



MOVING INTO NEW SPACES AND INTO THE FUTURE

By: Angelica de Vera,
Communications Officer, ATA

Close scrutiny will show that most 'crisis situations' are opportunities to either advance, or stay where you are.

– Maxwell Maltz, author of *Psycho Cybernetics*

Never let a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean by that it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before. – Rahm Emanuel, 55th Mayor of Chicago

**This article was written based on select webinars in ATA's recent webinar series.*

One of the biggest effects of the COVID-19 pandemic was that it forced every single one of us to get out of our comfort zone and embrace change. Everyone on all levels has had to adapt to a new way of doing things as part of the measures to curb the spread of the virus. This has furthermore allowed everyone on both the micro and macro scale to rethink the ways by which we have been doing things and thus be given an opportunity to shape a new normal. This same opportunity has been made available to theological institutions globally as most, if not all, seek to keep on amidst the ongoing disruption brought about by the pandemic. And from the responses of the institutions, rather than being a barrier to furthering the ministry, the crisis brought about by the pandemic has been serving as a springboard into a future once only envisioned. The new normal, it appears, is a mould in which the future of Theological Education is being shaped.

Occupying new spaces

The immediate response of Theological Institutions, as with almost all sectors of society, was to move everything online. From the classroom to the virtual meeting room, most institutions that were once reluctant to embrace online learning have been forced to do so. Others, who have been planning to set up an online program, have found that "... *the covid crisis became our fast track to moving online.*"¹ The world wide web which was once waiting to have its space occupied by theological

institutions is now in full occupancy (yet with more room to welcome others in).

Occupying new spaces has, without doubt, kept institutions in operation in this time of crisis and even fast-tracked progress, but with every new landscape to tread, it is not without challenges. From the lack of infrastructure² to be able to operate online to decisions on what mode of education (synchronous or asynchronous) to adopt, the challenges swing from extreme sides of the spectrum.

Many institutions have found themselves unprepared for the disruption caused by the pandemic- and so the lack of infrastructure to operate online does not come as a surprise. Apart from that, countless faculty have found themselves untrained to teach online. With cloud meeting platforms like zoom, the tendency of the faculty is to lecture³, but you can't give them the same lecture on zoom as you do in the classroom and call it online education⁴. In the scramble to move everything online, it has been observed that the pedagogies used in a residential context were simply transferred to an online context⁵. Yet with the availability of information everywhere, what the teacher needs to do is, rather than merely lecture, is to teach the students how to assimilate and integrate effectively⁶.

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¹ Dr. Ivor Poobalan in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#)

² Dr. Viktor Lee in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#)

³ Dr. Joanna Soberano in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#)

⁴ Dr. Jacob Li in [Online Education](#)

⁵ Marvin Oxenham in [Online Education](#)

⁶ Jean Lee in [Online Education](#)

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Furthermore, “For online learning to work well, you need three kinds of expertise: (1) *Content expertise*, (2) *Technology expertise*, and (3) *Pedagogical expertise [or] knowledge of adult education, knowledge of instructional design*”. Unfortunately, many Theological Educators have found themselves untrained for this task. To add to that are those that are still getting themselves to embrace the change and adapt to the so called “new normal”. More than just training, the faculty likewise need an online support team⁸ to come alongside them as they conduct their classes with this new mode of delivery. This support system will allow for some stability whether the institutions adopt a synchronous or asynchronous mode of delivery⁹.

Yet it's not only the faculty who are left with a huge predicament. The students likewise face an equal amount of challenges, particularly those with limited to no access to the internet. Of course, students also need a strong support system¹⁰ for them to be able to learn through the online mode of delivery. Furthermore, there are cases wherein students from an older generation struggle with technology and have not only no access to the internet but do not even own a gadget¹¹. In a time when everything has been moved online, technology and the internet has, without a doubt, become one of everyone's basic needs.

But more than the technological know-how and the availability of an internet connection, a more pressing concern among institutions is its ability to provide spiritual formation. Spiritual formation has always been within the context of community, face to face contact, and even physical touch¹², as appropriate. But this won't be feasible given the restrictions brought about by the pandemic. *This situation will force institutions to be more precise with regards to [their] spiritual formation and character education*¹³. This likewise brings institutions to be asking *how intentional do we do these in our face to face interactions*¹⁴?

Addressing the challenges: some examples

Challenges will always be part of occupying any new space- but what matters is how the occupants address and eventually overcome them. Certainly, amid the many challenges theological institutions have been thriving as they address and are moving towards overcoming these challenges.

While the limited to no internet connection among students presented itself as a challenge to many, it has opened doors to exercise compassion within institutions. One such example was the response of the Asian Theological Seminary in Manila, Philippines wherein they asked their students to be completely honest about their situation and the school gave allowance for data for the students who were really in need¹⁵. Another example is the London School of Theology (LST), an institution that has been employing the online mode of education for quite sometime now. [In order for them] *to make sure that those*

“Spiritual formation is learning to think, live, and serve like Christ- and this definition does not change, be it in a face to face or online context”

*who have limited bandwidth and data are not discriminated against, [their course] design blends acquisition and participation elements and very little video content. [In fact, they have] no synchronous videos. Students have full access to ebsco journals. [They employ] a semi synchronous delivery*¹⁶.

On the other hand, with regards to training of faculty, some institutions have taken advantage of the semestral break in order for them to provide training. One such example is Singapore Bible College¹⁷. In fact, they even so far as to extend the semestral break for it.

While occupying new spaces has presented new challenges for theological institutions, it has on the other hand also opened doors to practice compassion and to think outside the box. Many institutions have found themselves able to address the basic challenges of the lack of training and even the lack of internet connection. But how about the challenge of providing spiritual formation?

Spiritual formation in the new normal

Spiritual formation is learning to think, live, and serve like Christ- and this definition does not change, be it in a face to face or online context. With the ongoing pandemic, *we are all facing the same challenges, but we really have no choice other than to use a digital platform. We are all aware that there are things that can never be replaced by any digital*

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⁷ Jacob Li, [Online Education](#)

⁸ Dr. Joanna Soberano in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#)

⁹ Dr. Joanna Soberano in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#)

¹⁰ Dr. Joanna Soberano in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#).

¹¹ Dr. Billy Nishioka in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#). In his statement, he was referring to the fact that 1/3 of the Japanese church are over 75 years old and indeed have no gadgets or internet.

¹² Dr. Casey Ng in [Fostering Spiritual and Ministerial Formations in the New Normal](#)

¹³ Marvin Oxenham in [Online Education](#)

¹⁴ Marvin Oxenham in [Online Education](#)

¹⁵ Dr. Joanna Soberano in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#)

¹⁶ Marvin Oxenham in [Online Education](#)

¹⁷ Sam Law in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#)

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platform. But it doesn't mean that we cannot do anything. Paul was locked down and so he was not able to minister to his disciples as he wanted but he used whatever platform that was available. He wrote letters. And something good came out of it- and we now have the new testament¹⁸. To say that we cannot replicate the same kind of relationships online is jumping to conclusions. It must [and will be] be different. There are many creative ways to go about this¹⁹.

“To build relationship and community does not require face to face interaction but it does require presence.”

To build relationship and community does not require face to face interaction but it does require presence. *You can have presence even if you are not physically present. That's why there are online communities²⁰*. Whether digital or non-digital, key to creating community is being present. It matters for faculty to know what platform their students are using and be there- and be so daily, not just on a one time zoom. It is through those platforms that the faculty can get a glimpse of what thoughts run through the minds of their students and what they want to discuss. Additionally, with everyone so seemingly distant now because of the many restrictions, it matters that we are present²¹.

Certainly, while the mode of delivery may change, certain factors remain constant, such as the teacher. *Luke 6:40 says that the student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained becomes like the teacher. In other words, if we are going to achieve spiritual formation then the teacher is very important. Teachers produce people who are like them. Teachers produce graduates who are like them. It is scary really to every TE Educator- especially when you contemplate the implications of that. You as the teacher become like the standard specimen. They will become like us, even if they are fully developed one way or another...The teacher who will produce growing Christians should be a growing Christian himself²²*.

Spiritual formation may look vastly different in the new spaces occupied by theological institutions, but it doesn't mean it's less effective. It will be a little more challenging, but it's not impossible. *The foremost thing that we need to do is to change in mindset. There are many things that can be done, but we need to be willing to embrace it²³. Once we address the issue of mindset we begin to see the possibilities and doors begin to open up²⁴*.

Endless possibilities!

Occupying new spaces has allowed for possibilities to open for theological institutions. It has for one, allowed for a new demographic of students. One such example is Colombo Theological Seminary. *Since their institution is non-residential, [some possible students] struggle to get to class, many of which are home makers. They [the institution] projects that more students can sign in and join the classes because of this new opportunity²⁵*. Furthermore, it opens the doors to equip lay leaders. *Professionals, business people are always on the move, they cannot take classes on a fix schedule, they cannot commit to taking classes in a fix place, fix time. How can you cater to their needs? Are we ignoring the need to provide TE for these people? Online education is an option for them²⁶*. Secondly, the new space theological institutions now begin to occupy allows for them to bring and deliver programs overseas- and do so in a more cost effective manner²⁷. Thirdly, online education has removed the walls and brings the academy closer to the church because of the more situated learner context²⁸. Fourthly, *online education can enhance student centered learning to a greater degree. [It] Challenges one way authoritarian instructions [and] places students at the center of the learning process²⁹*.

Furthermore, because everything has gone online and become more accessible to more, this will open doors for more collaboration. *In fact, the new normal will require a new collaboration. Not just collaborate with the church but collaborate with each other. So there is a sharing of resources and a sharing of learning. Theological education should be seen as a whole rather than distributed in the pockets of a few³⁰*.

Back to the basics

The pandemic has put much of the world on stand still- except for one thing and that is change. *With so much change, it is a God given opportunity [to be able to] focus on the basics³¹*. During this season of tremendous change, it's easy to be fixated on the mode of delivery over everything

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¹⁸ Dwi Maria Handawani in *Fostering Spiritual and Ministerial Formations in the New Normal*

¹⁹ Jacob Li in *Online Education*

²⁰ Dr. John Ennyinaya in *Fostering Spiritual and Ministerial Formations in the New Normal*

²¹ Dwi Maria Handawani in *Fostering Spiritual and Ministerial Formations in the New Normal*

²² Dr. John Ennyinaya in *Fostering Spiritual and Ministerial Formations in the New Normal*

²³ Dr. Casey Ng in *Spiritual and Ministerial Formations in the New Normal*

²⁴ Dr. John Ennyinaya in *Fostering Spiritual and Ministerial Formations in the New Normal*

²⁵ Dr. Ivor Poobalan in *Theological Education before and after Covid-19*.

²⁶ Ronnie Poon in *Online Education*

²⁷ Dr. Jacob Li in *Online Education*

²⁸ Dr. Marvin Oxenham in *Online Education*

²⁹ Dr. Marvin Oxenham in *Online Education*.

³⁰ Shaiju Thomas in *Theological Education before and after Covid-19*.

³¹ Graham Aylett in *Good Practices in Situations with Limited Connectivity*



“Theological education should be for the church and with the church.”

- Dr. Paul Cornelius, [Theological Education Before and After COVID-19](#)

“The thing to remember is that there are humans at both ends, no matter how much we rely on technology.”

- Dr. Havilah Dharamraj, [Online Education](#)

“[It is] time to rethink Theological Education... What is Theological Education during this time of suffering, when our world is in pain. [In these days of suffering,] the entire humanity is waiting for good news... they are looking for good news. But we do have good news in the gospel of Jesus Christ. But we have been fossilized in our churches [and] so we are not so agile in doing our Theological Education in time of need and where the people are suffering. They need the gospel of Jesus Christ... We need to rethink our Theological Education [and] how our institutions can act with missional character. A mission centred on the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

-Dr. Andreas Himawan, [Theological Education Before and After COVID-19](#)

“We should think of the design of online education in such that it creates a virtual community. Create that community through the very online education itself, helping people build relationship and making it relevant.”

-Shaiju Thomas, [Theological Education Before and After COVID-19](#)

(On motivating Undergrads with the Online delivery)
“Theological Education is not about entertaining. Even if they are really young, but if they have a call from God but they find us not entertaining enough or not technological enough, they should not be studying theological education. This is not the kind of ministers we want in our church. This is harsh, but this is formational. Constancy, discipline... administering a set of skills. This is a formational question rather than a technical one.”

--Dr. Marvin Oxenham, [Online Education](#)

“One of the things that will prevent our success is our competitiveness among TE institutions. If we keep competing rather than cooperating, that’s going to be a very huge challenge.”

-Dr. Marvin Oxenham, [Online Education](#)

“We need to recognize that the church is a major stakeholder in our institution. We need to ask them what kind of people do they need and what skill sets should they have? And we try to be intentional to build that into our curriculum. We ask our ‘customers’ what they need because we are here to serve you. And as seminaries we should ask the church ‘how can we serve you.’”

-Dr. Jacob Li, [Online Education](#)

“There are 4 aspects/ factors that are important that will help us achieve SF through our academic work

1. Teacher
2. Curriculum
3. Delivery of the curriculum
4. Supernatural factor”

-Dr. John Ennyinaya, [Spiritual and Ministerial Formation in the New Normal](#)

“One of the key words is being present so that we can help our students grow in their spiritual life. That is more than technical issues. We need to be relevant by addressing key issues. We need to be aware of that. WE need to push ourselves not just as a user but also as a content creator.”

-Dr. Dwi Maria Handawani, [Spiritual and Ministerial Formation in the New Normal](#)



Towards a Mature Church: Celebrating God's Faithfulness

The ATA 50th anniversary
Online Celebration!

ATA is now 50! On this joyous occasion of 50 golden years, there is so much to be thankful to God for! His faithfulness to ATA and its ministry through the years calls for celebration! While measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 will keep the ATA community from gathering and celebrating in person, the thanksgiving festivities will go on- this time in virtual space!

The theme of this virtual celebration is "Towards a Mature Church: Celebrating God's faithfulness", and it will be a time of worship and thanksgiving for how God has sustained and grown the ministry of ATA. It will be streamed on Facebook and YouTube on October 30, 4pm, Philippine Standard Time.

And to make this joyous event even more exciting, we have an anniversary promo for all ATA books published in partnership with Langham Literature! All attendees are entitled to a 50% discount on all books with free international shipping at www.langhampublishing.org. Watch out for more details to avail of this promo!

We are looking forward to having you join us in this special time of celebration and thanksgiving! See you online then!



**ATA 50TH ANNIVERSARY
ONLINE CELEBRATION!**

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MATURE CHURCH:
CELEBRATING GOD'S
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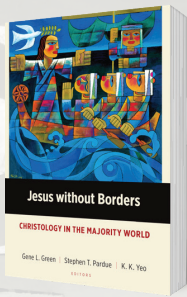
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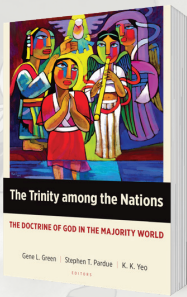
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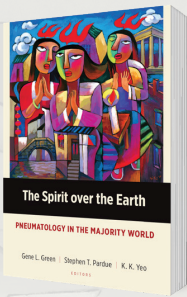
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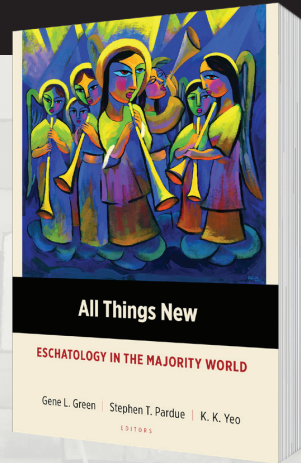
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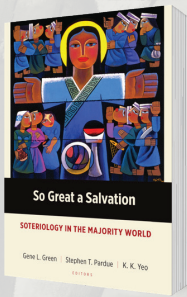
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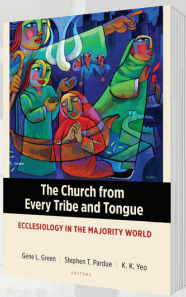
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ATA Hosts Three more Webinars in the Third quarter of 2020

As the crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic continues to persist, ATA likewise persists in coming along side its member institutions. And one of the ways it has done so in the third quarter of this year was by hosting three more webinars: Fostering Spiritual and Ministerial Formations in the New Normal;(2) Navigating Troubled Waters: Leading in Crisis; and lastly (3) Life Matters: Member Care in the Educational Community. All these webinars were streamed live on Facebook at 4pm, PST.

Fostering Spiritual and Ministerial Formations in the New Normal

This webinar was held last June 16 and was an avenue in which issues, challenges, and opportunities in pursuing spiritual and ministerial formations were discussed in online and emergency remote learning.

Prior to the pandemic, Theological Educators have already found it quite a challenge to integrate the spiritual and ministerial formation of students. The difficulties of the task have been further compounded by the fact that everything has been moved online. Spiritual and ministerial formation happen at best with presence and even physical touch- but at its absence, many Theological Educators are left clueless as to how to go about the it.

While it does seem like a daunting task, it isn't impossible and the following resource persons share how:

Dr. John Enyinnaya- Professor of Theology and Dean of the Post Graduate School of the Nigerian Baptist Theological

Seminary, Ogbomoso, Nigeria. He is also a Senior Fellow of the ICETE Academy.

Dr. Dwi Maria Handayani- Program Director for the MTh program at Bandung Theological Seminary and concurrently is also the Associate Director for Langham Preaching Asia-Pacific.

Dr. Kang Hack Lee- Associate Professor of Practical Theology and Chair for Spiritual Formation/Practical Theology Center at the Torch Trinity Graduate University in Seoul, Korea.

Rev Dr Casey Ng- President of ACTS College, Singapore.

Dr. Steve Taylor- Assistant Director and Director of Research and Development at Bangkok Bible Seminary.

These here are what the online community has to say about "Fostering Spiritual and Ministerial Formations in the New Normal":

I am very interested and watching from Myanmar and learned how I may be able to introduce my learning to our students here at Myanmar Lutheran Seminary...Thanks for sharing very inspirational thoughts and inputs for marching towards a well prepared digital world- James San Aung

Very stimulating conversations here. Thanks everyone. Appreciate your contributions...- Titus S. Olorunnisola

Willing to be a 'place' to share and provide our ears to listen are important to take care of the (spiritual) needs of the (seminary's) students especially in this new normal condition. It's not easy but thanks to digital platforms that bridge all the obstacles. Thank you Asia Theological Association (ATA) for holding this webinar, such an eye opener. - Paulina Margareta Widjaja

Thank you so much for holding such a profitable discussion - Prakash Pal

Great need of the day....thank you ATA - Kery Newmai

I appreciate the ideas presented. - Teody Pajaron



Fostering Spiritual and Ministerial Formations in the New Normal



Navigating Troubled Waters: Leading in Crisis

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Navigating Troubled Waters: Leading in Crisis

The ongoing pandemic has created an overwhelming crisis for most, if not all, Theological Institutions globally. This has left the leaders of these institutions grappling with so many questions and issues- so thus this webinar held last June 24.

Indeed, the issues abound: finances, course delivery, internet stability and availability, and high levels of uncertainty have synchronously plagued theological institutions. Additionally, all that was “familiar” and “normal” has been dismantled and taken away and so leaders are called to “shape a new normal for their institutions”. This has left many with these questions: What skills do leaders of theological institutions need for them to fulfill their mission in these trying times? Where do leaders even begin to navigate these troubled- and even murky- waters? How does a leader both embrace being a learner and also getting things right as he/ she moves the institution forward in times of crisis? How are leaders to acknowledge and name collective fear and uncertainty without fanning it and moving their people to unity and collective effort? And in the midst of all these, how does a leader even make time to care for him/herself? These questions were all address by the following resource persons:

Rev. Dr. Tom Rojas- President, International Graduate School of Leadership in the Philippines.

Rev. Dr. Jack Sara- President, Bethlehem Bible College and General Secretary, Middle East & North Africa Evangelical Alliance.

Rev Dr Lim Siew Pik- President, Alpha Omega International College and ordained minister of AOG Malaysia.

Dr. Stephen George- President, Asian Christian Academy of India and its graduate theological institute, the Evangelical Theological Seminary.

Dr. Casthelia Kartika- President, Amanat Agung Theological Seminary (Great Commission Theological Seminary) in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Here below are feedback from the online community:

Thank you so much! Very helpful and encouraging! - Appreciate you all...- T Hawi Phal

Great to hear you all sharing your experiences and insights- Philip Chang

Excellent work. Thanks- Deep Narayan Choubey

All the parting words of encouragement from the panel are much appreciated. Thank you Asia Theological Association (ATA). - Romerlito C. Macalinao

Life Matters: Member Care in the Educational Community

Last July 28, 4pm (PST), ATA hosted yet another webinar and it was entitled “Life Matters: Member Care in the Educational Community”. It was a very timely conversation



Life Matters: Member Care in the Educational Community

given the increased stress the Educational community is going through during this season.

Indeed, the tremendous change in every aspect of life and the constant adjusting to it has made going about life more tiresome. The looming uncertainty has also brought about higher levels of anxiety to both faculty and students. In the midst of all the stress, anxiety, and weariness, how will care look like? How should the Educational Community make sure that its members are provided with the support they need? These and many more related questions were addressed by the following resource persons:

Ms. Anne Elizabeth Samuel- director of Olive Theological Institute in Kerala, India. She is also the Director of Value Education Trust, a charitable, educational agency working among vulnerable women and children in four districts of Kerala.

Dr. Sunny Tan -Academic Dean at the Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary in Penang. He is also the Director of the Theology program at the Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST) Alliance.

Dr. Melchor Go -Associate Professor and Chair of the Pastoral Studies Department at the Asian Theological Seminary (ATS) in the Philippines. He also serves as Senior Pastor at Shekinah Christian Church.

Rev. Anita Chia -Faculty member of the School of Counseling in TCA College, Singapore and Centre Manager for the Centre for Counseling at TCA.

Rev. Sur del Rosario -Source Project Administrator, ICI Ministries and Head, Social Services and Disaster Preparedness and Response Commission for Philippines General Council of the Assemblies of God (PGCAG). He is also pursuing PhD studies at Asia Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary/Asia Graduate School of Theology, Philippines.

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These are what the online community has to say about "Life Matters: Member care in the Educational community"...

Thanks for the helpful insights from our speakers! ~ Jojo Bive

Thank you for all your inputs. Yes we need to find ways to relax in midst of the challenges of lesson preparations and online teaching. ~ Arun Sarkar

Greetings from Shalom Bible Seminary, Kohima, Nagaland! We are into our second week of Online leaning. Today's discussion is very close to our heart. Many things that are being said make sense. - Buno Iralu

I am so blessed by this non-formal sharing.~ Den Mik

The crisis brought about the pandemic has indeed brought about numerous hardships upon the members of the Educational community, as with society at large. Everyone has had to rethink the way they did things and even magnified the difficulty of those already difficult tasks. With pandemic still on going and without an end in sight, it's easy to become increasingly anxious. But as we continue to be and even grow in being a caring community, supportive of each other from top to bottom, we will find ourselves thrive and grow in all areas of our lives and areas in the life of our respective institutions. ♦

NEPAL THEOLOGICAL FORUM

NEPAL THEOLOGICAL FORUM

By: Dr. Abraham Saggu
Dean AGST Nepal

Formal Theological education and theological reflections are inseparable twin features of any healthy growing church. The phenomenal growth of the church was supported by Bible colleges and training institutions for the last 3 decades in Nepal. To sustain and strengthen the growth of theological education, some of the leaders in Nepal and ATA, have proposed the formation of a consortium of 8 schools which became known as Asia Graduate School of Theology, Nepal (prior to 2017 it was known as Nepal Theological Academy). Though AGST Nepal is still a small M.Th offering consortium, it has been very keen in promoting theological reflection with its few emerging local theologians and the expat professors and missionary teachers. With that vision, the Nepal Theological Forum (NTF) was formed in mid-2016.

Though initiated and currently run under AGST Nepal, NTF is meant to be a forum of all the theologians from within

and without the ATA colleges, churches, and Christian organizations across Nepal. NTF has successfully conducted 11 forums in the last four years. The forum meets once in four months and discusses issues the Nepali church is struggling with. At every forum, there will be one Nepali and one expat visiting professors presenting papers. NTF has successfully published its first 12 papers presented in the first two years on 1st February 2019. ATA released our first publication from NTF entitled "Doing Theology and Mission in Nepal".


The ongoing threat of pandemic has not stopped the enthusiastic forum. NTF

has organized two virtual forums during the pandemic. The second NTF virtual paper presentation was attended by over 85 participants. Thanks to our enthusiastic co-ordinator Dr. Chuba Ao under whose able leadership NTF is growing. Praise be to God!

God willing, our next 12 papers will be published as our next publication by Feb 2021. It is hoped that this forum will eventually give birth to several research communities whereby the envisioned reflections and research of the theological community in Nepal will be a vibrant community and thus be involved in doing theology.


NEPAL THEOLOGICAL FORUM PAPER PRESENTATION
Organized by AGST Nepal

August 16, 2020
01:50 PM (Kathmandu)



Topic


"Gospel and Culture: Ethical Implications of John's Gospel in the Nepali Context"



Dr. Johnson Thomas Kutty
New Testament professor at UBS, Pune

Topic

"An Overview of Inter Caste Marriages in Nepal with an Emphasis on Issues Concerning Christian Inter Caste Marriage"



Mrs. Karuna Ashish Christian
Teacher at NTC, Kathmandu

A Fresh New Beginning

Asia Graduate School of Theology: North East India

By: Sashinungla Pongen, Dean

Despite the crisis and restlessness of the times, the Asia Graduate School of Theology- North East India (AGST-NEI) has commenced its first Academic Session for school year 2020-2021. This first batch has a total of 10 students, with 8 MTh students, 2 in the field of History of Christianity, 3 in Systematic Theology and another 3 in Christian Ethics in the Oriental Theological Seminary (OTS) Campus and 2 MTh students in the field of Applied Theology in the Shalom Bible Seminary (SBS) Campus. In both campuses, under the esteemed leadership of Dr. Pangernungba Kichu and Dr. Vizovonuo Chiesotsu as Deans of Post-graduate Studies in OTS and SBS respectively, online learning is in progress. Though there are some glitches here and there due to limited facilities, the leaders of AGST-NEI are hopeful that its virtual teaching-learning process will endure these inconveniences with a hope that the real in-person classroom platform will happen sooner than later.

OTS students are into the sixth week of the first Trimester; SBS students have completed the first round of modules and have smoothly transitioned to the second. The following faculty members comprised the team of instructors who have taught the first round of modules and are teaching the current modules and courses:

1. Dr. Vizovonuo Chiesotsu, Assistant Professor of Educational Studies
2. Dr. Sanyü Iralu, Associate Professor of New Testament
3. Dr. Vezheto Solo, Adjunct Faculty of Systematic Theology
4. Dr. Villo Naleo, Assistant Professor of Christian Ethics and Peacemaking
5. Dr. Imliwabang Jamir, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology
6. Dr. Pangernungba Kechu, Professor of Society, Christian Ethics and Contextual Theology
7. Dr. Sashinungla Pongen, Associate Professor of Church History

At the consortium, faculty members are committed to bridge the gap between church and academy. AGST-NEI consciously strives to create awareness of the historical particularities of our local cultural contexts and the reality of social and ecclesiastical communities. This is to ensure that learning becomes more meaningful and relevant to those whom we are called to minister. The community of AGST-NEI will continue to encourage one another to carry out its noble vocation of teaching and learning as “ceaseless prayer,” to borrow the phrase of Michael Battle in *The Scope of our Art: The vocation of the Theological Teacher* (2002).

Your continuing prayers and support are needed as AGST-NEI intentionally participates in God's mission towards transformational leadership.



Getting to know the Dean of AGST-NEI: Dr. Sashinungla Pongen

Sashinungla Pongen (Associate Professor of Church History) began teaching at Oriental Theology Seminary (OTS) as instructor of Church History in 2001 and was promoted to assistant professor in 2006. After the completion of her PhD in the field of History of Christianity at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA, she resumed teaching at OTS since 2016. Before joining OTS, she taught at Trinity Theological College, Dimapur, Nagaland and Senate of Serampore College/University, Hooghly, West Bengal. She is a member of the Baptist World Alliance, Commission on Baptist Heritage and Identity. ♦

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else. But to see education only from the perspective of delivery is narrowing down the whole proposition of education and the whole rethinking of education is challenging the administration of institutions to get back to the drawing board to work on how they are going to accept the new normal or work with the new normal into the post covid as such³².

Going back to the basics will involve reviewing the basics of instructional design which will also be involving revisiting the institution's mission and vision. *The basics of instructional design is important because it is foundational no matter what the delivery mode may be. It begins with our God given calling, as reflected in our mission statements. Good instructional design begins with clarity and conviction about what God is calling us to do*³³. Going back to the basics is a beckoning to see the bigger picture. It involves *love, collaboration, integration, alignment, and prayer. During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, would there be a fresh love, collaboration, alignment and prayer among theological institutions?*³⁴

The way forward...

This pandemic has indeed forced theological institutions out of their comfort zones and into a new space and as long as restrictions to curb the spread of the virus are there, it will stay in that space. Yet it has also found that this new space wasn't so bad after all. It is in fact beneficial and the key to open many more doors and possibilities. So, does this mean the demise of the traditional ways of doing theological education? Will Theological institutions be operating in a virtual landscape post COVID-19?

Well, there is no other way but forward post COVID-19 and there is no turning back for theological institutions. The COVID-19 Pandemic has shown institutions new ways of carrying out its ministry and calling. Yet it does recognize *that the traditional approach has a lot of value that we should not neglect and throw away. It would be great to move toward a hybrid rather than to choose one over the other. It is good to adapt to the change and adopt new*

*ways of delivery but it does not mean we should give up on the traditional altogether*³⁵. *Technology will not necessarily replace the traditional Theological Education but it is instrumental in reaching those places that have no or limited access to Theological Education. [It will be used] to build a network. We're sharing our various resources. We are not competing but are sharing in a very global sense. Sharing resources across the places that did not have the resources before*³⁶. Furthermore, *while there are values in the traditional ways, but there will be changes for sure. The challenge is how to integrate the good things we are doing. How do we go about coaching and mentoring, the good relationships we have with students when it comes with our blended learning. It looks like we are headed towards a blended learning... so it looks like we are needing to reconfigure the curriculum, particularly the way we do assessments*³⁷. ♦

How about you? What direction do you think Theological Education is taking? How do you think the new normal will change the way we do Theological Education?

Send us your thoughts. Email them to ataasia.research@gmail.com. Selected thoughts will be featured in the next edition of the ATA News.

³² Shaiju Thomas in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#)

³³ Dr. Graham Aylett in [Good Practices in Situations with Limited Connectivity](#)

³⁴ Dr. Graham Aylett in [Good Practices in Situations with Limited Connectivity](#)

³⁵ Dr. Theresa Lua in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#).

³⁶ Dr. Sam Law in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#).

³⁷ Dr. Joanna Soberano in [Theological Education before and after Covid-19](#).

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