

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION
IN ASIA PACIFIC: A REFLECTION

Benjamin Sun

Introduction

The twentieth century Pentecostal movement was born on April 9, 1906 in a run down section of Los Angeles in the United States. There “fire” resembling what was recorded in Acts 2 came down from heaven.¹ From this humble beginning, the movement expanded to 500 million people by the end of the century. Thus, many church historians have called the twentieth century the “Pentecostal Century.”

Education has played a significant and yet struggling role in the Pentecostal movement. Many early Pentecostals felt that formal theological training was to be avoided at all costs since it would stifle the Spirit-filled life. The early leaders of the Assemblies of God (AG) U.S.A. rejected “intellectualism,” but saw the need for education to train Christian workers. Their desire for missionary work stemmed from the Great Commission (Matt 28:19, 20), which closely associated evangelism with education. So when the Assemblies of God established churches overseas, they also founded theological institutions.

Del Tarr, missionary and former president of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, describes Pentecostal education as a paradox: “On one hand it engages in some of the most rigorous education activities of any religious system, and yet on the other hand many Pentecostals are anti-intellectual.”²

¹ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, PA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), p. 45.

² Note Del Tarr’s response in a symposium, “Contemporary Pentecostal Education: A Symposium,” *The Pentecostal Minister* 9 (Summer 1989), pp. 6-13 (7).

Since the 1970s, this scene has changed. Upward mobility has affected the makeup of Pentecostal congregations, bringing an influx of middle-class Charismatics. They have demanded a more formally educated and trained clergy. Many Pentecostal educational institutions have since sought regional accreditation, some have even added graduate level training programs.

This article is a brief study of the past, present, and future of the Assemblies of God theological institutions in the Asia Pacific region. It has three parts. The first examines the pioneer years of these institutions (1920-1959), the second the years of consolidation and growth (1960-1999). The last part is focuses on the future. It asks how the various national churches and theological institutions can link arms, forming a strategic alliance for the future development of the Assemblies of God theological institutions in Asia Pacific.

1. The Pioneering Years (1920-1959)

The Assemblies of God, U.S.A., founded in 1914, had a strong commitment to establish indigenous churches in every country. From the beginning they believed the national worker was the key to the evangelization of every mission field and to the development of a strong self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating national church. That is why theological training has been, and continues to be, the heart of Assemblies of God foreign missions strategy. For years the Assemblies of God has led all evangelical missions agencies in the number of foreign theological institutions.

Early Pentecostals made evangelism their first priority, a task into which they put a great deal of effort. Despite their dread of education, they saw the training of workers as the key to evangelism. So, a growing interest in Bible institutes began in the United States. It soon carried over to the mission field.

The Assemblies of God Department of Foreign Missions had no formal policy or guidelines on starting foreign theological institutions in the early years. It was up to the missionary to determine what was suitable and right for the institution. The training institutions that the early missionaries established varied widely in program format and in the details of curriculum. It was up to the vision, ability, and experience of the founding missionary, as well as his or her perception of the specific needs of the local situation. The training in these institutes generally

included courses in biblical studies, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, prayer and evangelism.

1.1 Theological Institutions in China

Perhaps the earliest attempt by Pentecostal missionaries to found a foreign training institution in the Asia Pacific region was in north China in 1922. W. W. Simpson started this work.³ In the early years of this institution's existence, he wrote the following:

This four-months' term of theological institution has just closed. There were over forty students, from six provinces and Mongolia. About half had received the Spirit before coming, and now all but five have received. There has been very good progress on all lines; and nearly all will go into the Lord's work at once. There is abundant ground for the hope that the work all over North China will greatly be benefited by reason of these four months of Bible training.⁴

This school was called the North China Truth Bible Institute and located in Peking. It continued in operation until missionaries were evacuated from China. One pastor in China recently told me that the Pentecostal pastors who were trained in northern China in those days had dynamic spiritual lives. These pastors made a great impact upon the lives of many believers. Even today many northern Chinese Christians still faithfully rise up early in the morning to start their day with prayer.

The rapid expansion of missionary endeavors in different parts of China required additional workers. B. T. Bard mentioned the opening of a small local theological institution at the Ta Ch'ang mission station in Shansi, China.⁵ In south China, J. W. Ledbetter opened a theological institution for the purpose of instructing and growing native Christian young men in the word of God.⁶ Later, theological institutions were

³ "Missionary Department," *Pentecostal Evangel* (March 15, 1924), pp. 10-11 (10).

⁴ "Missionary Department," *Pentecostal Evangel* (March 15, 1924), p. 10.

⁵ "The Gospel in Foreign Lands," *Pentecostal Evangel* (July 18, 1936), pp. 8-9 (8).

⁶ "The Gospel in Foreign Lands," *Pentecostal Evangel* (August 17, 1935), pp. 8-9 (8).

established in Ningpo, China⁷ and Kunming, in southwest China.⁸ By 1948, a total of six theological institutions were operating in China.

1.2 Theological Institutions in the Asia Pacific Region

Political changes in the 1940s forced missionaries to begin to evacuate from China. As a result, mission efforts were redirected to other parts of Asia. From the mid-1940s through the 1950s, a total of twelve theological institutions were established in Indonesia (5), Philippines (3), Hong Kong (1), Australia (1), Korea (1), and Japan (1).

The Foreign Missions Department of the Assemblies of God, U.S.A conducted a survey of all its overseas theological institutions in May 1959. A surprising 80% of the institutions responded to the survey! Objective analysis and evaluation of field data gathered from this kind of a survey not only reveals trends and needs but provides a significant means to assess the effectiveness of the Assemblies of God theological institutions and the products they produced. Though the survey included all overseas theological institutions of the denomination, its findings provide a general picture of the theological institutions in Asia as well.⁹ According to the survey, approximately one half of the missionaries were associated with theological institutions and one half of the budget of the Missions Department was used directly to the ministry of theological institutions in the mission field.

The survey revealed that these overseas theological institutions were structured along three definite lines and formed three distinct groups. First, the more established institutions had a sufficient budget that permitted them to have a large full-time faculty, a staff sufficient for the needs of the institutions, good facilities, library materials for research, and entrance requirements approximate equivalent to high school or secondary school graduation. The second group was made up of

⁷ "The Gospel in Foreign Lands," *Pentecostal Evangel* (October 24, 1936), pp. 17-19 (18).

⁸ Cf. James Baker, "Ling Kuang Bible School Opens," *Pentecostal Evangel* (January 1, 1949), pp. 8-9 (8). Joshua C. Yang, "The Assemblies of God Missionary Effort in China" (a research paper, Assemblies of God Archives # 41611, Springfield, MO, April 3, 1985), p. 3.

⁹ Carl Malz, "Foreign Theological Institution Survey Report: A Report of the Theological Institution Program of the Foreign Missions Department of the Assemblies of God" (Assemblies of God Archives, #0882-221, Springfield, MO, 1959), pp. 1-14.

institutions that operated on a smaller budget with a higher percentage of part-time faculty members, many of whom were pastors. Small staffs, facilities, and libraries limited these institutions, nevertheless their graduates proved to be extremely effective in ministry. Most of the institutions in these two groups offered four, six, or eight months courses and a program which extended for a period of three or four years. The third group was comprised of the short-term theological institutions. Typically, they were conducted for short periods of time in villages or as part-time schools in local churches. They operated on very insufficient budgets and they provided training for the laity and people preparing to be pastors or evangelists.

The survey also provides information on the governance and finances of these theological institutions. Institutions in Asia had more nationals than missionaries serving on the board of directors. This encouraged ownership. Sixty percent of the institutions had no constitution. Most of them had adopted the statement of faith of the Assemblies of God, U.S.A. About three-fourths of their budget came from outside sources, while one-fourth was provided from sources on the field: from student fees, national churches, and various other sources.

With regard to academics, most theological institutions offered the basic Bible and theology curriculum, but the general studies offered varied from institution to institution. Twenty percent of them had correspondence programs, but less than half of the institutions gave credit for the work done through correspondence courses. Educational requirements for enrollment varied from institution to institution: 33% required only the ability to read and write, another 33% required third grade standard, 10% required high school graduation. Most institutions emphasized a definite call to the ministry. Only 12% of them used entrance examinations. Only one institution belonged to an accrediting association.

The survey also covered pedagogy. It reports the most common teaching method in use was lecturing. Faculty gave 75% of their classroom time to lecture and 20-30% to discussion or for student reports. Fifty percent of the institutions indicated that their teachers did not prepare syllabi for the students. Half of their courses had mimeographed notes available. About 25% of the institutions had faculty-training programs of one type or another. Almost all the reporting institutions had faculty meetings, some monthly, some weekly and others as the need arose. Approximately 50% of the institutions had no libraries, though much of the shortage may have been due to the very limited material available in the various vernacular languages. Most theological

institutions had practical ministry opportunities or assignments for their students. Approximately two-thirds of the institutions indicated that 80-100% of their graduates went into full-time ministry. Many of them went into pioneer works.

From the survey, the three most immediate needs stated by institution administrators: better-trained faculty, better teaching materials, and better facilities

1.3 Summary

The Assemblies of God Foreign Missions Department has from its beginning put a high priority on overseas theological institution. The objectives were clear: 1) to develop spiritual soul-winning churches; 2) to prepare full time as well as lay workers for evangelism and pastoral care; and 3) to prepare spiritual leaders in all spheres of ministries so that they will be able to carry on a fully developed, indigenous church program. These theological institutions were more concerned with making an impact on the vitality of the church and its mission than with biblical scholarship. Toward the end of this period, several distinct patterns of Bible institute structures began to emerge. With a clear vision and the strong support of the Foreign Missions Department leadership, Assemblies of God theological institutions in Asia Pacific were off to a good start from 1920 to 1959, even without formal, written guidelines.

2. The Years of Consolidation and Growth (1960-1999)

The Assemblies of God saw significant growth and change beginning in the 1960s, both in the U.S.A. and overseas. It grew in the number of churches, the total number of members, and the number of theological institutions training leaders. At the same time, the 1960s marks the point at which the A/G began to formalize its policies about theological education overseas.

2.1 Education Policies of the Overseas Assemblies of God Theological Institutions

The process of formalizing policies for AG theological institutions in foreign missions began in the 1960s. A number of articles and papers appeared at this time, which bear witness to the growing feeling that stronger direction and better guidelines were needed. One such was

written by Melvin Hodges, an Assemblies of God missiologist and educator. In 1959 he wrote

While we rejoice in the good results which we have seen...many of the pastors and workers produced by mission institutions have not turned out to be real soul winners nor have manifested true spiritual leadership.¹⁰

Hodges saw four gaps in the Assemblies of God training programs: 1) a gap between the intellectual development and the spiritual development of the workers; 2) a gap between knowledge and practical ministry; 3) too wide a gap between the clergy and the laity; and 4) a serious gap in the concept of training to fill vacancies and to evangelize the world and develop the church.¹¹

Based on the needs he saw, Hodges made several practical suggestions for the theological institutions. He felt there should be a balance between the spiritual development and the intellectual development of the prospective workers. In addition, training programs should be integrated with the national churches so that they would meet the needs of the churches better. He strongly recommended that Christian workers should be trained to the task, not away from it, i.e. "on the job" training was to be desired. Finally, he believed all training programs should be instruments for evangelization. They should be tailored to fit all levels of needs and aimed at the entire church; they should not just train the select few who would be devote themselves to full time ministry. Hodges believed that all believers should be trained to fulfill the ministry calling of their lives.¹²

Another helpful document is the "The Philosophy of Overseas Theological Education."¹³ Written in 1970, it provided clear guidelines for establishing training institutions. It points out that overseas leadership training should incorporate strong spiritual values. First and foremost, full place should be given to the moving of the Holy Spirit and the study of the Bible. Theological institutions were to have a vision to supply

¹⁰ Melvin L. Hodges, "Training the Worker" (a paper presented to the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association Executives Retreat, Winona Lake, IN, October 1959; Assemblies of God Archives, #1293-042, Springfield, MO), p. 1.

¹¹ Hodge, "Training the Worker," p. 2.

¹² Hodge, "Training the Worker," pp. 3-7.

¹³ Carl Malz, "The Philosophy of Overseas Theological Education" (Assemblies of God Archives, #1293-043, Springfield, MO, 1970), pp. 1-4.

indigenous leadership for expanding churches and to evangelize unreached fields. It asserts that flexible delivery systems were to be used to train a national worker in his or her own cultural setting.

These two documents provided helpful guidelines for Assemblies of God theological institutions in their early stages of growth. They provided a means for institutions to make certain that their training was distinctively Pentecostal and aligned with the philosophy of the Assemblies of God. Hodges had rightly pointed out the need to balance academic and spirituality, and the importance of integrating theory with practice. Theological educators were warned to guard themselves against the pitfalls of falling into what Walter Hollenweger would later call “theologizing to death,” or taking the faddish approach of adopting all the popular and successful corporate organizational models and strategies for ministry.¹⁴ They affirm that the purpose of establishing Assemblies of God theological institutions was to train Christian workers for evangelism and church planting. They also reveal that the primary focus of the training at that time was the study of the Bible and the work of the Holy Spirit.

2.2 Church Growth and the Theological Institutions

The Assemblies of God in the Asia Pacific region experienced phenomenal growth in the 1960s. It grew from 80 affiliated churches in the 1950s to 1,242 in the 1960s. Eight new theological institutions were established in the 1960s as well. The growth in the number of churches and the number of theological institutions for training leaders was connected. In fact, any organization’s growth is directly related to its personnel potential, as Noel Tichy says in his book, *The Leadership Engine*

Why do some companies succeed while others fail? The answer I have come up with is that—winning companies win because they have good leaders who nurture the development of other leaders at all levels of the organization.¹⁵

¹⁴ Cf. Walter J. Hollenweger, “Pentecostalism and Academic Theology from Confrontation to Cooperation,” *EPTA Bulletin* 11 (1992), pp. 42-47 (42). And Ian Jagelman, “Church Growth: Its Promise and Problems for Australian Pentecostalism,” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 1 (March 1998), pp. 27-40 (36).

¹⁵ Noel Tichy, *The Leadership Engine* (New York: Harper Business, 1997), pp. 3-4.

This is also true of Assemblies of God churches. Its theological institutions must supply enough Christian workers to meet the needs of its churches.

James Myung, in a paper presented at the Education Ministries Conference in Incheon, Korea, Nov. 1994, pointed out that theological education has greatly contributed to the growth of the churches in Korea. He suggested five positive influences: 1) theological institutions in Korea have trained sufficient Christian workers to meet the demands of the churches; 2) the indigenous principle was taught and emphasized at the training institutions; 3) influenced by the church growth movement in the States, church planting was taught as a means to grow more churches; 4) theological training was highly contextualized to the Korean cultural context; and 5) the training and mobilizing of the laity was a high priority of the institutions.¹⁶

The close relationship between church growth and theological training was not a unique experience in Korea. Panel members from Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines who were present at that same conference agreed that one of the contributing factors of rapid church growth in their countries was the effective training of church leaders.¹⁷

From 1970 to 1995 about 5758 new Assemblies of God churches were started in Asia Pacific. In the same period, 81 new Assemblies of God theological institutions were established in Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Vanuatu, Samoa, Australia, Taiwan, Solomon Island, Papua New Guinea, Tahiti, Marshall Islands, Korea, Cook Islands, Cambodia, Vietnam, Pohnpei, Tonga, Guam, and Kiribati.

2.3 Institutions, Organizations and Theological Institutions

While the number of Assemblies of God theological institutions in Asia Pacific grew in quantity from 1960 to 1999, individual institutions also sought to improve their quality. Beginning in the 1960s, two new institutions and three new organizations were founded to assist them in their quest for quality.

¹⁶ James Myung, "Church Growth and Theological Education in Korea," pp. 11-15.

¹⁷ APEO, "Asia Pacific Education Office 1994 Education Ministries Conference Report" (Laguna Hills, CA: APEO, September 23-26, 1994), p. 14.

2.3.1 FEAST (APTS)

The first institutional contribution was the establishment of the Far East Advanced School of Theology (FEAST) in 1964. FEAST, located in Manila, Philippines, was founded to serve the Assemblies of God in Asia and the Pacific. FEAST designed its curriculum to supplement the denomination's many three-year Bible institutes, located in various countries in the region. Students could now attend FEAST for a fourth year and complete the requirements for a bachelor's degree in Christian Education. The school also offered students a fifth year program that led to a Bachelor of Theology degree. In 1973 FEAST opened its extension education program, offering classes in various countries so that students could receive a bachelor's degree in Biblical Studies.

The opportunity for advanced training offered by FEAST greatly enhanced the theological institution ministry and the church leadership at that time. Since its foundation, FEAST has led the way of advanced theological education among the Assemblies of God theological institutions in Asia Pacific. Through the years, a number of institutes in the region have upgraded their programs to a four-year degree. In response, FEAST upgraded its degree offerings in 1978, adding the Master of Divinity degree program in 1982.

In 1985 FEAST changed its name to reflect its new mission, becoming Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS). That same year the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA) accredited its the Master of Divinity degree. APTS is now located in Baguio, Philippines. Through the years, it has led in providing advanced leadership training for the national churches, helped to strengthen institutional administrations and equipped Bible college teachers in the region. In recent years, APTS has established the Center for Asian Pentecostal Studies in order to promote Pentecostal scholarship. The Center sponsors the Annual Pentecostal Lectureship, publishes the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, the *Journal of Asian Mission*, and has started a Th. M. in Pentecostal Studies.¹⁸

2.3.2 ICI (Global University)

The second key factor that helped to consolidate the Assemblies of God theological institutions in Asia Pacific is the International Correspondence Institute (ICI) founded in 1967. The focus of ICI is on distance education. Evangelism was the first level of study offered by ICI. Four more levels were developed later: Christian Life (spiritual

¹⁸ See its website: <http://www.apt.edu>.

development), Christian Service (lay worker training), Christian Ministry (ministerial training), and college. In 1994, ICI started a Master of Arts program.

Since its beginning in 1967, more than 9.5 million students across the world have enrolled in ICI evangelism, Bible study, and degree programs. In 1993, ICI changed its name to ICI University, and in 2000 merged with Berean University to become Global University.

ICI has been an important and helpful tool to the emerging theological institutions in Asia Pacific in the following ways:

- 1) Faculty members have used ICI materials as resources for course preparation and teaching.
- 2) Theological institutions have used ICI courses to help students to make up their course deficiencies and to start a higher level of education or degree program.
- 3) ICI materials have been used for extension programs.
- 4) ICI materials have been a great educational resource with Pentecostal distinctive for both students and teachers. The materials are in user-friendly formats.
- 5) In training the students to use the ICI evangelism and Bible study materials, theological institutions have helped to prepare their graduates for local church ministries.
- 6) ICI has helped theological institutions to recruit prospective students.¹⁹

Despite of the overall usefulness of the ICI materials to the theological institutions, there have been several obstacles to overcome: 1) introducing ICI materials better and to more theological institutions, 2) teaching these institutions how to effectively use the ICI materials, 3) translating more ICI materials into the vernacular languages, and 4) using group study or study center methods to encourage student interaction and the completion of courses.

2.3.3 FEAGBS

The generally rising educational level of the people in Asia Pacific placed new demands on the theological institutions. In response to that felt need, Assemblies of God leaders took another step to consolidate the theological institutions in Asia Pacific. They appointed the first Far East Bible School Coordinator in 1966, then formed the Far East Bible

¹⁹ Ben Kaufman, "APEO ICI Report" (a paper presented at the Asia Pacific ICI Conference, Asia Pacific Education Office, Laguna Hills, CA, March 23-27, 1993), pp. 23-24.

Schools Advisory Committee (FEBSAC) in 1969.²⁰ These decisions came at the right time for AG theological institutions, as they were growing in numbers and looking for guidance in how to improve their quality.

The purpose of appointing the Bible Schools Coordinator and the FEBSAC for the theological institutions was:

- 1) To standardize the curricula.
- 2) To prepare teaching notes and text books in the vernaculars.
- 3) To prepare standard forms for admission, graduation, and record keeping.
- 4) To “integrate” all the Far East theological institutions into the advanced training program of FEAST.
- 5) To organize area educational workshops for theological institution administrators and faculty members in the region.
- 6) To secure funds to “upgrade” theological institution libraries.
- 7) To build a better relationship between the institutions and the local churches.
- 8) To encourage more nationals to get involve with the theological institution ministries.²¹

The First Far East Bible School Administrators Conference convened in Manila, Philippines on April 17-22, 1970. This provided an opportunity for delegates from various theological institutions to discuss topics such as administrative problems, curriculum development, financing, organizational structure, and educational philosophy. The results of their discussions were later distributed to all the institutions in the region.²² This and various other benefits (see below) created a new sense of cooperation among the theological institutions, preparing the way for acceptance of a more formal network in the future.

Another important ministry of FEBSAC was to gather information on the trends, issues and needs of the theological institutions in the region. In a 1970 report by William Farrand on the Far East theological institutions, some commendations and concerns of the institutions were listed. The commendations were: 1) a singular concentration on biblical and spiritual training, 2) trained national leadership for all levels of

²⁰ Maynard L. Ketcham, “An Open Letter From The Field Secretary,” *Bible Institute Coordinator* 1 (October 1969), pp. 1-3 (1).

²¹ Ketcham, “An Open Letter,” p. 1.

²² George Batson, “A Report on the First Far East Theological Institution Administrators’ Conference” (Assemblies of God, Department of Foreign Missions Archive, Springfield, MO, 1970).

ministry from all educational and economical backgrounds, and 3) an economy of operation that led to indigenization. The areas of concerns listed in the report were: 1) academic shallowness and neglect of national cultural studies, 2) lack of suitable facilities and study materials, 3) dependence on missionary personnel and foreign subsidy, 4) isolation and lack of coordination among theological institutions, and 5) poor long range planning due to a constantly changing staff.²³

Identification of strengths and liabilities of the institutions provided valuable information, enabling FEBSAC to plan future conferences, and to provide necessary resources to help address the felt needs region. It also provided valuable information for the institutions to evaluate their training programs and to set goals and make strategic plans for change. For example, a five-year core curriculum for the Far East Bible schools was developed in 1973. Due to personnel changes, the office of the Bible School Coordinator was vacant for several years. Eventually the ministry of the FEBSAC also came to a stop.

2.3.4 FEBSRO (APEO)

It was not until 1984 that a new Bible school coordinator for the Asian theological institutions was appointed. In July of that year the Far East Bible Schools Regional Office (FEBSRO) opened its offices in Manila, Philippines. Theological institutions in the region were about to enter a new phase of growth.

At the triennial Far East Conference in 1984, educators were polled on the kinds of help they felt they needed most from FEBSRO. They indicated the need for a wide-ranging education resource center for the region. As a result, FEBSRO assembled a network of resources to meet those needs. These materials would eventually include would help institutions for institutions wanting to their administration, academic programming, faculty and staff, library, student life and business finance. Special care was taken to design resource materials for the institutions that could be adapted according to the local institution needs, level of development, available personnel, and cultural setting. FEBSRO consultants also made on-site visits to each institution to track issues, trends and needs of the institutions.

FEBSRO also helped coordinate educational conferences, seminars and workshops. These provided opportunities for training, dialogue and periodic review of the regional institutions. One of the most significant

²³ William Farrand, "Far East Theological institutions" (Assemblies of God, Department of Foreign Missions Archive, Springfield, MO, 1970).

conferences was the East Asia Curriculum Conference held in Punta Baluate, Philippines in January 1986. There the 1973 core curriculum was updated to meet a wider spectrum of needs among the different rapidly growing theological institutions in Asia Pacific.²⁴ The 1986 core curriculum was slightly revised and renamed in 1992. In addition, six, 18-unit concentrations were developed in the fields of children and youth ministries, Christian counseling, Christian education, church music, missions and teaching.²⁵

In 1991 FEBSRO relocated to Laguna Hills, California, USA and changed its name to Asia Pacific Bible Schools Regional Office (APBSRO). One year later, in response to a request from the field, APBSRO expanded its services by establishing the Asia Pacific Education Office (APEO). APEO was designed to serve all types of educational ministries in Asia Pacific: the theological institutions, ICI and the local churches. APEO functions as a network of coordination, consultation, and resource center for these ministries.²⁶

FEBSAC and FEBSRO provided significant assistance to developing theological institutions in Asia Pacific at a critical time. The Assemblies of God theological institutions in Asia Pacific grew from 3 three-year theological institutions in the 1960s to the present total of 95. These educational institutions offer study programs ranging from diploma to graduate level. A number of them now have accreditation from Asia Pacific Theological Association (APTA), Asia Theological Association (ATA), and the Association For Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA).

2.3.5 APTA

In April 1987, representatives from the region's sixteen Assemblies of God four-year Bible colleges met in Baguio City, Philippines. The delegates proposed the creation of an Assemblies of God theological association to serve the Bible colleges in the region. The purpose was to encourage dialogue, cooperation, and optional accreditation services to

²⁴ Margaret J. McComber, "Far East Bible Institutions Regional Office: The Evolution of an Instructional Service" (Laguna Hills, CA: Asia Pacific Education Office, July 1987), pp. 4-7.

²⁵ For further information, refer to the *Asia Pacific Education Office Directors' Manual* (Laguna Hills, CA: Asia Pacific Education Office, 1990).

²⁶ Dan Anglin, "APBSRO Service Expanded," *Exchange* (Laguna Hills, CA: Asia Pacific Education Office, November 1992), p. 1.

the institutions. The APEO (then APBSRO) staff was asked to coordinate a committee to draft the basic documents for the proposed Association.

Before the charter membership of the Association closed on June 30, 1989, about sixty of the institutions had indicated their interest in APTA. They became the APTA charter members. The formal inauguration of APTA took place during the APTA first general assembly in Port Dickson, Malaysia on September 10-13, 1990. Today APTA provides a wide range of services to help theological institutions in Asia Pacific: APTA membership, theological institution accreditation, teacher certification, the honor society, and theological commission.²⁷

Together, APTA and APEO completed the support system for the Assemblies of God theological institutions in Asia Pacific. As an educational association, APTA set standards and criteria for the development and accreditation of ministerial training programs. These standards provide a means for the institutions to ensure that their education is focused on the philosophy and Pentecostal distinctives of the Assemblies of God. As a resource and service agent, the APEO Bible Schools Division assists theological institutions in providing educational resources to the institutions, networking the institutions to maximize their cooperative efforts, and providing consultation and training to the institutions.

2.4 Summary

The creative vision and the cooperative efforts of Assemblies of God leaders helped bring maturity and growth to the theological institutions in Asia Pacific from 1960 to 1999. Two educational institutions provided additional programs: FEAST offered graduate theological education, ICI offered distance education. Three new coordinating organizations, FEAGB, APEO and APTA, offered a network for dialogue, counsel, resources, accreditation and cooperation, and for member institutions.

The primary purpose of the AG theological institutions has been to preparing Christian workers to meet the various needs of the church. It is important that these institutions not lose sight of this purpose in their pursuit of academic excellence. Ongoing assessment of their graduates' effectiveness of the ministry will ensure that this purpose remains central.

²⁷ For more information on APTA, visit its website at <http://www.apta-institutions.org>.

3. The Years of Challenge and Opportunities Ahead (2000 and Beyond)

The Assemblies of God theological institutions in Asia Pacific have experienced healthy growth over the past sixty years. As we step into a new millennium, we must ask where we are headed. Are we prepared for the change that is taking place in our world? How can we better equip leaders to meet the challenge in Asia Pacific?

3.1 The Rapid Change

The world today is very different from that of only five years ago. The break-through in computers and telecommunications has ushered in the information age. Humanity has experienced more change in the past twenty years than the previous two millennia. The rate of change is like to double within just a few years. Some claim that we now have only 3% of the information that will be available to us by 2010.

What kinds of impact will this new cyberworld have on theological institutions? The “electronic superhighway” has led to the globalization of human activities—both personal and institutional, allowing information to pass almost as if national boundaries do not exist. Computers, multimedia, virtual reality, and other new teaching tools have already greatly enhanced education. Global educational institutions, on-line courses, interactive learning, and incredible information resources are making a great impact on education. It seems likely this impact will increase in the future.

If the church is to meet the challenge of the twenty-first century, it must position itself now for those future changes. So where is the church heading? Where should it be headed?

3.2 A Strategic Alliance: Theological Institutions and the Churches

In the past, outstanding individuals have been seen as the source of significant success in our world. But that is changing. The trend today focuses not only on extraordinary individuals, but also on the extraordinary combinations of individuals! As the tasks become increasingly complex, collaboration becomes a necessity, not a luxury. Collaboration simply means doing things together. It means to create and to discover something new while thinking and working together.²⁸ This

²⁸ Robert Hargrove, *Mastering the Art of Creative Collaboration* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), p. 3.

applies to theological institutions and churches in the Asia Pacific region as they [we] work together to equip a new generation of Christian leaders. We should be partners together in recruiting, training and sending workers to lead the church and to preach the gospel to all nations (Mark 16:15).²⁹

David Barrett and James Reapsome have identified lack of cooperation and collaboration among Christian organizations as the major hindrance to world evangelization.³⁰ What are the possible benefits of working together in training leaders? Hargrove lists the following

- 1) Working together achieves far better than working alone. It is a proven fact that a flock of geese flying together in a V formation has the lifting power to fly twice the distance of a single geese flying alone.
- 2) Thinking and working with others who see and respond differently will encourage innovation. It will also reduce the cost of production and the duplication of efforts.
- 3) Participating in a collaborative environment will result in new shared understandings, and in creating something that never existed before. It provides broad and creative ways to develop projects and resources.
- 4) Participating reinforces support, encouragement, communication, and cooperation.
- 5) Becoming part of a committed network makes learning and questions more important than knowing and certainty.³¹

Just as each believer is uniquely gifted (1 Cor 12), so are the church and the theological institution. They should be kingdom partners in accomplishing Christ's mission in this world. Such partnership, says Sigman, "must be marked by commitments made to one another out of a deep love and reverence for God and a desire to see His Kingdom advanced."³²

This writer feels strongly that theological institutions and churches must form a strategic alliance to effectively develop future leaders. The following are some of the ways he would suggest for productive collaboration.

²⁹ Michael W. Sigman. "Church and Seminary: Kingdom Partners for the New Millennium," *Evangelical Journal* 17 (Fall 1999), pp. 41-48 (41).

³⁰ David Barrett and James Reapsome, *700 Plans to Evangelize the World* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1988), pp. 49-50.

³¹ Hargrove, *Mastering the Art of Creative Collaboration*, p. 1.

³² Sigman, "Church and Seminary," p. 43.

3.2.1 Collaborating in Designing New Ministry Models

The church and theological institution should be partners in exploring new ministry models. The church and theological institution can inform one another of the impact of current cultural trends, issues and needs. Open channels of communications between the two are important. This may take place in an informal discussion session or a within a formal structure such as appointing a pastor's advisory committee to the institution.

For instance, rapid church growth is taking place among Pentecostal churches in China, Philippines, Australia and so on. How can other churches learn from them? It requires field studies and research, but such tasks are often beyond the effort of a single church or institution. Mutual collaboration could result in effective, new paradigms of ministry.

Currently, there are several Assemblies of God research centers in Asia Pacific.³³ These centers can provide opportunities for pastors, faculty and theological to work together to study, discuss, and publish trends in the region. They can also examine current models of ministry such as the apostolic church model, the purpose driven church model, the seeker driven church model, the cell church model, the life giving church model, the natural church development and so on.

James White suggests that we need to rethink the foundational questions like: What is the purpose and mission of the church? Who are we trying to reach? How will we accomplish the mission God has given to us?³⁴ A theological institution could work to provide churches and parachurch organizations with sound diagnostic tools to help answer these questions. A church might find innovative approaches to ministry in evangelism, the discipleship, the worship, the structure and the community of the church.

3.2.2 Developing New Delivery Systems for Ministerial Training

Today many in older, second-career people are responding to the call of God, They often cannot relocate their families to a residential campus. This presents a new challenge for theological institutions, one that could be met by the use of modern technology. Many theological institutions

³³ For instance, the Pacific Rim Center at Northwest College, Kirkland, WA; Asia Pacific Research Center at APTS, Philippines; the South East Asia Resource Center in Thailand; and the APTA Theological Commission, Manila.

³⁴ James Emery White, *Rethinking the Church: A Challenge to Creative Redesign in an Age of Transition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), p. 10.

are becoming more creative and flexible with their degree programs and delivery systems.

Fuller Theological Seminary, Global University and Regent University are three U.S. examples of institutions already using this kind of innovation. Fuller Theological Seminary, California, USA offers the Individualized Distance Learning (IDL) program.³⁵ It incorporates the use of media-assisted courses. Each course is delivered to the student complete with textbooks, syllabus, audio lecture tapes, a videotaped introduction, and a course study guide with instructions for submission of assignments for evaluation and grading. The seminary also offers fully accredited, master's level courses taught by regular Fuller faculty through the Fuller Online (FOL).³⁶

Global University (Assemblies of God, U.S.A.)³⁷ is another institution that offers theological training on-line. Students can choose from three methods of study to suit their personal style:

- 1) Virtual Study Center: It offers e-mail access to facilitator and classmates; weekly interactive session via the internet with facilitator and classmate; immediate feedback from facilitator.
- 2) Virtual Church Study Center: It includes all the benefits of the Virtual Study Center, plus weekly class in a church oversee by an assigned mentor.
- 3) Independent study: Students have e-mail access to Global University and other students, but are free to set their own pace of study independent of any set weekly session.

Regent College, Vancouver, Canada is yet another institution with creative and flexible training programs.³⁸ The Regent College offers a variety of learning opportunities through its Educational Initiatives:

- 1) Audio for individual distance education and video for theological education in community.
- 2) Conferences and evening and weekend classes on-campus for vocational ministers and other professionals.
- 3) The Saturday seminar, a full week-end program hosted in a local community. It seeks to engage learning communities in theological studies.

³⁵ www.fuller.edu.

³⁶ www.fuller.edu.

³⁷ www.berean.edu.

³⁸ www.regent-college.edu.

- 4) Customized short-term programs for vocational ministers and other professionals who desire an opportunity to study, reflect and write at Regent College. Students gain access to resident faculty, classes, libraries and community life.

These diverse opportunities make continuous theological education more accessible to Christians, both laity and clergy.

Assemblies of God theological institutions have been historically effective in employing different creative methods of training: the theological institutions, the apprentice-type training, training by correspondence, and mobile leadership training.³⁹ Will Assemblies of God theological institutions in the Asia Pacific region be able to incorporate audio, video and the internet into theological training? The key factors to consider in this venture are the cost, people with the skills to design and run the program, and access to the internet.

None of these should prove a significant obstacle. Electronic training programs can be expensive, but so can residence institutions, especially if one considers both capital and operating expenditures. In addition, people trained in communication technology are available in local churches. Finally, Asia is rapidly moving to implement information technology. By 2005, it is predicted that Asia will have nearly a quarter of the world's internet users. For instance, computers are now outselling television sets in Japan. China alone is expected to have thirty-six million people on-line in the next five years.⁴⁰

The university of tomorrow will not be contained within campus walls. Asian students will receive their degrees from U.S. colleges and universities without leaving their countries. Theological institutions need to keep pace with their secular cousins. The Assembly of God Bible College in Hong Kong is already in the initial stage of working with other Assemblies of God Bible colleges in Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia. These schools offer theological training in the Chinese language. Our goal is to put courses on-line, allowing worldwide access to the courses to millions of Chinese.

Although distance education will not replace residence campus, more and more theological learning opportunities have moved from

³⁹ Cf. Benjamin Sun, "The Holy Spirit: The Missing Key in the Implementation of the Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers," in *Pentecostalism in Contest: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*, eds. W. Ma and R. Menzies, JPTSUP 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 173-94 (191-93).

⁴⁰ Walter P. Wilson, *The Internet Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), p. xii.

being delivered at a place to being placeless. To ensure success, institutions must make sure that their distance education programs are aligned with their mission statement. They must also systematically integrate their distance education with other activities on the residential campus. Global University, for example, offers online access to chapel, prayer and study partners, mail conferences and discussion groups, and library resources.

3.2.3 *Leading Pentecostal Renewal and Revival*

Spiritual formation and renewal should be a vital component of the theological training, perhaps even more so in the light of the increasing stress of the modern world. Churches can play a significant role in the initial stage of character formation in the lives of prospective students. Under the guidance of mature church members, prospective students can develop basic Christian disciplines. Later, they will be able to start their theological training having already established a solid spiritual foundation.

Theological institutions can help to further student spiritual growth in a number of ways: 1) developing courses on Christian spirituality; 2) creating a spiritual life program to enrich the lives of the students; 3) encouraging faculty to do research in the area of Christian or Pentecostal spirituality; 4) training faith renewal teams among faculty and pastors; and 5) sponsoring special seminars to address issues in spirituality. These efforts to encourage personal spiritual development can pave the way for corporate revival. Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, U.S.A. played a significant role in giving birth to the modern day Pentecostal revival. In the same way, may today's AG theological institutions contribute to a fresh new wave of revival in the Asia Pacific region.

What will it take to see the Pentecostal movement continue to make an impact in the new millennium? Kennon Callahan says, "Power for the future is found in claiming our strengths...."⁴¹

So what are our strengths as Pentecostals? They include a priority on evangelism and missions, an unquestioned conservative Evangelical theology, openness to the person and work of the Holy Spirit, fervent prayer, dynamic worship and success in equipping and mobilizing the laity.⁴²

⁴¹ Kennon L. Callahan, *Twelve Keys to an Effective Church* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1983), p. xvi.

⁴² Cf. C. P. Wagner, "America's Pentecostals: See How They Grow," *Christianity Today* 31 (October 16, 1987), pp. 28-29 and William W. Menzies,

We also need to acquire new strengths, if we are to be on the cutting edge. We need innovative models to train a new generation of leaders, dynamic structures that will foster relationships and empower people and new patterns of congregational life that will enrich and transform the lives of the believers. We need to develop globally minded, technologically savvy, and culturally sensitive evangelism and missions programs.

As Pentecostals are gaining acceptance among Evangelicals, there is also a renewed interest in the gifts and works of the Holy Spirit in the larger church world. As a result, Pentecostals are encountering new theological challenges. We must meet these challenges with a response that is both clearly biblical and intellectually convincing. We are encouraged to see a new breed of Asian Pentecostal scholars rising to the challenge. They need more support and encouragement from the denomination's leadership. They are the key to articulating our faith in a persuasive and engaging manner.

3.2.4 Reaffirming a Passion for Evangelism and Mission

Pentecostal pioneers expected Christ's imminent return. That expectation sparked an urgent concern for the unreached people among the early in the twentieth century. Some early examples of pioneer Pentecostal missionaries are W. W. Simpson, Grace Agar, Allan Swift, and Victor Plymire, just to name a few.

From its first general council, evangelism and missions have been the central passions of the Assemblies of God. Beginning with a band of 32 in 1914, its mission force has grown to 2000. Consequently, its Foreign Missions Department has become one of the foremost missions programs in the world today.

There are a number of reasons for its success:

- 1) It has been blessed with astute leadership. William Menzies, referring to comments made by Evangelical observers, says,

The ability to coordinate into a team the energies of multitudes of aggressive, pioneering spirits, each charged with his own special sense of God-given mission, is a circumstance demanding the most skillful administration.⁴³

"Lessons From the Past: What Our History Teaches Us," *Enrichment* 4 (Fall 1999), pp. 84-91 (91).

⁴³ William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), pp. 243, 254.

- 2) It has clear and biblical missions strategy. The cutting edge of the Assemblies of God missions is evangelism, discipleship, the training of nationals and the planting of indigenous churches.
- 3) Its emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit. Assemblies of God missions is more than rational strategies, adequate resources, and the proper techniques. Spirit-imparted zeal and power are the motivating force behind AG missions.
- 4) Its missionaries have a unique self-image. Everett A. Wilson says Assemblies of God missionaries were effective not only because of their qualifications and preparation. They were effective primarily because they see themselves as “God’s representatives, the right man or woman in the right place at the right time.”⁴⁴

Stephen Hoke has identified several global contextual issues which have impacted the way we do missions today: 1) the continuing rapid urbanization, 2) the increasing religious pluralism, 3) the shift in the dominance from western missionaries to the coexistence and cooperation between missionaries from the West and the two-thirds world, 4) the changing role of western missionaries to become behind-the-scenes trainers, coaches, encouragers, and support personnel, 5) a change in missiology: to be more global in perspective, to integrate evangelism and social concern, to dialogue with other religions, and the emergence of a two-thirds world missiology, and 6) a changing strategy of mission: a shift from harvest field to the hard fields of the 10/40 window.⁴⁵

Therefore Asia Pacific AG theological institutions need to add new training programs and curricula for these urban and cross-cultural missions. Here are a few suggestions:

- 1) Structure urban and cross-cultural mission courses into the curriculum.
- 2) Help to research and coordinate information on cities and unreached people groups.
- 3) Design and develop creative programs to train workers for urban and cross-cultural missions.
- 4) Mobilize intercessors to pray and mission teams to work with local churches to reach cities and unreached people groups.

⁴⁴ Everett A. Wilson, *Strategy of the Spirit: J. Philip Hogan and the Growth of the Assemblies of God Worldwide, 1960-1990* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997), p. 66.

⁴⁵ Stephen T. Hoke, “Paradigm shifts and Trends in Missions Training—A Call to Servant—Teaching, a Ministry of Humility,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 23 (October 1999), pp. 329-46 (330-34).

- 5) Explore ways to work with Christian relief and development agencies to integrate evangelism and missions with social concerns.
- 6) Utilize modern technology to reach the entire world for Christ.
- 7) Plan special workshops to address issues relevant to local situations in the cities.

3.2.5 *Training a New Generation of Christian Leaders*

How do we characterize the culture in which the church exists today? Gregory Ogden, speaking from within a society with a Judeo-Christian background, observed that many people have lost the memory of Christian, the church has been moved from the center of influence to the fringe, many have discarded traditional moral convictions and lifestyles, and a postmodern view has emerged.⁴⁶ The cultural changes may be different in the Asia Pacific region, but how have these changes impacted the role of the church and its ministers? What kind of Christian leaders do we need for our churches in the new millennium?

First and foremost, we need leaders with servant hearts, who will use Jesus as their model for leadership. God gave the church leaders (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers) for the equipping of the saints for ministry and for edifying the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-12). So, Leaders of the future must be they are equippers and reproducers; they must draw upon people with different gifts, encouraging interaction and challenging them to come up with unique and creative ideas. And last but not least, they are to be men and women full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

To respond to this challenge, the APEO has designed a Leadership Enhancement and Development (L.E.A.D.) workshop. Its goal is to assist theological institution administrators and faculty in linking churches to developing future leaders. The L.E.A.D. workshop helps attendees to define goals and objectives for their specific institution needs. It provides tools for each institution to do strategic planning (track one) or human resource development (track two). Each track has a three-day workshop.⁴⁷

Theological institution administrators and faculty members must have a clearer vision of the kind of leaders they want to. Leadership

⁴⁶ Gregory J. Ogden, "Pastoring between the Paradigms," *Fuller Focus* (Fall 1999), pp. 6-7.

⁴⁷ For further information on the L.E.A.D. Workshop, contact the APEO Bible Schools Divisions at 23232 Peralta Dr. Suite 212, Laguna Hills, CA. 92653, U.S.A. Fax: (949) 472-2022.

courses should be built into the curriculum. Instructors can help the students learn how to lead by using more case studies theological reflection and critical thinking, by mentoring students, by assigning them to examine the lives of great leaders of the past or to interview the great leaders of today. Students must be exposed to leadership principles while they are studying. Students require guidance to develop a vision and strategies, a complete ministry philosophy that integrates doctrine with effective praxis. Finally, churches, theological institutions and parachurch organizations can join to establish leadership research or resource centers to encourage pastors, faculty and students to study more on the subject of leadership.

Conclusion

Theological training is at a crossroads and the institutions that provide it must be ready for change. They must collaborate with churches to create a joint vision of theological education for the future. That collaboration must continue if the vision is to be implemented successfully. Theological institutions should be more relevant to the needs of the church and churches more responsible to the institutions. By serving each other, they will strengthen each other, emerging into the new millennium with new vigor.

May God give us vision to see, faith to believe, and courage to act in this momentous time!