewise gave his testimony during the said event. To add to the festivities of the book launch, the participants were serenaded by the Sparrow Music Guitar Ensemble, a group of children

from Payatas, an urban poor community in Manila. This group likewise made music for the participants during the celebration dinner later on.

In order for the participants to see the bigger picture and gain a deeper appreciation for the sessions that followed, the theme for the consultation was introduced by Dr. Steve Chang, Vice President of Curriculum Development of Torch Trinity Graduate University and co-convenor of the Theological consultation. From there, the consultation moved into several thought provoking paper presentations, beginning with the three plenary speakers and papers as follows: Dr. Melba Maggay, a renown socio- anthropologist, writer and speaker, “*Contextualization, Social Science, and the Interpretative Task*”; Dr. Havilah Dharamraj, Academic Dean and Head of the Department of Old Testament at South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) in Bangalore, India, *The Curious Case of Hagar*:

Biblical Studies and the Interdisciplinary Approach of Comparative Literature; and last but not the least, Dr. Simon Chan, former Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity College in Singapore and editor of Asia Journal of Theology, “*The Church and Women: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Evangelical Feminism*”. Each presentation had a chosen responder and they are as follows: Drs. Steve Pardue, Rico Villanueva, and Teresa Chai respectively. Alongside the stimulating plenary sessions, there were 18 paper presenters from different parts of Asia for the parallel sessions, each putting forth a model of how interdisciplinary theologizing can and has been done.

Furthermore, to make interdisciplinary theologizing more than a purely theoretical exercise, a case study entitled “*Challenges and Responses to Ethnic Integration and Harmony*” was presented by a panel composed of Atty. Eugene Yapp, Executive Secretary in Research for the National Evangelical Christian

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Commentaries on *Leviticus* and *Numbers* were launched to kick off this year's theological consultation. (In the photo: Drs. Federico Villanueva, publications secretary, ATA; Riad Kassis, Director of ICETE and Langham scholars; Theresa Lua, General Secretary, ATA; and author Mitchel Modine.



Drs. Melba Maggay, Havilah Dharamraj, and Simon Chan, all experts in their respective disciplines, spoke during the plenary sessions

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The participants were serenaded by Sparrow Music Philippines



Millennials, the emerging leaders of the church and of seminaries, likewise participated very actively.



Several papers were presented during the parallel sessions, all modelling how interdisciplinary theologizing has been made possible.



A panel discussion composed of all the plenary speakers along with Dr. Riad Kassir integrated all that had been put forth in the consultation.



A panel composed of Atty. Eugene Yapp, Dr. Sooi Ling Tan, Drs. Steve Chang and Dick Eugenio presented and tackled a case study entitled "Challenges and Responses to Ethnic Integration and Harmony"



The participants of this year's consultation were very much engaged as they participated in the sessions and group discussions.



Drs. Steve Chang, Federico Villanueva, and Steve Pardue gathered the questions of the participants after each plenary session.



The consultation closed with Holy Communion and it was officiated by Dr. Rodrigo Tano

## Parallel Paper Presentations



- Al-Zhougbi, Grace**, Phd (on-going), Israel
- Aung, James**, PhD, India
- Blumenstock, James**, PhD, Thailand
- Carino, Michael**, Mdiv, Philippines
- Crizaldo, Rei Lemuel**, Philippines
- Gener, Timoteo**, PhD, Philippines
- Hwang, Tsung- I**, PhD, Taiwan
- Johnson, David Michael**, DMiss, Philippines
- Kim, Lauren**, PhD, USA
- Law, Samuel Ka- Chieng**, PhD, Singapore
- Oh, Hyun Joo, PhD & Hong, Kyungwha, EdD**, South Korea
- Poobalan, Ivor**, PhD, Sri Lanka
- Pwee, Benjamin**, PhD (candidate), Malaysia
- Raj, Josfin**, MTh Christian Theology, Mdiv, India
- Razu, Indukuri John Mohan**, DTh, India
- Sabanal, Christopher**, PhD, Philippines
- Spurgeon, Andrew**, PhD, Singapore
- Yango, Emo**, DMiss, Philippines



# ATA India holds its very first theological consultation

By Dr. Bennet Arren Lawrence, Associate Regional Secretary, ATA- India



The first Theological consultation organized by ATA India was held last 29 June.

Last June 29, 2018, the Asia Theological Association-India Chapter conducted its first Theological Consultation in India itself with the theme “One Gospel, Many Cultures”. This consultation came into being with the gracious consent of Drs. Theresa Lua, ATA General Secretary and Rico Villanueva, ATA Publications Secretary and was conducted primarily to help our ATA- India teachers, staff, and students to engage in theological discussions and develop theological frameworks for our issues indigenous to India, as most teachers from ATA colleges in India could not travel to ATA International’s

Theological Consultation. The venue of the consultation was the SAIACS CEO Center in Bangalore. 105 participants from different cities of India actively participated. A total of five papers were presented by world-renowned scholars, each accompanied by a question and answer portion.

The following presented their papers during the said event: Dr. Darrell Bock, who presented two papers, namely: “Cultural Engagement” and “Being a Great, Culturally Engaged Person of Faith”; second, Dr. Ken Gnanakan presented a paper with the title “One Gospel in Many Cultures”; while Dr. Andrew B. Spurgeon presented a paper entitled “The God of the Nations” (Rom 3:29) — A Pharisee’s Confession?”; and lastly, Dr. Prabhu Singh presented a paper with the title “Gospel Communication, Culture Change and Christian Missions in India.” These papers gave not only the biblical bases for cultural engagement, they likewise helped process the theological reasoning for it and gave the frameworks and practical guidance for the latter. We at ATA India are hoping

to make these papers, along with a few other papers on the same topic, available in book form in the near future.

The first ever theological consultation held in India and organized by ATA India was a huge success. At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that our sincere gratitude is due to Dr. Paul Cornelius for his constant encouragement and guidance for the success of this program.



Drs. Darrel Bock, Ken Gnanakan, Andrew Spurgeon, and Prabhu Singh presented papers in the said consultation.

## GATE workshops begin in Mongolia



ATA and the Global Associates for Transformational Education (GATE) held its first faculty workshop in

Mongolia last August 13-15 and it was facilitated by two GATE Associates from the Philippines - Dr. Theresa Lua, ATA

General Secretary and Dr. Julie Bustamante, Director of Koinonia Theological Seminary. The workshop was hosted by the Kingdom

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Leadership Training Centre (KLTC) in Darhan under the guidance of Rev. Mark Wood. The participants who came from Ulaanbaatar, the capital city which is roughly a four hour drive away, stayed in a nearby hotel.

Twenty faculty from the following schools participated in the workshop:

- Union Bible Theological College (Ulaanbaatar)
- River of Life Ministry School (Ulaanbaatar)
- Darkhan Union Bible Theological College (Darhan)

- Kingdom Leadership Training Center (Darhan)

With about half of the participants not able to understand English, language became a challenge, particularly for the facilitators; but with the presence of three excellent interpreters, the sessions still went well. Additionally, GATE lessons are designed in such a way that the focus is on learning not on teaching, with participants engaging in learning tasks rather than listening to lectures. Thus, despite the language challenge, the participants were highly involved in discussions both in their

table groups and in the big group.

Year 1 of the GATE curriculum focuses on the Theological and Philosophical Foundations for Transformational Education and “the workshop engages the participants in a discovery process to determine how factors such as the characteristics of entering students, the nature of the church, and the realities of their own cultures impact the designs and outcomes of educational experiences. Special emphasis is given to introducing relevant biblical/theological categories as well as modeling established educational practices.”

## NEWS UPDATES • NEWS UPDATES • NEWS UPDATES • NEWS UPDATES • NEWS UPDATES

### Three institutions visited in the third quarter of 2018

Over the third quarter of this year, three Visiting Evaluation Teams (VET) were sent out to three different institutions for accreditation. These institutions are Ha-Or Theological Seminary Office, Korea University of International Studies, and Logos Evangelical Seminary.

The first institution visited this quarter is the Ha-Or Theological Seminary located in Seoul, South Korea. The visit was in two parts. The first visit was last May 28-29 and it was primarily a visit to the Ha-Or office. Those who visited during the said dates were Dr. Ng Peh Cheng, Associate Secretary of Accreditation and Education Development, ATA, and Rev. Dr. Kyung Chul Lim, Vice President of Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST Pacific based in Hawaii, USA). The second visit was last July 16-17 with Dr. Luke Cheung, Vice President of China Graduate School of Theology, Hong Kong conducting the visit which was primarily a meeting with students and alumni.

Ha-Or Seminary was founded in 1995 with a mission “... to train up pastors, teachers, theologians, and missionaries in East Asia to do theological research and to practice spiritual discipline according to the reformed evangelical theology.” Its founders are JK Lee, a missionary and Hannah Jeong, a deaconess. Ha- Or Seminary has been teaming up with Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary (PUTS), its sponsoring institution.

The second institution visited this quarter is the Logos Evangelical Seminary

located in El Monte, California. The visit was conducted last June 25-27 and the team was composed of Drs. Theresa Lua, General Secretary, ATA, Lily Chua, Acting Academic Dean, China Evangelical Seminary, and Jonathan Ro, D.Min Programme Associate Director, GETS Theological Seminary. Prior to this visit to the campus in California, Dr. Ro likewise made a visit to the campus in East Asia in June 21. This visit allowed him not only to see the facilities but meet several key people there.



Logos Evangelical Seminary, California was visited by Drs. Theresa Lua, Lily Chua, and Jonathan Ro

Logos Evangelical Seminary was founded in May 1989 to equip “... servant leaders in the four core areas of spiritual formation, academic excellence, ministerial competence and godly living; to serve Christ’s Church and to proclaim the gospel to the world effectively.”

The third institution visited this quarter is the Korea University of International

Studies and it was conducted last July 24-26. The team that visited this institution is composed of Drs. Ng Peh Cheng, Jonathan Ro, and Kyung Chul Lim.



Korea University of International Studies was visited by Drs. Ng Peh Cheng, Jonathan Ro, and Kyung Chul Lim

Korea University of International Studies seeks to nurture frontier mission leadership and has a focus on global missions; it thus equips its graduates to work among the unreached. They give emphasis to seminary education that is “holistic and integrative” and so combines the social sciences, international relations, geographical area studies with Christian theology and missiology. The institution is associated with the Presbyterian Reformed Church and also with the Asian Culture and Development for Global mission.

We praise God for the work He is doing in and through the institutions visited this quarter. Let us continue to pray that God would continue to strengthen the leadership of each in order that they may effectively equip the church for God’s mission.




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Fellowship (NECF) in Malaysia, Drs. Steve Chang, Dick Eugenio, Academic Dean and Professor of Theology at the Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, and Sooi Ling Tan, Academic Dean at AGST Alliance. A panel discussion composed of all the speakers, along with Dr. Riad Kassis, Director of ICETE and of Langham Scholars, wrapped up the consultation and it was officially closed with Holy Communion officiated by Dr. Rodrigo Tano.

The participants all left refreshed and at the same time, challenged and with a broadened perspective. More importantly, it was clear to everyone that there was a need to foster partnerships and bring disciplines together in a hermeneutical community. Thus the participants left with a resolve to move towards being more inclusive rather than exclusive, to engage more in dialogue among people from different disciplines and backgrounds and to move towards expanding the media through which

theology is communicated. The members of the Theological Consultation Committee composed of Drs Steve Chang, Federico Villanueva (both convenors), Sooi Ling Tan, Steve Pardue, Bennet Arren Lawrence, and Theresa Lua, who all worked hard to make this happen, celebrate all that God had done during the three day event and are certain that this is just the beginning of a movement towards greater unity, not just among theological institutions, but within the body of Christ.



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