



## DEVELOPMENTS LEADING TO ATA FORMATION



*Since ATA just recently celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we decided that it would be good to look back at our history and revisit how God has led us and worked to bring us to where we are now. We hope that this piece of recollection will remind you of the faithfulness of our God.*

**A**sia Theological Association is a unique and distinctive example of evangelical cooperation covering a wide area of a number of nations and diverse cultures. Its clear focus is, true and faithful interpretation of the Bible in its historical and cultural settings to determine the content and method of theology and theological training, as they apply to the pluralistic contexts of Asia. It had its genesis in the Asia-Pacific Congress on Evangelism during Nov 5-13, 1968 in Singapore which was a follow-on of the Berlin Congress on Evangelism in 1966.

### **1968 Singapore Meeting of Theologians, and Its Follow-up**

Dr. Saphir Athyal of Union Biblical Seminary in India, organized two informal sessions outside the schedule of the Congress in consultation with its leaders, which was attended by some fifty theologians and theological educators. The group decided to take up the following concrete steps: (1) to organize in each country a theological commission or forum of evangelical theologians and church leaders to serve as a nucleus for developing indigenous theological thinking; (2) to plan on a two-year study program during 1969-70 on the theme, "The Church's Mission in Contemporary Asia" on national levels with a view to this leading to an All-Asia Consultation; (3) to encourage development and growth of evangelical

theological institutions in Asia and Australasia, and work toward closer link and cooperation between them; and (4) to appoint Saphir Athyal to work toward the above objectives.

He took up this new challenge with seriousness. In 1969, he travelled to Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Hong Kong, Thailand, and Burma to meet with key theologians and church leaders. On a second trip he visited Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. For these extensive and costly trips, he raised money from different sources. He spent a few days with just about all the evangelical institutions in each country and with its key church leaders. The meetings gave rise to their commitment to work to strengthen training of leaders and cooperation with schools in other countries.

Dr. Bruce Nicholls describes the early developments in *New Era New Vision*, published by ATA, (pp 11-16). He says, "God's *kairos* moment had arrived. On July 5, 1970 Dr. Athyal convened a consultation for three days in Singapore that by the grace of God was to plant a mustard seed destined to become the largest association of theological educators in Asian history. Fifty-one leaders came together from across Asia, New Guinea, Australia and New Zealand" (p. 14). This Consultation dealt with very many issues of theology and theological training of both the leaders and of the laity.

*Continued on page 2*

### Wholly Asian Vision and Asian Origin

Most evangelical organizations in Asia such as Youth For Christ, Campus Crusade, Evangelical Students Union, Scripture Union, and others like YMCA, SCM, not to speak of classical church denominations, all had their origins in the West, and then 'imported' into Asia — praise God for all that they richly contributed to us. But, one special pride and joy we had was that ATA was developed totally by Asian initiatives of those who participated in the Singapore

Dr Athyal served as the General Coordinator of ATA for its first ten years. During those early years he coordinated the work of ATA and its different committees and commissions, working with Dr Bong Ro, such as: organizing subsequent four all-Asia consultations; establishing Centers for Advanced Theological Studies (CATS in Seoul); developing core curriculum; producing Asian textbooks; promoting TEE program; and encourage establishing theological societies—much work yet to be done.



Dr Bruce Nicholls



Dr. Saphir Athyal



Dr. Bong Rin Ro

Congress to address Asian issues and needs.

Two outstanding servants of God worked with ATA from its outset. Dr Bruce Nicholls, an Asian in heart, through his arduous efforts and writings impacted evangelical theology and theological education in Asia more than any one person. He initiated Theological Assistance Program (TAP-International) of the World Evangelical Fellowship, and with his encouragement we initially called our organization "TAP-Asia". But shortly afterwards the group reverted its position realizing it was more factual to name the organization Asia Theological Association true to its Asian origin and development and not be tagged under an international organization.

Dr Bong Ro came into the picture when Dr Athyal got Overseas Missionary Fellowship to second him for us part-time, and from 1975 on a full-time basis supported by the Mission.

He served as ATA's Executive Secretary for two decades and significantly shaped its program and structure, and made it what it became as a great force in shaping evangelical theological education in Asia.

### Backdrop of the Beginning Years of ATA

During the 60's and 70's, several theological institutions of the mainline churches, with their liberal and syncretistic tendencies, were well established and accredited by associations of theological schools in South East Asia, North East Asia and South Asia. The Theological Education Fund of WCC during its third mandate raised over three million US dollars, to train Asian candidates at the doctoral level at liberal centers of learning in the West, and then return to teach in Asia. With its agenda of "contextualization of the gospel", contexts took precedence over the gospel. Dr Athyal who briefly participated in TEF's meetings as a consultant, once when asked its Director why not financial assistance for evangelical institutions also, he responded, "You have TAP of WEF for help". 1972/73 Bangkok Consultation of WCC on "Salvation today" further confused the concept of salvation and the gospel.

At the same time most evangelical schools were ill equipped, with pathetic libraries and untrained teachers, but yet offering degrees to attract candidates. A proliferation of such schools started by individuals or churches, mostly by

*Continued on page 8*

# The ATA Mango Tree

By Bruce Nicholls

Founder, Asia Theological Association



Everybody loves a mango!

I remember travelling in a train in India when at one of the long station stops I saw a small boy carrying a basket of mangoes on his head. He was walking up and down the platform, trying to sell his mangoes, but despite the heat no one was buying them. In despair he sat down on the platform, peeled one of his mangoes and began to eat it as the passengers watched. His creative approach was rewarded; within minutes he'd sold every mango.

The growth and fruitfulness of the mango tree reminds me of ATA. After fifty years of creating purposeful theological communities, the Asia Theological Association has been used of the Lord to restore biblical theology to its rightful place in Asia. Evangelism is again recognised as the starting point of our mission in a troubled world, and thousands of pastors and teachers have been trained.

## The founding of ATA

ATA has two taproots.

One was the fifth General Assembly of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1968, where Dr Bruce Nicholls was invited to become the theological coordinator of WEF. His first task was to set up in Asia the Theological Assistance Program (TAP) in 1969 as the theological arm of the WEF. It was based at first in New Delhi and then in Singapore, assisted by John Langlois, a lawyer from the Channel Islands, UK, and a theological graduate.

The second taproot was the Asia Pacific Congress on Evangelism in Singapore, in November, 1968. It was the Asian response to the Berlin Congress on Evangelism in 1966, which was sponsored by the Billy Graham Association. The focus was global evangelism. During the event, some 50 evangelical church leaders and theologians met to promote evangelical theological education in Asia and to define evangelical theology in the Asian context.

Dr Saphir Athyal, at that time the vice-principal of the Union Biblical Seminary in Yeotmal, India, was asked to organise a theological consultation in Singapore in 1970.

During October and November 1969, he travelled extensively across Asia, meeting church leaders and theological teachers in their colleges in preparation for the consultation. His visits included Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Manila, Hong Kong, Bangkok and Rangoon. The kairos moment had arrived.

From 4 to 7 July, 1970, 51 church and theological leaders from across Asia, along with representatives from Australasia, met in Singapore under the chairmanship of Dr Athyal.

ATA takes this consultation as its starting date, though it was not called Asia Theological Association (ATA) until four years later. While TAP contributed to the founding of ATA, we honour Dr Athyal as the one who brought together the two streams mentioned earlier, assisted by Dr Bong Ro. The latter became the Executive Secretary of ATA, a position he held for twenty years.

The delegates agreed to meet again in June 1971, and set up a TAP-Asia office in Singapore, chaired by Dr Athyal and led by Dr Bong Ro. TAP-Asia soon launched two research centres, one in Seoul, and the other in New Delhi.

Dr Han Chul-Ha of South Korea, a founding member of TAP-Asia, pioneered the Centre for Asian Theological Studies (CATS) in Seoul in 1973. This is now known as the Asia Centre for Theological Studies and Mission (ACTS), and is recognised as a leading missiological university in Korea.

Dr Bruce Nicholls and his wife Kathleen resigned their teaching posts at the Union Biblical Seminary in Yeotmal and moved to New Delhi. There they founded the Theological Research And Communication Institute (TRACI), a research community of seven scholars who became widely known for their publications. TRACI set up a publishing company called Select Books, designed for the secular market, as well as making films for national TV. As a research centre it remains active today.

In the first issue of TAP's Theological News (May 1969) Dr Saphir Athyal wrote:

*Continued on page 4*

From page 3

*The church in Asia today is facing challenges and opportunities which in many ways are similar to those which confronted the New Testament church. Her enemies within and without strikingly resemble those of the first centuries. The forces that persecuted the early church secular and religion, whether sponsored by the state or guided by mass psychology, have their counterparts in Asia today.* (New Era, New Vision, p 14)

During 1971 and 1972 the TAP-Asia staff visited colleges worldwide. Dr Athyal went to Latin America, Dr Bong Ro to Asia, John Langlois to Africa, and Bruce Nicholls to Europe and the Middle East. On 27 December, 1972, 80 delegates meet in Hong Kong for a consultation on “The Biblical

Theology of Salvation.” There an Asia-wide TEE programme was launched, coordinated by Ian McCleary.

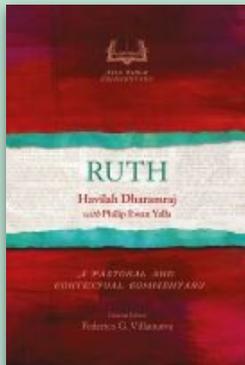
This consultation in Hong Kong saw the adoption of a new constitution and new name, the Asia Theological Association (ATA). It marked a new stage in Asian autonomy and regional theological development.

In 1975 Dr Nicholls became the director of the Theological Commission of the WEF and the term TAP was dropped. Dr Athyal continued as ATA’s acknowledged founder and leader until 1990, when he handed the reins to Dr Wilson Chow.

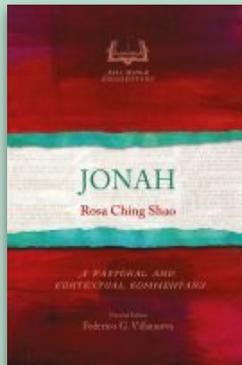
A new era and new vision had begun for the strong ATA mango tree. ♦

## What’s new?

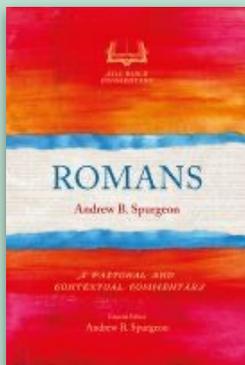
### ASIA BIBLE COMMENTARY SERIES



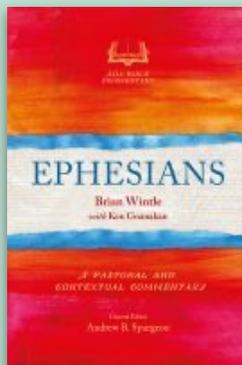
**Ruth**  
By Havilah Dharamraj



**Jonah**  
By Rosa Ching Shao



**Romans**  
By Andrew Spurgeon



**Ephesians**  
By Brian Wintle

### Journal of Asian Mission & Journal of Asian Evangelical Theology

ATA 50th Anniversary  
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For the complete list of ABCS, please visit:

[https://langhamliterature.org/books?series\\_id=4026](https://langhamliterature.org/books?series_id=4026)

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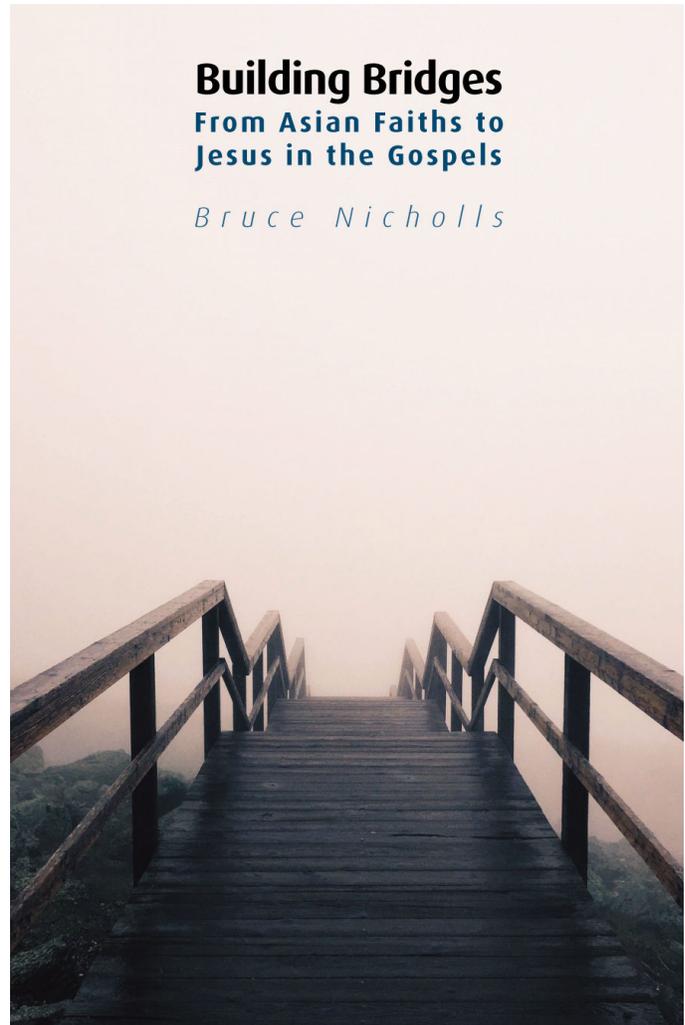
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“Knowledge, combined with experience and insight uniquely distinguishes this book on Asian faiths” —Paul Cornelius, Regional Secretary, ATA.



*Bruce Nicholls is a theologian, educator, author and pastor with more than 40 years of*

*ministry in India and Asia.*



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# TOWARDS A MATURE CHURCH: CELEBRATING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

## ATA's 50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Who would have thought that a ministry born out of the 1968 Asia Pacific Congress would grow to be the region's largest association of theological institutions? Who would have thought that from its humble beginnings, ATA will be brought to achieve significant milestones, one of which we celebrated amid the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic: our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary!

"Towards a Mature Church: Celebrating God's faithfulness", the theme of the celebration, was premiered and streamed on Facebook and YouTube last October 30, 2020, 4pm. It was a time spent not only looking back in gratitude for all that God has done, but also to rejoice over how God has led and used the ministry in equipping the people of God for the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a time of song, stories, encouragement, and prayer.

Yes, the COVID-19 Pandemic may have prevented the ATA Community from celebrating in person, but God has given us a new space to do so- and for that we praise Him! We also praise Him because He has blessed this online celebration and made it a blessing to many.

We, the staff and leaders of ATA, thank everyone who took the time to celebrate with us, everyone who helped make this event possible, and of course, everyone who stood by our side all these 50 years!



Itu semua berkat karunia Allah yang Agung, Mahakuasa;  
*It's God's creation, for our nation;*  
 Almighty God, give thanks and praise His name!

The music faculty of Southeast Asia Bible Seminary (Malang, Indonesia) led us in songs of worship.



We had a little foretaste of heaven as the song "How Great is our God" was sung in different languages.

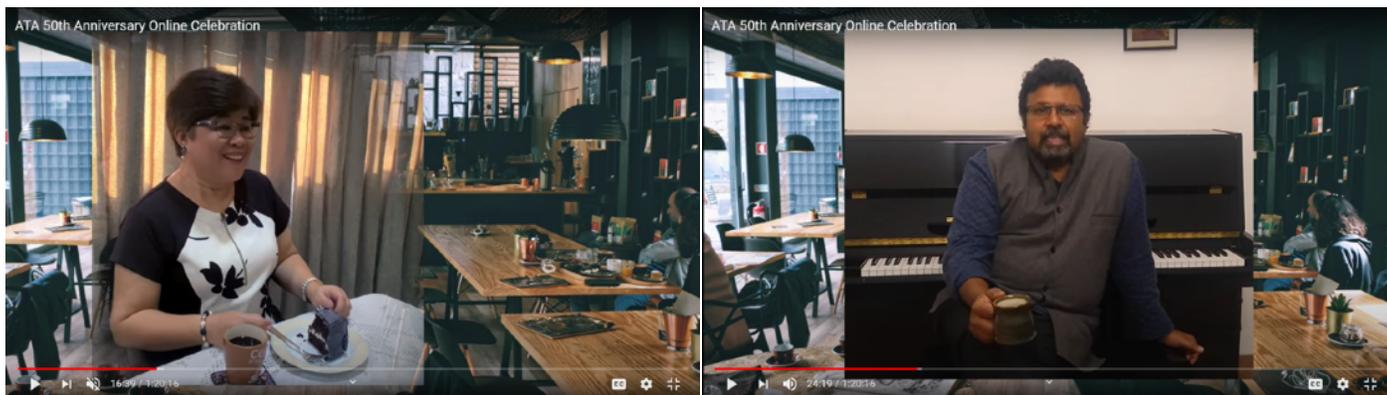


Dr. David Sangbok Kim, former ATA Chairperson (2001-2007), former President, Torch Trinity Graduate School (Seoul) gave an inspiring message



Amid the still ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic, we sing the cries of our heart through the song "The Prayer".

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*Drs. Theresa Lua and Paul Cornelius narrated the history of ATA through a friendly conversation in a “virtual coffee shop”*

## Praise for Towards a Mature Church: Celebrating God’s faithfulness

*What a tremendous 50th anniversary celebration this afternoon! You and your team did a superb job putting the anniversary gathering together. Thank you for your leadership of ATA. I enjoyed the program very much and the quality each portion was superb. It was wonderful to see & hear from so many - even if it was virtually.*

~Dr. Jeannette Shubert, Faculty, East Asia School of Theology

*Thank you so much for the preparatory work for the Online Celebration of the 50th Anniversary! I [can] imagine [how] you and your staff have laid down much, much work for this Celebration! [It was] so meaningful. I, for one, [am] so grateful to be part of the celebration in this way and enjoyed each section greatly- especially to [be able to] “meet” again the colleagues through the years. So, thank you very much again... May the Lord use ATA further for the realization of His saving will in this confused world!*

~Dr. Akio Hashimoto, Professor, Kobe Lutheran Theological Seminary

*... it seems to have been a very joyful occasion! And thanks for including my greeting from Langham, and the marvellous and lively advert for the ATA books published by Langham - I’m glad we were able to give that discount, and hope lots of people take it up!*

~ Dr. Chris Wright, International Ministries Director, Langham Partnership

*Thank you very much for the media production of our ATA 50th Anniversary celebration. The quality of the production is excellent. Thank you again for your hard work for the celebration.*

~Dr. Bong Rin Ro, Dean, AGST- Pacific

*Well planned and produced! Thank you all for your excellent work!*

~Dr. Jung-Sook Lee, Professor and former President, Torch Trinity Graduate University, Seoul

*Kudos sa ATA! Ang galing ng concept. Fave ko yung coffee shop history ni Ate Theresa at Dr. Paul... Masyado niyo tinaasan*

*ang standard ng online celebration! Kudos sa production team. Congrats to ATA! Very creative po. [Kudos to ATA! The concept was really good! My favorite is the coffee shop history with Sis. Theresa and Dr. Paul... You set the standard for online celebrations too high! Kudos to the production team. Congrats to ATA! Very creative.]*

~Rei Lemuel Crizaldo, Theological Education Network Coordinator for East and South East Asia, Tearfund UK

*Congratulations and many blessings to the ATA family on its 50th birthday. It is a privilege to serve together with you. Thank you for an inspiring and memorable celebration. Many blessings...*

~Stephen and Claire Pfann and the University of the Holy Land.

*So many different challenging, beautiful, and moving contributions to the glory of God! Well done to all involved!*

*For you [Dr. Theresa Lua] and Paul [Cornelius] especially, what a creative and fun way of looking back over the past 50 years!*

*Really, really, well done.*

~Dr. Graham Aylett, Incoming General Secretary, Increase Association

*Excellent job... Thank you Dr. Theresa Lua and [all those who make up the ATA Office]. My prayer for the future of ATA.*

~ Samuel Binsen Sidjabat, President, Tyrannus Bible Seminary, Indonesia

*Excellent message from the honorable guest speaker, underscoring John 14:12. “What was lost in the West may be gained in Asia. Great job production, team!*

~Romerlito C. Macalinao, Dean, AGST Philippines

***If you have not watched it or wish to watch it again, you may do so through the following links:***



<https://fb.watch/2iQSk-jAZj/>



<https://youtu.be/yu86aS8VXSI>



## *Testimonies of God's faithfulness through the years...*

When we think of ATA we often immediately think of "accreditation". But I realize accreditation is more than just giving each institution a certificate of approval. ATA's goal of holistic theological education with a focus on active spiritual formation sets the pulse for theological education in Asia. The standards hold us firm to the quality of the work we should be doing, reminds us of where we are and what we can improve on.

More than that, I am very impressed by ATA's commitment to growing Asian resources through her publications, theological consultations and in promoting higher graduate degrees. The growing body of theses and dissertations on topics related to Asian issues on the ground are very important resources for Asia. More than that there is a strong affirmation of Asian scholars who are confident, knowledgeable, creative and who have a unique voice and contribution to the global theological world.

*Finally, after working with the leadership in ATA for a brief period of time, I can attest to this heart-warming point that ATA models leadership with integrity, and leaders with a strong moral compass. The leadership is not perfect definitely, but everyone is doing their best and there is a respectful partnership. They are a great example of "kingdom" work – where we are not only looking out for ourselves, or our organizations only, but for the larger and broader community.*

~Dr. Sooi Ling Tan, Academic Dean AGST Alliance

*We are very grateful to the Asia Theological Association for initiating our growth and also for helping us to take off,*

*and to be one of the leading theological colleges and seminaries here in North India.*

~Dr. Simon Samuel, Principal, New Theological College (Dehra Duhn, India)

*What a joy to celebrate ATA's 50th milestone together online. CONGRATULATIONS ATA! The impact has been huge and we are all so blessed. Colombo Theological Seminary joins the ATA fraternity in thanking God, especially for the leadership over the years and our current General Secretary Dr Theresa Lua.*

~Dr. Ivor Poobalan, President, Colombo Theological Seminary

*Congratulations to ATA on your 50th anniversary! You have been a great blessing to God's kingdom throughout Asia! From TCA College in Singapore.*

~ Dennis Lum, President, TCA College, Singapore

*Congratulations ATA! And THANK YOU for being a blessing to the church.*

~ Jason V. Hallig, Professor, Alliance Graduate School and AGST Philippines

*God be praised. ATA is a strong beacon of light in Asia for 50 years, encouraging all in the most important work in the [world]. May God bless ATA! [I] loved the program!*

~ Dushyanthi Hoole, Principal, Baldeus Theological College, Sri Lanka ♦

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*From page 2, Developments Leading to ATA Formation*

foreign missionaries, with a primary purpose to promote denominational pet doctrines, did not help cooperation between them. Some of them did not want any accrediting body, even ATA, to examine them.

### **The Global Scene: One Perspective**

The 1950's to the 70's was a period of strengthening the cause of evangelical theology throughout the world. National evangelical fellowships were established in nine countries of Asia, and WEF established its Theological Commission with Dr Nicholls as its CEO. Meanwhile in Africa the 'Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar' (AEAM) and in Latin America 'Latin America Theological Fraternity' (LATF)

were formed. Dr. Athyal at the invitation of those bodies travelled extensively to six major countries in Latin America in 1972, and at a later time to six countries in Africa. He gave a series of lectures in each place, and sought to build up mutual understanding and fruitful cooperation between evangelical theological leaders in those continents and in Asia. ATA took initiative in bringing together select leaders from all continents in Seoul in 1982.

Praises and thanks be to God! Our relentless confidence in him is that he who planted ATA and made it to flourish in its multiplied ministries, will enable it to effectively continue in service of its Lord during the challenging future. ♦

# Research Ethics Courses Available in ICETE Academy



'Research ethics issues are critical to understand and address well when doing research with people,' writes Dr. Kevin Lawson, Co-chair of ICETE's Doctoral Initiative Steering Committee. To help this understanding ICETE Academy ([www.icete.academy](http://www.icete.academy)) now has three on-line courses available to orientate theological educators and research students to the issues of human participant research ethics and best practices.

with three groups in mind: faculty members and students in theological education institutions who are undertaking human participant research; faculty members and others on research ethics committees who are undertaking ethical reviews of research projects; and Christian leaders who want to ensure that research for their organisation or church is based on best ethical practice.

Complementing the *Human Participant Research Ethics* course are two nanocourses (2 hours). *Preparing a Research Ethics Application* helps researchers shape up their ethics application ready for submission to a research ethics committee; and *Reviewing Research Ethics Applications* provides guidance to those tasked with reviewing such applications.

The three courses are authored by Dr Allan Harkness, the founding Dean of AGST Alliance (Asia Graduate School of Theology, mainland SE Asia), who has been a member of research ethics committees for more than two decades in Singapore and New Zealand and is presently the chair of AGST Alliance's Human Participant Ethics Panel.

Kevin Lawson encourages the use of these courses: 'They are top notch resources for you and your students that should be required training!' Check them out at [www.icete.academy](http://www.icete.academy). ♦



The *Human Participant Research Ethics* course (10 hours) provides Christian researchers with helpful insights and matching practices aligned with those now widely accepted internationally. The course has been prepared

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2020 HAS BEEN AN EXCEEDINGLY  
DIFFICULT YEAR FOR EVERYONE.  
WE HAVE BEEN FACED WITH A CRISIS  
WE HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE  
AND HAVE EMBRACED SO MUCH GRIEF  
ALL YEAR LONG. BUT AMID ALL  
THESE, HOPE REMAINS- AND  
CHRISTMAS IS A TANGIBLE  
REMINDER OF THAT.



THIS CHRISTMAS, MAY YOU BE  
REMINDED THAT GOD DID  
NOT ABANDON THE WORLD  
IN DARKNESS.  
THIS CHRISTMAS, MAY YOU BE  
REMINDED THAT GOD  
DOES NOT FORGET.  
THIS CHRISTMAS, MAY YOU BE  
REMINDED THAT HE KEEPS  
HIS PROMISES, NO MATTER WHAT.  
AND MAY YOU ENTER THE NEW YEAR  
CONFIDENT IN HIM  
WHO IS FAITHFUL!

*Merry Christmas  
and a blessed  
New Year 2021!*