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# The Discernment of the Church

Joshua Cho



President's Word

In the previous issue on the topic "Edification: How to Discern It," I pointed out that the method of discernment is not a process of problem-solving used in parliamentary models, but a truth-seeking process. It is an action of *phronesis*. This discernment process includes "the truth that we feel," "to think about the truth we have together," "the truth that we have received," and "the truth we have experienced in prayer." In summary, discernment is to seek a more comprehensive and abundant truth: a truth that leads people to freedom. This kind of truth can bring about the transformation of a person's heart and make synergy and co-walking possible in people's lives.

## **The Church Has Succeeded the Faith of the Prophets**

In the present issue, I seek to consider the discernment of the church. First, we must return to Old Testament times to examine the faith of the prophet that the church has succeeded. The prophets of Old Testament times strove to understand the will of God and put it into practice. Their actions were specific, symbolic, and relational. Their words

included reproach, judgment, call, and encouragement. For example, the prophet Ezekiel reprimanded the false prophets of that time, "because they lead my people astray, saying, 'peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash." (Ezek 13:10) Ezekiel pointed out that such kinds of lies would bring about the judgment of God: "My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will not belong to the council of my people..." (Ezek 13:9)

Isaiah declared that Yahweh would punish Israel by rendering His people to be defeated by a great power. Isaiah tells us, "Who has stirred up one from the east, calling him in righteousness to his service? He hands nations over to him and subdues kings



before him. He turns them to dust with his sword, to windblown chaff with his bow.” (Isa 41:2) However, Isaiah also pointed out that God had the power to come up with another possibility. That is to bring about new things in this world. God has the power to defeat Babylon and liberate Israel. Isaiah conveyed to them the declaration of God in the days of exile, “I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you ... For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians... See, I am doing a new thing...” (Isa 43:11-19) The distinctiveness of interpreting history through Old Testament prophets consists in seeing that God is at work in human events, and that the history of Israel is an interaction between God’s will and human intentions.

How did the prophet discern God’s will? How did they see God working in human events? Prophets could discern the movement of political powers and the establishment of military powers. They criticized corruption, oppression, and greediness in society. Their observations did not come from superb intelligence but from their spiritual sensitivity. They were people co-walking with God. Not only did God speak to their minds but also to their hearts and souls, prompting them to take action—a result of submission to God to speak out the word of God.

### **The Church Has Succeeded the Faith of the Apostles**

The church has also succeeded the faith of the apostles. The church in the apostolic age had seen the intervention and action of God in human history and knew that they lived in an age promised by the prophets’ prophecy. They saw that God had intended to act in the history of the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and saw that the Christ event was the focal point of all past, present, and future events. This is the hallmark of the boundary between the old age and the new. Acts 2 points this out, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy ... And everyone who calls on the name

of the Lord will be saved.’ Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death ... God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.” (Acts 2:16-32)

The church of the apostolic age saw this: God through Jesus Christ began a new age and they could enter into the new age through Christ. If the heart of man refuses to submit to God and remains self-centered, then the old age will continue. But when a person’s life is transformed from disobedience into obedience and from being self-centered into Christ-centered, a new age will begin. As man is willing to forsake sin and lead a life of being a faithful disciple, he will then find himself being connected to Christ and form a solidarity community with other followers of Christ to announce that the new age has come. They announced the salvation of Christ and called on all people to repent and be baptized into a faith community. This ever-growing community believed that the new age had come and Christ would return with power and glory. However, in the meantime they knew that the old age had not disappeared, the new age had not yet come and they were living in an eschatological age when God would implement His intention and action through their lives.

### **The Church Will Continue to Discern God’s Action and Will**

Today’s churches will have to succeed the experience of the prophets and apostles and continue to discern the action and will of God.

#### **1. Discern Society’s Reality: Announce the Peace Promised by God**

Like the prophets, today’s churches need to discern the reality of contemporary society and the agony and wounds of the human world. The dark reality is that the poor have nothing to eat, nowhere to live, and their souls are weak and weary. Their deep, hidden wounds

have not received any attention, and they do not feel like they are part of society. Those who are wounded cover up their inner anger, fear, and alienation. Yet, the hidden wounds grow deeper and deeper, the areas affected grow wider and wider, even extending to the younger generation. These wounded souls give birth to even greater indifference and cynicism, inciting more calls for revenge and hostility. In discerning the social situation, the church seeks to see how some of the economic policies help greedy syndicates, to see the selfish nature and evil tendencies of some economic systems (be they capitalist or socialist), and to point out that the way those who unintentionally or intentionally join the economic system have become its perpetrators and victims.

Yet, as the prophets testified to the new things of Yahweh, the churches today also announce the new things that God has done. One of the new things is that God's love will never part from His people and His covenant of peace will not be removed. "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back ... Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed." (Isa 54:7-10) "I will make a covenant of peace with them ... I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hands of those who enslaved them ... they will know that I, the Lord their God, am with them...." (Ezek 34:25-30) Like the prophets, our churches should declare the peace that God has promised and put peace into practice. This is the work of the church. When the church earnestly recounts the real situation of man and actualizes the promise of God, then the peace of God will come to men, so that barriers will be demolished, orphans adopted, and slaves released. In so doing, the land can be reformed, the river water can be purified, and nature can be protected.

## **2. Being a Reconciling Community in a Broken, Disintegrating World**

That the church can discern the will of God in this generation of confusion does not mean that the church has superb knowledge and status; we do not think that possessing the wisdom or strategies of the human world

will enable us to act in the name of the Lord. In a time of injustice, by following the example of Jesus' disciples, we trust that the gospel of peace comes from God and only the gospel of peace can demolish the barriers of the human world. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ... His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit." (Eph 2:13-18) The church declares that Jesus came to the world to demolish the walls that separate us and God, and us from each other, so that humankind can have access to true peace.

For the apostle Paul, the gospel is the way that God has taken the initiative to put an end to hostilities. Therefore, "reconciliation" means through the love of Jesus Christ, God turns enemies into friends in order to make peace. The presupposition of this kind of discernment is this: the grace of God brings about reconciliation, justice, and peace, and so the conclusion is this: reconciliation is the way God makes friends with humankind, and similarly, it is also the way we make friends with one another (referring to an individual or a community). If the church acts as a community of reconciliation in this broken and fragmented world, then the church will testify to the fact that God's reconciliation work throughout history continues to extend through Christ.

## **Discernment Is the Theological Task of the Church: Reflection and Action**

Just as the apostles devoted themselves to Jesus' reconciliation, the church also needs to respond to God's peace-making gospel by devoting herself to submitting to God's will and action. Obedience is discipleship and it means to follow Christ throughout one's life. This implies forsaking one's old self, following Christ and re-learning a new way of life. From this we can see that the real test of

discipleship is not faith but following, that is the renewal of acting on our faith. Regeneration, holiness, and love are not intellectual beliefs or subjective experiences, but are the renewal of life. The gospel of reconciliation enables everyone who takes up the cross to advance toward more abundant grace from God.

The reconciliation action of God is eschatological. As the church participates in God's action, the existence of the church will also be eschatological. We are standing on a newly developed place and in that position we experience God's action so that all will be renewed. Right here, we can see the new age conquer the old.

In this way, the mission of discernment includes both reflections that contain criticism and also actions that contain purpose (arising from our obedient response to God) while the two are mutually interactive. In the face of the hostility, oppression, strife, and isolation of today's society, the church needs to keep making rational, critical reflections, to keep understanding the revelation of God's word to us today and looking carefully at how God is acting today and how we can get involved in God's action. Therefore, on the one hand, the church should have the courage to point out contemporary social problems, while on the other hand, the church should faithfully read the Bible and look carefully at the eternal will of God, following the inspiration and direction of the Bible to make decisions and take action. The kingdom of God is an eschatological reality that helps us understand and participate in the past, present, and future while the power of the Holy Spirit enables us to learn from the past and prepare for the present and the future.

Discernment is like a continuum that cannot be divided. One end of it is critical reflection while the other end is action with a purpose, that is submitting to God's will and getting involved in God's action. The relationship between obedience to God and taking action and making reflections are inter-connecting and inseparable. To understand the will of God is to obey His will. Our true knowledge of God comes not from our rational operation but from God's self-revelation (the self-revelation of God to those He wants to reveal) and our efforts to follow

God. The true knowledge of God's actions in the world at this present moment cannot be gained by on-lookers or objective analysts, but from the reception and discernment of those who understand the purpose of God, respond obediently to God's will, and participate in His action. The will of God must be received in humility and faith.

For this reason, the church must not take the will of God as "it-truth." The will of God is not the kind of truth that is discussed, analyzed, and objectified. Such a kind of "it-truth" is reviewed by us, and it does not review us. The will of God is "thou-truth" in which the everlasting Lord will judge us, guide us, and care for us at an unexpected place and time.

Overall, discernment is the theological task of the church. The reflection and action of discernment cannot be separated. A church busy with social action does not always have the time to reflect upon the church's mission in this generation and is unable to see from history God's action and join His action. Only when we see God's present purpose and action can the church accomplish her ministry of discernment. Only when the church is situated between the old age and the new, can it accomplish the task of discernment and discern that an abundant life is not built on our good work but is a God-given gift and the fruit of our response to God and involvement in His action.

# Learning about Discernment



“Discernment” is the learning objective of this school year. It is our hope that our teachers’ guidance and sharing can provide more opportunities for our students to think about and experience how to “discern” as they receive theological training in the seminary. The faculty team is pleased to work together to nurture our students to become pastors who know how to discern. In the midst of this generation of confusion and chaos, it is necessary for pastors to have both theological wisdom and the power to discern God’s will so that they can follow the Lord closely all their lives and be His faithful servants.

In this issue of the *HKBTS’s Newsletter*, three articles from our teachers are included which seek to explore “discernment” from different angles. The teachers are Dr. Andres Tang, Dr. Jonathan Lo, and Rev. Brian Lam who have either preached on this subject in chapel or presented a sharing on the Spiritual Formation Day respectively. We thank them for their hard work creating the manuscript, making amendments, and revising in order to share their thoughts with our readers here.

## Discernment, Beginning with “Who Jesus Really Is”

### **Christian Discernment Begins with Discerning “Who Jesus Is”**

While living in the world, we cannot help receiving thousands of messages everyday, telling us how to behave and how to live. However, in the midst of so many voices, how should we practice discernment? As Christians, where should the primary discernment begin?

Christians, as the name suggests, are disciples who follow Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, as disciples

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and followers of Christ, do we know who Jesus Christ really is? This is a matter of life and death. Therefore, discernment must begin with “who Jesus Christ really is.” But, when we discern “who

Jesus Christ really is," perhaps we will arrive at a similar question: where do we begin? To put it simply, we must ultimately go back to the Bible, beginning with the four Gospels that testify to Jesus Christ as we go on a journey of discernment. Let us embark on a journey together by reading a passage from the Gospel of Luke to learn to discern "who Jesus really is."

### **Discerning the Holistic Coherence of Three Passages**

In the Gospel of Luke, after giving an account of Jesus' baptism (3:21-22) and his victory over Satan's temptation (4:1-13), it gives an account of Jesus who began his public ministry (4:14-21). When reading the three passages, generally it is agreeable for us to read and interpret these three events that took place under different scenarios independently. We can make an in-depth study of the meaning of Jesus' baptism account. For example, we may say that it was the scene when Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit by God the Father. We can make an in-depth study of the meaning of the account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. For example, we may say that it was a fight when Jesus submitted only to the word of God and not that of Satan. We can make an in-depth study of Jesus' first sermon preaching, saying that it declared the good news: the ultimate promise made by the prophet Isaiah in those days which is now being fulfilled as "the new exodus."

Admittedly, these respective interpretations are necessary and cannot be ignored. Yet, we still need to link these three passages or events together to ponder and discern the meaning implied. We do so because the gospel of Luke is trying to tell us a story about Jesus and not some piecemeal and unrelated information about Jesus. We must discern the holistic coherence of the story itself, mastering both the meaning of the story's different passages respectively and also an integrated understanding of all the passages of the story.

### **Is Jesus Only the Son of Joseph?**

In our sermon preaching, whenever we talk about Jesus' public ministry and his first sermon, we always focus on Luke 4:14-21. Of course, to do so is necessary. If we do not read this passage carefully, it is not possible for



us to understand why Jesus came into the world, what Jesus' relationship with the Israelites was, or from an eschatological point of view, why Jesus came to be with us. To answer these questions, we need to interpret this passage of Luke carefully: Jesus entered into the synagogue on the day of Sabbath, turned open the Septuagint to the chapter of Isaiah, read out the related text (Isaiah 61:1-2, 58:6) and preached. However, who is Jesus? Based on what authority did he declare, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Lk 4:21) Jesus declared that the former prophecy of the prophet Isaiah had already been fulfilled. But did things happen that way? Was Jesus then surrounded by an outburst of clapping as all the people offered praise and thanksgiving to Jesus before they dispersed?

If we take an in-depth reading still further, we will come to two questions: Who is Jesus? Was he really supported by the masses? To this question we must clearly discern how it was. In fact, after Jesus' declaration that today the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah is fulfilled, although all spoke well of him and were amazed at his gracious, powerful words, what naturally followed was many questions: "Isn't this Joseph's son?" (4:22) This was a negative questioning. Then Jesus gave this group of people

a negative response and that very response could well be associated with their initial negative questioning. As a result, it served to prove that it was a negative and not a positive question.

After giving an account of the response from the crowd, Luke recorded two consecutive responses that gave rise to an awful situation, "all the people in the synagogue were furious ... got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff" (4:28-29). Isn't there a big difference between this account and the account of when Jesus entered the synagogue, read aloud, and then declared, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"? As a result of the crowd's negative question about whether he was merely Joseph's son, Jesus' response was unflinching, and showed that their words spoke their hearts, which were trying to challenge his authority and power: "Physician, heal yourself!" (4:23) Their intention is well reflected in this proverb. It was followed by "Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum" (4:23) which meant to make a challenge: "Do you have authority and power? Perhaps you did have authority and power there in Capernaum, but here in your hometown Nazareth, we all know who you are, merely Joseph's son, what then can you do?" Jesus had unflinchingly, and explicitly brought to light what the crowd had intended but had not said. Who actually is this Jesus?

Things did not end there. Jesus seemed to gain the upper hand and went on to issue them a stern warning: God's salvation will part from the Jews and come to the Gentiles. These were severe words. How could salvation come to the Gentiles? But in the hearts of the crowd, they would say: "Jesus, don't ever expect what you did in Capernaum can be fulfilled here in your hometown." What Jesus did was to point out further: "As in your hearts you refused my bringing God's salvation to you, I could only then turn to the Gentiles." In the face of such words, how could the crowd accept this? They refused to accept this because they did not believe in Jesus because they saw him as merely the son of Joseph. "Who do you think you are?" they would ask.

Who is Jesus? The Jews in Nazareth considered him

to be merely the son of Joseph and so they did not accept his proclamation: The prophecy of the prophet Isaiah is fulfilled today. If we are like the Jews in Nazareth in former times who only knew that Jesus had gone into the synagogue, read out a passage from Isaiah and proclaimed that the salvation promised in the scripture has been fulfilled today. Then who do we think Jesus is? Can we believe what he proclaims? Can we accept him? When we read on further, we will find out that the attitude of the Jews in Nazareth towards Jesus was undoubtedly negative. However, Jesus was also very blunt with this group of people, unflinchingly bringing to light what they did not themselves say. Elijah, in Israel's time of famine, was commissioned only to the Gentiles in the region of Sidon where he served to help a poor widow. Jesus quoted Elijah's story to respond to the crowd of Jews, implying that God's salvation had been rejected by the Jews but was received by the Gentiles. Reading up to this point, how would we see Jesus after treating the Jews this way? Who actually was Jesus?

### **Looking at Who Jesus Is Based on a 'Three-fold' Relationship**

The Jews in Nazareth considered Jesus to be the only son of Joseph but what about those of us who read this text today? The record of Luke does not simply provide this text to tell us about Jesus' identity, but then why is it that we do not always go back and forth between texts when we read the Bible? Why is it that we keep an eye on this passage only without referring to the texts before it at the same time, for example, the temptation of Jesus, or even Jesus' baptism, to have a coherent reading?

Going back to these two passages and studying closely, we immediately see who Jesus is through Luke's disclosure of Jesus' "three-fold relationship." After Jesus' baptism, "And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" (3:21-22) This passage illustrates Jesus is the beloved son of the Heavenly Father. But Luke went on to say, "Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph." Luke has already told us: The Heavenly Father declared Jesus as His beloved son

and yet people regarded him as the son of Joseph. Jesus is the beloved son of the Heavenly Father. This is the “first-fold” of the relationship which decides Jesus’ “second-fold” relationship: his relationship with Satan. Although Satan’s temptation takes three forms which include turning the stone into bread, enjoying all the authority and splendor; and God’s fulfillment of Jesus’ acts to display his power: Satan essentially only had one goal: he trapped Jesus into refusing to be an obedient son who would keep following the Heavenly Father; or to be His disobedient son. In this temptation, we can see that obedience is a manifestation of the son of God. Why is it that Jesus was the beloved son of God? It is because he obeyed the Heavenly Father, resisted the cunning temptation of Satan, and thus became the beloved son of the Heavenly Father?

Who is Jesus? We see that the Gospel of Luke gradually discloses Jesus’ identity. This is not an abstract identity which involves a relationship with the Heavenly Father, a relationship with Satan, and a relationship with the Holy Spirit, which is the ‘third-fold’ relationship. When Jesus was baptized, was it not the Holy Spirit that descended on him? When Jesus was put to the test, was he not filled with the Holy Spirit? We can say that Jesus counted on the power of the Holy Spirit in order to be the beloved son of the Heavenly Father. Along with the descending of the Holy Spirit, the proclamation of the Heavenly Father; and Jesus’ resistance of Satan in the wilderness, what we call the son of God is revealed. The “son of God” is not merely a name, but has specific meaning. We can see the specific meaning only when it is manifested by a specific event. By means of the Holy Spirit, Jesus triumphed over Satan’s temptations and showed that what he should be called is the son of God. Of course, the story has not yet come to an end. After that, Jesus showed who should be called the son of God throughout his entire life. Therefore, Luke went on to tell us, “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.” (4:14) This time it involved Jesus’ relationship with the Jews and the proclamation incident along with the ensuing confrontation inside the Nazareth synagogue further demonstrates what it means to be the son of God.

## **It Is a Priority of Discipleship to Discern Jesus’ Identity**

What kind of son of God can we see here? Accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus went into a synagogue to preach on Sabbath. However, because the Jews regarded him as merely the son of Joseph, Jesus debunked their disbelief and the rejection inside their hearts. Along with their disbelief and rejection, he thoroughly illustrated the matter: As the matter stands, deliverance could only go to the Gentiles. The son of God was rejected by the people of God. The rejection can be seen from how they behaved: the people in the synagogue were furious, drove him out of the town, and wanted to kill him. Who is the son of God? In his relationship with the Jews, Jesus, the son of God, showed that he was the one to be persecuted and even to be killed. Is it not that the son of God is the one who delivers the good news to the people of God? In the beginning, is it not that Luke wants to tell us that Jesus was the one who declared that salvation would be fulfilled? But then Luke took a U-turn as the Jews simply took Jesus as the son of Joseph, Jesus declared that salvation would then go to the Gentiles and he became the person who declared the good news to the Gentiles. But it was also because of this reason that Jesus, the son of God, was to be persecuted, rejected, and even killed.

Who is Jesus? What kind of God is Jesus? The story that Luke writes does not stop there. We will have to read on to continue. Luke went on to say, “But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.” (4:30) Jesus had to walk on and we have to follow him and continue to read on in order to be able to answer more fully: who is Jesus after all?

Discerning the identity of Jesus has always been the priority of discipleship. Only through reading the Bible over and over again can we make a proper discernment. In the olden days, the Jews killed Jesus because of a mistaken discerning of his identity. Today, as Jesus disciples, what have we learned in the study of discernment?

# Discernment and “Finding the Will of God”

Jonathan W. Lo



Hong Kong is undergoing a tumultuous time at present, and the need for discernment has never been greater. Seized by political uncertainty, social unrest, and the fracturing of society, Christians in Hong Kong face the challenge of making informed and wise decisions in a climate characterized by instability, fear, misinformation and growing

distrust. Discernment is the ability to make good decisions; Christian discernment is the realization that the best decisions we can make in any given situation are those that align closely with the will of God. In a confusing time such as this, it is more important than ever to be able to hear the voice of God amidst the chaos.

## Models of Discernment

There are two typical approaches to “finding the will of God”: (1) the blueprint model, and (2) the wisdom model. The blueprint model assumes that there is only one path ordained by God and suggests that the believer’s goal in life is to seek out what that one path is. It is not uncommon for those who subscribe to this model of discernment to look for external signs, including dreams, coincidences, “open doors,” and Scripture to confirm for them that the path they have chosen is the right one. In the wisdom model, the goal is to grow in wisdom as one matures in Christ and immerses oneself in the Scriptures. Having become enlightened, the believer will naturally be more inclined to make the right choices and less inclined to make bad ones. According to this view, the wiser a person becomes, the better choices they are able to make. The blueprint model attempts to find the will of God through signs and confirmations; the wisdom model implies that the wisest decision we can think of must be God’s decision.

The problem with both of these two models is that while they are rightly concerned with the will of God, they fail to acknowledge the presence of the living in our times of choice. Perhaps the fundamental problem in using terminology like

“finding the will of God” in the first place is that it places the emphasis on the plans of God, rather than on God himself. It is as though we are seeking a map that tells us where to go, rather than the company of someone who actually knows the way. With both the blueprint and wisdom models, God’s plans for a situation may be discovered without requiring a person to be in actual communion with God. Since what we really want is to know the plans of God, the abiding presence of God becomes secondary, and worse, irrelevant.

Gordon Smith, theologian and president of Ambrose University, proposes an alternative approach to understanding Christian discernment. In his book, *Listening to God in Times of Choice*, Smith endorses the practice of actively seeking to hear the voice of God, especially in moments when one has to make difficult decisions.<sup>1</sup> Smith writes, “God is present; God does speak; and if we can, if we will, hear and respond to his prompting.”<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the blueprint and wisdom models, Smith’s approach firmly acknowledges the presence of the living God and the desire of God to speak to his people. The God of the Christian Bible loves his people and is actively engaged in leading and guiding them.<sup>3</sup>

And, since God is a living God we must view Christian discernment as an intentional and dynamic process that involves continually seeking to listen to God. Rather than receiving the roadmap ahead of time and going forth at our leisure, we must stop at each juncture to ask God for directions. Smith’s model of discernment properly reorients our misguided views about God and realigns our lives in relation to God’s will. We are not ultimately in control of our own lives; we do not get to choose where we are going. Perhaps “what is God’s will in my life?” is the wrong question; instead we should ask “how should I align my will to God’s?” Such an approach to discernment is revolutionary, because it implies that the most important thing is not knowing what to do in a difficult situation, but realizing that God is in the midst of it.

According to Smith, the key to knowing the will of God in times of choice is to cultivate a relationship with God in which the believer is habitually aware of God’s presence and intentionally seeks to hear his voice.<sup>4</sup> In other words, we must be accustomed to hearing God’s voice on a regular basis, so

that we can also hear his voice in times of choice. With the wisdom model of discernment, the believer grows in wisdom through reflection, contemplation, and the study of Scripture, so that he is able to make good decisions when times of choice come. Similarly, the believer who subscribes to Smith's model prepares himself before the time when a decision is to be made; however, instead of growing in wisdom, he is trained to acknowledge God's presence and to hear God's voice in his everyday life so that when the moment of decision comes, he can rely on what has become a customary practice. Catholic scholar Father Ernest E. Larkin notes that "[d]iscernment can never be successfully carried out if it is only an occasional act that is foreign to one's usual total life."<sup>5</sup> This is similar to the opinion of Brother Lawrence: "That we need only to recognize GOD intimately present with us, to address ourselves to Him every moment, that we may beg His assistance for knowing His will in things doubtful, and for rightly performing those which we plainly see He requires of us, offering them to Him before we do them, and giving Him thanks when we have done."<sup>6</sup> A discerning person is the one who is constantly aware of God's presence and actively seeks to hear from God will.

### **Ways to Cultivate Awareness of God's Presence and Attentiveness to God's Voice**

Since Smith's approach to discernment relies on actively seeking to hear God's voice in times of choice, and since God is dynamic and may respond differently to people even in the same situations, there is not one set method for determining God's will. However, there are three ways through which we may cultivate the practice of being aware of God's presence and actively hearing his voice: (1) worship, (2) prayer and meditation, and (3) community.

The goal of worship is to allow us to be aware of God's presence. Worship reminds us of who God is and reorients ourselves in relation to God. Every time we worship, we proclaim that God is Holy and that God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."<sup>7</sup> Marva Dawn, the American theologian best known for her work on the topic of worship, notes that "[t]he goal of the Christian life is that for more and more seconds of each day what we think and do and say is to God's glory, that every moment is worship of the true God instead of various idolatries of our making or of our culture's."<sup>8</sup> Every time we worship, we are acknowledging that no matter how important we may think we are, we are not God, we are fellow-created-beings, and we are not in charge of anything. Worship is an activity by which we acknowledge God's presence and let go of our desire for

control.

The goal of prayer and meditation is to actively approach God and seek to hear his voice intentionally. Dallas Willard says that Christians are intended "to live in an ongoing conversation with God, speaking and being spoken to."<sup>9</sup> Being in relationship with God involves both speaking and listening. Smith similarly suggests that friendship with God is sustained by prayer, and that "it is in prayer that we encounter the will and purposes of God and allow God to speak to our wills, our motives, our desires, and our priorities." An example can be seen in the Lord's Prayer, where Jesus teaches his disciples to prioritize God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will above their own needs.<sup>10</sup> If prayer is speaking to God on God's terms, then meditation is way we listen to God. Richard Foster, in *The Celebration of Discipline*, states that one of the important goals of meditation is to remind us that "God is speaking in the continuous present and wants to address us."<sup>11</sup> Meditation enables one to enter the presence of God, for the purpose of hearing from God. Therefore, prayer and meditation are opportunities to practice the presence of God by tuning our minds to God's will and desire. Brother Lawrence cultivated his prayer and meditative life to the extent that even when doing tedious kitchen work in the Carmelite Order in Paris, he was able to experience the presence of God. He writes: "[t]hat we should establish ourselves in a sense of GOD's Presence, by continually conversing with Him."<sup>12</sup> Prayer and meditation are activities undertaken with the intention of approaching God and hearing his voice; Brother Lawrence is a good example that such an intention can be learned, practiced and cultivated. In the words of Anglican theologian Samuel Wells, prayer is "an experience of God's ultimate purpose that his people should worship him and be his friends."<sup>13</sup> God's will for his people is revealed through prayer and meditation.

The role of the community of faith is also crucial to the process of discernment. As Smith suggests, "[w]e never discern in isolation; we discern in community."<sup>14</sup> In the New Testament, the community of faith replaces the Temple as the place where God's spirit dwells,<sup>15</sup> and is therefore also crucial for hearing God's voice. God does not speak to his people in isolation; the truth of God's revelation, whether it is obtained through Scripture, teaching, or prayer and meditation, is affirmed within the community of faith that comes before God. In the early church, tongues require interpretation, and words of prophecy are evaluated by other people in the community.<sup>16</sup> Important decisions, such as the commissioning of Barnabas and Paul for missionary work, were affirmed by the Holy Spirit in a

communal setting of worship and prayer.<sup>17</sup> The church is to be a place where the voice of Jesus and the direction of the Holy Spirit, whether through Scripture or personal revelation, can be heard, tested, and affirmed by the community of God's people. God's presence become more real and his voice clearer; through the community of faith.

## Conclusion

Although discernment is the primary concern of this essay, we discover that Christian discernment is actually a by-product of something much more valuable: a relationship with the living God. Willard writes, “[h]earing God is but one dimension of a richly interactive relationship, and obtaining guidance is but one facet of hearing God.”<sup>18</sup> We do receive guidance from God when we engage with his presence, but it is no longer our goal. The model of discernment advocated by Smith is not dependent on a specific decision-making method or a systematic formulation of theology; it is a type of spiritual discernment, in the sense of a mystical and experiential encounter with God that is facilitated by regular worship, prayer and meditation, and community. If our lives are characterized by an intentional and ongoing relationship with God, there may not be a need to “find the will of God”—we will already be walking in the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> We make specific decisions, being mindful of God's presence and actively seeking to hear his voice in the particular situation. Similarly, the American philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard stresses the importance of human initiative in response to God's guidance in his book *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*: “Generally speaking, we are in God's will whenever we are leading the kind of life he wants for us. And that leaves a lot of room for initiative on our part, which is essential: our individual initiatives are central to his will for us.”<sup>20</sup>

As Prov 1:7 reminds us (“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...”), the realization that God is present in our times of choice is the starting point for making wise decisions; it is also the anchor that will ensure that our actions will be done in accordance with God's character and will. And ultimately, the realization of God's presence is also a source of comfort and peace; because God is ultimately in charge, the world will not end because we make a bad decision. God is able to work with our mistakes and limitations. As Smith articulates in another helpful book on discernment called *The Voice of Jesus: Discernment, Prayer, and the Witness of the Spirit*, “in the end, our confidence rests not on our capacity to choose well, but on the loving and providential care of the God who guides and whom we long to hear.”<sup>21</sup> Smith's model of discernment “does not lead

to absolute, infallible, irrefutable answers, but to an assurance that we are living and working in response to God.”<sup>22</sup> Peace in our decision-making comes not from being certain that our decisions are absolutely correct, but from knowing that we have done our best to make our decisions in view of God's presence, and that our actions spring out of a desire to live in accordance with what we can know of his will.

- 1 Gordon T. Smith, *Listening to God in Times of Choice: The Art of Discerning God's Will* (Grand Rapids: IVP Books, 1997). I had the pleasure of taking a course on discernment and calling with Gordon Smith during my time of study at Regent College, where I first became aware of this material. I am indebted to Dr. Smith for his tutelage and for shaping the way that I now view discernment and calling. The following essay outlines the major contours of Smith's thinking on discernment, but readers are highly encouraged to read Smith's insightful discussion in *Listening to God in Times of Choice* for themselves.
- 2 Smith, *Listening to God in Times of Choice*, 17.
- 3 E.g. The Bible frequently introduces the image of the shepherd and his sheep to describe God's care of and guidance over his people (e.g. Ps 23; Ezek 34, John 10:4, etc.); those with God-given leadership roles are also referred to as shepherds (e.g. Ps 78:70–72; Isa 44:28; Jer 3:15; 23:4; Ezek 37:22, 24; Zech 13:7, etc.)
- 4 Smith defines the believer's relationship with God as one of “friendship.” Smith, *Listening to God in Times of Choice*, 19–20; see also Samuel Wells, *God's Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 1–2, 9–10, 26–28, 39–41; and Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Grand Rapids: IVP Books, 1999), 81, 86, 122.
- 5 Ernest Larkin, *Silent Presence: Discernment as Process and Problem* (Denville: Dimension, 1981), 28.
- 6 Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God the Best Rule of a Holy Life: Being Conversations and Letters of Nicholas Herman of Lorraine* (New York: F. H. Revell, 1895), 15.
- 7 Cf. Lev 19:2; Exod 34:6.
- 8 Marva J. Dawn, *In the Beginning, GOD: Creation, Culture, and the Spiritual Life* (Grand Rapids: IVP Books, 2009), 17.
- 9 Willard, *Hearing God*, 252.
- 10 In the Lord's Prayer in Matt 6:9–13, Jesus teaches his disciples to first pray for God's reputation (name), kingdom, and will—before they ask God to meet their needs.
- 11 Richard J. Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 24.
- 12 Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 8.
- 13 Wells, *God's Companions*, 84.
- 14 Smith, *Listening to God in Times of Choice*, 128.
- 15 Cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; Eph 2:21–22, etc.
- 16 1 Cor 14:27–29; Cf. John 4:1.
- 17 E.g. Acts 13:1–3. See also Acts 1:15–26; 14:23.
- 18 Willard, *Hearing God*, 122.
- 19 E.g. Gal 5:16, 18, 25.
- 20 Willard, *Hearing God*, 132.
- 21 Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus: Discernment, Prayer, and the Witness of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: IVP Books, 2003), 260.
- 22 Smith, *Listening to God in Times of Choice*, 23.



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# Being Called and Sent: Discerning God’s Guidance as a Community

**Scripture: Acts 13: 1-3**

## **Introduction**

- Should I respond to the messages on my Facebook page today?
- Which job should I choose?
- Who should I marry?
- How will the church change in the next five years?
- How should the church respond to contemporary societal issues?

Every day we have to make many big and small decisions. Sometimes decision making is difficult because we need to make the decision before we are able to master all of the information involved. Those in the Christian faith need to make an additional consideration: what is God’s will? In spirituality, we call this discernment.

## **Discernment and Life**

There are different approaches to discerning the will of God. The focus of this article is this: the God we believe in is a living and loving Heavenly Father. He always cares for us by giving us guidance at the appropriate time while offering us freedom. He is present with us and still speaking to us. Therefore, discernment is based on an intimate relationship between us and the Lord. Today, God still personally speaks to us but the problem is whether or not we have sensitive enough ears to pay close attention and listen so that we can discern His voice in the midst of a lot of other noises. This requires us

to be familiar with His voice and that means that we have to be intimately connected to Him.

Gordon Smith describes this approach in a beautiful scene: we are dancing with the Lord as we make big and small decisions along life’s road. God does the leading and we follow. We all need to practice the basics and there are opportunities for improvisation. We do need to fear God but not so that we are afraid and trembling (with a heart of God’s children and not of slaves); not as if we are taking a test or an examination but with an attitude of enjoying the happiness in the process. In this way, facing choices along life’s path will be an exercise and an opportunity for growth in our spirituality.

From this we can see that discernment does not emphasize principles and methods, in the final analysis it is a life skill: we need to cultivate ourselves to become a discerning people.

In addition to the basic notion mentioned above, we also need to explore its practical applications. It is a pity that when we talk about discernment, we always focus on the decision made at any given time. However, when we talk about practical application, many important considerations will be neglected if we only focus on the decision at hand on an individual level. If the discussion is focused on the present decision only, then God’s calling (which is called “vocation”) in the lives of each of us is liable to be excluded or even forgotten. For me, God’s calling is an important context for the decisions that I make here

and now. Firstly, I must make clear what God's calling is in my life. Then the decisions I make at any given time will make more sense.

Likewise, if I only focus on the decision at an individual level, then I will miss out on the help of the faith community in discerning the will of God. When an evangelical Christian talks about discernment, he always focuses only on the relationship of God and himself. This is important, but it is not the whole picture. Even if it only seems to be a personal decision, in the process when I make the discernment, the involvement of the faith community is indispensable. This is because we sometimes will deceive ourselves, so admonishment from others is needed. Sometimes we assume that we have listened to the voice of God, but in fact, it may only be the voice of society or the voice of someone who has had a deep influence on us a long time ago, or it can even be the voice of my own wishful thinking. On the other hand, the faith community should not be ignored because the Bible is filled with accounts of one person speaking to another person in order to manifest God's intentions. For example, from Acts 13, we can see that when the church leaders in Antioch worshipped and fasted together, the Holy Spirit spoke to the community and personally gave guidance.

### **Discernment and Community**

What follows is an attempt to show from Acts 13:1-3 God's calling and commissioning, which is also a concrete example of the discernment of God's guidance within a community.

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

In Acts 9, it was recorded that Paul experienced God's call on his way to Damascus. It was about 13 to 14 years later that he was commissioned by the church at Antioch to go on a mission abroad. From Paul, we see that first there is an individual calling by God and then commissioning by the faith community. We cannot control the time when the Holy Spirit will give guidance to us. We have no choice but to wait and listen. But from this passage, we can see the context where the Holy Spirit works: the Holy Spirit speaks in the spiritual exercise of a community. Therefore, it is necessary for us to learn to discern

God's guidance within our community.

According to this passage, at that time there were five people in the leadership team at the Antioch church. The Holy Spirit did not speak to Barnabas or Paul individually, but gave guidance to the whole leadership team. Small as this community was with only five people, each of them came from a very different background. Barnabas was a Levite whose origin was from Cyprus. Simeon who was called Niger was probably an African negro. Cyrene is now within the territory of Libya, so Lucius was from North Africa. Manaen was brought up in palace and Saul was a Pharisee from Tarsus.

The church is pluralistic but it is also a faith community with one heart. The church at Antioch is also a pluralistic community (11: 19-21), and its leadership team is composed of members from different backgrounds. In modern society which one-sidedly emphasizes individualism, when we talk about community, we often refer to people who are very similar to each other and who group together. But in reality, communities are made up of very different people.

Community discernment is especially important. We will meet people who are very much different from us, but they are God-given gifts along our journey of life that are put there by God. The more dissimilar they are to us, the more precious gifts they will be. This is because in discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit, we need to be aware of self-deception which happens when we confuse other voices as God's voice. Those who are very different from us, especially those whom we trust and who deeply understand us, can easily see that we are deceiving ourselves. For they see things from a perspective that we are not accustomed to seeing. They are by-standers who are quick to know whether we are deceiving ourselves or not. Community can truly help us discern the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is filled with accounts where God speaks out His will to humans through the voice of other people. In this passage in Acts, we do not know how the Holy Spirit speaks, but when we look at other accounts about the prophets (these five leaders are prophets and teachers) along with the reference from biblical scholar F. F. Bruce who deduced from another version of this passage that the Holy Spirit probably spoke out its guidance to this leadership team through one of the five leaders.

Community is very important in discerning the will of God. God calls us individually and then the faith community sends us out to serve. Therefore, our service needs to be accountable to

the community and take responsibility from community. After Barnabas and Paul had finished their first mission to Antioch, they were accountable to the community that had sent them out (14: 24-28).

### **Discernment and Spiritual Exercises**

In this passage with only three verses, it talks about the five Antioch leaders' three spiritual exercises: worship (one of the explanations of "serving God"), fasting (13: 2-3), and prayer.

How do church leaders today listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit or know the will of God? Through ministry meeting? Or like what is being said in this passage, when we are worshipping, fasting, and praying together? Not worshipping, fasting, and praying individually but worshipping, fasting, and praying together.

Spiritual exercise or discipline is very important in discernment. Discernment is built upon an intimate relationship between us and the Lord. God still speaks personally to us today and the issue is whether we have the sensitive ears to listen and to discern. This would require that we are familiar with God's voice and are closely connected to Him. Spiritual exercise is the discipline of life which builds up an intimate relationship between us and God and also seeks to cultivate ourselves to be a person of spiritual discernment.

Since community is so important in discernment, not only do we need individual spiritual discipline, but we also need community spiritual discipline. In Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline*, there are three kinds of discipline: inward discipline, outward discipline, and corporate discipline. When evangelical Christians talk about spiritual discipline, they always focus on an individual relationship with God and much less on community discipline. If we have to learn the lesson of discernment, we need to pay attention to community discipline, such as worship, fasting, and praying together.

It takes time to build a community, like Barnabas and Paul who joined and served in the church at Antioch for a long time (11: 22-26, 14: 24-28). We have to make community discipline a habit. Not only did Barnabas and Paul worship, fast, and pray at the Antioch church and then listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, they were later commissioned by the church to go on a mission. And again when the mission experience came to an end, "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust." (14: 23) It seems that community discipline was a big part of their lives.

### **Conclusion**

The Acts of the Apostles records the important moments and the important decision making process of the Early Church. The way a faith community looks at decision making is different from other communities. For other communities, after they have made an important decision, they mostly pay attention to the outcome. Then they weigh the outcome and calculate their gains and losses. In addition to these considerations, a faith community pays even more attention to discernment: When we make a decision, how does God guide us?

In Acts 9, our Lord Jesus Christ personally revealed himself to Paul who was still continuing to persecute Jesus' disciples. Meanwhile, Jesus also spoke to Ananias in a vision so that it clearly proved Paul was being called by Jesus. In the following chapter (10), Peter unexpectedly went to preach the gospel to a Roman soldier Cornelius. They both had a similar vision which they could then mutually share with each other. From this we can see that even in matters which we assume only involve individuals, God can also reveal His intention through other people.

For decision making that involves the community as a whole, there are a few more passages besides this passage in chapter 13 to consider. For instance, Mathias was chosen to replace Judas (chapter 1), the choosing of the seven to attend to food and drink (chapter 6), and the Council at Jerusalem (chapter 15). From these scriptures, we can similarly see discernment in these two elements: community and spiritual discipline. In 1:23-26 and chapter 6:1-6 prayer was mentioned. In the council at Jerusalem, both the disciples and the elders gathered together for a discussion. They spoke one by one successively and learned to listen. According to scripture, the Council at Jerusalem recorded only those men who spoke at the meeting but in the letter sent to Gentile believers, it said, "It seemed good to the **Holy Spirit** and to **us** not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements." (15: 28)

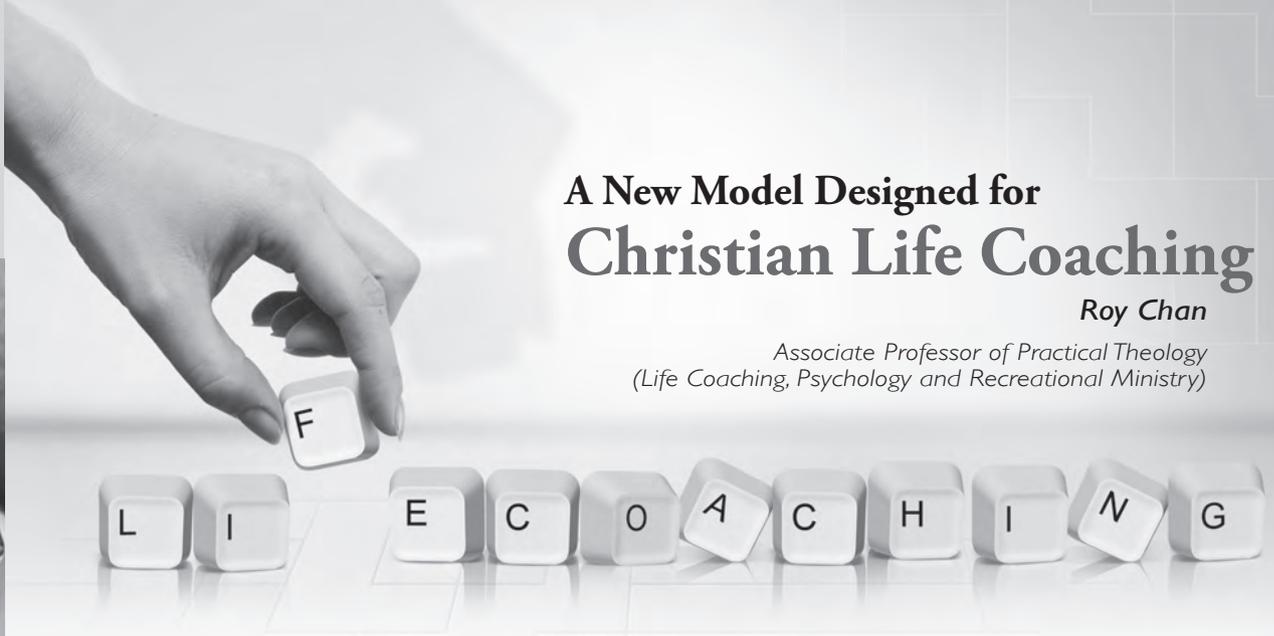
Overall, discernment is not only a matter of principle and method, in the final analysis it is something to do with our spiritual lives: we need to cultivate ourselves to become a discerning people. During the cultivation process, spiritual discipline in community is indispensable.



# A New Model Designed for Christian Life Coaching

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Life coaching is a fairly new term, which refers to a new technique that is much sought after in modern management, training, counseling, and education. Within Christian circles, the promotion of Christian life coaching education

has also begun. After all, some may ask whether it is appropriate to apply a technique developed in the commercial sector to Christian management, training, and counselling. I remember the first time when I mentioned Christian life coaching in a church fellowship meeting and talked about how everyone needs to pursue their own dreams and goals in life, one brother raised this question, "Isn't it excessively individualistic thinking if a Christian pursues his own dreams and preferences while neglecting the plan of God in his life?"

This is indeed a key issue as modern psychology and counselling pays attention to tapping into each person's potential advocated in humanism, seeking individualistic self-actualization and exalting personal preferences as the ultimate direction to pursue. However, the essence of Christianity demands that a Christian believer forsake their old self and seek to lead a life where they can say, "I no longer live but Christ lives in me." The aim of this essay is an attempt

to explore the major differences between life coaching and Christian life coaching in an effort to come up with a new model that complements the two views.

## The Humanistic Character of Life Coaching

What are the basic elements of life coaching? Different books list the main ideas of life coaching, for example, Linda Miller and Chad Hall list eight vital coaching skills: listening, asking precise questions, identifying action, delivering direct messages, acknowledging, sharing self, being silent, and synthesizing while Chen Heng-lim mentions seven basic skills: attention, listening, empathy, asking questions, reiteration, doing a summary, and feedback. Tony Stoltzfus, the writer of a set of very popular theories on Christian life coaching in America, introduces his simplified three-point model: relationship based, client-centered, and God driven.

## Stoltzfus' Life Coaching Model

For discussion and analysis, Stoltzfus' life coaching model is used in this essay (see figure 1).

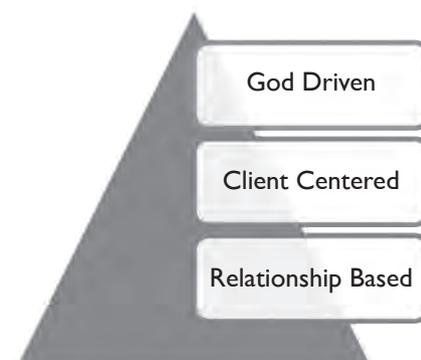


Figure 1: The model of life coaching (Stoltzfus 2005)

1. **Relationship Based:** This seemingly simple element is in fact the most basic key in shepherding care and it is a test of a tutor's patience and self-cultivation. The tutor may always be too enthusiastic, anxious to offer suggestions and assistance while neglecting to build up a relationship of trust and acceptance between the community to be cared for and himself. First, does the care-recipient feel that the life coach is worthy of being trusted? This involves the issue of integrity. Second, the care-recipient would consider whether the tutor is capable of helping him or her. Finally, we need to consider whether a heart-to-heart relationship has been established between the tutor and the care-recipient. A professional counsellor / life coach can shorten the time it takes through their professional authority but that hinges on whether trust has been gained in the process of relationship building as the recipient's trust toward the tutor may take a bit of the latter's patience. I had been waiting for five years in the church's teenage basketball team before a young man had gained enough courage to ask me some questions about his spiritual growth. The key is not strong leadership but giving time and space for the care-recipient to deepen their understanding and trust in the tutor.
2. **Client-centered:** Almost all modern counselling theories attach importance to putting the client at the center. Such an emphasis helps the life coach understand how the care-recipient looks at the problem they face from their own point of view and not from that of the life coach or a stereotypical understanding. The difficulty consists in the fact that the person involved very often has an emotional understanding of their big problems and yet lacks an intellectual or logical understanding. The task of the life coach is first to begin with the person's understanding and emotion. Then the tutor seeks to help the care recipient to integrate the two in an effort to get to the core issue.
3. **God Driven:** The life coach will attempt to help the person pursue their goal or dream and so they have good reputation of instructing people to "go after their dreams." The person himself may know neither what he wants nor the core desire which lies hidden beneath the superficial goals. For example, if the superficial goal is to lose weight, the inner, hidden need is in fact the need for acknowledgement and love. The goals pursued by most people, for example, money, fame, power, and partners, are only superficial goals and not the core goals such as inner peace, to be loved, to

contribute to society. The primary task of a life coach is to locate the core goal and then to try and help the person find the way to achieve those goals. A Christian's primary concern is ultimately to seek to be God-driven which is their core goal.

The life coaching technique consisted of the three criteria mentioned has proven to be a strong communicative technique in training and counselling. But something is still lacking when they are applied to Christian ministry. Although Stoltzfus' three key points do have God's guidance, its connotation still needs to be interpreted. For a long time, psychology and counselling focused on the personal needs of the care-recipient. This is especially true for Positive Psychology which advocates for improvement of oneself and self-actualization. This has originated from the humanistic approach which places the person at the center. Christianity, which regards God-centeredness as the central consideration, is wary of modern humanistic psychologists. Because life coaches take personal goals as the starting point and the finishing line, where is the place for God's will? Can human desire and God's will co-exist? Brothers and sisters always pose this question: what is the difference between life coaching and Christian life coaching? Of course the two are different. The major distinction is that life coaching applies a set of tools to counsel, lead, teach and communicate without a value system or any ethical thinking of its own. In contrast, Christian life coaching has its own central beliefs such as Christian doctrines, beliefs, and value systems, and it is a set of methods that can be applied to counselling, leadership, training, and communication. After careful consideration, in seeking God's will I have designed the following model which is composed of three key points: to be based on the Bible, relationship with God, God's plan (see figure 2).

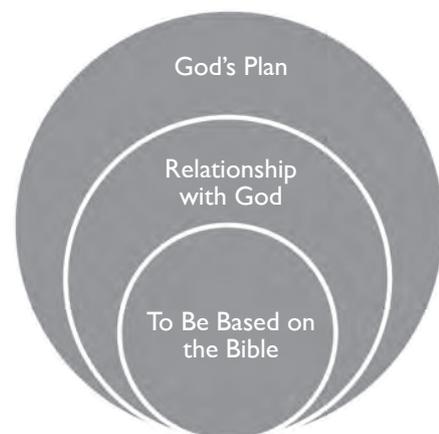


Figure 2: The model of seeking God's will

## The Model of Seeking God's Will

1. **To be based on the Bible:** God's will and teachings have been revealed to us through the Bible. Therefore, in the process of life coaching, the coach can directly ask the care-recipient according to the criteria shown in the Bible: "What does the Bible say?" This is not what ordinary life coaching can offer.
2. **Relationship with God:** Very often it is not that the person doesn't know what to do but because that person is far away from God or their relation with God is at a low ebb so that they choose their own way when facing life decisions. Gradually the voice of the Holy Spirit fails to ring in their hearts and they gets lost in the midst of the world's temptations.
3. **God's Plan:** Even as Christians, sometimes some decisions we have made are not in line with God's plan. For example, some Christians only take up a ministry that fits their own personal preference with no consideration to the needs of the church, nor do they seek God's plan in their lives. We need to be still, listen attentively to God with our hearts, and accept God's will. In this way, what we go after becomes in line with God's will. Then we receive God's blessing and walk in His will.

## A New Model Designed for Christian Life Coaching

If the three key points in life coaching technique (figure 1) act in concert with the three conditions based on Christianity (figure 2), then it will constitute the Christian life coaching basic combination that consists of 6 main points in three strata (figure 3). Figure 3 is formed when I try to overlap the following two units. Here there is a balanced symmetry of the three elements of technique and the three spiritual elements as the technique and the spiritual elements are mutually in accord with one another. According to this model, the Christian life coach will seek to build up a relationship with the care-recipient and begin with the two elements in the lowest, base stratum as they seek guidance from the Bible which is their common basis.

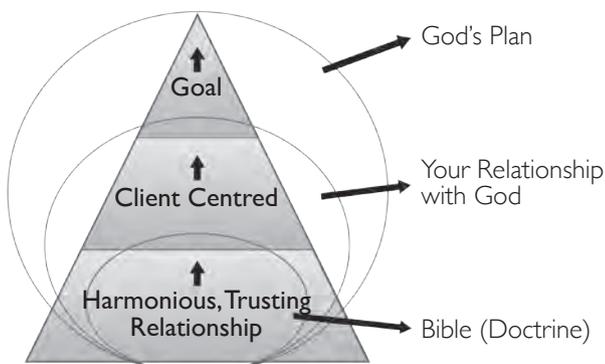


Figure 3: The model designed for Christian life coaching

1. The lowest stratum stresses building a relationship between the two. A good relationship is set up when there is an approval of the coach's integrity, competence, and trust from the care-recipient. The biblical criteria and teachings facilitate communication between the two parties as they share a common value system which makes an effective consensus possible. If not, it is like playing a game where each player follows different rules. As a result, the game cannot go on. If a harmonious and trusting relationship is built for both parties and the biblical teachings serve as the communicative criteria, then both parties contribute to creating the basis of life coaching together.
2. In the middle stratum, the two key points seem to be mutually antithetical because they pay attention to both the human-and-God relationship and the client as the center of attention, implying that the person concerned takes his personal needs as the criteria in pursuit of his goal. In fact, it is of course important to understand the criteria and teachings of the Bible but the main reason for a good spiritual life is to have a close relationship with God. For one who has a close relationship with God, he will also be Christ-centered and not self-centered. The two key points in the middle stratum is to emphasize rebuilding "the quest for the true self" upon the basis of a good relationship with God. In Jesus' teaching, he often begins with the saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like this." This saying intends to teach us Christian believers to rebuild "a self-concept of those who belong to Christ."
3. Finally, it comes to the third and top stratum. We can see that the moral standard of personal goals takes on the biblical standard and a close relationship with God as its basis. Therefore, while a Christian goes after their personal goals, they need to understand God's will and plan in their lives.

These six key points are divided into three strata with the two main points in each stratum which is a combination of skills and concepts. In the first stratum, the harmonious, trusting relationship between the coach and the care-recipient is based on the mutually shared biblical concepts. The second stratum emphasizes the relationship between the person and God. The re-constructed self in this relationship comes close to the idea of self that a Christian should have. The third stratum seeks to integrate personal goals and God's plan in



the person's life which is set on the basis of the first two strata.

Christian life coaching is an important technique for future shepherding and care between pastors and lay Christians. In recent years, the number of books written on Christian life coaching has increased greatly. Yet, the theory building still needs to be strengthened. This essay mainly explores the succession of relevant theories on how to strengthen the integration of spiritual life guidance and life coaching techniques. Only time and practical implementation can tell how successful such an integration will be.

\* The writer holds the copyright of this article including the content, ideas and figures.

- 1 Linda Miller and Chad Hall, *Coaching for Christian Leaders: A Practical Guide* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2007), 23.
- 2 陳恆霖：《Coach領導學：帶人才超越「現在職位」的企業教練心理&對話技術》（台北：大寫，2012），頁249-279。（It is a book printed in Chinese, published in Taiwan on coaching and leadership.）
- 3 Tony Stoltzfus, *Leadership Coaching: The Disciplines, Skills and Heart of a Christian Coach* (Virginia Beach: Coach22, 2005), 79-80.

## Academic Affairs News

- **2015-16 Spring Opening Convocation**

This year's spring term began on January 11. The following day was Spiritual Formation Day with "Discernment" as its theme. In the morning seminar, the seminary chaplain, Rev. Brian Lam and N.T. Assistant Professor, Dr. Jonathan Lo, shared a message on spiritual discernment with our community. In the afternoon, there was time for individual reflection followed by a small group discussion session between teachers and students. As a result, students were spiritually renewed as they prepared for a new semester of studies.

- **Experiencing Seminary Life Camp**

Experiencing Seminary Life Camp was held from March 2 to 3 and its contents included a message, sharing the call of God, sit-in class lectures, and talking with both professors and students. Through the activity, participants gained a deeper understanding of God's call and reflected on pursuing full-time ministry. Likewise, they got to know the seminary's study programs and life on campus better.

- **65th Anniversary Thanksgiving Concert and Worship Service**

This year is HKBTS's 65th anniversary. On April 24, the 65th Anniversary Thanksgiving Concert and Worship Service was held at the Academic Community Hall of the Hong Kong Baptist University. The theme was "Glorifying the Lord Almighty and Honoring Heritage across Boundaries." The contents included a sermon from President Joshua Cho, the singing of *Magnificat* by the joint choir of the seminary, and a thanksgiving video consisted of interviews of the faculty, students, and alumni from over the years.

- **Awards Ceremony and Inauguration Ceremony**

This year's Awards Ceremony and Inauguration Ceremony of a new Board of Directors Committee will be held on May 26 at 7 pm at Sai O campus. Through the Awards Ceremony, the seminary seeks to encourage students who have excellent performance in academic studies and other areas and to express our appreciation of and thankfulness to the donors of grants and scholarships. That night, we will also have the Inauguration Ceremony of our Board of Directors for a new term. Together we will offer up to the Lord our thanksgiving and praise.

## From the Chaplain's Office

*Rev. Brian Lam (Chaplain)*

### **A Prayer: "Thanksgiving for Armadillos and Custodians"**

"... Thank you also for giving us in the midst of the wonder of it all good work to do, that we might be of service to one another. As those whose work it is to read and write, we give you particular thanks for Annie, who cleans my office, and for Jean, Dawn... all of the housekeeping staff, who do the work necessary to give us the space and time to study. The wonder of the kindness of their lives humbles us. May our work witness their wonderful lives. Amen."

This is a prayer from the American theologian Stanley Hauerwas' book. He teaches Christian ethics at Duke Divinity School. At his students' request, Hauerwas would say a prayer at the beginning of each lesson. This is one of those prayers.

The first half of the prayer is in praise of and a thanksgiving for God's creation. He was amazed at the richness and variety of God's creation. He even found it inconceivable. For example, there is color as subtle as lime green and armadillos (the mascot in the 2014 World Cup Soccer Tournament held in Brazil), which are an exotic animal. What is more inconceivable is a God who goes so far so to grant us His word and the sacraments. In the second half of his prayer, Hauerwas turned to man's position in God's creation. The quoted passage above is from the second half. What he mentions are not abstract ideas but specific persons to be thankful for: to thank God for the staff working on campus. He even mentions their names one by one and thanks God for each of them.

I am not a scholar, but simply a pastor serving in the seminary. However, this prayer conveys what I want to say. Everyday before I reach my seminary office, the first one I meet and say "Good morning" to is Sister Ha, who cleans my office. I am thankful to God for her service. She is always smiling and even happily hums as she works. Because of the hard work of the seminary staff, HKBTS's

teachers and students have the best environment to engage in study, to teach, and to do research. Just as Hauerwas says in his prayer, their lives teach us to be humble. I hope that the fruit of our ministry can similarly testify to their extraordinary lives. We thank God for the rich diversity of creation.

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1 Stanley Hauerwas, *Prayers Plainly Spoken* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 41.

## Lay Theological Education Department

*Toto Choi (Associate Director)*

### **Flexible Study**

The Lay Theological Education Department offers all kinds of study programs. There are degree and non-degree level programs and daytime and evening classes. The duration of the course may take an entire quarter or it can be a one-time lecture, church practicum or a retreat camp. The program contents are all-encompassing, including Biblical knowledge, theology, history, mission, education, counselling, music, and ministry training by age group. However different these programs of study are, there is one single objective: to build up believers' lives, give them support and training so that they can be good witnesses of Christ for their families and in their workplaces and be strong leaders who can shoulder different ministries in their own churches or para-church organizations.

People in Hong Kong live in a fast-paced, high stress environment. It is not easy for them to set aside time from work, family, and church service to pursue further studies. In view of this, we provide flexibility as much as possible for students to take programs according to their individual situation and needs. Amongst these programs, the program content of the degree programs is the broadest and most diversified. So we set up a system so that students can choose what subjects to take in a flexible manner and extend their duration of study, thereby "saving up" enough subjects until they meet the requirement to graduate. As for the non-degree programs, we keep

renewing and optimizing the program content. Meanwhile we also keep reviewing the school system as a whole in an effort to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters by offering a wide variety of options. For this reason, system modifications have been made over the last two years. For example, after streamlining the program content of the Youth Ministry Program, we further shortened the original two-and-a-half-year diploma program to a two-year higher certificate program to allow students to complete the program half a year earlier. As such, they can plan ahead according to their own needs and make arrangement for further studies in other areas after graduation. In addition, we now also provide a one-year basic certificate program in the Elderly Ministry Program in addition to the original two-year intermediate certificate program so as to attract more people to take the one-year program in preparation for serving the elderly. Moreover, the Women Theological Training Program (daytime) and the Lay Theological Training Program (evening) have been integrated to enable credit hours of the two programs to be transferrable. As a result, students can choose to take the daytime or evening program according to their own situation.

In addition to providing individual specific programs, we also set up a sit-in system. With the hectic pace of city life, it is not easy for adult Christian believers to complete a program of study in a limited period of time. Due to many factors, not many people are willing to deal with the pressure of quizzes and examinations. For auditors, they join the program according to their own interest and do not have to hand in any assignments to be reviewed. In other words, as long as you are willing to learn, whoever you are and whatever form it takes, there is always a period of time, a subject or a topic that will be interesting to you. You are welcome to log-on our website and see the content of each study program and the subjects offered every quarter. We also hope that pastors will encourage their church members to join the ranks of those to be better equipped by further studies. May God nurture one worker after another who follows His heart through these different study programs, which rejuvenate Christian believers.

## Distance Education Program

***Chow Pui-shan*** (Director)

The diploma programs for Spring 2016 began on March 1 after the orientation for new students and the tutorial sessions for the first and second subjects that were held on February 27. Afterwards, the tutorial sessions for other subjects were held in the following two weeks. We have now begun our student recruitment and promotion work for the diploma programs for Fall 2016. Students are welcome to take our certificate programs all the year round.

In addition to supporting local Christians, we also offer the "Mainland Ministry" and the "Special Training Ministry" that show our concern for communities with special needs by providing opportunities for them to pursue studies in theological education. Through our "Special Training Ministry," we are serving Christians who are visually-impaired, hearing-impaired, and those who have come to Christ in correctional institutions. On January 23, the tutorial session of the last two subjects of the Certificate in New Testament Studies of the "Spiritual Light Project" for the fourth year, jointly organized by HKBTS and the Christian Ministry to Visually Impaired Persons, was held at the CMVIP center. After the session, the tutor and students sat together to enjoy tea and refreshments together while students received encouragement from sharing their joys and hardships from their studies. Students hope to successfully graduate this November and are looking forward to taking the Certificate in Old Testament Studies.

Since 1999 the DEP has collaborated with The Hong Kong Christian Kun Sun Limited in organizing the Onesimus Training Project to provide the opportunity for further studies in theology for the inmates in the correctional institutions. This year, we will take a step further to cooperate with Beauty of Grace Foundation Limited to set up the Philemon Training Project, dedicated to training marginalized people and the underprivileged. DEP is willing to join hands with churches and Christian organizations and we encourage you to contact us if you have the prompting

to support our "Special Training Ministry" or if you know of a community with special study needs.

The first annual topical seminar this year will be held on May 21, and the topic is "An Educational Program Beginning and Closing with Fearing Yahweh" with our Assistant Professor of the Old Testament, Tony Sher, as the speaker. Such a seminar will be held twice every year with an objective of broadening the vision of DEP students. Brothers and sisters from our churches are also welcome to attend. Registration to join the seminar has already begun, however, it will stop once the quota is filled.

## Student Union

### *So Ming-him (Chairperson)*

At the beginning of 2016, the Student Union Executive Committee 2016 took office in January. Its executive members include: So Ming-him (Chairperson), Chu Hoi-kwan (Vice-Chairperson), Yuen Ka-kiu (Treasurer), Kwok Hin-chiu (Head of Secretary Department), Chan Sze-chung (Head of Spiritual Devotion Department), Yeung Chiu-kwan (Head of Mission Department), and Lam Ka-ho (Head of Daily Living Department). Our advisory teachers include Dr. Vincent Lau (Student Union), Dr. Andres Tang (Student Union), Dr. Freeman Huen (Secretary Department), Chaplain Rev. Brian Lam (Spiritual Devotion), Ms. Grace Chan (Spiritual Devotion), Dr. Eric Kwong (Mission) and Dr. Jonathan Lo (Daily Living).

Our theme for this year is "Be Still Together, Be Invigorated Together, Be Empowered Together" which expresses the executives common objective: because the whole seminary is a community with one heart, we experience both static and dynamic activities together in our triune God and learn to be empowered in community life so that we can face the church ministry, seminary study, and our own difficulties.

Following this goal, each of the departments has begun to launch their activities. The Secretary Department

is in the process of publishing the Spiritual Wind, which provides a platform for teachers and students to share their campus lives and their inner thoughts through their writing so that both teachers and students can provide each other mutual support, receive consolation, and regain their strength. Moreover, it has organized an activity of having used books for sale. It provides an opportunity for our students to give away their used books so that students in need can buy these books at a low price. The revenue generated will be donated to the seminary library for the purchase of new books in the future.

The Spiritual Devotion Department is responsible for leading the Morning Prayer Meeting and the Noon Time Prayer Meeting, which enable students to learn to keep watch over one another for the world, our society, our seminary, and our teachers and students in prayers. Two topical seminars have been planned during the Noon Time Prayer Meeting and the first one was held on February 2 when Dr. Andres Tang was invited to share with us on the topic of fasting.

The Mission Department is planning this year's short-term mission trip in the hope that our students can learn to serve as a community, to see how our triune God is working in different places and cultivate a heart for mission. Furthermore, the Department will also invite speakers to come to speak to our students at the noon time sharing meeting on various mission topics to enrich our knowledge and help them understand the needs of different places.

On February 17, the Daily Living Department organized a Spring feast when teachers and students gathered together to celebrate the Lunar New Year. It also continues to run the "snack corner" which allows students to buy snack and/or soft drinks at a relatively low price, helping them to enliven their spirit and go on with their studies.

We hope that the Student Union can be a vessel of use to God and a bridge between students and the seminary as we seek to make our campus life to be well pleasing to God.

## Presidency of Dr. Joshua Cho Is Extended for Five More Years

Our Board of Directors, on 22nd March 2016, unanimously passed a resolution to extend the presidency of Professor Joshua Cho Wai-tung for another five years, effective from 1st September, 2016. The Seminary thanks God for His grace and guidance, and we pray that our churches and individual supporters will continue to pray for God's leadership on our way forward and for the grace of God to President Cho as he leads the Seminary into the future.

## Faculty News

- **Dr. Andres Tang**, Professor of Christian Thought (Theology and Culture), spoke on the topic of "The Politics That the Church Cannot Avoid: The Church in Politics," in a series of lectures entitled "Theology and Public" jointly organized by Logos Ministries Ltd. and HKSXH All Saints Cathedral on January 8; on the topic, "Hope amidst Internal and External Troubles," on the "Seminary Students' Day" organized by Hong Kong Theological Students Prayer Fellowship on February 19. Besides, Dr. Tang conducted the "Workshop on Trends of Theological Thoughts," in the "Spiritual Revival and Bible Study Meeting," which was organized by Theological Paths and Thoughts on February 10 and 12. Dr. Tang also spoke on Trevor Hart's book, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* in a series of talks entitled "Reading Christian Classics" jointly organized by Virtue and Wisdom Link and Mongkok Swatow Baptist Church on February 20, March 3, 11, and 18. Also, Dr. Tang's two articles appeared in *Crisscross Garden* (issue 8) which was published on January 15, 2016.

## Visitors

- A team of eight people from Wycliffe Bible Translators, the Asia Pacific Region visited the Seminary on December 16, 2015.
- Officials from Beijing Lianghui (The China Christian Council and the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China) paid a visit to the Seminary on January 12.
- Rev. Chin Lee-yeon and his pastoral coworkers visited the Seminary on January 26.
- Rev. Benjamin Si visited the Seminary and preached a message in the morning chapel on February 16.
- Dr. Timothy Lim, Chair Professor of Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism at the Divinity School of The University of Edinburgh, visited the Seminary and gave a topical message in the morning chapel on February 23.
- Rev. Canon Rob Hay, President of Redcliffe College, England visited the Seminary on February 24 and gave sermon messages during the morning chapel and a noon time lecture.
- Dr. Graham Walker, President of the Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary, visited the Seminary on March 10 and preached a topical message in the morning chapel.
- Dr. Philip Wickeri, Adjunct Faculty in Interdisciplinary Studies at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California and Professor of Church History at HKSXH Ming Hua Theological College, visited the Seminary on March 15 and was the speaker of the Seminary's 3-day Mission Week 2016.

# **Lay Theological Education Department**

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## **Student Recruitment**

### **Master in Christian Studies (Major in Communication)**

This is a part-time evening program, which enables lay Christians with university education to integrate Christian faith with communication theories so that they can engage in theological reflection on the present social condition and situation, allowing them to communicate the Christian message more effectively. Student recruitment for the 2016-17 program will begin in late May. Please check our website for more details.

### **Recruitment into Bachelor / Diploma / Certificate of Christian Studies Program**

Students can directly apply to the following part-time evening programs:

**Certificate Program** : Certificate in Christian Studies, Certificate in Music Ministry.

**Diploma Program** : Diploma in Biblical Studies, Music Ministry, Care and Counseling Ministry.

**Bachelor Program** : Students can choose to major in Biblical Studies, Music Ministry, Care and Counseling Ministry.

Having completed the certificate and diploma program and having been granted permission to study for a diploma or bachelor degree, all subjects concerned (those subjects getting a pass) can be exempted. Enrolment for the 2016-17 school year will begin in late May. Our website will have more detail.

### **Women Theological Training Diploma/Certificate Programs**

The program provides holistic and practical theological training for women and seeks to help them establish mature Christian lives while they face issues of individual growth, family responsibility, church service, and other challenges of contemporary times. Recruitment of registered students will begin from July to September. At present, you can take the courses as a non-registered student or as an auditor.

### **Youth Ministry Certificate Program (Beginning in September)**

To provide systematic training in ministerial skills and basic theology for those Christians interested in understanding the youth community, and especially those committed to join the youth ministry. Program contents include ministry subjects, topical meeting, retreat camp, spiritual formation group, and ministry practicum. Classes meet every Monday evening. The program can be completed in 2 years.

The new school year will begin in September. Those who enroll before July 18 will have a 50% discount from the registration fee. The registration deadline is August 19.

### **Certificate in Mission Ministry Program**

The program is designed to provide holistic and systematic ministry techniques for those interested in understanding and joining church mission ministry in response to Jesus' great commission. Student recruitment for 2016-17 will begin in July and continue until September.

For enquiries, please call 2711 2552 or you can log-on to our website at [www.hkbts.edu.hk/lted](http://www.hkbts.edu.hk/lted) to download the application form.

## Pastoral Continuing Education Center

**April – June Quarter** (teaching is conducted in Chinese)

Course/Talk	Speaker	Date	Time
How Christians Should Look at Yoga and Zen Meditation	Dr. Eric Kwong	11/4, 18/4	2:00 - 5:00 pm
The Trends and Challenges in Today's Mission	Dr. Albert Wu	18/4, 25/4	9:30 am - 12:30 pm
How a Pastor with "Integrity" Is Forged	Rev. Lo Sek-wai	25/4	2:00 - 5:00 pm
Understanding The Integration of Trauma Healing and The Christian Faith	Ms. Esther Poon	9/5, 16/5, 23/5	2:00 - 5:00 pm
Seeing-through the Book of Joshua: History, Politics, and Theology	Dr. Robert Lo	30/5	9:30 am - 12:30 pm
Children's Ministry: Keeping Up with The Times	Mrs. Gabie Fok	6/6, 13/6, 20/6	2:00 - 5:00 pm
A Brief Discussion of <i>The Sibylline Oracles—Chapter Five</i>	Dr. Clement Shum	13/6	9:30 am - 12:30 pm
Contemporary Apologetics	Dr. Kwan Kai-man	20/6, 27/6	9:30 am - 12:30 pm

Fee concessions : (1) A 10% discount for graduates from the Seminary's degree programs, ministers of Baptist churches, and students taking degree programs in our Lay Theological Education Department; (2) a 20% discount for cardholders of HKBTS Alumni Association; (3) a 50% discount for full-time seminary students. For details, please refer to the application form or our website: [www.hkbts.edu.hk/pce](http://www.hkbts.edu.hk/pce)

Teaching location: 8/F, Christian Building, 56 Bute Street, Mongkok, Kowloon

Enrolment : Application forms can be downloaded from the Seminary's website or registered online: [www.hkbts.edu.hk/pce](http://www.hkbts.edu.hk/pce)

Enquiries : Please contact us by calling 2768 5179 or by emailing [pce@hkbts.edu.hk](mailto:pce@hkbts.edu.hk)

## Distance Education Program

### Exploring Truth · Reflecting upon Faith · Equipping for Ministry

Student Recruitment: The new diploma programs will begin in September 2016 while the certificate programs can begin at any time.

Correspondence Program	Program Description	Admission Requirements	Date of Commencement	Registration Deadline
Diploma in Biblical Studies Program	Through an in-depth study of a specific book of the Bible, students are trained to do systematic hermeneutics and Bible study.	Secondary school leavers with their church pastor's recommendation	March and September	<b>March semester :</b> Hong Kong: February 10  Overseas: January 10  <b>September semester :</b> Hong Kong: August 10  Overseas: July 10
Diploma in Christian Studies Program	Designed for equipping students for ministry, the program helps students strengthen their foundation in the Christian faith, doctrine, and theology.			
Higher Diploma in Biblical Studies/Christian Studies programs	Further studies for students having completed the diploma program			
Certificate in N.T./O.T. Studies Programs	Introductory programs in biblical studies, leading students to study a specific book of the Bible systematically	All are welcome	Register at any time	

**Elective students:** Students can choose a portion of the subjects offered in the correspondence courses according to their own personal interest. For details, please log-on to the Distance Education website: [www.hkbts.edu.hk/dist](http://www.hkbts.edu.hk/dist).

Online Program	Program Description	Date of Commencement
<b>Online Version</b> <b>Online Certificate in Old Testament Studies Program</b>  <b>Online Certificate in New Testament Studies Program</b>	<b>Description:</b> * Students can download learning materials and course work directly from the website. * Upon completion of the course work, a student may upload it for the tutor to mark and provide comments. * The whole process is more efficient and time-saving than through correspondence.	* Students can begin at any time with fee concessions. * Trial study of the online program is welcome: <a href="http://elearning@hkbtn.edu.hk">http://elearning@hkbtn.edu.hk</a>

For enquiries, please call 2768 5105, or email [deinfo@hkbtn.edu.hk](mailto:deinfo@hkbtn.edu.hk), or log-on to the Distance Education website at [www.hkbtn.edu.hk/dist](http://www.hkbtn.edu.hk/dist).

## Topical Lecture

Topic : **An Educational Program Beginning and Closing with Fearing Yahweh**

Content : Proverbs is like an educational program, recording how a teacher (the father) teaches his student (child) to understand the truth of life through different mottos, paradoxes, and discussions. This lecture seeks to understand the design concept, foundation, and objective through a study of the book's introduction, that is verses 1 to 7, so as to re-examine our (Christians) teaching and learning before God (Christian education).

Speaker : Dr. Tony Sher (HKBT's Assistant Professor of Old Testament, Ph.D., The University of Edinburgh)

Date : May 21 (Saturday)

Time : 2:30 - 4:00 pm

Venue : 8/F., Christian Building, 56, Bute Street, Mongkok, Kowloon

Registration: Please call 2768 5105, email [deinfo@hkbtn.edu.hk](mailto:deinfo@hkbtn.edu.hk), or visit [www.hkbtn.edu.hk/dist](http://www.hkbtn.edu.hk/dist) (registration available via the website)

Deadline : May 20 (Admission is free, but space is limited so register to ensure a place)

## Publication News



The Seminary's Professor of Old Testament, Dr. Wong Fook-kong's new book, *Theology of the Pentateuch*, has been published in February. It is the second volume in the Seminary's Biblical Theology Series. The Pentateuch is the cornerstone of the Old Testament and the theological foundation of the gospel. It explains the need for salvation and describes the beginning of salvation history. This is where doctrines like original sin, propitiatory offering, and justification by faith originate. *Theology of the Pentateuch* introduces readers to the discussions and questions regarding these issues in the context of the Christian canon.

Our biannual academic journal, *Hill Road* (issue 36), has been published in January with "Theological Interpretation"

as its theme. There are four thematic articles: "A Theology of Election and Non-Election in the Pentateuch and Its Practical Implications" (Wong Fook-kong), "Christological Hermeneutics" (Lindsay Robertson), "Theological Interpretation of Origen" (Nathan Ng), and "From the Holy Scripture to the Theological Interpretation of the Holy Scripture" (Andres Tang). Additionally, there are three miscellaneous articles and several book reviews. This issue's miscellaneous articles include a Chinese translation of the morning lecture manuscripts from last year's Belote Lectures. The overall theme is "Being with God" with its sub-themes "Being with God Alone," "Being with God and One Another," and "Being with God and the Creation." *Hill Road* is available at the Seminary and its town centers as well as in local Christian book stores. For enquiries, please call the Publication Office at 2768 5168.

# Awards Ceremony and Inauguration Ceremony of Board of Directors



The Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary  
requests the honor of your presence  
at the Awards Ceremony  
and Inauguration Ceremony  
of a new Board of Directors  
on Thursday, the twenty-six of May,  
two thousand and sixteenth  
at seven o'clock in the evening  
Seminary Chapel  
1 Nin Ming Road, Sai Kung North, Sai O, N. T.



## R e p l y

I will support The Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary by

- praying for the Seminary's theological education ministry
- contributing \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for
  - Education Fund     Others: \_\_\_\_\_
- Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Mr / Ms / Rev / Dr / Mr & Mrs)
- Address: \_\_\_\_\_
- Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_
- Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Donation Methods:

- Crossed cheque** payable to  
"Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary"
- Cash** either deliver to the Seminary or direct deposit into our  
Hang Seng Bank Account No. "242-026144-003"
- Monthly Autopay** by Bank Account —  
autopay form will be forwarded to you

*Thank you for your support !*

- Credit card:**     VISA     MASTERCARD
- One-off Donation     Monthly Donation\*
- Cardholder's Name: \_\_\_\_\_
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(Same as signature on credit card)
- Card No.: [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] - [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] - [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] - [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
- Verification Code : [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] (The last 3 digits on the back of card)
- Card Expiry date: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ (MM/YY)
- Amount: HK\$ \_\_\_\_\_ (Credit card donations are denominated in HK\$)
- The bank charge for credit card donation will be paid by the Seminary.
- \* You may inform us to terminate this monthly donation at any time.

- Please send cheque or bank deposit slip with this reply to the Seminary at 1 Nin Ming Road, Sai O, Sai Kung North, N.T., Hong Kong.
- Receipt will be issued and donation is tax-deductible.
- Your name and donation amount will appear in the Seminary's *Newsletter*. If you do not wish them to appear in the *Newsletter*, please tick the right box.
- Your personal data will only be used for issuing receipt and Seminary's administration purposes.
- For donation enquiries: Tel : (852) 2715 9511  
Fax: (852) 2761 0868



## DONORS REPORT FOR DECEMBER 2015

<b>Education Fund (Church / Organization)</b>		何錦燕	500.00	無名氏	500.00
九龍國際浸信會	12,365.00	何譚惠如	1,000.00	無名氏	400.00
上環浸信會	2,500.00	吳建恆	88.10	無名氏	300.00
大埔主恩浸信會	1,000.00	吳炳榮伉儷	8,000.00	無名氏	300.00
大埔浸信會	12,000.00	吳國傑伉儷	500.00	無名氏	200.00
屯門浸信教會	500.00	呂志華	1,100.00	無名氏	106.50
以馬內利浸信會	4,700.00	李宇海	500.00	無名氏	102.10
生命頌浸信會	1,000.00	林威烈	1,000.00	馬志遠伉儷	HK\$ 313,336.70
竹園浸信會	6,000.00	姚安清心	1,000.00	US\$	200.00
利群浸信會	3,000.00	洪坡拉	200.00		
青山浸信會	15,000.00	洪錦源	100.00	<b>Lay Theological Education Program</b>	
紅磡浸信會	3,500.00	洪鷹輪	200.00	蔡艷桃	HK\$ 500.00
香港(西區)潮語浸信會	5,000.00	胡文恩伉儷	500.00		
香港仔浸信會	14,303.80	徐詩雅	300.00	<b>Local Filipino Program</b>	
香港浸信教會	117,250.00	曹偉彤	6,000.00	張智理伉儷	7,500.00
香港堅尼地城浸信教會	1,200.00	梁麗嫦	300.00	陳麗英	400.00
柴灣浸信會	3,000.00	許鋒威	400.00	溫祥、黎琮珍	400.00
粉嶺浸信會	43,037.00	陳偉倫	200.00	HK\$	8,300.00
荃灣潮語浸信會	1,000.00	陳麗英	1,000.00	<b>Graduation Ceremony</b>	
基磐浸信會	1,500.00	勞家怡	500.00	上水浸信會	HK\$ 200.00
將軍澳浸信會	1,000.00	曾慶忠	500.00		
深水埗浸信會	10,000.00	馮德華	200.00	<b>Book Fund</b>	
深荃浸信會	500.00	黃華娟	100.00	2015 BTh. 畢業班同學	HK\$ 1,400.00
第一城浸信會	5,000.00	黃雅忠	10,000.00		
愛群道浸信會	6,000.00	溫祥、黎琮珍	500.00	<b>Distance Education Program</b>	
新希望浸信會	1,500.00	葉煥章	300.00	Chinese Gospel Church of Dublin	8,303.23
置富浸信教會	2,000.00	劉永生、鍾梓萍	300.00	Ernest & Sylvia Ho	1,000.00
嘉盛浸信會	4,000.00	劉建紅	600.00	何鏡煒伉儷	3,000.00
銅鑼灣浸信會	3,500.00	蔡慧英	200.00	鄒小寶	1,200.00
興田浸信會	1,000.00	鄧炳光伉儷	1,000.00	無名氏	444.00
灣仔浸信會	120,000.00	鄭德儀家人	500.00	HK\$	13,947.23
觀塘浸信會	1,469.00	薛聲明	1,000.00		
浸信宣道會明道堂	500.00	謝任生伉儷	1,000.00	<b>DE: Special Need Training Program</b>	
浸信宣道會啟業堂	5,766.78	羅佩珊	100.00	無名氏	HK\$ 100.00
基督教四方福音會彩坪堂	1,000.00	羅凱慈	500.00		
基督教宣道會信愛堂	1,000.00	譚嘉敏	500.00	<b>Seminary Sunday : 九龍城浸信會</b>	
基督教宣道會華基堂	2,000.00	關志偉	100.00	九龍城浸信會會眾	650.00
基督教華人神召會旺角堂	500.00	關德華伉儷	140.00	Kwan Kit Lai	100.00
啟聞基金	300.00	龐凌玉珍	1,000.00	尹麗芬	1,000.00
HK\$	<u>414,891.58</u>	蘇敏儀	200.00	李隆生伉儷	1,000.00
		主知名	300.00	徐何美倫	500.00
<b>Education Fund (Donor)</b>		無名氏	250,000.00	徐慧敏	500.00
方志強	100.00	無名氏	5,000.00	梁桂華	500.00
王紹良	700.00	無名氏	4,000.00	陳紫明	200.00
王群	800.00	無名氏	1,500.00	陸澤潛伉儷	2,000.00
白智信伉儷	500.00	無名氏	1,000.00	黃秀琴	500.00
伍志龍	500.00	無名氏	1,000.00	潘妙嫻	100.00
朱活平伉儷	300.00	無名氏	1,000.00	羅榮忠	10,000.00
何仲儀	1,000.00	無名氏	900.00	HK\$	<u>17,050.00</u>
何偉明	200.00	無名氏	500.00		

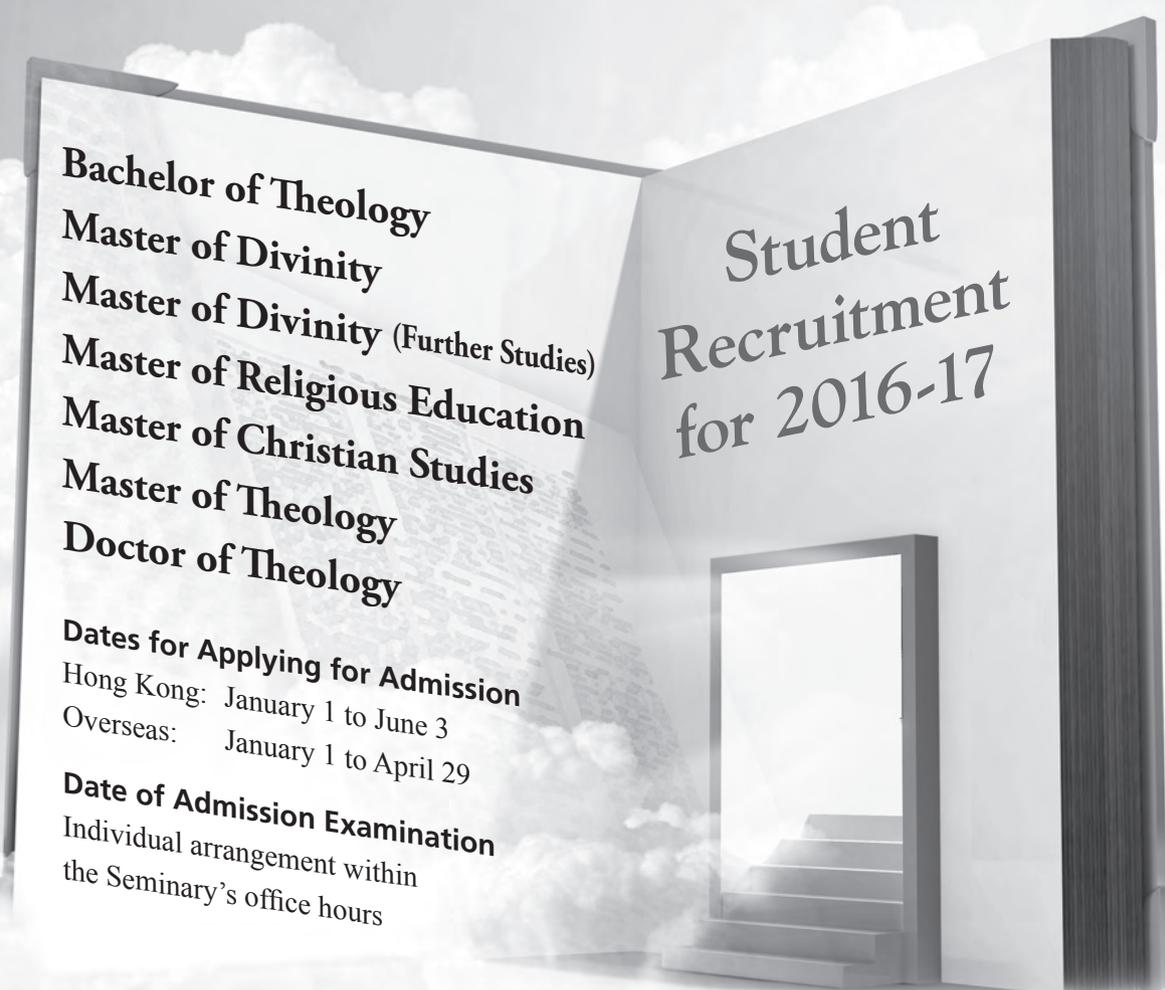
## DONORS REPORT FOR JANUARY 2016

<b>Education Fund (Church / Organization)</b>		呂志華	1,100.00	無名氏	500.00
九龍城浸信會	260,000.00	林威烈	1,000.00	無名氏	200.00
九龍國際浸信會	16,131.00	洪坡拉	200.00	無名氏	2,000.00
大埔浸信會	12,000.00	洪錦源	200.00	無名氏	300.00
屯門浸信教會	500.00	洪錦漢	500.00		HK\$ <u>145,060.00</u>
以馬內利浸信會	4,300.00	胡文恩伉儷	500.00	<b>Lay Theological Education Program</b>	
尖沙嘴國語浸信會	5,000.00	倪承恩	7,300.00	蔡艷桃	500.00
沙田浸信會	8,000.00	徐均平伉儷	10,000.00	婦神同學會	3,575.00
赤柱浸信會	3,000.00	徐詩雅	300.00	無名氏	10.00
香港(西區)潮語浸信會	5,000.00	梁兆津伉儷	20,000.00		HK\$ <u>4,085.00</u>
香港天樂浸信教會	24,000.00	梁麗嫦	300.00	<b>Local Filipino Program</b>	
香港仔浸信會	19,872.95	許鋒威	400.00	第一城浸信會	6,050.00
香港浸信教會	117,250.00	陳美德伉儷	1,000.00	溫祥、黎琮珍	400.00
香港堅尼地城浸信教會	1,200.00	陳偉倫	200.00		HK\$ <u>6,450.00</u>
恩牧浸信會	5,000.00	陳偉權	500.00	<b>Distance Education Program</b>	
基磐浸信會	1,500.00	陳麗英	700.00	Ernest & Sylvia Ho	1,000.00
深荃浸信會	500.00	勞家怡	500.00	何鏡煒伉儷	3,000.00
圓洲角浸信會	5,000.00	曾慶忠	500.00	鄒小寶	1,200.00
愛群道浸信會	9,000.00	馮德華	200.00	無名氏	444.00
置富浸信教會	31,250.00	黃華娟	100.00		HK\$ <u>5,644.00</u>
銅鑼灣浸信會	3,500.00	楊玉環	5,000.00	<b>DE: Special Need Training Program</b>	
觀塘浸信會	1,285.00	楊謝金玉	2,700.00	無名氏	20,000.00
中華傳道會盛福堂	1,500.00	溫祥、黎琮珍	500.00	無名氏	100.00
基督教四方福音會彩坪堂	1,000.00	葉煥章	300.00		HK\$ <u>20,100.00</u>
基督教宣道會華基堂	2,000.00	劉永生、鍾梓萍	300.00	<b>65th Anniversary Thanksgiving Service</b>	
基督教華人神召會旺角堂	500.00	劉玉英	1,000.00	陳美德伉儷	1,000.00
基督教筲箕灣潮人生命堂	4,000.00	劉建紅	600.00	楊玉環	2,000.00
基督福音堂主愛堂	10,000.00	蔡慧英	200.00	無名氏	1,000.00
啟聞基金	300.00	鄧炳光伉儷	1,000.00		HK\$ <u>4,000.00</u>
HK\$	<u>552,588.95</u>	薛聲明	2,000.00	<b>President Council</b>	
<b>Education Fund (Donor)</b>		羅佩珊	100.00	李德祥	10,000.00
Ricky Ng Ka Fai	20.00	羅凱慈	500.00	陸彩萍	30,000.00
方志強	100.00	譚嘉敏	500.00	溫恩智伉儷	20,000.00
王紹良	700.00	關志偉	100.00		HK\$ <u>60,000.00</u>
王群	800.00	關德華伉儷	140.00	<b>Scholarship and Bursary</b>	
白智信伉儷	500.00	龐凌玉珍	1,000.00	張智理伉儷	700.00
伍志龍	500.00	主知名	300.00	<b>Faith, Hope and Love Project</b>	
朱活平伉儷	300.00	無名氏	300.00	李德祥	5,000.00
何仲儀	1,000.00	無名氏	4,000.00		HK\$ <u>5,000.00</u>
何偉明	200.00	無名氏	1,000.00		
何錦燕	500.00	無名氏	5,000.00		
何譚惠如	1,000.00	無名氏	5,000.00		
吳炳榮伉儷	8,000.00	無名氏	400.00		
吳國傑伉儷	500.00	無名氏	50,000.00		

## Financial Report

### General Fund, 1 November 2015 - 31 January 2016

	HK\$
Income	8,057,669.94
Expenditure	<u>(8,751,375.20)</u>
Surplus / (Deficit)	<u>(693,705.26)</u>



**Bachelor of Theology**  
**Master of Divinity**  
**Master of Divinity (Further Studies)**  
**Master of Religious Education**  
**Master of Christian Studies**  
**Master of Theology**  
**Doctor of Theology**

**Student  
 Recruitment  
 for 2016-17**

**Dates for Applying for Admission**  
 Hong Kong: January 1 to June 3  
 Overseas: January 1 to April 29

**Date of Admission Examination**  
 Individual arrangement within  
 the Seminary's office hours

**Enquiries** Telephone: 2768 5130 Email: [admissions@hkbtn.edu.hk](mailto:admissions@hkbtn.edu.hk) Website: [www.hkbtn.edu.hk](http://www.hkbtn.edu.hk)

## *Precious Moments*

**January 12, 2016**

### ***Spiritual Formation Day***

The *Spiritual Formation Day* was held on the second day of the spring semester to enable students to be spiritually renewed for a new school term. The theme was "discernment." During the morning session, Chaplain Rev. Brian Lam and Dr. Jonathan Lo, Assistant Professor of New Testament, gave messages while in the afternoon there was a time for individual reflection and a small group discussion with both teachers and students.



**January 14**

### ***All Seminary Prayer Meeting***

Taking the Lord's Prayer as the framework, Associate Chaplain Ms. Grace Chan led all the teachers, students, and staff to reflect on their personal relationship with God and pray together for the kingdom of God. First, we had a time of personal reflection and prayer, and then in groups, we prayed for the world, for the coming of God's kingdom, and for His will to be done.



**February 23**

**Dr. Timothy Lim Spoke on a Topical Message**

Dr. Timothy Lim, Chair Professor of the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism, Divinity School of University of Edinburgh, spoke on the topic of “Why Do We Study Ancient Judaism?”



**February 29**

**Alumni Association’s Day Retreat**

The theme for the Retreat was “Empowerment for Pastoral Workers.” Rev. Maak Hay-chun was invited to share on two topics. With earnestness, Rev. Maak encouraged our alumni to trust in God’s power even amidst difficulties inherent to the lives of pastors as they promote God’s ministries and enjoy His presence and gracious blessings.



**March 10**

**Sharing from Dr. Graham Walker**

Dr. Graham Walker, President of Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary, spoke on the topic of “Baptist Theology and Worldwide Ministry: Rethinking Adoniram Judson.”



**March 15-17**

**Mission Week**

For three days successively, the Mission Week was held at the morning chapel on the theme of “Christianity in China: 1954 to 2016.” Dr. Philip Wickeri, Professor of Church History of HKSCH Ming Hua Theological College, was the speaker. The sub-themes for the three days were “The Church in Turmoil: From Liberation to The End of Cultural Revolution,” “Rebirth of Christianity: 35 Years of Reform and Opening,” “The Future of China and Christianity.”

