

HOW ASIAN IS ASIAN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION?

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The mandate of the Asia Theological Association is to 'serve the Church in Asia in equipping the people of God for the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ.' How well has the ATA equipped Asian Christians for ministry in the Asian context in light of its mandate?—or 'How Asian is Asian theological education?' This article seeks to answer this question by framing it within the larger Asian context in which ATA-associated theological training programs have arisen. Then, two more specific questions are asked: First, are the faculty in ATA institutions adequately trained for the realities of their Asian context? Second, are the courses and curricula in ATA institutions truly contextualised for the Asian context? The article concludes by suggesting practical steps seminaries in Asia could take to help make their theological education more Asian and more relevant for their Asian contexts.

When I became Academic Dean of Asian Theological Seminary (ATS), I asked the faculty at our annual retreat to ponder this question: What is *Asian* about ATS? I followed this up with several related questions: What does it mean to be an Asian seminary? How does an Asian seminary differ from, say, a seminary in North America? Is it just due to location, or to the number of Asians on the faculty or

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in administrative roles? Or are there deeper issues involved? Is an Asian seminary one that is primarily dedicated to issues that are distinctly Asian? If so, what are uniquely Asian concerns? Does the course content of an Asian seminary reflect a bias towards Asia first, and let the rest of the world—especially the Western world—be secondary? What does an Asian classroom pedagogy look like? And, are there Asian ways to interpret the Bible, to contextualise theology, to preach a sermon, to evangelize and disciple people? We asked many questions during the weekend of that faculty retreat!

What do these questions have to do with the Asia Theological Association (ATA)? The stated mandate of ATA is to ‘serve the Church in Asia in equipping the people of God for the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ.’ As ATA celebrates its 40th anniversary, it is appropriate to ask, ‘In the light of its mandate, how well has ATA equipped Asian Christians for ministry in the Asian context?’ This question may be asked in another way: ‘How *Asian* is Asian theological education?’ Many of the questions asked of my ATS faculty are also relevant for all involved in theological education in Asia today.

How *Asian* is Asian theological education? In this article I frame this question within the larger Asian context in which our theological training programs have arisen. Then, I seek answers to two more questions: 1. Are the faculty in ATA institutions adequately trained for the realities of their Asian context? and 2. Are the courses and curricula in ATA institutions truly contextualised for Asia?

I am familiar with theological education in much of Asia, but in this article I will limit my analysis and insights mostly to the Philippines context, where for the past twenty years I have been training Asians as a professor, an AGST Program Director and an Academic Dean of an

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ATA-related seminary. From the specific Philippines context applications may be drawn for the broader Asian contexts reflected in ATA. Also, while I specifically address theological education at the seminary level, the insights may apply across all the levels of Asian theological education.

EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND THE ASIAN CONTEXT

The topic of theological education in the Asian context is vast, so I will limit the discussion here to two areas: 1. the historical realities of colonisation out of which Asian evangelical theological educational institutions have emerged; and 2. whether Asian evangelical theological educational institutions are meeting the training needs of the various Asian constituencies they are serving. These two areas may seem quite unrelated, but in reality they are intimately linked, as I will explain.

Colonisation and Evangelical Theological Education in Asia

Asia's history of colonisation is 'the elephant in the room' that few Asian evangelicals want to recognise. A vast majority of Asian nations have a history—for some, fairly recent—which includes colonisation. Whether that colonisation was British, Dutch or American, it has often created among Asian evangelicals in these nations a tendency to assume without question that the western theology that came with the colonisers is still appropriate to use, even though the colonisers have long gone.

Colonisation has affected Asian theological education in many ways, but primarily with regards to curriculum relevance and to dismissing local ways of teaching and learning. Recent ethnographic

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research has come to label the influence of colonisation as ‘authoritative knowledge’. A result of colonisation is that those who are colonised eventually take on as authoritative a certain way of thinking or knowing that was at first foreign to that particular culture. What happens is this:

... frequently one kind of knowledge gains ascendance and legitimacy. A consequence of the legitimation of one kind of knowing as authoritative is the devaluation, often the dismissal, of all other kinds of knowing.... The constitution of authoritative knowledge is an ongoing social process that both builds and reflects power relationship within a community of practice. It does this in such a way that all participants come to see the current social order as a natural order, that is, the way things (obviously) are. (Jordan 1997, 56)

The kind of theological knowledge that has gained ascendancy and legitimacy in Asian evangelical circles is predominantly western. And most of us naively assume that this is just the way it is. Such was my own situation when I first began ministry in Asia:

I was confronted with the shortcomings of western [...] methods when my wife and I first came to the Philippines in 1980. I was assigned to teach the Bible, theology, as well as the biblical languages, at my denomination’s small Bible college located in a rural area on the northern tip of the island of Cebu. The school was isolated in every way: no electricity, no amenities whatsoever; nothing but some classrooms and dormitories located in the middle of a huge sugar cane field. Both the curriculum of this Bible college, as well as the content of most of the courses, were thoroughly western. I soon realized, however, that my Filipino students, obviously enough, were not western. Most were recent high school graduates from predominately poor, rural back-

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grounds. Though they knew English, many of the first-year students were hearing native English speakers (my wife and me) for the very first time. Nonetheless, in order to adequately understand the content of my courses these students had to think like I thought; in other words, they had to learn to think in western ways. The burden was on *them*, not on me. And everyone at that Bible college, westerner and non-westerner alike, thought nothing of this. It was simply taken for granted. (Caldwell 1999, 25)

Then, I did not question the western dominance of both what was taught and how it was taught. I considered neither the four centuries of Spanish colonisation of the Philippines nor the nearly fifty years of colonisation by the USA (up until shortly after World War Two).

What both Asians and westerners in Asia must come to see is that the way things are should not be accepted uncritically. What must be seen is that Asia's colonial history has influenced both the understanding of theology as well as how that theology is taught. Stephen Brookfield's words, although written of critical learning about the natural sciences, apply also to the critical learning techniques assumed in the Asian seminary classroom:

[Such learning] was developed in a specific context and disseminated through certain already-established networks of communication.... This does not mean ... that we automatically reject these criteria as inherently oppressive or exclusionary because they represent Eurocentric worldviews. But it does mean that we acknowledge that their position of preeminence has not been attained because they exhibit some sort of primal universal force or truth; rather, their acceptance is socially and politically created. (Brookfield 2000, 27)

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We must, therefore, at least acknowledge the fact that much of the theology that we teach, as well as the educational techniques that we use, have come from the way the colonisers did it. (See Jenkins 2006, especially Ch. 2; also Sugirtharajah 2003, 2005, and 2006.) This should give us all pause, not least because

a transcultural perspective on education is essential, for education is a cultural process and occurs in a social context. Without attention to cultural difference and the way education serves those differences, we have no way of achieving perspective on our own culture and the way our educational system serves it or of building a comprehensive picture of education as affected by culture. (Spindler 1997, 272)

Another illustration from my experience reinforces this point. One of my favourite professors in my seminary experience in the USA was Millard Erickson. His systematic theology classes were highly stimulating intellectually and very relevant to the North American church scene that my fellow students and I were in. Erickson's *magnum opus*, *Christian Theology* (1983-85, 1998), was in its formative stages, and we had the opportunity to interact with the material before its publication. Once published, *Christian Theology* became the systematic theology textbook of choice for many evangelical seminaries in North America.

I have been surprised, however, to observe that *Christian Theology* is also used as the primary text in the systematic theology classrooms of many Asian evangelical seminaries. While this text is undoubtedly excellent, it was written primarily for the North American context, and so its legitimisation and pre-eminence in Asia should not be taken for granted. For while much of its basic content is pertinent to any context, if it ends there (as many of the systematic theology syllabi

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that I have examined do), it truly fails to be appropriate in the Asian context. For example, the spirit world is an important area of most Asians' lives, but Erickson's work addresses the spirit world only in passing, with seven pages on 'evil angels' and five pages on 'the powers', and with nothing at all on ancestors. This is not to fault Erickson, because North America was his context, not Asia.

In line with Brookfield's suggestion above, we need not reject *Christian Theology*, but we must view it as preliminary to the kind of theology that we do in Asia. (Of course, another question concerns whether 'systematic' theology is an appropriate way to teach theology in non-linear thinking Asian cultures.) If we begin with Erickson we must continue on with significant theological texts that address specific Asian issues.

At ATS we have attempted to help fill this textual void by running annual theological forums for several hundred Bible college and seminary faculty and informed laypeople. These forums deal directly with theological issues that are patently Asian, and from each forum a book has been published for broader distribution throughout Asia. Forum topics have included: doing theology in the Philippine context (Suk 2005); dialoguing with people of other faiths (Gorospe 2006); principalities and powers in the Asian context (Gener and Gorospe 2007); and the church and poverty in Asia (Wanak 2008). This may be a good model for other seminaries to adopt.

[The Roman Catholics and mainline Protestant groups within Asia, in particular, have been proactive in publishing resources that are geared for Asian contexts (e.g. see England 2002, 2003, 2004). It is encouraging to note that there is an increasing number of evangelical resources, even from the West, that are attempting to address issues that pertain uniquely to the non-western world: see, for

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example, Adeyemo (2006) and Dyrness and Karkkainen (2008). The current ATA *Asia Bible Commentary Series* project is helping fill the tremendous need for relevant evangelical Asian textbooks. See also Tennent (2007), who shows how the global church is influencing the way theology is discussed.]

Asian Theological Education and the Constituencies It Serves

In 2005 Manfred Kohl released a devastating study, *The Church in the Philippines: A Research Project with Special Emphasis on Theological Education*. This work examined the relationship between the evangelical seminaries in the Philippines and the constituency of evangelical churches they serve. The Kohl Report, as it came to be known, showed that of the 50,000 evangelical churches in the Philippines, about 55% either did not have a pastor (16%) or had a pastor without any formal theological training (39%) (Kohl 2005, 19). And at the current rate that evangelical seminaries were graduating pastors, they would never be able to make up the shortfall. Furthermore, the churches of the vast majority of the untrained pastors and leaders were located in poor areas, both urban and rural. Kohl concluded that either a new model of theological education was needed or the existing theological school programs radically revamped, if these institutions were to meet the theological training needs of their evangelical constituency.

How does this evidence from the Kohl Report relate to the colonisation issue? It relates precisely at the point that the seminaries of the Philippines have been built primarily on western models of what seminary education is supposed to be like. Such western seminary education is typically for those with advanced education (a tertiary degree) and with adequate time and funding resources for several years of full-time training. In the past this has often meant that most students in western seminaries are from the middle and upper social

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classes. As this same model of evangelical seminary education has become dominant in Asia, it is increasingly difficult to critique the status quo and analyse whether it is truly meeting the needs of the evangelical Asian church. The Kohl Report shows that the model is not working in the Philippines in so far that it is not truly supplying sufficient numbers of pastors for the evangelical churches of the Philippines, the vast majority of which are among the urban and rural poor. My travels in the region indicate that this is probably true for much of Asia.

Some will argue that the purpose of seminary education is to train those who are indeed at higher educational and social levels so that they can then train the rest. This reasoning is faulty for two reasons: First, those at higher educational and social levels are seldom able to adequately relate to, and be relevant for, the majority who are at the lower levels. Second, most of those who graduate from seminaries do not even try. More often than not they are recruited by higher-level churches, thus neglecting the poorer urban and rural churches. This is a natural outgrowth of a colonial mentality which assumes that the education and other benefits at the higher levels will eventually trickle down to the lower levels. Unfortunately, trickle-down theory does not work in economics—nor in theological education.

The fact is that most Asian evangelical seminaries are not meeting the theological training needs of the evangelical churches, especially those churches located among the vast numbers of the poor, whether urban or rural. The Asian Development Bank estimates that over one billion people in Asia live on less than US\$1 per day (GMA 2009). How will Asian evangelical seminaries meet the training needs of the thousands of urban and rural pastors needed to lead churches among these poor?

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ATS has attempted to address some of the concerns raised in the Kohl Report by starting its Center for Continuing Studies (CCS). The purpose of CCS is to respond to the need for quality theological training to equip pastors, Christian workers, lay leaders and professionals who are unable to attend regular seminary programs, due to distance, economics or time constraints. But even with CCS, ATS still has a long way to go in its attempts to help local churches in the Philippines.

These insights on colonisation and the training needs for leaders in our constituencies leads us to consider two further questions:

1. Are the faculty in ATA institutions adequately trained for the realities of their Asian context?
2. Are the courses and curricula in ATA institutions truly contextualised for the Asian context?

ARE FACULTY ADEQUATELY TRAINED FOR THE REALITIES OF THEIR ASIAN CONTEXT?

The short answer may be ‘yes and no’. Yes, if we mean that most of the faculty are Asian; or if they are non-Asian, they live and minister in an Asian context. No, if we mean that being Asian, or living and ministering in Asia, guarantees that these faculty teach in light of the realities of the Asian context.

Many (if not the majority) of the faculty of Asian evangelical seminaries are to some extent Western-trained—and this legitimises the question of this section. Does it matter that most of the faculty with advanced degrees (doctoral level, especially PhD) have received their training in the West, and predominantly in North America or Europe? Does it matter that even those who have received their advanced training in Asia have often been trained by westerners, or at

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least studied a western-dominated curriculum? Indeed it does matter, especially for those faculty who are Asian. For with these the colonising influence has had a great impact. On one hand, their exposure to the West can be viewed positively: They have seen new vistas as they have thought about theology in new ways and have been exposed to a view of theology that is a part of the overall history of the development of theology. But on the other hand, the influence of the West has sometimes made these Asian faculty less sensitive to their own local contexts, and many must be brought back to the realities of Asia.

That faculty want training in the West subtly illustrates the colonialist mentality that ‘West is best’, including in higher-level theological education. Yes, higher-level theological training for evangelicals in Asia has been sub-standard or unavailable, thus necessitating Asians to study abroad. But today, if promising younger Asian faculty are given a choice between studying in the West or studying in Asia, and if their total funding needs are easily met for themselves and their families, the majority will usually choose to study in the West. This is despite good quality post-graduate programs being available locally, for example through Asia Graduate School of Theology, South East Asia Graduate School of Theology, local Catholic universities, and even secular universities.

But, some will argue, these who are western-trained are still Asians. Yes, indeed. But how much are they really able to relate to their own contexts again once they return? The unfortunate fact is that through their advanced education in the West they have once again been colonised—a subtle colonisation, but colonisation none the less. For western education is geared primarily to westerners, as it should be. Most theological educators in the West have not thought about the significance of this in their own teaching, and most Asian doctoral candidates have not thought about this in relationship to what they

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are learning and the impact that this might have on their future teaching. One of our Filipino ATS faculty, prior to her PhD studies in the West, wisely took a year off to live and minister among some of the poorest of the poor on the island of Samar. This kept her focused on the realities of the majority people of the Philippines during her studies abroad and when she returned. Unfortunately, her example is rarely followed.

Colonisation also tends to reward those who are willing to go along with the system. Are those who have received advanced theological training in the West—or in the non-West through a western-based curriculum—really the ones who are best prepared to equip pastors? At ATS, fully half of the resident faculty, including me, have not had front-line church experience as pastors. The ATS faculty members are highly talented and competent in their individual areas of teaching, and most are intimately involved in the life of their local church, but they have not been pastors; and this must affect the relevance to ministry that pastoral candidates draw from their classes. Note that this is an observation rather than a judgment.

This ATS situation is reflected in many of the other Filipino seminaries. Those who are the experts in Greek or Hebrew, or theology, are not necessarily experts at pastoring a local church. This lack of faculty ‘hands on’ experience is, I believe, one of the main reasons that many of the larger churches in Asia are by-passing the seminaries and starting their own pastoral training programs. These churches have seen that the seminary training their pastors have received, although often academically exceptional, has not adequately trained them for actual church ministry. I fear that this trend will continue to grow, unless our seminaries become more relevant to our churches. A step forward is for seminaries to select potential faculty from the pool of those who have already successfully pastored local churches.

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Alongside the lack of church experience as a measure of the adequacy of Asian faculty is a lack of knowledge and ministry experience with the poor, whether urban or rural. Since most seminary faculty tend to be from at least the middle class, this lack may make it difficult for faculty to adequately train church workers for ministry among these significant groups of people.

ARE COURSES AND CURRICULA TRULY CONTEXTUALISED FOR THE ASIAN CONTEXT?

Relevant faculty is one challenge. Directly related to this is the challenge of relevant courses and curricula for the Asian context.

I was shocked into the reality of this challenge when talking with a Filipino faculty colleague. During our conversation my colleague said something that I will never forget: “I don’t think any Christian can accurately interpret the Old Testament without at least four years of Hebrew study.” I wasn’t sure that I had heard correctly, so I followed up by asking: “Certainly this will be necessary for those who are going to teach Hebrew, but do you really believe that four years should be required of all our students?” The answer was an unequivocal “Yes!” Since I had studied Hebrew for only three years, I quickly let the conversation lapse.

Hebrew is indeed a good thing to study, typical of most seminary courses. But is it the best, or most relevant, training? In light of the desperate need for trained pastors for local churches in the Philippines, as throughout Asia, these questions demand answers.

Two questions need to be asked of our extensive courses, curricula and programs: 1. How many? and 2. How much? Most faculty members in Asian seminaries have completed many courses on the

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Old and New Testaments, Greek and Hebrew, exegesis, systematic and biblical theology, etc. And I dare suggest that not many of us have seriously questioned the need for all of this extensive training for our own students here in the Asian context. We have bought into the system that has been carried over from the West. We have rather blithely assumed that the extensive western-oriented training that we received is what our Asian students should also receive. But should this really be so? Elsewhere I have written:

... It is imperative that we do indeed question the appropriateness of such extensive training, not only for our own lives but for the lives of our students who will minister in the Asian context. Yes, some of us will need to be scholars, and some of our students will need to be scholars. And yes, our students will need to be aware of some of the complexities of the biblical text and consequently will need a basic familiarity with the tools that can help answer those complexities. But the bottom line question comes down to this: how many and how much? *How many* of our students need to be able to exegete a text in Greek and/or Hebrew? *How much* Greek and Hebrew needs to be required for ministry purposes? *How many* need to be able to write library-based papers comparing and contrasting the views of several commentators on a particular text? *How much* emphasis should be placed on the mastery of the viewpoints of professional scholars? Yes, a small percentage of our students will need to learn a lot of this information. But not everyone; in fact, not many at all. What *everyone* really needs, and this is crucially important in our Asian context, are the tools, resources and training that will equip them to relevantly interpret the Bible [and do theology] in the complicated context that is Asia. If we do not properly equip them, how will Asia truly be reached with the gospel? (Caldwell 1999, 41)

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To offer contextualised courses and curricula will mean a radical re-think of what the Asian situation is and what our Asian students really need to learn. (See LaBute 2006 for a good starting point to develop relevant Asian theology; and Gener 2004 and Caldwell 2005 for similar in the Philippines context.) This is especially true as we attempt to meet the training needs of those who are working with the urban and rural poor (see Gunderson 2008).

Here we can benefit from recent development theory and especially what is known as participatory rural appraisal (PRA). PRA is the new field practice of putting the first last; in other words, recognising the natural abilities and giftings of poor people (see Chambers 1997). This practice confronts the dominance of those called ‘uppers’ as opposed to the vast majority of the people who are the ‘lowers’. The uppers see grass-roots programs flourish through empowering the lowers to do them. Such a practice is a major challenge for ‘upper seminaries’ and faculty whose curricula and courses are based on ‘top-down’ systems (see Friesen 2008). According to Robert Chambers, top-down systems have “brought bad practice: dominant and superior behaviour, rushing, upper-to-upper bias, taking without giving, and arousing expectations which are not met” (210). New lower-based training programs are necessary. But such new paradigms

imply and demand changes which are institutional, professional and personal. Institutional change needs a long-term perspective, with patient and painstaking learning and re-orientation. Professional change needs new concepts, values, methods and behaviors, and new curricula and approaches to learning. Personal change and commitment have primacy, and can be sought experientially. Learning to change, and learning to enjoy change, are fundamental. (210)

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This is precisely where I have been most challenged in recent years. As Academic Dean at ATS one of my priority projects was to develop a new program in urban ministries. But how could we do this in an 'upper seminary' with a 'top-down' system? The answer eventually turned into the ATS Center for Transformational Urban Leadership (CTUL) that offers courses leading to a Diploma, Graduate Diploma or MA in Transformational Urban Leadership (TUL). (During this time ATS also began offering a DMin in Transformational Leadership for Ministry in the Global City, in cooperation with the Trans-Pacific Alliance for Urban Ministry Education.) These courses are designed for Christian practitioners among the urban poor and bring together a team of national and international academic and 'hands on' experts currently working with the urban poor. Built on a foundation of Bible, evangelical theology and applied social sciences, TUL studies include such areas as holistic church planting, community development, ministry to prostitutes and street children, starting preschools, primary health care, and advocacy and environmental issues among the urban poor. All these courses are combined with extensive field internships among the urban poor.

Notice that these studies in the TUL program are not found in the catalogues of typical Asian evangelical seminaries (nor of most seminaries in the West). But I felt that it was imperative that ATS offer courses that were really needed for effective urban poor ministry and that they be taught by those who were actually 'doing the ministry'. This caused some headaches for our upper resident faculty, but eventually the TUL program was approved as a separate centre of ATS. The main concerns related to government recognition and accreditation issues. However, eventually the government regulating body for education was highly impressed that an evangelical seminary was

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offering such a practical program, and the program is on track for full accreditation.

I was even more challenged by the TUL program when I was asked to teach one of the core courses, *Interpreting the Bible With the Urban Poor*. I had taught basic hermeneutics courses for 25 years, but I had little personal experience with, or exposure to, the urban poor. I, as an upper, was challenged by the prospect of putting my theories concerning ethnohermeneutics (cross-cultural hermeneutics) to the test through empowering the lowers and, as a result, seeing grass-roots Bible interpretation flourish as the poor did it themselves.

This required me to ‘go back to the drawing board’ to develop a ‘border pedagogy’ (the term of fellow cross-cultural hermeneutics expert D. N. Premnath) that goes beyond the traditional approach I have been so fond of:

The term ‘border’ sharply captures the dominant tendency to establish borders or boundaries based on the either-or binaries within Western thought.... The dominant group defines, structures and thereby dominates all constituted as Other. Border pedagogy provides a pedagogical alternative for learners to identify and be critical of these borders that are used to set apart entities and peoples.... [It] seeks to create spaces for ... experiences to be expressed, valued, and thought through by students and teachers alike. (Premnath 2007, 6)

Border pedagogy allowed me to teach my students reading strategies for exegeting the text of the Bible while at the same time challenging me to help my students develop relating strategies for exegeting the culture of their urban poor audience. Thus they would better develop their own strategies for exegeting the text of the Bible with the urban

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poor (Caldwell 2008. See also Wit et al 2004 and Caldwell 2005). This aspect of border pedagogy involves

the ability to expose the dominant definitions of reality. It enables the learner to recognize cultural codes and social practices that marginalize or even repress alternative ways of perceiving.... The models of the dominant culture need no longer be the sole basis for defining what constitutes proper knowledge.... As learners cross borders, alternative forms of knowledge emerge and the dominant definitions of reality come under closer scrutiny. (Premnath 2007, 7)

As I taught my students, and my students (who, in turn, had been taught by their urban poor communities) taught me, we arrived together at hermeneutical strategies that worked with the urban poor. In almost every class period my students would come back from leading Bible studies with their urban poor groups and report comments that some individuals had made, for example, "I never knew that the Bible was for me", or "I never knew that I could interpret the Bible for myself." It is precisely this kind of interaction between professor, student, and the urban poor that is so necessary if evangelical Christianity is to make an impact among the poor of Asia.

WAYS FORWARD

How *Asian* is Asian theological education? This article has suggested that it is on the right track, but given the background of colonisation there is still quite some way to go to truly meet the needs of the Asian church and the Asian people.

The challenge for evangelicals teaching at seminaries in Asia is to be relevant to the Asian context while at the same time recognising the authority of God's Word. The Bible must always take precedence over any culture, Asian or other. In the final analysis we want our

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students, upon graduation, to be able to rightly handle the Bible with relevance in the Asian contexts in which they will be ministering.

With this in mind, there are practical steps that seminaries in Asia can take to help make their theological education more Asian and more relevant for their Asian contexts. These steps include:

1. Carefully evaluate local ministry contexts, and develop courses and programs that truly meet the ministry training needs of the local churches in those contexts—even if this means radical change of an existing curriculum. As Jesus said, “people do not pour new wine into old wineskins” (Luke 5:37). Asian seminaries must resist the urge to conform uncritically to foreign curricula, ministry training programs, libraries and standards that are simply not applicable in so many places in Asia. Also, resist the temptation to do everything in light of government recognition and regulations. Certainly the basic educational laws of the land must be followed, but the educational requirements should not get in the way of local relevance. Even seminary faculty members will answer to a higher authority one day.
2. Partner with local churches (especially strategic ones), so that the ministers being trained by the seminary are appropriate for these churches and their leadership needs. Creatively work with the churches to ensure that their training needs are enfolded into new or existing seminary programs—a ‘win-win’ situation for both seminary and local church.
3. Develop new faculty, and engage experienced faculty, who are intimately acquainted with the seminary’s local context and who ideally have ministered in local churches in that context. Make sure that tenured faculty stay intimately and actively

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connected with the local church scene. Seminaries must ensure that the training their faculty are receiving—whether in Asia or further abroad—will indeed better equip them for teaching in Asia.

4. Don't be afraid to offer non-academic tracks and programs to help meet the overwhelming leadership needs of the churches of Asia. Only a very small percentage of Asian pastors have the time, money and qualifications to take MA and MDiv programs, let alone higher level ones. Seminaries can be at the forefront in helping to equip the vast number of these 'non-degree pastors' through programs and courses facilitated by existing faculty and masteral graduates.

In highlighting some of the weaknesses of current evangelical theological education in Asia, it may appear that I am pessimistic about the entire situation. On the contrary! I am very excited about the future of ATA and evangelical theological education in Asia. There is a new crop of younger evangelical Asian scholars who are very much in tune with their cultures, and who have the ability to make their teaching relevant. More evangelical Asian seminaries (and consortia like Asia Graduate School of Theology) are launching new and relevant programs geared specifically to their contexts. I am confident that the mandate of ATA—'to serve the Church in Asia in equipping the people of God for the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ'—will indeed be fulfilled in the 21st century.

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