



ATA

The Official Newsletter of Asia Theological Association

news

online

LEARNING TO SERVE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: QUESTIONS OLD AND NEW

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ATA Digital Content Editor



The 2022 ATA General Assembly in Penang was held with the theme “The Digital Turn in Theological Education: Impact, Opportunities, and Challenges.” At ATA-Digital, the GA extended an ongoing conversation we had been having as a team since mid-2021 as we contemplated our role at ATA and theological education in a world forever changed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Extended lockdowns, severely curtailed travel opportunities, and social distancing brought to the fore questions that had been brewing in the background for several years. Over several years, we saw changes in how people consumed content, learned, and accessed information. These changes were felt across generations, heightened in Asia by the rapid adoption of smartphones and access to the internet. The world was changing, and we wondered how ATA could respond.

Despite all the changes, some things remained unchanged. There was still a need for the world to know God and understand the world through his word. Relatedly, there was still a need for quality theological education. However, we wondered, was this only to be a change in the mode of delivery – make the same content available on the internet? Or were we to reconsider the very nature of the content? We also wondered how we could change and adapt yet remain true to who we were and not pretend to be something or someone we were not. After all, none of us would be the next dancing Tik Tok sensation any time soon!

With these questions, we tentatively launched ATA-Digital. We took our questions to our partner institutions – sending our surveys and gathering data.

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As we sifted through the data and began to understand the needs and habits of our partners across Asia, we saw three key areas that needed to be addressed. First, supplementing the education at our partner institutions. We noticed that most students accessed the internet to follow up on questions and topics. However, most of the materials available were from Western sources. Second, continued learning for church leaders and members. We saw a desire among church leaders and members, many of whom did not have the time or opportunity for formal education, to continue growing in their understanding of God and his world. Finally, we saw a need to reach a wider audience across Asia, addressing issues and questions that mattered to us in Asia. There was a need for Asians to speak to and for other Asians.

The task was immense, and to be honest, we felt inadequate. However, ATA's recent publication in partnership with Langham *Asian Christian Theology: Evangelical Perspectives* provided us with a starting point. The book had been well received in academic circles. However, the questions it asked were not limited to those in academia. They were questions Christians asked in their everyday lives, perhaps without the academic jargon. We started with many questions and conversations among ourselves, which made us realize that ATA-Digital could also begin as a conversation. With this thought, we launched a podcast series where we talked at length with authors from *Asian Christian Theology*. It allowed us to elaborate on complex ideas from their chapters, get to know the person behind the concepts, and ask – "What does it mean for us today in our present circumstances?" Academic theology became embodied in honest conversations where people could see the authors as passionate and vulnerable fellow Christians living and struggling with being Christian within the realities of Asia.

The content continued to evolve in the coming months, with shorter topical videos and reels extracted from the longer podcast to foster further thought and engagement. We heard back from people across Asia and even the West. For example, a senior pastor from India called and said how he enjoyed learning again after decades without formal education and how he had shared the resource with his youth. Some gave us feedback on how to improve the content, and we continued to listen and grow.

The GA brought more questions and insights. As we continue to grow and add more variety to the content, we were encouraged by many at the GA. Many of you came, sat, and talked with us sharing your passion and its meaning for Asia today. These conversations will soon be coming out in a new series where voices from Asia will speak to Asia and the world. Some of you shared content with us and offered your expertise to help ATA-



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Digital grow. We were surprised and immensely grateful. ATA-Digital began as a conversation born out of circumstances that brought certain questions to the fore.

There were many questions and some attempts at answers. We have more questions. Like, what does the conversation look like in this format? What about embodied aspects of our lives and faith? What next?

We invite you to join us as we continue to grow. As the people of God across Asia and as part of the ATA family, ATA-Digital is open to your contributions, questions, critique, and continued input. There is a need, and we seek to meet it. However, it is a task too big for any person or institution to fulfill by itself. We look forward to growing and learning together in the coming years. ♦

"Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us." -John 1:14

HAVE A MEANINGFUL CHRISTMAS AND A BLESSED 2023!!!

from the Leaders and Staff
of the Asia Theological Association



BEARING FRUIT, STANDING IN UNITY, AND WALKING IN OBEDIENCE: THE ASIA 2022 CONGRESS^[1]

The pursuit of holiness must happen alongside one another. – Asiri Fernando

Delays are not denials- and that is certainly true of the recently concluded Asia 2022 Congress. A journey that began in 2018 and initially planned for 2020, it, like most gatherings and events, had to be postponed indefinitely because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. But with restrictions being lifted and boundaries opening, the planned gathering had finally materialized- and last October 17-21, over 600 leaders of various spheres of ministries, churches, and organizations from more than 20 countries in Asia gathered for Asia 2022 “Rethinking Church and Mission: God’s Agenda for Today”.

At the very core of Asia 2022 congress’ agenda is the enabling of its participants both individually and collectively to have a “comprehensive and collaborative vision of mission”. With Asia constituting 60% of the world’s population, this congress, in the

words of Dr. David Ro, the chair of the congress and Lausanne Movement’s regional director for East Asia, “has come at an opportune time in history connecting Christian leaders together for the purpose of seeing a church and mission movement from our unique Asian context.”

To move towards the goal of the congress, there were plenary sessions, Bible expositions, and regional teams leading in worship. Speaking in the plenary sessions were Chadwick Mohan, Jason Young, David Doong, Blessing Sarangany, Angie Ng, Joseph Liow Chin Yong, David Yeghnazar, Mangalman Maharjan, Kisung Yoo, Asiri Fernando, Yoshiyuki Nishioka, Chansamone Saiyasak, and Finny Philip. These speakers addressed various issues and pressing matters that were relevant to the needs of the Asian



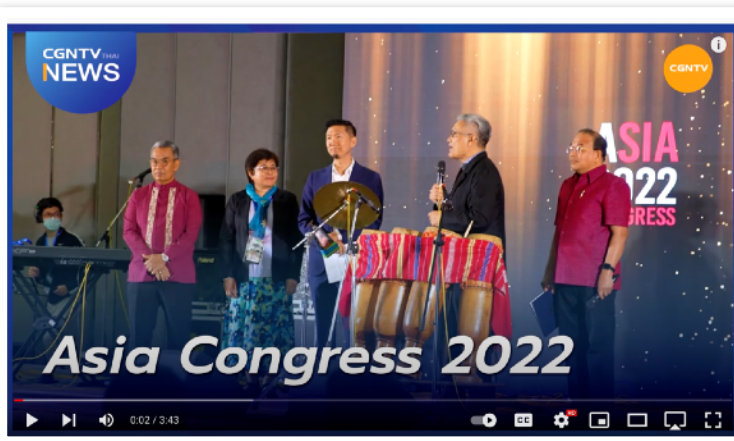
ATA was privileged to serve as co-sponsor the Asia 2022 Congress, with Dr. Lua as a member of both the steering and program committee.

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Church as a whole, including what Asian churches ought to be doing to remain Salt and Light in the continent. On the other hand, the Bible expositions, delivered by Drs. Patrick Fung, Havilah Dharmaraj, Dick Eugenio, and Eiko Tamizawa, had themes based on John 15 and aimed at specific calls of Jesus to unity and love, obedience, intimacy, and fruit bearing. Furthermore, these Bible expositions were aimed at encouraging each of the participants to abide in Christ, both as individuals and as a Church. And of course, in addition to the Plenary Sessions and Bible Expositions, the Asia 2022 Congress likewise gave room for the delegates to reflect, pray, and discuss amongst themselves in small groups.

While the Plenary sessions, Bible expositions, and moments of reflection and discussion were all very encouraging, equally remarkable were the stories from suffering churches in the various regions of Asia, particularly those in Iran and Nepal. Through these stories, the delegates were strengthened to persist in their service to God in their own contexts and were filled with hope, faith, and spiritual fervor.



The Asia 2022 Congress was featured in the Thai news channel CGNTV.

Amid all these amazing things, one other blessing that the Lord blessed the congress with was it being featured in the Thai News Outlet CGNTV. You can watch the segment with English subtitles here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsfsO2JE02E&fbclid=IwAR1QFIjGGy4wl8CjvFwyfihL6A98wAaC_yrJjUESylyqTFZ-U0RnlsRkvM

The Asia 2022 Congress was phenomenal and a clear manifestation of the health of the Asian church in three dimensions: vitality, unity, and depth- and the Asia Theological Association is grateful for the opportunity to be part of this momentous gathering as a co- sponsor. This was alongside the Lausanne Movement in Asia and Asia Evangelical Alliance- a concrete demonstration of Evangelical unity in Asia. Well, apart from being a co-sponsor, our very own General Secretary, Dr. Theresa Lua, is a member of the Program Committee and the Steering committee and was co-facilitator with Nana-Yaw Offfei Awuku (from Ghana), Global Associate Director for Generations Lausanne Movement for the session entitled "Partnership with the World Church: Africa and Asia"

The Asia 2022 Congress maybe over, but it is only the beginning of even greater things for this gathering has been set against the backdrop of the global church gearing up for the 4th Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Seoul, South Korea in 2024. Michael Oh, Lausanne's Global Executive Director and CEO, said of the 4th Lausanne Congress in his opening statement: "The Fourth Lausanne Congress will be of the global church, by the global church, and for the greatest needs and opportunities of our global society. Ultimately Seoul 2024 will be about action. Global collaborative partnerships informed by research, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and catalyzing blessed change in the world. Seoul 2024 will not be a triumphalist gathering. Rather, we will repent of our isolation and competition, and we will renew our commitment to a truly comprehensive, coordinated, and collaborative global mission." This vision began to unfold in Asia 2022 as delegates prayed, worshipped, and discussed, and shared meals side by side, hand in hand, as one. What an exciting time for the global church as the "The Church in Asia has unquestionably come of age", in the words of Jim Memory, Co-Regional Director for Lausanne Europe.

There is much to look forward to in the days and years to come as the Lord moves in our midst as He continues to bring us together to serve Him side by side, hand in hand, with one goal, one purpose, one mission. ♦

^[1] Source: Lausanne.Org and EvangelicalFocus.com



THE HISTORIC AND RECORD-BREAKING ICETE CONSULTATION 2022: IT'S MORE THAN JUST THE NUMBERS^[1]

Last November 14-18, hundreds of theological educators witnessed and participated in what has been described as historic and record breaking: the 2022 International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) consultation or C-22. Indeed, it was nothing short of remarkable as *462 delegates from over 80 countries, representing schools, churches, and organizations* gathered in Izmir, Turkey for the said consultation with theme “Formal and Non-Formal Theological Education: Beyond Dialogue”. This consultation was organized with the goal to bridge the gap that has long prevented a collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship between formal and non-formal training providers. Furthermore, it was also built on months of dialogue. So, with that, C-22 focuses on putting new strategies of collaboration into practice—one that will be on all levels: from global to grassroots.

In moving towards its goal, the consultation featured six tracks which addressed some of the

practical questions that have surfaced through the earlier online consultation. Some of the questions dealt with issues of quality assurance for non-formal training, use of technology for education, spiritual formation, and preparing the future for the next generation. But more than just simply addressing the questions that have surfaced, each of the track leaders have outlined the next steps forward with practical solutions. In addition to the six tracks, the consultation also boasts of 18 workshops along with a special time of mourning and prayer for Ukraine halfway through the event.

Well, to kick off this historic gathering, ICETE's International Director, Dr. Michael Ortiz, warmly welcomed the participants and his opening address was filled with excitement! There certainly was so much reason to be excited- and it wasn't just the numbers- but also because, for the first time, majority of the participants were from the Global South- a reflection of the shift in the center of gravity of the Global Church

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over the past few decades to Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

But even with all the excitement, Dr. Ortiz, still expressed lament in his opening address... a lament over the many missed opportunities for collaboration between formal and non-formal educational training, along with the gaps that have existed between the two. These gaps and the missed opportunities have resulted in the ongoing struggle to equip the growing number of pastors and church leaders in those parts of the world where the Church has grown exponentially. He thus prayed that "... history measure C-22 Izmir not by our numbers, but by our mutuality in one common aim – to strengthen Christ's Church." Along with that prayer, Dr. Ortiz shared what he hopes the consultation will achieve- and for that he quoted the ICETE Manifesto II, "in an increasingly globalized and polycentric world, partnerships in theological education will become more and more important and significant. Consequently, we are committed to the development of partnerships in theological education which are shaped by mutual respect and interdependence." Finally, Dr. Ortiz challenged the participants to adopt an outward attitude, to open themselves up to collaboration rather than just simply thinking of their own ministries and programs. Finally, he encouraged them to engage in this consultation with a vision of moving towards 2034.

Why 2034? Well it is the vision of ICETE, that 12 years from now, that church and ministry leaders would look back and testify that "C-22 Izmir was a catalytic event in the history of the Church. A mutuality was birthed that accelerated collaboration in the whole of theological education worldwide. Now in 2034, the Church is stronger and on mission for Christ like never before because of that one week in November of 2022 in Izmir."

This same hope was echoed by the Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance, Bishop Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher. In his video greeting, he spoke of the relevance of this gathering to the wider



462 delegates from over 80 countries, representing schools, churches, and organizations gathered for the historic C-22

evangelical community: "The future of the Church is the future of its leaders, what we invest today into the education, training and maturing of emerging leaders will shape the Church in ten or twenty years from now. Therefore, this ICETE consultation represents our own future."

Well, over the entire week, one thing became clear among all those gathered: that the exponentially growing need for training can only be met if we worked together. The consultation concluded with communion, worship, and prayer- and of course the hopes expressed during the opening night were reiterated and once again given emphasis.

As the participants left Izmir, Turkey to return to their respective ministries and fields, they left overwhelmingly positive feedback! A number of these participants have pointed out that "ICETE is the only platform that exists to gather all players in theological education globally". And while the consultation is officially over, there will be ongoing efforts to ensure the legacy of C-22- a legacy measured by stronger collaboration between formal and non-formal theological education resulting in a significant increase in effective leadership training for the multifaceted needs of the Church worldwide. ♦

[\[1\]](#) Sources: WEA and ICETE

Theological Education Expo in Pakistan

by Dr. Qaiser Julius
 Director, Open Theological Seminary
 Member, ATA CAED

The Theological Educators' Forum (TEF) is a local network of theological educators which is committed to providing added value services to Theological Institutions in Pakistan. Its goal is [to] 'Transform Theological Education for the Health of the Church in Pakistan'. TEF is working to enhance the capacity of Theological Institutions within Pakistan through training, workshops, consultations, and conferences.

One of the ways by which TEF hopes to move towards its goal is to connect with Bible schools and seminaries around the country and so be able to work with them in synergy to improve the quality of theological education in Pakistan. TEF is determined to unite a network of theological educators under the slogan, 'let's connect and learn together'.

Certainly, togetherness and collaboration is one of the key areas that TEF promotes, so in pursuit of this aim TEF organized its first ever Theological Education Expo in Pakistan held on the 9th and 10th of December, 2022 at Forman Christian University, Lahore. In these two days, there were 27 theological institutions, 9 Christian publishing houses, and 14 related organizations showcasing their ministry work. We had around 1700 visitors, including heads of theological institutions, students, Church leaders, and local Christian community members. During the



Dr. Qaiser (R) with Chief Guests of the Expo while worshipping



Dr. Qaiser and theological institute heads at the official inauguration

EXPO different activities were conducted such as a Bible quiz, conversations with experts on the challenges facing theological education in Pakistan, along with different choir performances. The expo concluded with a candle lighting ceremony which gave a message of unity and spreading the light of the Gospel in the difficult context of Pakistan.

This effort by TEF has been greatly appreciated by visitors, and many commented that it will generate a great momentum of collaboration among theological institutions and organisations for the cause of quality theological education in Pakistan. ♦

Meet ATA India's New Regional Secretary: Dr. Bennet Lawrence!

A new season is beginning to unfold for ATA India as Dr. Bennet Lawrence has been appointed as its new Regional Secretary beginning January 2023.

Dr. Bennet hails from Chennai, India, and has completed his PhD in New Testament from the Asia Graduate School of Theology, Manila. He is married to Joyce and they have been blessed with a daughter, Netanya! He is the author of *Legalistic Nomism* (ISPCK, 2015), *Comparative Characterization in the Sermon on the Mount* (Wipf and Stock, 2017), and *Approaches to the New Testament* (SAIACS Press, 2018). He is also editing *Exploring the New Testament in Asia* (Langham Press), and *Friendship in the New Testament*, while he is also writing *Asia Bible Commentary* on the Epistles of Thessalonians (Langham Press).

As he takes on leadership of ATA India, Dr. Bennet looks forward to seeing his hopes and dreams for ATA India materialize. In addition to the regular evaluation of institutions, Dr. Bennet envisions strengthening theological education by enhancing Value Added Services through training consultants who would be able to train our institutions in areas such as curriculum development, syllabus writing, teaching, assessment, spiritual formation, ministerial formation, leadership, and administration. In addition to that, he also hopes to conduct regional theological consultations, as well as to publish more contextual publications in the region. Furthermore, he envisages research being conducted on ministries and theological education in the region. He hopes to accomplish these goals with the help of the leadership of ATA, the ATA India Managing Committee, and with the cooperation of the ATA India team!



Dr. Bennet will be taking the place of Dr. Paul Cornelius who has served through the ministry of ATA India in various aspects since 2009. Dr. Cornelius will be serving as the president of Willaim Carey International University in California starting January 2023. We thank God for Dr. Paul Cornelius' hard work and unwavering dedication to the ministry! We also thank God for Dr. Cornelius' life and how he has richly blessed the ATA community! So, as he begins this new chapter in his life and ministry, we send him off with our love and blessing! We also warmly welcome Dr. Bennet as our new Regional Secretary for ATA India and look forward to coming alongside him as he pursues the vision the Lord has given him for ATA India. ♦

Hybrid Classrooms: A Useful Resource

Through COVID-19 most Asian theological education institutions wrestled with developing on-line teaching and learning processes. And what a journey it was, as we rose to meet the technological and social challenges, often for sheer survival!

Now, as we face post-COVID 'new normals', many of us recognise the benefits of continuing to build our internet-based capacity. A challenge is to find a suitable platform (integrating software and hardware) to support our teaching and learning in classrooms which simultaneously include students physically in the classroom as well as participating on-line. Dr Steve Taylor (Bangkok Bible Seminary – BBS) has designed just such a hybrid platform that is well-worth considering.

In Dr Steve's Limitless Classrooms platform, 'physical' and 'online' students alike can enjoy live interaction with each other and the teacher, make presentations, etc. Unlike Zoom, designed primarily for online conferencing, as an educator Dr Steve has integrated into his system what is important for theological education in a classroom setting. Most of all this is trying to ensure that the students and teacher alike are able to interact and concentrate on the learning process without being distracted by the IT. So Limitless Classrooms includes these key features:

1. It is easy to use by the online students, so that they can concentrate on their study without the distraction of having to switch between pages, etc. After logging into their registered class, all that students need for the interactive class is available on one single screen.
2. The students physically in the classroom must be able to see and hear the online students, and vice versa, and without the distraction of having to push buttons. So up to nine high sensitivity microphones are installed throughout the classroom, and connected to a custom-built switching mixer controlled by an operator. The classroom students can speak as normal and are heard clearly by those online.



"Limitless Classrooms" in use- enabling more students to enjoy live interaction with one another in a hybrid setting.

3. Teachers must be free to concentrate on their teaching material, use the whiteboard and interact with all the students without concurrently needing to handle technical issues. So while each classroom broadcast needs to be started initially by someone familiar with the platform, it can then be operated by any staff member or volunteer.
4. Teachers need to be sure that the online students are paying attention to the class and not doing other things. So each class time is initially set up with criteria that need to be met for a student to be counted present. These criteria include the latest time students can enter the session, how many minutes they must display their face via their webcam, and whether they need to respond to automatic prompts at random intervals. The system logs all of this and automatically sends an attendance report email to the teacher at the end of each session.
5. It can be used in conjunction with other blended online learning options.

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Dr Steve reports that Limitless Classrooms has dramatically helped to boost BBS' student enrolment. BBS now has three fully functioning hybrid classrooms able to run concurrently. Classes may have up to 200 students attending, especially the evening courses for lay-leaders.

Hardware setup (microphones, computers, monitors, etc.) for a single classroom is likely to be USD3-4,000, but for TE institutions in Asia Dr Steve is very happy to provide access to the platform software free of charge. And this is the sort of capital investment which theological education funding agencies are keen to support in this post-COVID era. The Limitless Classrooms platform is now also used by another seminary in Bangkok, by seminaries in Myanmar and the Philippines, and it is being implemented in a leading seminary in Jakarta.

Dr Steve, from the UK, has been serving the churches in Thailand for the past 42 years and a faculty member of BBS for the past 24 years. He is also on the AGST Alliance faculty and Theology Programs Committee. He started dabbling in hybrid classrooms in 2009. His experimentation since then – encouraged by the Lord and other people – has led to the more refined Limitless Classrooms. “When I left my work in computers in 1978 to prepare for missionary service in Thailand I thought I had left IT behind me,” Steve says. “Little did I realise God had plans to use and develop these skills in recent years.” We can thank God for Steve’s creativity in Limitless Classrooms “for such a time as this.”



*The man behind “Limitless Classrooms”:
Dr. Steve Taylor*

For further information about Limitless Classrooms, visit <https://limitlessclassrooms.com>, which includes recordings of actual BBS classes. Contact Dr Steve at steve@bbsthailand.org to talk further about setting up a hybrid classroom at your institution. ♦

FACULTY VOCATIONAL ENRICHMENT

The **Faculty Enrichment Initiative (FEI)** of AGST Alliance partners with faculty members of Asian seminaries to help you become competent...



- Responsive communicators
- Proficient educators
- Reflective colleagues
- Transformational leaders
- Innovative teachers



Contact us for more information about FEI’s customised, collaborative, and bite-sized approach to your vocational equipping.



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ATA News is a quarterly publication of the
Asia Theological Association

www.ataasia.com

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