

## Pentecostal Theological Education: Bible College and Teacher's Impact in Asia

### 1. Background

From the very beginning, Pentecostals were mission-focused after being baptized by the Holy Spirit. They believed that once filled with the Holy Spirit, they needed to go out doing mission work. There was a great sense of interconnection between the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and becoming involved in practical ministry in God's Kingdom. However, such zeal for, and commitment to, mission sometimes resulted in the neglect of training and theological education. This unhealthy notion has gradually diminished as Pentecostals have become more aware of the necessity of a theological education.

Pentecostal theological education<sup>1</sup> through its colleges and seminaries all over the world has grown significantly, both in quantity and quality. Yet, comparative with existing churches, Pentecostal theological education is not at the level of a standard adequate for ministerial formation for today's complex world. Most Pentecostal scholars today have obtained their higher theological education from non-Pentecostal schools. When I began my study, no Pentecostal school offered a Ph.D. program, although Doctor of Ministry programs soon flourished among western Pentecostal schools. Also insufficient was networks among Pentecostal schools at a regional or global level and only in the 1980s did such an initiative begin to appear.

This study introduces the Asia Pacific Theological Association (APTA) which has played a significant role in offering various services to its constituency schools, while fostering interaction among the schools in Asia and the Pacific islands. As APTA has inspired other regions to form similar associations among Pentecostal schools, a close look at the services provided by APTA would be useful. To illustrate its accreditation service, two member schools accredited by APTA will be presented, particularly to assess its impact on the improvement and growth of the schools. Finally, the area of teacher's development will be elaborated and I will deal with teacher qualifications and teaching skills in the classroom and interaction with students.

### 2. The Purposes of Asia Pacific Theological Association

It was formed in 19xx as an outcome of various initial discussions among US Assemblies of God missionaries and the leaders of Assemblies of God Bible schools in the Asia Pacific region. In spite of its denominational origin, today the Association is open to other Pentecostal and Charismatic institutions in the region that uphold the Association's purposes. APTA aims to offer aid in the growth and efficiency of the ministerial training programs of its member schools.

The APTA website notes the following purposes of the Association:<sup>2</sup>

- 1) To provide a means for member schools to ensure that their education is focused on:

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<sup>1</sup> Wonsuk Ma. "Pentecostal Theological Education in Asia," in Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, Joshva Raja (eds.), *Handbook of Theological Education in Global Christianity: Theological Perspectives, Regional Surveys, Ecumenical Trends* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2010), 729-735.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.apta-schools.org/index.htm> The Asia Pacific Theological Association 2006.

- a) the basic philosophy and the Pentecostal distinctives;
  - b) academic excellence;
  - c) student spiritual life development;
  - d) effective and practical field ministry training; and
  - e) training programs that are developed and adjusted to the needs of the students, the church and the culture.
- 2) To establish standards which provide direction in the development and effectiveness of ministerial training programs, provide accreditation services based on the standards as criteria for a self-study and facilitate transfer of credits among member schools.
  - 3) To provide criteria for member schools to assess the effectiveness of their working relationships with the churches and other ministries within their areas.
  - 4) To promote close working relationships and the sharing of resources among schools in the region and to promote communication with the world-wide Assemblies of God and Pentecostal Bible school network.

### 3. Accreditation Service

#### 3.1 Assemblies of God Bible College (AGBC) in Singapore

I want to note several features of AGBCS, established in 1977, in order to highlight key requirements for an institutional accreditation. APTA's 2010 accreditation report reads,

“The accredited team of APTA visited the Assemblies of God Bible College in Singapore last April 26-29, 2010. The college has been granted a full ten year. Established in 1977, AGBC is the official ministerial training college of the Assemblies of God in Singapore under the control of the College Management composed of representatives from the Executive Committee, pastors and laity.”<sup>3</sup>

The college is dedicated to preparing men and women with a satisfying biblical education and equipping them for their service to the fast rising church and society in Singapore.

In compliance with APTA's aim based on Ephesians 4:11-13, the institution has routinely evaluated and revised its curricula in theological and ministerial studies for effectiveness and relevancy in preparing church leadership. It particularly underscores the importance of mission and evangelism to encourage and equip its students to prepare them to become more like Jesus with compassionate hearts especially toward the lost, and to equip them to be passionately effective in witnessing Christ to those who are not yet 'in the fold.'

AGBC aims not only to help its students to develop skills for ministry, specifically in a Pentecostal environment, but also to prepare their ministries to be socially and culturally pertinent to the current Singaporean context. It seeks to provide spiritual surroundings in which students will have opportunities to cultivate as a man or woman of God, to raise their gratitude for biblical standards and for the worship of God in spirit and in truth. This is applied through the many student performances outside the classroom such as chapel festivities and services, Spiritual Emphasis

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara Houger, 'Featured Bible School: Assemblies of God Bible College in Singapore', *APTA Update* (Updated Report, 2010), 4.

services, koinonia or small group gatherings, and sharing in world missions through the college's Missionary Prayer Band.<sup>4</sup>

AGBC has achieved in having over 200 graduates currently serving as pastors, teachers, evangelists and missionaries all over the world. It is definitely a place for God's servants who are eager to deepen and broaden their commitment to God and to further fulfil His call.

### 3.2 Ecclesia Bible College (EBC) in Hong Kong

Ecclesia Bible College was granted a Full Accreditation Status for 5 years by the Accreditation Commission, after the AC visiting team conducted a visit in the Hong Kong campus last May 10-14, 2010. It was first established in the Yee Lok Village in Guangzhou, China. It was inaugurated in 1947 by Rev. J. Elmor Morrison, a Canadian Assemblies of God missionary, who has already been training and equipping Christian ministers within the area through Bible classes.<sup>5</sup>

After moving to several locations, in 2002 it was relocated to its current location in Tuen Mun. In 1983, the school started offering a four-year program of Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies. In the same year, its name was changed from Ecclesia Bible Institute to Ecclesia Bible College.

With over 60 year's existence, EBC has consistently devoted its faculty and administrators to the educating of China's young people. The college's mission statement is "To Provide Pentecostal Training for Tomorrow's Church leaders." With these words inscribed on the foundation stone near the front door to the main building, the EBC family is constantly reminded of the commitment of the school to train Pentecostal leaders for tomorrow and to equip people for anointed ministry. This mission is further incorporated throughout EBC's curricula and in its public ministries. With its emphasis on ministerial training, EBC has developed a good number of courses on practical training rather than focus on theories. It seeks to train leaders with a servant's heart and with their hands dirty. "The directorate, governorship, administration and faculty of EBC agree that its mission is thus fulfilled as evidenced by the students and graduates' present ministries in various churches."<sup>6</sup>

In the forthcoming years, it is EBC's wish to take several directions to move on its mission declaration. It purports providing Pentecostal training, equipping people of God for effectual work, and developing the spiritual configuration of servant leaders, which is the ultimate response to the needs of churches in Hong Kong and China today.

## 4. Teacher Development

### 4.1 Teachers in Students' Spiritual Formation

In the small group discussion during parallel sessions of the Edinburgh 2010 conference, a couple of members in the group raised the issue of students' spiritual life in connection with theological education. In the session, one question became the most fundamental in their probing: Who is the most influential person in shaping the

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Houger, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Houger, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Houger, p. 5.

spiritual life of students? Traditionally Pentecostal schools have placed a heavy emphasis on spiritual life, such as daily prayer and Bible reading. Updated news from the Teacher Development and Certification Commission notes the central role of the teachers in the spiritual and theological formation of the students:

Asia Pacific region has a number of Bible schools from training centers and institutes to seminaries. Each school desires to grow, and through the graduates reach more people for Jesus. One question that leadership in the schools needs to ask is, “What or who is the key for growth numerically and spiritually?” One answer that stands strong is “the Teacher.” Teachers become a key to student retention, to change in students’ lives, and to spiritual growth and maturing in the knowledge of God, His Word, and His work. Other ingredients make a difference, but teachers definitely impact the lives of the students and the future work of God.<sup>7</sup>

Teachers are called to live an exemplary life to build an adequate atmosphere and to make an impact on their students through associations, community, prayer life, quality of valuable teaching, and creativity.

#### 4.2. Relationship Building

Then, how is a teacher-student relationship built? Jesus shows an excellent example of teaching by relating to people from all walks of life. Often he reached out to people in need and built relationships with them. Through this process, he demonstrated his exemplary life, and consequently nurtured a trusting relationship. Paul also showed connectedness to those who came to know Jesus Christ. “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Jesus and Paul provide good examples for the teacher to apply in their own life. Firstly, the teacher needs an intimate relationship with God. In doing so, the teacher learns how to develop the relationship with students in the school. People tend to have a desire to imitate someone they trust and admire. Connecting to students enables the teacher to better understand the students, their background and their plans for the future. Palmer rightly argues, “Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teaching.”<sup>8</sup>

Mentoring is another way of influencing students through relationship-building. It takes place through spending personal time with students, and providing ministry opportunities. Paul demonstrates his mentorship to Timothy through instruction and spiritual guidance (2 Tim. 1:13-14). Tim Elmore described mentoring as a relational experience “that enables people to develop potential.”<sup>9</sup>

#### 5.3 Classroom Teaching

A classroom atmosphere as a learning community based on truth and trust is important for students to enjoy learning, interacting, asking questions, and making valuable contribution in class discussion. “Students will desire to enter a community much more than just a classroom.”<sup>10</sup> The teacher leads the students to interact with a

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Houger, *A Key to Growing, Effective Bible Schools: The Teacher* (Updated Report, 2010), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1998), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Elmor, *Mentoring: How to Invest Your Life in Others* (Atlanta, GA: Equip, 2001), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara Houger, *A Key to Growing, Effective Bible Schools: The Teacher*, 3.

carefully selected subject in the classroom, and it contributes to the development of desirable learning.

The subject becomes the center with the students and teacher interacting with it. It no longer stays an inanimate or dead object of a required subject that one must take to graduate, but it becomes applicable to life. It is available for action, for a source to grow and mature, for a relationship with truth and knowledge. If students feel safe in the classroom they will interact with the subject and then know how to make it applicable in real life.<sup>11</sup>

Peter Saunders discussed “enthusiasm.”<sup>12</sup> If a teacher displays dullness or acts as if he is merely accomplishing a duty, students rapidly determine that the subject is not important. Using body language, having cheerful voice intonation, keeping eye contact with students, and moving around, the teacher involves everyone in the class in the discussion, but also communicates his conviction on the importance of the subject.

Another quality for teaching is relevance. Teaching materials, concepts, and ideas have to be relevant to the students and real ministry they are involved with. The Bible colleges need to provide opportunities for students to apply their ministerial knowledge and skills to the world outside the school. The more pertinent the material is to the social and ministerial context, the more students will come alive, understand a reason for learning, and keep in mind the concepts taught.

If the teacher gets into the classroom with an open heart, being keen to be flexible, relations and learning opportunities will flourish. Further, teachers need to listen passionately and show their interest when students ask questions. Their active participation in discussion will reveal to the teacher what needs to be emphasized more and what will be more applicable to their ministry setting.

Another important quality for effective teaching is creativity. Lecture is the most common mode of teaching and is effective for introducing fresh concepts to the students. This can, however, become an uninteresting one-way communication, if the teacher fails to bring creativity. Students learn in different ways, especially in creative ways of teaching. Howard Gardner “noted different intelligences, showing that some students learn better with music included, with movement and hands on activities, with writing activities, or with logical questioning activities.”<sup>13</sup> The incorporation of various teaching-learning methods increases learning possibilities.

David Kolb also offers a useful idea for empirical learning to help students with diverse learning styles process fresh materials. “The key to his ideas is to use the concrete knowledge students presently have and add new information with students interacting with the concepts and reflecting on the use and meaning for real life with the opportunity to apply it to real life.”<sup>14</sup>

Students learn best through creative teaching and learning methods. A teacher should put into practice variety to provide opportunities for students to interrelate with the contents of the class teaching. If a teacher attempts to use the three fundamental learning styles of visual, audio, and skill developing or “psychomotor skills” and

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara Houger, *A Key to Growing, Effective Bible Schools: The Teacher*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Saunders, Peter, *Characteristics of Effective Teaching*. Retrieved May 19, 2003 from [http://www.wmich.edu/teachlearn/new/char\\_effect\\_tch.html](http://www.wmich.edu/teachlearn/new/char_effect_tch.html)

<sup>13</sup> Howard Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999), 14.

<sup>14</sup> David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984), 25.

creates opportunities within the teaching session, the students' effectiveness in learning will drastically increase. The use of visuals, stories, illustrations, parables, current examples, and opportunities for the students to practice or incorporate the concepts will also enhance learning outcome. Interactions through question and answer, discussion, small group activities, presentation, and drama will involve the students in the learning process, and will provide chances for them to learn meaningfully.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The Asia Pacific Theological Association has been a new thinking in Pentecostal theological education. Challenges will continue to arise for APTA, as Pentecostal theological education continues its development in the Asia Pacific region, and societal changes affect the nature of churches and the demands of church leadership. Teachers are constantly required to update their qualifications, as formal academic qualifications decades ago would not be adequate in the now changing context. The challenge also applies to the delivery of education as new teaching and communication skills continue to evolve.

However, the greatest challenge for any theological teacher is how to facilitate the students to experience a genuine transformation in their own life, and learning takes place in this triangulate relationship between God, the student and the teacher. Hence, the teacher's role becomes critical in spiritual and theological formation. And such an experience is fostered in a meaningful relationship; therefore, the teacher is called for this relationship-building work with his or her students. This illustrates the necessity of God's definite call upon the teacher and the student. With this vocational commitment and conviction, professional qualifications become meaningful. Here lies the unique role and challenge of a theological association such as APTA.

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<sup>15</sup> Barbara Houger, *A Key to Growing, Effective Bible Schools: The Teacher*, 6.