



## 2020 ATA THEOLOGICAL CONSULTATION

**“ETHICS IN ASIAN SOCIETIES:  
AN EVANGELICAL CONVERSATION”**

**AUGUST 3-6, 2020, KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA**



**DR. SOOI LING TAN**

### **When?**

Set aside August 3-6 and join us for a double celebration! You are warmly invited to participate in the 2020 ATA Theological Consultation where we will engage in a pivotal theological conversation on the topic: “Ethics in Asian Societies.” At the same time, ATA will be celebrating her 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. What a wonderful opportunity to celebrate and give thanks together for God’s faithfulness and guidance throughout these years. Indeed “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain (Psalm 127:1).”

### **Why and For What?**

Today’s globalized world brings with it fresh, unique and complex political, societal and religious challenges. Accompanying these challenges, fresh ethical issues have emerged that can no longer be neglected or glossed over by the Christian community. In this current

climate of ethical ambiguity, Christians urgently seek answers to how they ought to be, the values they hold, and the kinds of actions they ought to perform or avoid. The 2020 Theological Consultation seeks to identify and begin a robust conversation to address the throbbing ethical issues present in Asian societies. What will be unique in this consultation is the deliberate incorporation of Asian perspectives and ethical values to this growing global evangelical Christian ethics discussion.

### **Featuring:**

- Two Plenary Sessions: The consultation will open on Monday evening and end on Thursday noon with two plenary sessions.
- Four Panel Conversations. Held on Tuesday and Wednesday, each panel conversation features an area of focus where two or three specialists will present their

perspectives. This will be followed by discussion and contributions from the participants.

### **For Whom?**

All are welcome! We invite theologians, scholars, ministry practitioners, educationalists, specialists, researchers, students and faculty to join us in this vital discussion. You will bring to the table your unique perspective and experience and perhaps even highlight issues and responses that we are not aware of.

We hope that these four days together will provide a vibrant open space for robust (and perhaps contentious) engagement with these current ethical questions particularly for the Asian context. As ATA moves forward to the next decade, we cannot think of a more appropriate theme as we begin (and continue on) formulating faithful evangelical Christian ethic responses in Asia.

*Continued on page 2*

Plenary Session 1  
6.30pm Monday  
3 August

Asian Theological Perspectives  
on Ethical Issues in Asia:  
An Overview

Plenary Session 2  
9am Thursday  
6 August

Asian Theological Perspectives  
on Ethical Issues in Asia:  
The Challenge

## 1. Justice and Ethics in Society

What are Christian responses to religious discrimination bribery and corruption in society? This conversation seeks to engage with the present realities and discuss appropriate theological responses that will help provide guidelines for Christians to live as responsible citizens in their respective countries and contexts.



## 2. Family and Sexual Ethics

Divorce, homosexuality and gender identity are three of the most significant challenges to God's pattern for family in today's society. This session presents salient thinking on family and sexual ethics and seeks for appropriate theological and pastoral responses.

## 3. Creation Care

In light of the current climate crisis, these conversations will cover the theological, scientific and practical concerns on our responsibility to care for God's creation. What is the response of faith communities to these concerns both on a macro and micro level?



## 4. Ethics and Care(Humane Relations)

Christian ethics of care will be considered in the Asian context where there is a strong experience of social and economic inequality, prejudice and human exploitation. This session touches on issues of class and caste, human trafficking, overseas migrant workers and migration.

## Stepping Down Into a New Chapter

Towards the end of November, another beloved ATA leader began a new chapter in her life. Dr. Ng Peh Cheng stepped down and has retired from her ministry with ATA.

Dr. Peh Cheng has served fulltime as the Associate Secretary of Accreditation of ATA's Commission on Accreditation and Educational Development or CAED. She has had

this role since 2012. Prior to that, Dr. Peh Cheng has already been a member of CAED even as she was teaching full time at the Singapore Bible College.

In her stepping down and retiring, Dr. Peh Cheng has passed on the baton to Dr. Jonathan Ro and is thankful to the Lord for the opportunity to serve in and through the ministry of ATA.

On the other hand, the entire ATA community is grateful beyond words for Dr. Ng Peh Cheng! Countless schools have benefited from her thorough evaluation and her dedication to uphold and help in ensuring quality theological



education. She will definitely be missed!

We praise God for Dr. Ng Peh Cheng and for her faithfulness to the ministry! We uphold her in prayer and wish her growing joy as she begins a new chapter in her life!

## Introducing A•CROSS

(Asian Christian Reflections on Society and Spirituality)

### ATA's Online Forum

One of ATA's priority goals is the formation of "'hermeneutical communities' of Asian Evangelical Scholars from different disciplines

working together to provide a prophetic voice to the burning issues in Asia". This hopefully leads to "member institutions serving the Asian Church effectively so that the whole people of God are fulfilling God's global mission within diverse Asian cultures." But even in reaching out for its vision and moving towards its goals, ATA seeks to be relevant to the fast changing times. So thus, the birth of A•CROSS or Asian Christian Reflections on Society and Spirituality. A•CROSS is an online forum that aims to provide a space for ongoing dialogue on key issues in Asian societies and how the church through

theological education can address them.

A•CROSS will be up and running on **31 January 2020**. Watch out for it!

#### Newsflash!!!

*Last November 29, we at ATA launched a contest in search for a name for the online forum to be launched in January, 2020. Several entries were given from all over Asia, each one beautiful but one name must be chosen. After much prayer and deliberation, the name A•CROSS or Asian Christian Reflections on Society and Spirituality was chosen and this suggestion was given in by Mr. Rei Lemuel Crizaldo from the Philippines.*

*Congratulations, Rei!*

Wishing you a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New year and New Decade 2020!

As we all begin a new year and a new decade, it is our prayer that you will not forget that the future is as bright as the Promises of God.

"The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it."

~ 1 Thessalonians 5: 24

# Institutions Visited in the Last Two Months of 2019

The last two months of 2019 allowed for three more visits to three different institutions in two different regions of Asia.

The first institution is located in the Middle Eastern region of Asia and it is a visit to Program for Theological Education by Extension, or PTEE, located in Amman, Jordan. PTEE was visited last 04- 06 November and it was a joint visit with MENATE or the Middle East and North Africa Association for Theological Education. The team from ATA was composed of Drs. Allan Harkness, Founding Dean, AGST Alliance; and Dr. Qaiser Julius. MENATE team was composed of Drs. Hani Hanna, Academic Dean of the Evangelical Theological Seminary, Cairo (ETSC); and Nabeeh Abbassi, director for Arab Center for Consulting and Training Services (ACCTS).



*VET with leaders of PTEE*

Established in 31 May 1981, its mission is “to provide evangelical theological education by extension to equip Christians for leadership wherever they live in the Arab world for the advancement of the Kingdom of God” and its founders designated it to be a program with courses for at the Bachelor’s level with a vision of

developing leaders for church growth and transformation of society in the Arab World. And being an extension program, it has no one permanent campus but rather in local churches in 12 countries in the region and in 4 Western countries. PTEE was founded by different Middle Eastern church denominations, institutions, and organizations.

The next two institutions are found in South East Asia. The first being TCA College, located in Singapore, and it was visited last 06-08 November by a team composed of Drs. Ng Peh Cheng, Associate Secretary of Educational Development, ATA; Rahmiati Tanudjaja, Overseer of the Missions Department, South East Asian Bible Seminary, Indonesia; and Rev. Dr. Lin Khee- Vun, Principal, Anglican Training Institute, Sabah, Malaysia. Founded by Rev. Dr. Naomi Dowdy in 1979 with a mission to “train ministers to spread the Gospel



*VET with leaders of TCA College*

message and equip leaders for the church and the Christian community”, the institution is an interdenominational college which is made up of two Schools of Theology- one for English and another for Chinese, and the School of Counselling and Leadership. TCA College, in its founding years, was known as Trinity School of Bible and in 1983 changed its name to Trinity Center for Asia and eventually in 2006 the name “TCA College” was embraced and to this day Rev. Dr. Naomi Dowdy serves as its chancellor while Rev. Dominic Yeo serves as its Vice

Chancellor and Rev. Dr. Dennis Lum as its 4<sup>th</sup> and current President.

The second institution is the Phnom Penh Bible School (PPBS) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The institution was visited by a team composed of Dr. Chiu Eng Tan, ATA CAED member; Rev. Prak Vuthy, Cambodian Methodist Bible School; and Rev. Dr. Jonathan Ro, Associate Accreditation Secretary. The team visited last December 9 to 12. Founded by the late Daniel Yee- Wah Lam, backed up by many Cambodian



*VET with leaders of PPBS*

believers and Christian organizations, PPBS was meant to help meet the growing pastoral needs of the Cambodian Church. Its vision is to provide the Cambodian Church with leaders of sound Christian character and ability to faithfully serve the Christian community, effectively teach the Bible and boldly proclaim the Gospel through words and actions. While supported by many churches and organizations in numerous countries and regions, PPBS is primarily supported by Country Network (CN), a non- denominational organization founded by Daniel Lam.

We praise God for the work He is doing in and through these three institutions. Let us continue to pray that these institutions will persevere in their unique, God-given calling.

## From Asia to Europe: Visiting Evaluation Teams Sent Out Last October

Several Visiting Evaluation teams were sent out in the month of October and these visits were not only limited to institutions in Asia, but extended also to Europe. The institutions visited were in the following countries: Philippines, Spain, and Japan.

The Institutions visited in the Philippines were the Biblical Seminary of the Philippines (BSOP) and the International Graduate School of Leadership (IGSL). BSOP was visited last 7-9 October by a team composed of Drs. Madeline Vega, Adjunct Faculty, Asian Theological Seminary, Philippines; Rosalind Tan, Director, Holistic Development Institute, Malaysia Baptist Seminary and Director of Education Programs, AGST Alliance; and Dr. Samuel Sidjabat, Principal, Tyrannus Bible Seminary of the Philippines. With the vision of “disciple-making servant leaders building up the Body of Christ in Asia and beyond that effects biblical impact on peoples across cultures, BSOP aspires to

develop their students holistically by aiding their spiritual formation, growing their knowledge of the Bible along with their ministry skills. IGSL on the other hand was visited last 10-12 October by a team consisting of Drs. Dick Eugenio, Academic Dean, APNTS, Philippines; Samuel Sidjabat and Rosalind Tan. Its vision was first born out of that of its founding organization, Campus Crusade for Christ and it is “to help



VET at IGSL

*train, develop, and mobilize Christian leaders around the world to fulfil the Great Commission of Christ*”. But with the changing times, the institution has adapted its vision to read as “a growing network of Christ-like leaders who are building movements that are transforming lives, communities, and nations for the glory of God. IGSL hopes to cultivate servant-steward leaders who are not only spirit filled, but are also strategic in order to fulfil the Great Commission.

From the Philippines, we move to Spain, and the institution visited there was the International Chinese Biblical Seminary (ICBSIE) in Europe. ICBSIE was visited last 14-16 October by a team composed of Drs. Andreas Himawan, ATA Chairperson; Lily Chua, China Evangelical Seminary, Theresa

Lua, ATA General Secretary. Being in a situation where in a diverse group of Chinese immigrants has come to settle, ICBSIE serves to unite the different Chinese Churches across Europe and has in fact already had a strong impact



VET with leaders of ICBSIE

among them. Its vision is to see “every Chinese Church in Europe to have its own pastor and for each pastor to be amply prepared.” It aims to participate in building God’s kingdom by preparing fulltime ministers for both the church and the mission field and also by training lay leaders. ICBSIE does not have any denominational affiliation.

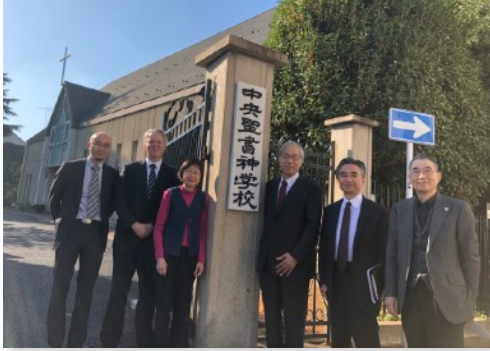
The last institutions visited in the month of October are back in Asia, particularly, in Japan. The two institutions visited in Japan were Central Bible College (CBC) and the Tokyo Biblical Seminary (TBS), both in Tokyo. The Central Bible College was visited last 28-30 October by a team



VET at BSOP

Continued on page 5

From page 4, From Asia to Europe:



VET with leaders of CBC



VET with leaders of TBS

composed of Drs. Ng Peh Cheng, Associate Secretary of Accreditation and Educational Development, ATA; Akio Hashimoto, Professor, Kobe Lutheran Theological Seminary, Kobe, Japan; and J. Randall Short, Professor of Old Testament, Tokyo Christian University, Chiba, Japan. CBC was founded in 1949 by the Japan

Assemblies of God (JAG) and was originally named Central Bible Institute. While it changed its name to what it is known today, CBC has maintained its vision to “train God’s workers for service” and continues to be affiliated with JAG and also serves and works with other Pentecostal churches. And finally, the Tokyo Biblical Seminary

which was visited by the same team members as CBC, did so last 30 October to 01 November. Founded in 1949, the Tokyo Biblical Seminary was borne from the efforts of the Japan Holiness Church (JHC) with the assistance of One Mission Society (formerly called Oriental Missionary Society) and was first known as Tokyo Bible Seminary. TBS had undergone several transitions, from moving locations, to the transfer of its ownership from OMS to JHC. The institution is currently led by Dr. Hiroshi Nishikori.

Let us praise God for all the institutions visited in the busy month of October and let us uphold these institutions in prayer as they seek to follow God’s calling for them.

## Visiting Evaluation Teams sent out to Mongolia



VET with leaders of MTEE



VET at UBTC

Last September, Visiting Evaluation Teams were sent out to two schools in Mongolia. The first school was Union Bible Theological College (UBTC) and the second was Mongolian Theological Education by Extension (MTEE). Both schools are in Ulaanbaatar.

UBTC was visited last 23-25 September by Dr. Theresa Lua, General Secretary, ATA; Mr. Mark Wood, Director of Kingdom Leadership Training Center (KLTC) in Darhan; and Ms. Tuya Bold, Academic coordinator, also from KLTC. Born out of a revival that created a need for leaders for younger churches, UBTC aims to

*prepare leaders who will serve the people and churches of the Mongolian world and beyond with God’s love in words and actions.* It is registered with the city government of Ulaanbaatar as a religious institution and has no affiliations with any single church or denomination.

On the other hand, MTEE was visited last 26-29 September also by Dr. Theresa Lua and Mr. Mark Wood but with Mr. Luya Gantumur, Principal of Union Bible Theological College, Ulaanbaatar. With a vision to see all

*Mongolians become disciples of Christ and glorify God,* the institution offers courses and ministries that are not only Bible based but are also focused specifically on the Mongolian context. MTEE is registered as a Non-governmental organization with the Mongolian government and has no affiliations with any single denomination.

Let us continue to uphold UBTC and MTEE in our prayers as they seek to serve the church in Mongolia.

# The Gospel in our Asian Cultures

By Bruce Nicholls

The crisis of theological education in Asia is the crisis of its theology which in turn is the crisis of understanding the gospel in Asian cultures.

Our seminaries on the whole have not been successful in training pastors, educationalists and evangelists to reach the thoughtful and educated people of their national cultures, I felt this deeply when teaching a course in a seminary in Myanmar where I learned that in nearly all the seminaries there were few students who had a Burmese cultural heritage. Virtually all the students were tribals, and we can be grateful for the opportunity to build the tribal churches. There are 50 million Buddhists in Myanmar but the number of Christians with a Burmese heritage is probably only two to three thousand, despite Adoniram Judson having translated the Scriptures into Burmese almost 200 years ago.

Is this failure because few of the missionaries and the teachers in the theological schools have been able to show the relevance of the Gospel to the Buddhist mind? Or is it because most of the teachers at the masters and doctoral level have been trained in a western culture with a western worldview? For the Buddhists the word "God" is meaningless. And by "sin" they mean shame, Buddhists are appalled at our Christian view of eternal life. Their longing is to achieve nirvana, the end of life. The same is true for Hindus wanting to be liberated from the bondage of karma-sansara, the cycle of endless rebirths.

In most cases our theological curriculum is modelled on those that are common in the west, and our degrees such as MDiv and BD are a puzzle to the government officials. When I was a pastor

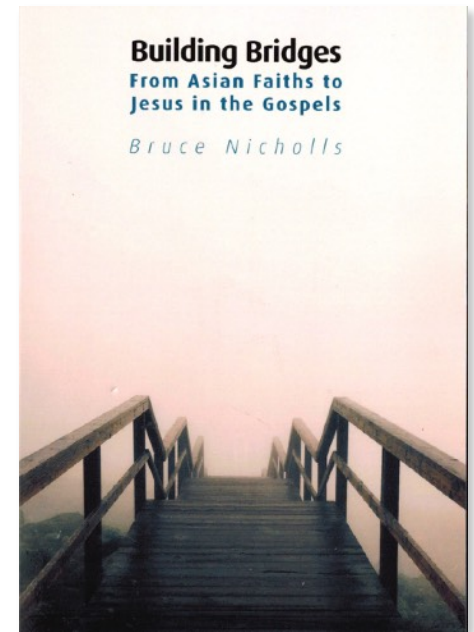
in a north Indian church I had an able young woman in the congregation who daily lived with five demon spirits whom she knew by name. She has been cursed by a fakir. Sadly, an Indian pastor and I failed to cast out these evil spirits. In our theological education we had not been taught how to exorcise evil spirits, a work central to Jesus' own public ministry.

The purpose of theological education is to serve the church, to mentor its members, to guide them in worship and to inspire them to engage in Christ's mission to the world. At the recent ATA General Assembly in Singapore our main speakers were all millennials, chosen because they were the church of the future. They called on us to build communities of faith in which inquirers from other faiths would feel welcome and accepted, even though they were not yet believers. Conversion is normally a process that might follow years of struggle and doubt. Yet we can rejoice that when Christ miraculously heals sufferers or gives supernatural guidance, many of other faiths instantly believe. This happens often among jihadist Muslims. In some cases Christ appears to them on the night of power in Ramadan, or during the Eid al-Adha festival to honour Abraham's sacrifice of his son (unnamed in the Qur'an).

Christ is calling us to build relationships of understanding and acceptance with the people of Asia, both the poor and illiterate and those who are educated. This is the concern of my new book, *Building Bridges from Asian Faith to Jesus in the Gospels*, published by Regnum. Oxford.

Our millennials also called for an authentic living of the Gospel in our pluralistic and changing cultures. They feel this deeply. The culture of my youth was pro-Christian. This is no longer true today in the western world where Christians are being pushed to the periphery of society.

In Asia persecution is increasing across Asia by the fundamentalists of each religion, Hindu, Buddhist and



Muslim. Tragically there were more martyrs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in all the previous centuries. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is just as threatening. The task of training pastors to be good shepherd of their flocks suffering persecution should be emphasized in the curricula of our theological schools. Persecution is no longer a subject limited to church history.

Our millennials are no longer wedded to their traditional denominations. They want to be part of churches where Christ is Lord and the Holy Spirit is present in power. The millennials also showed their love for the creative arts and urged that these have a greater part in our churches. They emphasized their love of music and drama, and expressed their creativity in their hair and dress styles. But sadly, many millennials are addicted to the misuse of the social media.

We conclude the curricula of our theological school need constant revision in the light of our changing cultures. This calls for more emphasis on research in the areas where we are failing and where we are succeeding and why.

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Address all correspondence to the editor:  
**Angelica De Vera**  
[ataasia.research@gmail.com](mailto:ataasia.research@gmail.com)