

香港浸信會神學院



Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary

Today's Students, Tomorrow's Pastors
Today's Seminary, Tomorrow's Churches

Newsletter

May 2017

President's Word

On "Preaching" and "Graduation Sermons"

Feature: The Preaching of Preachers-in-Training

The Full Extent of Jesus' Love

The Characteristics of a Preacher

To Sow in Tears in a Dry Land

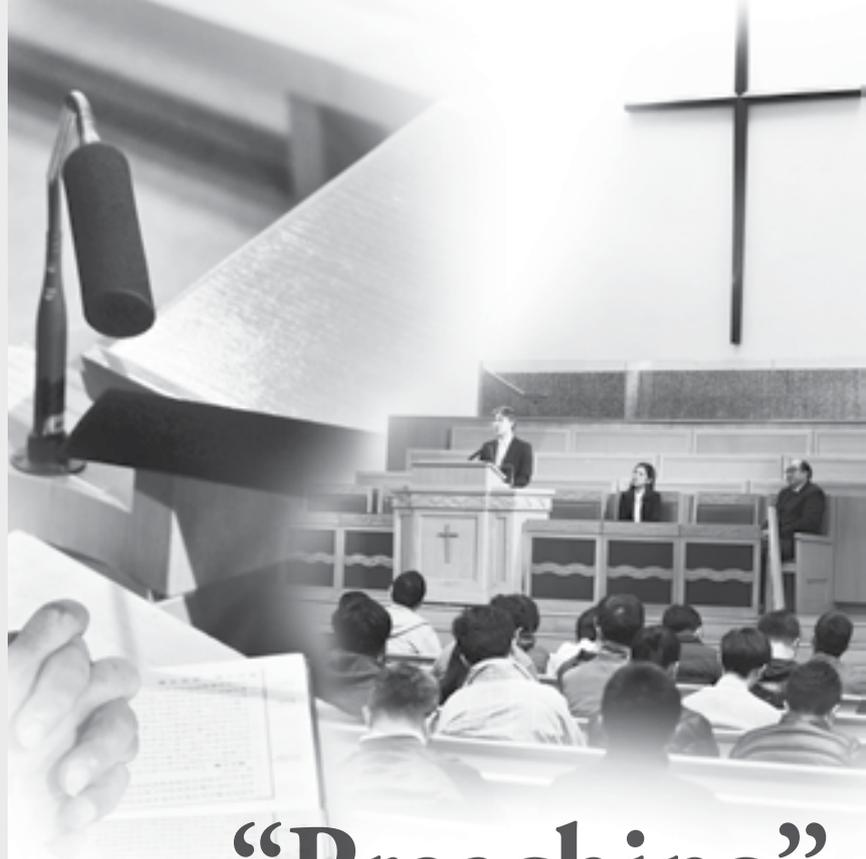
Faculty Sharing

God's Justice Is Unlike Ours (I)

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On "Preaching" and "Graduation Sermons"

Joshua Cho



President's Word

Cultivating the "spirit of preaching"

Since the time of the Reformation, preaching has played an important role in worship. The Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary (HKBTS) emphasizes the importance of giving our students a solid foundation in biblical and theological knowledge and the importance of teaching them to interpret the message of the Bible faithfully. Above all, our preachers-in-training must cultivate their own preaching with spiritual vitality. Their preaching must be the kind of preaching that reflects this principle.



Beginning in the 2009-10 academic year, the seminary further enriched the training and

practices of the preaching ministry. I expect that each sermon preached by our faculty members and students reflects this in that it will be a faithful and beautiful service, enabling the whole community, both the speakers and the audience, to grow together. I feel that the seminary must actively develop our students into preachers. We encourage them to cultivate their own “spirit of preaching,” because only then will they be able to deliver their preaching with spiritual vitality at the pulpit.

To become God’s faithful workers who have no need to be ashamed, preachers must pay close attention to the core of their ministry, and not chase after trends, but rather ask God to lead us back to the most important aspect—preaching the Gospel of the cross. For the world, the cross represents a very humiliating death; it is a foolish and ridiculous sign. But preachers must be convinced that we can only find life on the cross, because the cross is the source of salvation and the mystery of God. By the death of Jesus Christ, God has turned lamentations into triumphal hymns, humiliation into glory, despair into hope, and a mark of death into a sign of peace.

A preacher must proclaim the truth of the cross faithfully, not conforming to widespread secular culture which rewards opportunism and easy truths. Instead of simply trying to win the favor of others, sermons must be faithful to the Bible. We pray for the Word of God to penetrate into our lives. May we preach the truth of the Bible faithfully and humbly. May we proclaim nothing except Christ and His cross, and not by artful or sensational means. May we exhort our brothers and sisters in Christ with love and patience, believing that the Spirit of God would open their ears to hear and their hearts to follow His Word.

This is what I mean by the “spirit of preaching.” If preachers practice preaching with spiritual vitality, not only can they feed their flock, but they themselves will also be molded to become better shepherds. With this kind of spirituality, preaching will not be a burden, but will instead bring abundant joy and rest; the mission of the cross will be a source of life and strength.

A preacher is an evangelist, a pastor and a prophet

The preachers who are being nurtured in the seminary will take up the preaching ministry in the future.

As I send the graduates out into the fields during the Commissioning Ceremony, I have been praying to God again and again that they would become “evangelists” who faithfully deliver the gospel message, “pastors” who listen and serve their brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as “prophets” who have the courage to speak the truth and who dare to engage themselves in the fight for it.

The concept of “evangelist” is derived from the Greek word *kerusso*, which means “preaching,” in the New Testament. By *kerusso*, God speaks through a human, just as a king delivers his words through the mouth of his messenger. The mission of a preacher is to become a vessel for God’s words, faithfully passing on the message of the Gospel — the message of God concerning life and death, His judgment and the good news of forgiveness. As “evangelists,” we must pay attention to God’s voice with faith and discern His will. Once we have heard His voice, we must pass it on faithfully, without any amendments to His message. And we must also respond to His words — not just respond, but also follow through with what is asked of us.

Moreover, preachers should also be “pastors” who love their flock. They should care and serve their brothers and sisters in Christ. A “pastor” will respond to the existential conditions of the people, feed the people of God with the Word of God, as well as satisfy their physical hunger and spiritual needs. These pastors genuinely get along with people, bringing healing and changes to the people they encounter. If a sermon can be delivered with a kind of faithfulness that tells the congregation, “I understand what you have experienced,” the congregation will be able to understand and receive the message of the preacher. Sincere care further reveals the humanity of the pastor. Therefore, preachers who have concerns for their flock are also caregivers, counselors and healers. They must have good ears to listen, sound discernment, empathy and love as

well as integrity.

Furthermore, a preacher must also be a “prophet” who has the courage to speak the truth and act on it. A faithful sermon is prophetic in the sense that it dares to proclaim the divine sovereignty that transcends all the powers of the corporeal world. Being committed to delivering the Word of God, prophets will not care about how others will react or what price they will have to pay; they dare to confront, and expose the depth of sin as well as revealing how people are entangled by sin. Confrontation is often painful, but its intent is to bring healing; this is an essential part of pastoral care. Such preachers have to be genuine and authentic; they have to be genuine to God, others and themselves, so that they can preach genuinely.

Resuming graduation sermons

Seven years ago, in order to strengthen our students’ preparations for the preaching ministry, and after a period of exploration and consideration, I, along with my faculty team, decided to resume the graduation sermon arrangement. Since then, graduating students must deliver a sermon at the pulpit. I know that for a variety of reasons, several local theological seminaries have ceased their graduation sermon arrangements. Even so, we still endeavor to provide our students with an opportunity to practice preaching. Through this experience, they will be reminded that preaching is a very important part of ministry.

I remember when I first proposed to resume the graduation sermon arrangement, some faculty members worried that the seminary may not have enough chapel services for each graduating student to deliver a sermon. At that time, I suggested a solution that two students could preach at the same chapel service. If there were two students preaching at the same chapel, they may even work together; their messages or scriptural texts may relate to each other. Hence, the two sermons could be mutually connected, like a bird flying on two wings. I therefore called this form of preaching “flying on two wings.” I explained to the faculty members that this approach is not without precedent. For example, two veteran preachers, Brian K. Blount and Gary W. Charles, co-authored the book *Preaching Mark in Two Voices*, which proclaims the message of the Gospel of Mark from two different perspectives. In doing so, the book fully reveals the abundance and the depth of the Word of God.

In the early stages when the graduation sermon arrangement had just been resumed, the graduating students were invited to participate. After the three-year transition period had ended, all full-time students were then required to deliver a graduation sermon before graduation. At the beginning when students were faced with this new challenge, many were a bit hesitant. But then the number of students enrolled for preaching gradually increased. A new atmosphere of excitement and expectancy began to pervade the campus. During that year, more than 60% of the graduating students enrolled to give their graduation sermon. In the second year, the number of applicants increased to more than 80%. We can see that not only did our students recognize the importance of the preaching ministry, but that their confidence also increased.

A meaningful tradition at HKBTS

Now that the number of graduating students keeps increasing, we generally arrange that two students deliver their graduation sermons during the same chapel service. Some students are excited to pair up and adopt the “flying on two wings” approach. Often each of the two students will choose a closely related topic, or each will expound a related text from the same book, or even from a different book of the Bible depending on the subject. In this way,



the messages of the two sermons serve to echo each other. The “flying on two wings” approach has become one of the defining characteristics of the graduation sermon. Subsequently, even teachers have joined in. A teacher will sometimes be paired with a graduating student, each preaching a closely related scriptural text at the same chapel service. The messages of the teacher and the student echo each other, demonstrating the full essence of the “flying on two wings” approach.

Although the students may have taken courses like “preaching methods,” “preaching practice” and may have accumulated some practical experience in the classroom, standing up in front of the pulpit and delivering a sermon before all the teachers and students is, after all, a terrifying experience. In order to encourage and help the students, two teachers serve as “gatekeepers” for the graduating students; they will scrutinize the sermons the students have prepared and make sure that there are no hermeneutical or theological problems. After the graduation preaching, a teacher will lead the audience to pray together for the students who have just preached — pray for their needs and entrust their future ministry to the hands of the Lord.

The outcome has been encouraging and gratifying. For more than seven years, the overall performance of the graduating students has been brilliant. All of them have made a good effort to preach the Word of God, and the whole seminary community has been very supportive of them. Each time a graduation sermon ends, the whole seminary community will come together to shake hands with the student preachers, giving them encouragement and blessings as well as expressing gratitude for their messages. No one would have thought that these spontaneous handshakes and hugs which have carried on from the very first graduate preaching would continue into the present. It has become a tradition of HKBTS which is both a gratifying and moving experience for the whole seminary community.

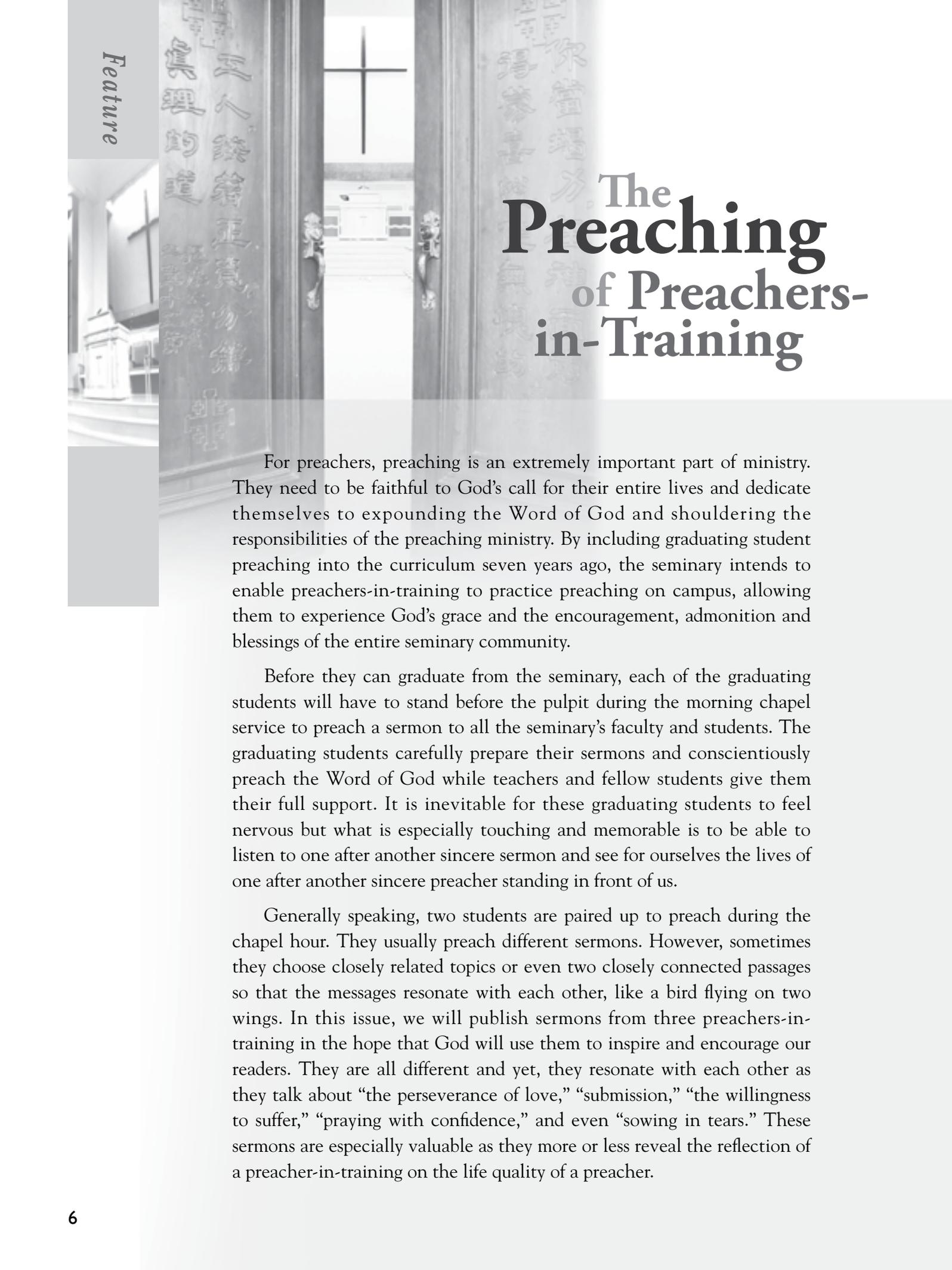
The sermons of the faculty: amazing interactions and tacit understandings

In recent years, the faculty has become more mature, resulting in great synergy. I find that the mutual trust and friendship among the faculty members has also been deepening, so that all our energy can be focused on

teaching, research, and working together to care for the various needs of our students. I thank God for the healthy community the faculty shares. In particular, I am amazed by the close interactions and tacit understandings among us. Such interaction and understanding is often reflected in the sermons. At the very beginning of the spring semester, Dr. Freeman Huen delivered a sermon entitled “Just Praying” which examined the issue of “justice and prayer” for teachers and students on the Spiritual Formation Day. It elicited enthusiastic responses from the faculty members at the subsequent chapels. For example, Dr. Wong Fook-kong and Dr. Nathan Ng then preached on the topics “Just Pray” and “Just Prayer” respectively. The former taught us how to pray by learning from Nehemiah’s prayer to God. The latter examined the life transformation of Peter at different turning points in his life and how it can shed light on the way we should pray to God today. In addition, the messages of Dr. Andres Tang and Dr. Eric Kwong also focused on “prayer” in close succession.

Unexpectedly, an amazing synchronicity also occurred between Dr. Jonathan Lo and me. My sermon was arranged to precede Dr. Lo’s sermon by one day, and the scriptural text we selected for exposition was coincidentally the same text! God providentially led us to expound the same scriptural text and share two related messages with our faculty members and students at two consecutive chapels. In HKBTS, a tacit understanding among the faculty members has been formed.

That is how we are learning to preach and listen to the Word of God at the chapel services. The chapel service at HKBTS is a sacred opportunity for communal worship. It is a spiritual discipline for all of us. It is an essential part of our spiritual formation. During the chapel service, we worship, pray, and listen to the Word of God together as a community. Our research and what we learn in the classroom will all converge at the chapel, which is like a big classroom where we as a community come to discern the heart of Jesus Christ through preaching the Bible. I hope that in the process of delivering and receiving sermons, our prospective preachers will learn to discern the will of God; so in the future they will be able to respond to the needs of the church, face the challenges of our society, and walk through the hardship and suffering of this generation with their neighbors.



The Preaching of Preachers- in-Training

For preachers, preaching is an extremely important part of ministry. They need to be faithful to God's call for their entire lives and dedicate themselves to expounding the Word of God and shouldering the responsibilities of the preaching ministry. By including graduating student preaching into the curriculum seven years ago, the seminary intends to enable preachers-in-training to practice preaching on campus, allowing them to experience God's grace and the encouragement, admonition and blessings of the entire seminary community.

Before they can graduate from the seminary, each of the graduating students will have to stand before the pulpit during the morning chapel service to preach a sermon to all the seminary's faculty and students. The graduating students carefully prepare their sermons and conscientiously preach the Word of God while teachers and fellow students give them their full support. It is inevitable for these graduating students to feel nervous but what is especially touching and memorable is to be able to listen to one after another sincere sermon and see for ourselves the lives of one after another sincere preacher standing in front of us.

Generally speaking, two students are paired up to preach during the chapel hour. They usually preach different sermons. However, sometimes they choose closely related topics or even two closely connected passages so that the messages resonate with each other, like a bird flying on two wings. In this issue, we will publish sermons from three preachers-in-training in the hope that God will use them to inspire and encourage our readers. They are all different and yet, they resonate with each other as they talk about "the perseverance of love," "submission," "the willingness to suffer," "praying with confidence," and even "sowing in tears." These sermons are especially valuable as they more or less reveal the reflection of a preacher-in-training on the life quality of a preacher.

The Full Extent of Jesus' Love

To Wan-ting (M.Div. 3)

Scripture: John 13:1-20

A demonstration of Jesus' love: Loving to the very end

I know of a nursing home female manager, a Christian, who is now in her seventies. Before her retirement, she personally took care of every one of the residents who have a severe physical impairment together with mental impairment. All the residents' daily lives and food were to be taken care of. Every day the female manager woke up and started preparing breakfast as early as 5 am. With the help of two other sisters, she fed each of the residents, bathed them, got them dressed and the two sisters accompanied them to special schools. In short, every aspect of the residents' lives was attended to with meticulous care. Upon reaching a certain age, this female manager had to retire and handed over her work to the caregivers to take care of the residents.

The love of this woman towards the residents touches me deeply. As the manager, she personally serves the residents, who are from relatively disadvantaged social backgrounds and have physical and mental impairment. Such an example is rare. We generally serve according to an extent and with a method that is comfortable for us. When I think of the ministry of this lady, she reminds me of Jesus in John 13:1-17.

This passage records the third Passover feast in the Gospel of John. During the Passover, the Israelites would often kill a lamb as a sacrifice to God. In the third Passover feast in John's Gospel, it gives an account of a series of events that happened to Jesus who served as the lamb of atonement for humanity at that fateful hour. In Chapter 13 verse 1, Jesus knew that the time had come for him. He did something unusual — he washed the feet of his disciples. Verse 1 explains the reason for his actions: "He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end." (New Living Translation)

Jesus demonstrated through action how he loved the disciples "to the very end." At meal time, he got up, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around

his waist. Then, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet. If you have been in church for many years, you may have had the experience of "your feet being washed" or "you have washed other



people's feet." For example, when you join a retreat camp, they may practice the way Jesus served; your instructor or your pastor will "wash your feet" or you will "wash the feet" of your group members or teenagers, etc. Usually we do this on special occasions. However, actually in those days servants did this for their master every day; when the master came back home, the slaves or maidservants had to wash the feet of their masters before entering into the house. Feet-washing was an ordinary action at that time and yet Jesus chose this action to demonstrate "the full extent of his love."

This attitude has two aspects

Through his actions, Jesus reveals "the full extent of his love" in two aspects:

1. The subversion of traditional practices

The first is a subversion of traditional practices. In a house where there are both a master and a Filipino maid, who do you think will do the feet washing? If both the superior and the subordinate are present, who will wash the feet of whom? It must be the servant or the subordinate who will do the feet washing. This is based on the idea of social class and it is more reasonable to expect the one lower in status or position to do the job. The one with a lower position usually does more manual labor. For example, in a medical ward changing diapers is work that both a nurse who has more education and a caregiver who has less education can do. But as we all know, this work is generally done by a caregiver.

2. Humble oneself

The second aspect is to humble oneself. For one in a high position to unexpectedly do something lowly, unless he is intentionally pretending to show how good he is, he must be one who can condescend himself. In verse 4, it describes Jesus who then “took off” his outer clothing. The verb “took off” is the same verb used when Jesus “lay down” his life in John 10:11; similarly, the verb used to “put on” (13:12) his clothes is the same verb used to “put up” the sheep’s life (10:18).

In Chapter 10, it says that Jesus lays down his own life for the sake of the sheep (or men) but that he has the authority to take it up. That means he actually has the power to let go or the power to resist but he chooses to forsake his own power. Only those who have power can have the opportunity to be humble; only those who have can give away what they possess. Jesus has the status of a teacher, the identity of a master, and he has authority, originally he could keep everything to himself and give nothing away. Yet, he is willing to humble himself and do the lowly work of feet washing. This kind of love shows great humility.

Although the action of feet washing may not seem special, it subverts traditional practices and is an example of how to humble oneself.

The meaning of feet washing

Why did Jesus do this? John 13: 6-9 records the conversation between Peter and Jesus in detail. When it is Peter’s turn to be washed, Peter was astonished and refused to be washed by Jesus. Then Jesus said, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” (v.8) The cleansing here has nothing to do with the issue of food cleansing in the Jewish tradition. **Jesus cleaning his disciples’ feet with water also means that Jesus’ future death will make them clean.** Originally they are unclean and sinful but through Jesus’ death, they receive the baptism of atonement so that they can be cleansed and become one with Jesus. Therefore, Jesus must wash the feet of each one of them. Although they do not understand the meaning of Jesus’ words and there is even someone who is unclean and has decided to betray Jesus, Jesus insists on washing his disciples’ feet, hoping that all his disciples will belong to him.

Keep loving even without reciprocation

From the passage we can see that Jesus offers the full extent of his love even when there is no reciprocation, and he still continues to love his disciples.

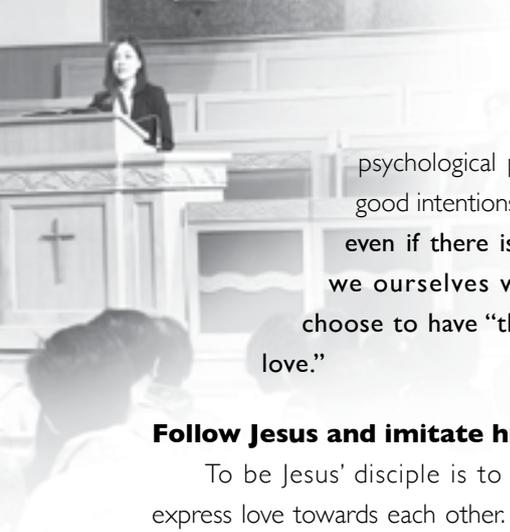
1. Even though the ones being loved do not understand (vv.6-11)

In this narrative, the response of two people made us feel reluctant to wash their feet. The first one is Peter. From what he said, Peter essentially did not understand the reason why Jesus wanted to wash their feet. That is why he said, “You shall never wash my feet.” But later, Peter wanted to belong to Jesus and so he changed his mind, “Then Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” At the time when Jesus displayed “the full extent of his love,” his disciples essentially did not understand his thoughts nor his pains. That is why if we want to learn “the full extent of Jesus’ love,” sometimes we need to experience the displeasure of not being understood. Even then, this will not stop us from continuing to demonstrate our love, just as Jesus did. For he knows very clearly why he has to be crucified on the cross for our sake.

2. Even though the one you love will betray me (vv.2, 11, 18)

What is worse is the next person: Judas. The passage says this from the very beginning: “The devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus.” Jesus had already known someone among his disciples was unclean. What kind of man was Judas? In Chapter 12, John described Judas as a thief because he often stole money from the money bag that he was supposed to keep track of. According to John, from the beginning up to the end, Judas was not a good person. Ever since he began to follow Jesus, not only had he not yet truly repented, soon he would betray Jesus because of his love for money. Jesus had already known what kind of person Judas was but he treated him just as the other eleven disciples by also washing his feet. This kind of love is: Even when you know you are about to be betrayed and hurt, you still choose to love that person who will hurt you.

Therefore, not only should we strive to imitate “the full extent of Jesus’ love,” we also need to have the



psychological preparation: Even if our good intentions will not be understood, **even if there is no reciprocation, and we ourselves will get hurt, we still choose to have “the full extent of Jesus’ love.”**

Follow Jesus and imitate his example

To be Jesus’ disciple is to serve each other and express love towards each other. After washing their feet, Jesus asked his disciples, “Do you understand what I have done for you?” Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.” (cf. vv.12-15) Jesus indicated that what he had demonstrated and personally done, they also had to do. From what follows in vv. 34-35, Jesus told them that the way he loved them was also the way they should love people around them. From the way they live out love, people can see that they are the followers of Jesus.

This kind of love is not blind, not according to one’s own will, interest or feeling, nor is it necessarily done in a manner that one regards as being good for the other person. To do something like this to another person and demand that person to accept it is a kind of love with expectations. In my seminary days, something had happened that made me feel frustrated, and even the new identity and values that I had built with great effort through Christ were severely damaged. At that time, I did not want to love people, nor to love some brothers and sisters specifically. I do not want to give generously, because there was no reciprocation and I felt hurt. One evening during the devotion, God allowed me to read this story. **Jesus told me that since he loves those who belong to him, he would love them to the very end. Having loved those who belong to him, he showed them the full extent of his love. At last, he died in the image of a slave crucified on the cross! This means that to follow Jesus, to be his servant, is to continue to love relying on his power.** I began to ask God to teach me how to love, how to imitate Jesus, how to humble myself, how to offer myself and wait — asking only for the benefit of others and no longer acting according to my own wishes.

Seemingly undistinguished “service of love”

Jesus is willing to love his disciples because he knows why he should make such an effort. The narratives in

Chapters 13 to 17 tell us what Jesus did in preparation for the crucifixion. Jesus knew the time had come, that he was going to be crucified and that it was the time for him to go back to his Father. When there was not much time left, the Son of God who was good at planning, had to do something very important, or something significant and without much choice. At such a crucial moment, Jesus, however, personally did something seemingly insignificant, and that was feet washing. If you have one day to live, what would you do? Or to put it in another way, if you know you are about to leave a community, what would you do? Fellow graduating students, you will soon leave the seminary. Fellow students in field practicum, the time to have field practice at church from beginning to end is actually just 52 weeks. Each visit to a church member is perhaps your last visit. To be honest, who can guarantee that the family members you see today will still be here tomorrow?

As Jesus would soon depart from his beloved disciples, he chose to show “the full extent of his love,” and instructed them to do likewise believing those who did so to be blessed. It would be ideal when we make an effort to do something good for a person, that person appreciates our effort. **But we do not wait for that moment to come when they understand before we make the effort. If so, Jesus would not have done what he did.** Many of the miracles would not have been done, the disciples’ feet would not have been washed and even Jesus himself would not have been crucified! This is because ever since Jesus became flesh up until the moment he died and was resurrected, and even to Christians of this generation, there are still a lot of people who do not understand that much about Jesus! We are not Jesus, it is not necessary or possible for us to be crucified for those around us; but as servants of the Lord, we have to learn the incredible love of Jesus, the higher-ranking must serve the lower-ranking with humility and even do for the lowly the seemingly undistinguished “services of love.”

Recently I saw the movie “Hacksaw Ridge,” which was adapted from a true story that tells of a person named Desmond Doss, who joined the army because of his faith during the Second World War. Yet, he refused to take up a rifle and kill anyone. Doss suffered from horrendous acts of bullying, was held in contempt, and almost imprisoned before going into the battlefield. Because of

his perseverance, he managed to join the American Army as a military doctor and went to the war front. In an important battle, he alone saved the lives of 75 soldiers in one night. Every time he saved one soldier, he would ask God: Allow me to save one more! Consequently, God let him save one after another wounded soldier. At first, no one understood Doss but he did not give way. By the grace of God and his thirst for submission to his God-given mission, he tried his best to save lives as an action of love to his God and his fellow soldiers up until his last moment. I believe the reason for Doss' perseverance was that he knew what he was doing and why he did such things. To him, how other people responded seemed less important.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us learn from Jesus' example. We know not how much time we still have nor how many opportunities are available, but let us take hold of every opportunity, put aside common sense, put aside any calculation, put aside our pride and disdain, put aside our own ego, just put into practice "the full extent of Jesus' love." This is the kind of life lived out by our Lord Jesus Christ and also the instruction He gave us.

- All Bible quotations are taken from the New International Version unless specified otherwise.

The Characteristics of a Preacher

Choy Lai-shun (M.Div. 3)

Scripture: Acts 8:26-40

Foreword

Today we will take a look at the deeds of Philip who preached the Gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch so that we all together could learn something from it. From Acts 8:5-6, we know that Philip could both preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and perform miracles.



Moreover, his gospel work in Galilee had good results. In verse 6, "When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said." Verse 8 said, "There was great joy in that city." What a beautiful picture it was! I am sure we all expect our gospel work to have such kind of effect. How we look forward to our ideal audience who "all pay close attention" to our words which bring "great joy." However, we also understand that we cannot have complete control over the effect of our gospel work. That is within the domain of the work of the Holy Spirit as Paul taught the Corinthians. Paul said, "I

planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." (1 Cor 3:6) As a preacher, what we can do is to plant and to water and then consider how we can do our part well. Therefore, **today through the deeds of Philip who preached the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, let us consider together: What are the characteristics of a preacher? What are the characteristics that we have to learn to acquire?**

Following the guidance of the Holy Spirit

The first characteristic we can learn from Philip is to obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In verse 26, "Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.'" What deserves our attention is this: The angel's demand was an almost unreasonable order. To go south was exactly the opposite of the original plan and where Philip was heading was a sparsely populated wilderness. Was it because in the wilderness there was someone who was waiting for him to preach the Gospel; someone waiting to come to Christ? We do not know whether Philip had an internal struggle about whether to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit because the Bible does not record it. What it does say is that Philip immediately responded to the angel's call: "So he started out" (v. 27).

Philip responded to the Lord's order, and as a result the Ethiopian eunuch came to Christ. This opportunity could not

have been what Philip had foreseen. This Ethiopian eunuch held enormous power, taking charge of all the treasures of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. Not only did this Ethiopian eunuch who later came to Christ change his own life, but it was also a life-changing opportunity for the entire ethnic community. Could such a golden opportunity for the Gospel to be spread have been foreseen by Philip? How could we predict that an uninhabited wilderness would turn out to be the starting point for the Gospel to spread to the gentiles?

Acts 1:7-8 recorded Jesus speaking to the apostles, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes to you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth." Ethiopia is situated in the eastern part of Africa and according to a Roman map, it can be said that it is a place close to the ends of the Earth. That is, Philip is the first apostle who preached the Gospel to someone at the ends of the Earth. Acts 8:40 says, "Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the Gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea." Jesus gave the apostles the mission to preach the Gospel to the very ends of the Earth. **Philip, who was not an apostle, could also join the Gospel-sharing campaign in the extension of God's kingdom simply because he obeyed and that allowed him to grasp the opportunity the Holy Spirit had prepared for him.**

The Ethiopian eunuch was a man of great authority and was in charge of the economic lifeline of the country. In the eyes of the world, he was an important person: someone from the upper-class who held a lofty position second only to the queen; on the other hand, his body was defective. In the eyes of the Jews, he was a eunuch, who was to be rejected from the kingdom of God, and he was someone from a lower-class. Philip preached the Gospel to someone who meanwhile held the highest and the lowest status. This indicates how broadly the Gospel can spread. From this, the world can see that the Kingdom of God can accommodate many different ethnic communities. **It is an ideal kingdom regardless of any ideas of superiority or inferiority, regardless of who you are and what social class you belong to. Philip was able to join such an extension campaign of God's kingdom because he followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit.**



I will graduate this year. My fellow graduates have to consider the way to go, and so do I. I will have to contemplate where my ministry field lies; those who know me well know that I hope to return to and serve in my mother church. But this passage reminds me that I should let the will of the Holy Spirit be my will. If God wants me to serve elsewhere, I should also learn to put aside my ideas and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Please do not have the misconception that my mother church has rejected me or that some other churches or organizations have offered me a better ministry position. I am simply reflecting that in the past I actually have not put the will of the Holy Spirit ahead of my own.

Dear brothers and sisters, if one day you clearly see that God has called you to do a certain thing for Him but that it is something in the opposite direction of your expectations, then consider whether you are willing to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Philip, through his actions, has set a good example for us and I hope that we can all act, like Philip, and follow guidance from the Holy Spirit within.

To be a suffering servant

Apart from following the Holy Spirit's guidance, a preacher must be ready to be a suffering servant. The second lesson we can learn from Philip and another characteristic we need to consider is the willingness to suffer for the sake of our faith.

According to the record in Acts, the Ethiopian eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship and came upon Philip on his way back home. Following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Philip ran up to the eunuch's chariot and stayed near it. As a result, Philip heard the eunuch reading

the Bible. He then took the opportunity to expound the book of the prophet that the eunuch was reading. The passage came from the Book of Isaiah 53:7-8, "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the Earth" (Acts 8:32-33). The message of Isaiah 33 tells of a suffering servant, which foretells that the prophet sent by God will present himself to the world in the image of a suffering servant. In Isaiah's time, no one was willing to listen to the voice of the prophet who was also treated unfairly. In expounding the passage to the eunuch, Philip pointed to this suffering servant described by Isaiah to Jesus Christ to show that the prophecy had been fulfilled. **The act of Jesus Christ on Earth is exactly the model of a suffering servant: He was rejected in his native town, disgusted by his own people, and ultimately betrayed by his own disciple and was crucified on the cross.**

The Gospel that Philip preached to the eunuch was not a Gospel of prosperity telling that everything would be smooth-sailing and every problem would be solved easily. To believe in Jesus is to suffer and to follow Christ is to be persecuted. After Philip's explanation, the Ethiopian eunuch would definitely reflect on his future life, on his noble career, and the difficulties and challenges he needed to face if he decided to come to Christ. Upon reading this narrative, Theophilus, the reader of Acts, would have the picture of one scene after another of disciples being persecuted for Jesus' sake in his mind. For example, in Acts 4, Peter and John were imprisoned for teaching the Gospel of repentance to the people; in Acts 7, Stephan was stoned to death after speaking in defense of the Gospel in the Sanhedrin; in Acts 13-14, Paul and Barnabas faced all kinds of persecution as they preached the Gospel in Asia Minor... **Because of their belief in the Christian faith and proclaiming the Gospel, these disciples met with many challenges and persecution, their deeds of courage and faithfulness must have helped Theophilus and even help us today. Their stories help us to reflect on the kind of attitude we should have as we face difficulties, challenges and persecution in our own lives and ministry posts for the sake of our Christian faith.**

How do you understand the idea that "to come to Christ is to suffer"? You may think that living in Hong Kong,

a civilized society, being persecuted for one's faith is very remote from our own experiences. Perhaps, you believe that persecution is happening in other places around the world. For example, the crosses of the churches in Zhejiang had to be demolished, other countries have had to face terrorist attacks from ISIS. Yes, these things are happening but for the time being they are far from Hong Kong, and not affecting our lives and our ministries. Do you think Hong Kong will see terrorist attacks? The cross in our seminary will be torn down by the SAR government?

Let us think carefully about this and we can see that persecution based on religious belief appears in many different forms. For example, one day you may be verbally attacked because you publicly express your faith to someone; or one day you may offend the powerful simply because you put into practice the teachings of Christ in order to safeguard the interests of a disadvantaged community and thus bring trouble to your family; government control and suppression may have already silently affected the church in ways we do not know.

To follow Christ indeed is to pay the price, to come to Christ or to proclaim the Gospel is to be persecuted. But we have to be grateful because Jesus has already personally experienced the humiliation of the cross, triumphed over death and been raised from the dead; the Holy Spirit has even come to all who are willing to follow Christ, giving us extra courage and strength to face tribulation. After Philip's interpretation of Isaiah's message about the suffering servant, not only did the Ethiopian eunuch not shrink away, his response was asking to be baptized immediately. Verse 36 says, "As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?'" **The fact that to come to Christ means to suffer not only did not hinder him in his decision to believe in Jesus but it also became a driving force for him to follow Christ.**

Brothers and sisters, may Philip's deeds we have seen today admonish us to think carefully about the characteristics of a preacher as we learn to be God's servants who follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and are willing to suffer for the Lord.

To Sow in Tears in a Dry Land

Lau Sze-yan (M.Div. 3)



Scripture: Psalm 126:1-6

Yahweh has done great things for us

Recently, in the morning chapels we have heard new students sharing their testimonies of God's call. Most of them mentioned that they had not thought of further studies in theology or of becoming a pastor. As for walking on the path of full-time ministry, many fellow students at first have had struggles or reservations. I know a fledgling preacher whose story is totally different. He received God's call in his second year of study at the university. After graduation, he very much hoped to receive theological training immediately, but he could not get his wish. He then began to work in society and waited for the day when he could enter a seminary to study. Five years passed by. Then eight years passed by and he was still waiting, waiting for God's time. He could not help thinking: Is it true that God will call me? How long will I have to wait?

The returnees described in Psalm 126 were those Israelites being captured to Gentile nations after the fall of the Kingdom of Judah and now they could go back to their homeland. Several decades later, when the Holy Temple could be rebuilt they would have been looking forward to a homecoming. What Psalm 126 describes is exactly the voice from the hearts of the returnees. After the kingdom had fallen, many prophets predicted that one day the Israelites would return to their homeland. In

the process of waiting, how pained and distressed they were! When they were living very hard lives, the return to their homeland seemed impossible within the foreseeable future. Therefore, the psalmist says, "When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed." The psalmist describes himself returning from captivity to his homeland as going through a dream. It was a dream come true! Today, finally their return was in sight and had already begun taking the "immigration clearance" procedure. For the Israelites, the dream they had had over the years was about to come true.

One day after eight years, the brother mentioned above had the opportunity to join the seminary's Experiencing Seminary Life Camp. In the camp, a teacher said to him, "Hope to see you this August!" Upon hearing these words, this brother understood that the time had come and so he took action: Filled in the application form, took the entrance examination, and attended the interview. At last, he received the HKBTS admission notice. He still remembers the moment he received the notice, it was like a dream. He immediately called his wife. Later, he went through the admission procedures, moved into the student quarters, and joined the spiritual formation camp. Then the new school year began, he came up to the pulpit to share his testimony of God's call. It was like

a dream that had come true. The dream which lasted for several years had unexpectedly come true today. What is his mood when a person's dream finally comes true?

This brother was in a mood similar to what the psalmist says, "Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy." When our dream comes true, we are indeed extremely delighted, aspiring to share the good news with others at the earliest possible time, and even unknowingly laughing while walking on the city streets. We are so radiant that others can see from our talk and our walk that we are no longer despondent but overjoyed. This is what the psalmist says here.

I still remember this brother, after his admission was confirmed, he updated his status on the Facebook, "Next stop of God's grace: Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary." Instantly many friends gave him "like" and someone left a message: "Thank God! Super!" In these few years, he had had the opportunity to share his testimony of God's call on different occasions, a majority of people gave the same response: "Thank God! May God make great use of you!" He profoundly understood this: "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."

Brothers and sisters, just imagine, this brother has waited for only eight years and become so overjoyed when his dream came true, not to mention how joyful the Israelites would be coming back to their homeland from captivity that year! On the day of their return, how will they not be a hundred times more excited than this brother? **How hard it was for the Israelites to return from captivity, the psalmist said that the Lord had done great things for them, indeed great things had been done!**

To say a prayer in an arid land

Here, everything seems to be good from the

scripture. If this psalm ends in verse 3, that is we all profoundly know, "The Lord has done great things for us," that would be wonderful. However, the psalm does not end in verse 3. Returning to Zion, the psalmist saw that the Earth was desolate and from the situation around he realized that in the future there would be a lot of difficulties. Accordingly, he called out to God in verse 4: "Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev." Negev, located south of Hebron, is a wasteland, an arid and dry land. That is why the psalmist says a prayer of faith. Admittedly, to be able to return from captivity is incomparably joyful and yet the reality still needs to be faced.

In these few years' of seminary study, we have undergone laborious struggles. For graduating students, you know what it is all about. The brother mentioned above also needs to deal with practical problems of everyday life. For example, he needs to face economic difficulties as his savings may have been used up while he lacks the ability to earn any income. He needs also to do church practicum, to learn biblical and theological knowledge in class lessons, and face the potential challenges and impacts of knowledge upon his faith. He seems to enter into an exotic new world as he needs to handle different situations and to face different challenges.

The psalmist teaches us just to say our prayer of faith to God, that is to call out to Yahweh who has done great things for us. We need to have an unwavering faith in God, just like the psalmist. **Since God has promised to lead the Israelites to return to their homeland from captivity, today He can similarly do great things for us in difficult situations!** It is with this confidence that our brother has also completed his seminary studies and is ready to enter into the ministry field.

Sow the seeds in tears and reap in joy

Will it be an easy road for a new minister to enter into church ministry? Will the ministry scene in front of us be smooth sailing like sowing in good soil that we need to

only give some very basic care and the seed will sprout and grow? The psalmist mentions in verse 5 to “sow in tears” and then once again in verse 6 to “go out weeping carrying seed to sow.” Have we ever thought of sowing in tears? Have you seen farmers in tears when they sow? It is always when there is a poor harvest and the crops are lost that farmers will be in tears.

We can see such scenes on the screen when farmers affected by natural disaster are heart-broken and in tears. That is why here **the psalmist gives us an important message: To sow in tears, to sow is to weep and shed tears!** This reflects that the actual environment for sowing is not ideal as described in verse 4. It is probable that they sowed in a dry land. Brothers and sisters, we need to know that seeds are not available anytime anywhere and we have to pay for them. We may purchase them with money or save them up from the previous harvest. In short, they are not “falling from heaven.” From the scripture we see that farmers reluctantly sowed. Brothers and sisters, in such a situation, if you were farmers, would you still sow the seeds? From scripture, the psalmist repeatedly shows what is in his mind: He chooses to sow. He needs to remind us further: In tears he sowed.

Thank God that the psalmist did not stop at the stage of “shedding tears.” He says with certainty, “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.” “In tears” and “with joy” shows a great contrast, revealing the progress of the psalmist’s faith in God. Since God has fulfilled such an impossible thing as the Israelite’s returning home from captivity, not to mention the seed-sowing and crop-harvesting. The psalmist trusts that God will do great things for him. Yes, it is true that the difficulty in front of us would make us shed tears. However, the psalmist also reminds us that the God we believe in is of great power, is the Lord of abundance and filled with grace. **Without sowing, there will be no harvest. More specifically, without going through the process of sowing in tears, devoting a great**

effort with flesh and blood, how can we be joyful upon harvest? Admittedly, we know not when to harvest, just as the Israelites at first did not know when they could return home but the psalmist reminds us to sow at this moment.

Recently, I have the opportunity to read a book on teaching and church pastoring. There is a confession from the author, a pastor. He says the following:

I have pastored a church for six years. At first, I graduated from the seminary and entered into a church to serve with lofty ideal and ambitions. The reality of serving in a church made me exhausted. Reading suitable reference books on how to face difficult situations may help me understand my own situation. I am convinced that as long as I truly love the congregation, show them clearly the gospel message and that my teaching is also consistent with truth, the believers can come to know God’s salvation through Christ and grow. However, this idea is too naïve! When believers do not care the spiritual condition of their own and that of their neighbors at all, what use is there in doing all these? In this day and age, what is the worthiness of pastor, church and the gospel? That makes me very struggling.

Of course I know that God wants His servants to be faithful and keep sowing the seed but in practical situation this is very difficult. I was standing at the crossroads. I have seriously considered giving up serving at church and pursued a Master degree in Business Administration, then taking a job that I can see the result. But finally, I chose to continue with my ministerial profession because I still love Jesus and His church. I still believe that men need the gospel. I still believe in the mission of the church.

James E. Dittes regards Christian ministry as grief work!

Brothers and sisters, to sow the seed in tears will surely be to reap with joy! May we all sow the seed in tears together and experience the great things that God has done for us together.



God's Justice is Unlike Ours (I)

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"For the sake of justice, why can't we use violence?"

In recent years, Hong Kong has gone through dramatic political upheavals, the social fabric is being torn apart when people with different political opinions treat their rivalries as enemies. Consequently, the kind of sentiment voiced above began to surface in the society.

Not all Christians are able to resist the temptation of violence with the truth of the Good News of peace, and the question about the use of force is often raised within local churches as well. In the eyes of many Christians, to uphold and mete out justice, to safeguard the good and counter evil, and to root out the strong and support the weak are the top priorities of the church's social mission; some lay Christians even righteously propose to "bear arms against violence," presuming that such a voluntary act of "giving up one's life for justice" is Christ-like.

However, throughout the Bible we seek in vain for any support for the position that: "For the purpose of pursuing justice, lethal force can be used." Not to mention that according to our grammar of faith, it is oxymoronic to say, "In order to do justice, we can use violence" because it is impossible to achieve true justice through unjust means; no matter how righteous our goal or intention may be, Christians cannot achieve justice by resorting to unjust means.

Indeed, as long as we take the teachings of the

Bible seriously, we will discover that the justice of God is reflected in **“sharing but not distribution, reconciliation but not retaliation.”** This is very different from the distributive justice and retributive justice of *suum cuique* (to each what is due) championed in the secular society.

The justice that belongs to God

The most basic difference between biblical justice and social justice as pursued by the secular world is this: True “justice” must belong to the Triune God, which means that “justice” is personal and not a characteristic of an impersonal system or policy. In everyday language, we may say, “In order to satisfy what justice demands, this is what we should do,” but if “justice” is merely an abstract concept, a formal principle, or an ideal impossible to be fully realized, it actually will not “demand” us to do anything, and whatever we do, it will not be “satisfied.” The justice that Christians talk about must **belong to** God, the justice that **comes from** God. There is no such thing as an ordering principle of justice, which is above or outside of God, sovereign over the universe, able to safeguard the well-being of humanity, and keep the scales and maintain a balance of good and evil, so much so that even God must submit to it and act in concert with its operation. God **is** justice, but justice **is not** God. Any “justice” which purports to be self-evident or inherent in the way things are, apart from God, and independent of God’s economy of salvation or His ultimate will to reconcile the world to Him, is a counterfeit of true justice. True justice can only be achieved **under** God’s governance and **within** the Kingdom of God.

Thus, strictly speaking, the adjective “just” cannot be applied to describe an impersonal policy, a system, or a “society” that lacks a sense of common destiny or collective consciousness; only God Himself or a people called by God to be like Him is worthy to be called “just.” Justice is to be lived out by a community faithful to God in their daily lives, and cannot be “administered” from above, or through good governance by the powers that be.

Without careful consideration, Christians sometimes mistake secular “social justice” as an article of Christian faith. The most common example is that when we quote Micah 6:8, the mission of the church is reduced to “do justice, and to love kindness” and equated with social activism. Contrary to how this passage is commonly (mis)

understood, the irony is this: The most important part of the passage is often intentionally or unintentionally omitted, to wit, “and to walk humbly with **your God!**” We cannot deliver justice by our own effort, we must first of all belong to God and keep Him as our companion; otherwise, when we regard ourselves as already possessing justice and act on God’s behalf, we easily only do what we think is right and become self-righteous. Both “justice” and “kindness” cannot be interpreted literally or commonsensically because in the Hebrew vocabulary of faith, they embody Yahweh’s divine attributes, the self-revelatory character of the God who saved the Israelites as recorded in their salvation history. The Israelites hold in their collective memory of Yahweh, the God of Israel, as the One who walked with them. Only within this historical and personal relationship can we correctly grasp what it means “to do justice and to love kindness,” which is actually God’s very specific demand from or what He expects of His chosen people. Correspondingly, doing justice and practicing kindness is the appropriate **response** of God’s covenanted people towards a faithful, just and loving Lord, and an active “response” in kind to the God who always acts first. Living in solidarity with neighbors is the concrete embodiment of faithfulness to the covenant of grace. Therefore, every time when Christians only “voice out” our demand for justice, making an empty call at a distance to those in power and demanding the secular society to implement our ideas of justice, yet without our setting the example of being just in order to call for others to achieve a higher righteousness, we look conspicuously hypocritical and self-righteous.

Thus, biblical justice must be covenantal and also relational. We cannot use rational, moral or religious principles to deduce a priori the universal requirement of justice. “Justice,” whose content can be given only within the specific relationship between God and His covenanted people, is to be worked out historically by God, who takes the initiative to make a covenant and adheres to the covenant, as well as by the community that belongs to Him. To put justice into practice is not a kind of external legal requirement but the embodiment of a wholesome relationship of us with God, with others, and with the creation (*Shalom*). Those who truly “know” Yahweh will do justice, to love kindness and to walk with God; “doing justice, loving kindness” **is** to “know” Yahweh, the upshot

of really knowing and correctly remembering the past, present, and future deeds of the Lord.

In comparison, secular justice is impersonal or even “sub-personal”. It resorts to a broad abstract principle: To each what is due. “Distributive justice” considers this question: What rights to welfare a person ought to enjoy? “Retributive justice” asks: What kind of punishment a man who does evil deserves? Of course, various political philosophies propose vastly different theories about how to measure or account for what one “deserves”. Nevertheless, they have a common concern, in the final analysis, the central issue is always procedural; even if what really concerns us is whether the substantial result is just, but these philosophies cannot help first focusing on devising a set of policies, regulations or systems to “execute” justice or to “guarantee” outcomes that will be (mostly or most nearly) just. Consequently, secular justice would regard the state or the government as the focus, and delivering justice would then be seen as the primary responsibility of those in power. In practical terms, accordingly “upholding justice” only means criticizing the government whenever its policy is found wanting, overseeing whether the regime is fair in distributing rewards and punishments, in assigning power and responsibility, and then enjoining the authorities to right the wrongs. When Christians forget that “doing justice” is tied to our identity as the people of God, we tend to believe that delivering justice is the sole responsibility and privilege of the state. The public ministry of the church will remain on the level of advocacy, “voicing out” our demands for justice, and we tend to deceive ourselves that making the appeals is almost as good as them being realized. So, it will be always easy for us to blame others for the injustice in society, when we see ourselves as the defender of justice. Yet we often lack the commitment to give up what we legitimately deserve for the benefit of others, or to forsake what we rightfully enjoy for the sake of others so that they may receive fair treatment.



Justice is not about distribution, but sharing

Secular distributive justice, generally called “social justice,” is concerned with how to distribute scarce public resources or benefits, including some basic material needs for subsistence and non-material rights, and to ensure what we get be proportional to either our efforts, needs or merits. Distributive justice will ultimately appeal to individual “rights,” namely the just claims on others. The enjoyment of “rights” could have been non-competitive, when what is required is not in short supply; but in reality, one person’s “rights” will generate corresponding “obligations” of others (especially the government) to safeguard their rights, which means that individual rights incur social costs. Besides, rights of an individual can compete with those of another, or individual rights may clash with the greater good of the collective, so that having the best of both worlds is often impossible, hence the enjoyment of “rights” become a distribution problem. Proposals of different principles of distributive justice originally purport to settle the competing claims of individual rights, but they more often than not end up

reducing justice to a balance of power between vested interests groups. The distributive justice in the real world is a sabotage of true justice, stipulatively christening any outcome of the strong overpowering the weak as "justice." Distributive justice should even be counted as a "ruse," nominally helping the society to resolve conflicts and disputes, but actually it perpetuates, normalizes, even institutionalizes competition, conflict, and contradiction, unable to fix brokenness in human relationship or to reconcile people in dispute.

As such, distributive justice always demands some people to give up their interests and sacrifice for others, which is the same justice of Robin Hood, robbing the rich to benefit the poor. When Christians fight for this kind of justice, we think that, to speak for the poor is to ask those who are wealthy and powerful, namely the government and the enterprises, to give to the poor, but we forget that caring for the poor is actually the responsibility of **the church**. It is as though our social vision is the perfection of our social welfare system, such that there will no longer be any poor people in our society who need our help; in other words, we pray for a society in which the churches will not have to spare our own time, spend our money, and with our own kindness, to care for the poor face to face. If so, the just society that Christians imagine would be a world in which we no longer need to walk daily humbly with God in doing justice and loving kindness!

However, the repeated teaching "to do justice and to love mercy" in the Old Testament has very concrete and clear practical meaning, namely: taking care of the basic subsistence needs of the orphaned, the widowed, the old, the weak, the sick and the poor, even the sojourners and the outsiders. Because the Lord wills to protect those who are unable to fend for themselves and to save those who are helpless, it is not necessary for us to fight for any abstract justice, nor to reform and perfect the social system once and for all. The Bible never says that in order to assist the weak, we have to defeat the strong. In fact,

what is so extraordinary about biblical justice lies in this: To assist the weak, **we do not have** to fight the strong! Of course, we often see in the Old Testament the prophets condemning the social inequality between the rich and the poor; the strong and the weak, but in doing so they are performing their primary role to proclaim the Word of God **to** His people (including their rulers). This is contrary to the contemporary prophetic self-preoccupation of some Christians who imagine that they should speak **to** the secular power and leading the society to the direction they deem right. It is liable for Christians to forget that when the prophets denounced those who are wealthy but heartless and turning a blind eye to the poor, we are also being criticized.

It is because, in a capitalist society characterized by distortions of the nature and relationship of humans with other humans, as well as that of humans with other creatures, all of our accumulated wealth (that is "capital") comes directly or indirectly from exploiting others and is not what we are entitled to or can claim credits for. Those churches whose congregations have moved upward socially and becoming predominantly middle class in composition and in mentality are themselves the beneficiary of the present unjust economic system. In a capitalist society, the rich becomes rich most often only at the expense of the poor; being wealthy but unwilling to share with others is thus definitely a sin. Therefore, those who are "fortunate" enough to have more should be more than willing to give and share with others; and that means, they should not feast on meat but feed the poor only with breadcrumb. That is the economic justice taught in the Bible.

The biblical justice of sharing far exceeds the secular distributive justice and the principle of "to each what is due" which is a matter of mere calculation. In a just society as envisioned in the Bible, wherever there is someone in destitution, **everyone else** has a duty to give a helping hand and cannot shift the responsibility to the government, the wealthy or others. It's always irrelevant whether that

person in need is “worthy” of being helped or not, nor is it our concern to diagnose the root cause of that person’s predicament, trying to figure out whether he eats the bitter fruit of his own making or is the victim of injustice. Many of Hebrew laws related to economic life in the Old Testament, including tithe, the left over in the wheat field during a harvest, fallow, the Jubilee year, tax concession, the release of slaves and return of land to its owner, etc., are meant to “regulate wealth in order to alleviate poverty.” They are not designed to redistribute wealth or to eradicate the disparity between the rich and the poor through public finances. These laws given to the Israelites, are meant to prevent any of their fellow clansmen, due to whatever cause, from falling into a situation where they cannot survive on their own and as a result trapped into a deeper crisis of being excluded from the daily life of the community. For it is well-known that the poor and the needy will likely suffer other forms of oppression as well, frequently fall victim to injustice and being mistreated, which means that their appearance will bring forth more social evils. So the biblical teachings on economics are meant to prevent some people from accumulating a scale of wealth, that brings them disproportionately overriding and dominating economic advantage over above the others. Therefore, from the biblical perspective, poverty is seen as not merely an “economic” problem, because it will affect the well-being of the community as a whole.

In the Old Testament, the litmus test of whether the Israelites obey their covenantal God’s will is not whether there are poor people in the society, but whatever the cause of poverty maybe, whether the poor receive assistance from others or are left defenseless. The people of God should be a community in which no one should be left to fend for themselves or suffer from social isolation, even including outsiders and sojourners. For the Israelites were themselves once slave-sojourners, they should remember God’s salvation of them from exile. Attending to the needs of others is the inexcusable responsibility of

everyone in the whole community. What infuriates Yahweh most is not that there is inequality among His people but that they turn a blind eye to those amongst them who are in destitution and poverty. The whole Jewish tradition of *Torah* should not be compared with or interpreted as the written code of laws in modern sense. It is rather given to help the Israelites live out Yahweh’s “path of righteousness”, guiding them to lead a life of peace, righteousness and love in the fallen world. In so living, they should reveal the shalom that comes from God, a wholesome/perfect relationship with God, with other people and with other members of the creation, which was indeed the original purpose of God’s creation of humanity and the world. Thus one should conclude that a community cannot be made into a just people by means of legislation, regulation, administration, or by devising a perfect politico-economic system.

That is why for both the Israelites and the churches, “charity” should not be an optional benevolence or a favour dispensing to the less fortunate only when we have left over after satisfying all our needs and wants. Caring for the poor is not a matter of heartfelt sympathy or overflowing love, or selfless voluntary offering, but a demand on a people called to be righteous. Generosity **is** the embodiment of God’s justice. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, biblical economic teachings from beginning to end are about sharing, not distribution. The Bible has not furnished us with a blueprint to (re)design a distribution system that guarantees fairness and equity. Surprisingly, biblical economic ethics has suggested no scheme at all to deal with systematic injustice or structural evil, nor targeted the causes or sources of poverty either. Instead, biblical teachings are mostly palliative measures, not permanent cure. Where there are poor people, there is a need for “justice” (that is “sharing”). What is most intriguing is that the Bible seems to assume that there will always be poor people with us and the true justice which belongs to the Kingdom of God is eschatological;

yet the church, the community of God's people, is called by God to live out such a eschatological style of life of the Kingdom of Heaven right here, right now, though not fully. The strategy for God to deal with injustice is not to mobilize His people to battle with this sinful world of injustice but to call into existence an alternative community which gladly share with others all that we have received from the Lord.

"Sharing everything with one another" (Acts 2:44-47) or "equality" (2 Cor 8:14-15) as practiced by the early church is not the prototype of communism. It is merely a way to ensure that members in the community will not become helpless because of poverty. The Bible does not support private property rights, but it also does not advocate overthrowing the economic system by force. Instead, "sharing" is the means by which both to expose the truth about the fallen world and meanwhile to point towards the consummation of salvation.

On the one hand, we have to admit that all that we now have and enjoy is the gracious gift from others, otherwise they must come from plunder or exploitation. Nothing we now "possess" is what we **deserve** to have "rightfully". As such, it means that, we can only enjoy the wealth that we should not have with gratitude, in repentance and indebtedness. Moreover, we ought to be able to share generously what we have with others, once realizing that our possessions are not "our own" to begin with, but are either received from others or freely from God. "Sharing" effectively **out-does** the demand on equivalence in exchange and commerce of the secular world and fundamentally **undoes** the source of all evils, to wit, private property rights: when I voluntarily let go of what I regarded as "my own" and unconditionally give them away to someone else who does not "deserve" them, what I "deserved" to have becomes what someone now "owns".

On the other hand, "sharing" also reveals the original

intent of creation: as creatures, our existence ought to be interdependent and never self-sufficient and self-existent; the reality of our life as creatures is that we should and can rely on God, other people and other creatures. What we call "sin" is manifested in "isolation": either pushing others away and refusing to let others depends on me, or asserting autonomy and refusing to let myself depend on others. "Sin" is to insist that everyone takes care only of oneself, each having their own share, each having what is due, nothing more, nothing less. But the Gospel liberates Christians from the bondage of sin so that we can now feel at ease to trust the goodness of God and all the gifts of God's creation, and even joyfully receive the grace from others, without feeling ashamed. In practicing mutual sharing, we better learn how to support, help and serve one another in God's grace. Between brothers and sisters we do not default, the only thing we owe to each other is love (cf. Rom 13:8); even the sin committed by others is originally what I "should not" and cannot shoulder for them, but now it has become what I "should" share (Gal 6:2). (To be continued...)

Further reading: Chris Marshall, *Little Book of Biblical Justice: A Fresh Approach to the Bible's Teachings on Justice* (New York: Good Books, 2005).

- This article is rewritten by the author from his speaking notes for Spiritual Formation Day (January 17, 2017).

Preview for next issue of "Faculty Sharing"

"God's Justice is Unlike Ours (II)" will be published in the November issue of the seminary's *English Newsletter* when Dr. Huen will continue with his thesis "justice is not distribution, but sharing" and further expound the idea that "justice is not retribution, but reconciliation" as he elaborates the nature of biblical justice.



Academic Affairs News

1. 2016-17 Spring Opening Convocation

This school year's spring term began on January 16. On the next day, it was the Spiritual Formation Day with "Justice and Prayer" as its theme. In the morning session, there was a seminar with Dr. Freeman Huen, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology (Social Ethics), as the speaker and Rev. Brian Lam as the respondent. In the afternoon, students were divided into groups in which the Chaplain, Associate Chaplain, or a teacher would offer individual spiritual mentoring.

2. Experiencing Seminary Life Camp

The camp was held from February 15 through 16 and the content included getting to know HKBTS, students' sharing of God's call, singing praise, message, sit-in classroom lesson, workshop on "Discernment•Christian Life•God's Call," exchange with professors and students. Participants can have an in-depth understanding of God's call, full time ministry, and the learning atmosphere of the seminary through various sessions. Quite a lot of participants have planned to apply for admission into the seminary.

3. Spiritual Revival Concert

The seminary's annual concert 2017 was a spiritual revival concert with the theme "Our Father's World," held on April 2 at the Academic Community Hall of Hong Kong Baptist University. That evening, Dr. Nathan Ng preached the sermon message, Ms. Josephine Li was the choir conductor, the seminary's joint choir (the seminary choir and the alumni choir), guest singers Ms. Fung Chi-lai and Mui Wai-lun did the singing, Mr. Chow Chun-yin played the violin, the Sisters' Hand-Bell Group of Kowloon City Baptist Church gave a hand

bell performance, together with testimony from a student To Wan-ting.

4. The Awards Night and Installation of Directors Ceremony

The Ceremony will be held on May 25 (Thursday) at 7 pm at the Sai O Chapel.

Through the Awards Ceremony, the seminary gives recognition to students with remarkable academic achievements and talent in non-academic areas and our long service faculty and staff, and express our appreciation and thankfulness to the scholarship donors. That night, in the meantime, we will have the Installation Ceremony for a new Board of Directors. Together we will offer up to the Lord our thanksgiving and praise.

From the Chaplain

Rev. Brian Lam (Chaplain)

Whose People? Meditation on Exodus 32

The relationship between a spiritual leader and the congregation can generally be seen as two extremes: being too close together or being too far apart.

The first extreme is deep in the heart of the leader; he regards "this group of people belongs to me," unconsciously he "owns" this congregation. The leader wants to predominate every single move of the congregation. Since he is the leader, when a believer is in need, he or she ought to seek his help; if the believer seeks help from someone else, he will feel uncomfortable. The danger of this extreme is: We forget that we are entrusted to guide God's people, to shepherd the sheep of Jesus Christ. The congregation does not belong to us but actually they are God's people, the sheep of Jesus Christ.

The second extreme is that the relationship between the spiritual leader and the congregation

being too “detached.” Reading through the Old Testament, we can see that Moses’ relationship with the Israelites is not like this. Let us read Exodus 32 carefully to feel the sentiment of Moses.

It was recorded in Exodus 32 that when the Israelites worshipped, sacrificed burnt offerings and presented offerings to the golden calf, God was enraged and said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt.” (v.7) It seems that the Lord also wanted to become “detached,” not to regard the Israelites as His people. However, Moses was certain that they were indeed the people of the Lord and not his own. When Moses asked for mercy from the Lord, he made it clear that the Israelites were the Lord’s people: “O Lord, why should your anger burn against your people whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?” (v.11)

The Lord wanted to wipe out this people and then made Moses’ descendants into a great nation. (v.10) These people had made a big complaint to Moses (ch. 16) and now even the Lord would want to get rid of them. However, what made us feel moved was that Moses sought the Lord’s forgiveness on their behalf. Just when we are depressed in our ministry, then God tells us not to pay attention to this group who makes us feel frustrated and He says He will lead us to minister to a new community and even promises us that the new ministry will certainly bring fruitful outcomes. In such a case, as a leader, will we still pray to God on behalf of this group of people as Moses did? Or we would rather “submit” to God’s leading, to be prepared to “start from scratch” somewhere else?

But Moses absolutely did not acquiesce the Israelites. After supplicating for the Israelites, Moses went down the mountain and stepped in to punish them (v.15-29). Then on the second day, he went up the mountain again to earnestly plea for God’s mercy on the people with these moving words: “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin — but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.” (v. 31-32, NIV)

How I pray that all of us spiritual leaders will learn from Moses’ sentiment.

Lay Theological Education Department

Toto Choi (Associate Director)

New Issues • New Perspectives

Programs on the Bible, theology and ministerial skills are what we regularly provide and they can be described as the “core” of LTED’s training. However, in response to the needs of different ministries, interest of the lay and expertise of the lecturers, we devise new subjects to guide our students to have in-depth thinking into different issues to give them new perspectives and to let their lives be renewed and grow.

In the area of care and counseling, new subjects set up recently are: “Care for Divorced Families,” “Seeking Opportunities of Growth from Family of Origin,” “Aspects of Mental Health in Infants and Children.” Student registration in these courses has often been high. This reflects interest and needs of the lay people in this area. It is believed that these subjects provide specific help to students’ individual lives and ministries.

As for programs designed for different age groups, there are new courses: “Creative Activities for the Elderly,” “Discipleship Training for the Elderly,” “Spiritual Nurturing and Growth Psychology for Children,” “How the Bible Looks at Parents and Nurturing Children after God’s Heart,” “Learning and Growth through Games for Infants and Children.” Thank God for His preparation that all the lecturers of these subjects are knowledgeable with extensive experience and that students get a lot of inspiration and make an effort to put knowledge into practice becoming blessings to others in their ministries.

Looking to the future quarters, the offering of the new courses will continue. For example, there will be “Multiple-Intelligence in the Bible—Learning Lively and Effectively,” “Guilt and Forgiveness—Inspiration from the Book of Hosea,” “Self-Understanding and Growth for Caregivers.” Besides, we particularly want to introduce two new subjects: “Think Again Art • Faith” and “Understanding Contemporary China.” To some people, art and beauty seem unrealistic. Yet, “Think Again Art • Faith” can somehow help us understand the theological significance

of culture and art. The lecturer will lead students to personally experience creativity and art, and teach them to cultivate an appreciation of beauty in life. This subject will begin this May. As students responded enthusiastically, the class quota was quickly filled. From this we can see the subject is relevant. As for "Understanding Contemporary China," it will be offered in the B.A. degree program next year. The lecturer, Rev. Au Pak-ping points out that as we are stepping into the "information revolution and the globalization" era and living in the current situation of "an amalgamation of both Politics and Legislature," the world is changing and the society is splitting every day, for us living in the here and now, we cannot be a China-blind. Thus, the course seeks to outline the origin of China today, trying to broaden students' understanding of the current national situations so that we can offer an even better ministry in both Mainland China and Hong Kong. It is believed that this course is most relevant for contemporary Hong Kong Christians and our students are looking forward to learning from it.

We will continue to explore and offer different subjects with the hope that students will have more reflection and inspiration from the courses, and that horizon of knowledge and understanding be broadened and a new dimension in personal life and areas of ministry be broadened too. Detail of the LTED's program information and the subjects offered each quarter are available on the LTED's website. We cordially invite you, who seek to grow in the Lord, to enroll in these courses and to recommend them to other brothers and sisters in Christ.

Distance Education Program

Carter Pang (*Associate Director*)

On November 13 last year, the Main Campus Program, Lay Theological Education Department and Distance Education Program held their Joint Programs Graduation Ceremony. Two days later, we received a email from one of our graduates, together with a sound recording and the lyric of a song. Actually it was a hymn especially written by a visually impaired graduate who

wanted to celebrate his graduation from the Certificate in New Testament Studies Program. He sent us the song recording as a souvenir. The lyric is as follows:

God Is Love

*(Song & lyric by Chow Chun-cheong;
quoted here with the author's permission)*

1. God is love. God is love. The profound grace of the Lord is like the deep blue sea. In the vast sea of common people, I have the accompaniment of God's love. My heart is filled with His gracious love.
 2. God is love. God is love. It lasts forever. It remains unchanged. This love continues from generation to generation. God's love keeps alive. It will long be remembered in my heart.
- Chorus: Grace on top of grace, regardless of distance;
Grace on top of grace, God's love has descended upon the earth.
Dying on the cross, Jesus has offered salvation to save sinners, showing His great mercy.
3. God is love. God is love. I offer up my whole life to shine out glorious colors for God.
I pray to remain faithful all my life to highlight the Lord's holy name. I fear not the way ahead being long and with many obstacles.
I pray to remain faithful all my life to exalt the Lord's name. I fear not the way ahead being long and with many obstacles.

We heard the recording and also read the lyric and we were moved. It is not hard to imagine the challenges and difficulties a visually-impaired person must have endured, and the hardship that would have been a lot more than other students in his studies. In the past, we have witnessed many visually-impaired students who join the "Spiritual Light Project" complete the one study stage after another through overriding hurdles without fear of difficulties by counting on the Lord's grace and love. Just like the student mentioned above, after completing the Certificate of New Testament Studies Program, he cannot wait to begin taking the Certificate of Old Testament Studies Program in the beginning of this year.

Besides the "Spiritual Light Project," DEP has other special training ministries too, including the "Onesimus Training Project," which serves Christians in correctional institutions, and the "Philemon Training Project," which serves the marginalized and the disadvantaged. We earnestly invite you to pray and give offering support to this meaningful ministry.

The diploma programs for spring 2017 began on March 1. The Orientation for new students was already

held on February 25 and the tutorial class for each subject has also been conducted one after another within the two weeks after the Orientation. Together with the students taking the certificate programs which enroll students all the year round the total number of DEP students has exceeded 300. There will be a tea gathering on June 11 to be held at the Applied Theology Education Center in Bute Street, Mongkok. It is hoped that by gathering together all the tutors and students and through worship, sharing and prayer we can support and encourage each other on the road of equipping ourselves for Christian ministry.

To further enable DEP students to broaden their horizon of faith and knowledge, we will have our first topical lecture for this year on May 13. The speaker will be Dr. Andres Tang, Professor of Christian Thought (Theology and Culture) to speak on the topic, "Separation of Church and State: Baptist's Perspective." This is an open lecture, which welcomes DEP students and brothers and sisters from all our churches. To join or inquire, please contact the DEP office.

Student Union

Chan Chi-wang (Chairperson)

The year 2017 begins with a new Student Union Executive Committee who are committed to serve. This year's committee members are as follows: Chan Chi-wang (Chairperson), Ho Man-chiu (Vice-Chairperson), Cheung Yat-chung (Treasurer), Chan Man-ching (Head of Secretary Department), Tsang Wing-shan (Head of Spiritual Devotion Department), San Yung-yung (Head of Mission Department), Lam Chun-yin (Head of Daily Living Department). Our advisory teachers include Dr. Vincent Lau (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 "Commit Ourselves to God's Kingdom. Build One Another up. Commit to Fulfilling Our Mission." As the seminary emphasizes the building of a disciple community, it reminds us to be a disciple

community dedicated to practicing hospitality, be diverse and yet still united in Christ. We all identify with this aim and believe that our fellow students, who all have different personalities and spiritual gifts, are disciples following Christ and are committed to the kingdom of God, and we will build the body of Christ together. Even so, we also need to keep reminding and encouraging each other as we shoulder the mission of spreading the Gospel. Each department of the Student Union will aim at fulfilling the objective of "Commit Ourselves to God's Kingdom. Build One Another up. Commit to Fulfilling Our Mission" in planning different ministries and activities. As a result, our mutual understanding and appreciation will be deepened as we imitate Jesus whom we take as our role model and learn to listen, be humble and deny ourselves in the course of practicing to be one in the Lord in this disciple community.

Through publications and lectures, the Secretary Department hopes that students and teachers can share their life experiences on campus as they exchange reflections and experiences through reading and faith. For example, the Secretary Department is busy engaging in the student publication, *The Spiritual Wind*, so that through the exchange of written words students and teachers can care for one another and be mutually edified. Moreover, a book sharing session will be held to facilitate interaction among teachers and students for sharing their reading experiences outside the classroom.

The Spiritual Devotion Department continues to use the Morning Prayer Meeting, the Luncheon Prayer Meeting, and the Thursday Prayer Session in the Morning Chapel as the platforms to enable teachers, students and seminary staff to gather together to pray, keep watch over one another and create a powerful spiritual atmosphere. There will be two luncheon lectures this semester. The first lecture was held on March 21 when Dr. Freeman Huen spoke on the topic, "The Devotional Method for Lectionary Reading."

The Mission Department adopts "Getting to Know the Hong Kong Cross Cultural Gospel Ministry" as its theme this year and a luncheon sharing meeting was held on February 23 where fellow student Hui Wing-shing and Dr. Eric Kwong shared the message to enable our students to see the relationship between doing cross-cultural work and the gospel ministry. Also, the Mission Department is

planning some sight-seeing and visiting activities in the hope that our students will learn more about the churches and organizations that serve cross-cultural communities. Moreover, short term summer mission activities are being planned and we believe that through these activities students' understanding of mission work will be further enhanced.

The Spring Tea Gathering was held on February 8 by the Department of Daily Living. That evening many students and their families were present, and there were many wonderful performances by teachers and students. As we celebrated the festive occasion, we did not forget to be thankful for the grace of God and expressed our appreciation of the teachers, students and their families. Additionally, in the middle of March, the department reorganized the students' common room. We plan to buy some recreational items to help our students to take time to relax from their busy lives.

Each of the members of the Executive Committee will continue to keep each other closely informed and to further strengthen the cooperation and coordination between different departments. We hope that through life on campus, our fellow students can learn to keep watch over each other, put unity in the Lord into practice and meanwhile give witness to Christ our Lord.

Faculty News

- **Dr. Freeman Huen**, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology (Social Ethics), has written a book, *Writing with Hauerwas: Essays on Social Ethic* (Hong Kong: Logos Publishing House, 2017), which was published in January.
- **Dr. Nathan Ng**, Professor of Christian Thought (Church History), spoke on the topic, "Baptist Faith and Polity" in a topical seminar organized by the Baptist Convention of Hong Kong on February 20.
- Three of our professors were speakers at a topical seminar series organized by the Worldwide Bible Society: **Dr. Nathan Ng**, Professor of Christian Thought (Church History), spoke on "Living out the Truth: The Spiritual Pursuit of Martin Luther and John Calvin" (March 16); **President Joshua Cho** spoke on "Looking at Spiritual Growth from Spiritual Theology" (March 23); **Dr. Wong Fook-kong**, Professor of Old Testament spoke on "Seasons of Our Lives: Spirituality of Poetic and Wisdom Literature" (March 30).

Visitors

- Faculty and staff from The Word College in Myanmar visited the seminary on January 11.
- The delegation of eight people from CCC and TSPM in Shandong Province accompanied by Rev. Terence C.Y. Man, Director of The Hong Kong Baptist Mission, visited the seminary on January 12.
- Three accreditors from the Association of Theological Education in South East Asia paid a visit to the seminary from January 17 to 20 to give an academic accreditation to the degree programs offered by the seminary.

Lay Theological Education Department

Student Recruitment

Master in Christian Studies (Major in Communication)

Aim: This part-time evening program enables lay Christians with a university education to integrate Christian faith with communication theories so that they can engage in theological reflection on the present social conditions and situation, allowing them to communicate the Christian message more effectively.

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.
Enrollment for the 2017-18 school year will begin in late May.

Please check our website for updates and more details.

- **Certificate Program in Elderly Ministry (Classes begin in April)**

This program provides holistic and systematic training in ministerial skills and basic theological training so that students may experience holistic growth and be prepared to meet the challenges of an aging population. Classes meet every Tuesday and Thursday.

- **Certificate Program in Church Administration and General Affairs (Classes begin in April)**

This program provides holistic and systematic training for those currently working or those who want to serve as church administrative staff. The contents include individual spiritual formation, the art of getting along with others in a community, personnel and administrative management skills, and lessons on the Bible and theology. It also instills in students a Christian view of ministry while upgrading their ministerial skills so that they can serve more effectively in their own churches.

Classes meet on every Tuesday afternoon. The program can be completed in one year.

Lay Theological Education Training Diploma / Certificate Program

Subjects offered in April-June quarter are as follows: (enrollment has already begun)

Subject	Lecturer	Location	Date /Time
Self-Understanding and Potential Growth	Rev. Tai Shing-wai	Mongkok Education Center	8/5 - 26/6 (Mon, 8 lessons) 7:00 - 10:00 pm
A Survey of Church History in China	Rev. Au Pak-ping	Mongkok Education Center	25/5 - 13/7 (Thu, 8 lessons) 7:15 - 9:45 pm

For inquiries or to apply please call 2711 2552. You can also log-on to the Lay Theological Education Department website at www.hkbts.edu.hk/lted to download the application form.

Tuition Locations:

Mongkok Education Center (10/F, Chung Kiu Commercial Building, 47-51 Shan Tung Street, Mongkok)

Applied Theological Education Center (7-9/F., Christian Building, 56, Bute Street, Mongkok)

Distance Education Program

Exploring Truth • Reflecting upon Faith • Equipping for Ministry

Student Recruitment: New diploma programs will begin in September 2017 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 can get in in-depth understanding of the Bible.	Secondary school leavers with their church pastor's recommendation	March and September	March semester : Hong Kong: February 10 Overseas: January 10 September semester : 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 and doctrine.			
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 each 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 interests. For details, please log on to the Distance Education website: www.hkbts.edu.hk/dist.

Online Program	Program Description	Date of Commencement
Online Version Online Certificate in Old Testament Studies Program Online Certificate in New Testament Studies Program	Description: * The program content is the same as the correspondence program. * Students can read and download learning materials and coursework directly from the website. * Upon completion of the coursework, a student may upload it for the tutor to mark and provide comments. * Time-saving, quick and efficient.	* Students can begin at any time with fee concessions. * Trial study of the online program is welcome: http://elearning@hkbts.edu.hk

For inquiries, please call 2768 5105, email deinfo@hkbts.edu.hk, or log-on to the Distance Education website: www.hkbts.edu.hk/dist.

Topical Lecture

Topic : **Separation of Church and State: Baptist's Perspective**

Content : This principle is firmly held and practiced by Baptists. This conviction must be understood in the context of the religious reformation of England. Moreover, it does not mean that Baptists ignore the government on earth or national politics. So then, what actually does "separation of church and state" mean? This lecture will explain the two points mentioned above and enable attendees to understand the Baptist conviction of "separation of church and state."

Speaker : Dr. Andres Tang (HKBTS's Professor of Christian Thought: Theology and Culture, Ph.D. of the University of St. Andrews, U.K.)

Date : May 13 (Saturday)

Time : 2:30 – 4:00 pm

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

Registration: Please call 2768 5105, email deinfo@hkbts.edu.hk or log-on www.hkbts.edu.hk (to register on the internet).

Deadline : May 12 (free admission, however space is limited)

Pastoral Continuing Education Center

April – June Quarter 2017

Course/Talk	Speaker	Date	Time
Overcome Obstacles with Children and Young People	Dr. Lawrence Chen	10/4, 24/4	9:30 am - 12:30 pm
Re-examine Contemporary Social and Church Reform from 16th Century Religious Reformation	Dr. Nathan Ng	24/4	2:00 - 5:00 pm
The Way of Church Pastoring	Rev. Ng Shan-ho	8/5, 15/5	2:00 - 5:00 pm
Structure and Message of Daniel Chapter 2-7	Dr. Tony Sher	15/5	9:30 am - 12:30 pm
Baptism, Wedding, Funeral: Message and Preaching	Rev. Au Bak-ping	22/5, 29/5, 5/6	9:30 am - 12:30 pm
Prayer Ministry and Christian Counseling	Dr. Alexander Mak	29/5, 5/6	2:00 – 5:00 pm
Preaching from the Book of Judges	Dr. Wong Fook-kong	12/6, 19/6	9:30 am - 12:30 pm
Dealing with Inter-e Relationship in Ministry	Dr. Agnes Ip	26/6	9:30 am 4:30 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.

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

Enrollment : Application forms can be downloaded from the seminary's website and submitted online: www.hkbts.edu.hk/pce.

Inquiries : Please contact us by calling 2768 5179 or by emailing pce@hkbts.edu.hk.

Publication News



Hill Road (issue 39), the seminary's biannual academic journal, will be published in June with "The Spirits and Traditions of the Reformation" as its theme. There are six thematic articles: "Revisit the Reformation after Five Hundred Years" (Pilgrim Lo), "Progressing with Time and Responding to Challenges: The Contemporary Face of the Reformed Tradition" (Cheng Yang-en),

"The Principle of *Via Media* in Anglican Theology, Liturgy, and Biblical Interpretation" (John Yieh), "The Birth of Anabaptists: The Controversy between Zwingli's Students and Their Teacher" (Vincent Lau), "Denominationism: A Baptist Principle?" (Nathan Ng), and "Quakers: Beginning and Ending with Silence" (Andres Tang).

Alumni News

- Alumnus Lee Yu-hoi (class of 2012) married Ms. Yuen Ah-wing in a wedding ceremony held at Tsimshatsui Baptist Church on February 18.
- Alumna Cheung Ting (class of 2014) was married to Mr. Kwok Hoi-bong in a wedding ceremony held at HKBTS's Chapel on March 19.

Student Recruitment for 2017-18

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

Date of Application for Admission

Hong Kong : January 3 to June 2

Overseas : January 3 to April 28

Date of Admission Examination

Individual arrangement within the Seminary's office hours

Inquiries

Telephone : 2768 5130 Email: admissions@hkbtn.edu.hk

Website : www.hkbtn.edu.hk

Discernment

Christian
Life
God's
Call

Awards Night and the Installation of Directors Ceremony

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

Financial Report

General Fund, 1 December 2016 - 28 February 2017

	HKS
Income	8,183,747.87
Expenditure	(8,778,929.81)
Surplus / (Deficit)	<u>(595,181.94)</u>

Reply

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

- Credit card:** VISA MASTERCARD
- One-off Donation Monthly Donation*
- Cardholder's Name: _____
- Cardholder's Signature: _____
(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

Thank you for your support !

DONORS REPORT FOR DECEMBER 2016

Education Fund (Church / Organization)		何錦燕	1,000.00	無名氏	500.00
九龍城潮語浸信會	110,000.00	何譚惠如	2,000.00	無名氏	500.00
上環浸信會	5,500.00	吳炳榮伉儷	8,000.00	無名氏	400.00
大埔主恩浸信會	1,250.00	吳國傑伉儷	500.00	無名氏	300.00
大埔浸信會	12,000.00	李德祥	10,000.00	無名氏	300.00
屯門浸信教會	500.00	林威烈	1,000.00	無名氏	200.00
牛池灣竹園潮語浸信會	5,000.00	姚安清心	300.00	無名氏	57.10
以馬內利浸信會	4,700.00	洪坡拉	200.00		HK\$ 82,657.10
生命頌浸信會	1,000.00	洪錦漢	100.00	Rev. & Mrs. Stephen Ma	US\$ 200.00
竹園浸信會	6,000.00	洪鷹輪	200.00		
西九浸信會	8,984.00	胡文恩伉儷	500.00	Lay Theological Education Program	
香港(西區)潮語浸信會	5,000.00	徐詩雅	300.00	杜桂鵬	1,650.00
香港仔浸信會	17,985.95	張啟明	1,000.00	陳明輝、梁美鳳	5,000.00
香港浸信教會	117,250.00	曹啟明伉儷	400.00	蔡艷桃	500.00
香港堅尼地城浸信教會	1,200.00	梁麗嫦	300.00		HK\$ 7,150.00
柴灣浸信會	3,000.00	許鋒威	1,000.00	Theological Education for Filipino	
將軍澳浸信會	500.00	郭鳳瓊	500.00	Leaders Program	
彩坪浸信會	50,000.00	陳偉倫	200.00	張智理伉儷	5,000.00
深水埗浸信會	10,000.00	陸澤浩伉儷	2,000.00	溫祥、黎琮珍	400.00
深荃浸信會	500.00	勞家怡	500.00		HK\$ 5,400.00
第一城浸信會	6,250.00	曾慶忠	500.00	Distance Education Program	
新希望浸信會	1,500.00	馮德華、鄧如玉	200.00	Ernest & Sylvia Ho	1,000.00
置富浸信教會	2,000.00	黃華娟	100.00	何妙貞	100.00
銅鑼灣浸信會	7,000.00	黃雅忠	10,000.00	鄒小寶	1,200.00
觀塘浸信會	1,876.00	楊謝金玉	4,000.00	鍾慧瑤	300.00
觀塘國語浸信會	10,000.00	溫祥、黎琮珍	500.00	無名氏	450.00
基督教四方福音會彩坪堂	1,000.00	葉煥章	300.00	無名氏	444.00
基督教宣道會信愛堂	1,000.00	劉氏	3,000.00		HK\$ 3,494.00
基督教宣道會華基堂	2,000.00	劉永生、鍾梓萍	300.00	DE: Special Need Training Program	
基業國際實業有限公司	10,000.00	劉建紅	600.00	黃雅各、林靜華	500.00
啟聞基金	500.00	蔡慧英	200.00	無名氏	100.00
無名氏	11,000.00	鄧炳光伉儷	1,000.00		HK\$ 600.00
	HK\$ 414,495.95	鄭鵬程	300.00	Campus Maintenance and Repairs	
Chinese Indep. Baptist Church-S.F.	US\$ 1,080.00	蕭桂娥	1,000.00	高志堅伉儷	HK\$ 2,000.00
		薛聲明	2,000.00	Faith, Hope and Love Project	
		謝志超	5,000.00	朱活平伉儷	HK\$ 15,000.00
Education Fund (Individual Donor)		羅佩珊	100.00	Bursary Fund	
方志強	200.00	羅凱慈	500.00	香港中華基督教青年會	HK\$ 11,000.00
王紹良	700.00	譚嘉敏	2,000.00	Lam Pui Kiu Usable Fund	
王群	800.00	關志偉	100.00	林培喬牧師	HK\$ 200,000.00
白智信伉儷	500.00	關德華伉儷	200.00		
伍志龍	500.00	主知名	300.00		
朱活平伉儷	300.00	無名氏	8,000.00		
何仲儀	1,000.00	無名氏	4,000.00		
何偉明	200.00	無名氏	1,000.00		
		無名氏	1,000.00		

DONORS REPORT FOR JANUARY 2017

Education Fund (Church / Organization)

九龍城浸信會	260,000.00
九龍國際浸信會	28,331.00
大埔浸信會	12,000.00
大學浸信會	10,000.00
屯門浸信教會	500.00
牛池灣竹園潮語浸信會	5,000.00
以馬內利浸信會	4,300.00
尖沙嘴國語浸信會	5,000.00
沙田浸信會	8,000.00
旺角浸信會	4,013.00
香港(西區)潮語浸信會	5,000.00
香港仔浸信會	25,462.80
香港浸信教會	117,250.00
香港浸信教會赤柱福音堂	3,000.00
香港堅尼地城浸信教會	1,200.00
粉嶺浸信會	50,000.00
將軍澳浸信會	500.00
深荃浸信會	500.00
富亨浸信會	3,001.10
愛群道浸信會	9,000.00
嘉盛浸信會	4,000.00
銅鑼灣浸信會	3,500.00
灣仔浸信會	137,589.90
觀塘浸信會	1,558.00
中華傳道會盛福堂	1,500.00
香港華人基督教聯會	70,000.00
基督教四方福音會彩坪堂	1,000.00
基督教宣道會華基堂	2,000.00
基督福音堂主愛堂	20,000.00
啟聞基金	500.00
無名氏	13,000.00
	<u>HK\$ 806,705.80</u>

Education Fund (Individual Donor)

Wong Ling Yuk	250.00
方志強	200.00
方時芳	500.00
王紹良	700.00
王群	800.00
白智信伉儷	500.00
伍志龍	500.00
朱活平伉儷	300.00
朱美珍	500.00
何仲儀	1,000.00
何偉明	200.00
何惠娟	1,000.00
何錦燕	1,000.00
吳炳榮伉儷	8,000.00
吳國傑伉儷	500.00
招志強伉儷	5,000.00
招慧敏	1,000.00
洪錦漢	200.00
洪鷹輪	100.00

胡文恩伉儷	500.00
倪承恩	5,500.00
徐詩雅	300.00
曹啟明伉儷	400.00
曹潔貞	600.00
梁兆津伉儷	70,000.00
梁麗嫦	300.00
許鋒威	1,000.00
陳映君	1,000.00
陳偉倫	200.00
陳麗英	500.00
勞家怡	500.00
曾慶忠	500.00
馮德華、鄧如玉	200.00
黃華娟	100.00
楊謝金玉	2,000.00
溫恩智伉儷	20,000.00
溫祥、黎琮珍	500.00
葉煥章	300.00
劉永生、鍾梓萍	300.00
劉秀珍	1,000.00
劉建紅	600.00
蔡慧英	200.00
鄧炳光伉儷	2,000.00
鄭鵬程	300.00
盧愛貞	500.00
羅佩珊	100.00
譚嘉敏	2,000.00
關志偉	100.00
關德華伉儷	200.00
主知名	300.00
無名氏	8,000.00
無名氏	5,000.00
無名氏	5,000.00
無名氏	5,000.00
無名氏	4,000.00
無名氏	1,000.00
無名氏	500.00
無名氏	400.00
無名氏	300.00
無名氏	300.00
無名氏	200.00
無名氏	200.00
無名氏	134.20
無名氏	80.00
	<u>HK\$ 167,864.20</u>

Graduate School Program

北角浸信會	
明義神學助學金	<u>HK\$ 500,000.00</u>

Lay Theological Education Program

北角浸信會	500,000.00
婦神同學會	2,000.00
李世雄	200.00
蔡艷桃	500.00
無名氏	30.00
	<u>HK\$ 502,730.00</u>

Theological Education for Filipino

Leaders Program

第一城浸信會	11,077.50
張智理伉儷	5,000.00
陳麗英	200.00
溫祥、黎琮珍	400.00
	<u>HK\$ 16,677.50</u>

Distance Education Program

Ernest & Sylvia Ho	1,000.00
無名氏	444.00
	<u>HK\$ 1,444.00</u>

DE: Special Need Training Program

黃智惠伉儷	<u>HK\$ 3,000.00</u>
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Campus Maintenance and Repairs

Wong Ling Yuk	250.00
方時芳	1,000.00
何惠娟	1,000.00
林妙	1,000.00
鄒小寶	1,200.00
無名氏	10,000.00
	<u>HK\$ 14,450.00</u>

Spiritual Revival Concert

方時芳	500.00
吳炳榮伉儷	5,000.00
吳梓明伉儷	1,000.00
杜偉南、李燕珊	500.00
徐沛然	2,000.00
校友(#06021)	500.00
袁鄧光	500.00
逢守本伉儷	200.00
梁蘭卿	700.00
陸澤浩伉儷	2,000.00
黃昌義伉儷	2,000.00
劉秀珍	1,000.00
	<u>HK\$ 15,900.00</u>

Scholarship and Prizes

大學浸信會	<u>HK\$ 4,000.00</u>
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Mrs. Sue Mau Memorial Scholarship and Bursary

冒懷慶	<u>HK\$ 30,000.00</u>
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Rev. James Mau Memorial Bursary

冒懷慶	<u>HK\$ 20,000.00</u>
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DONORS REPORT FOR FEBRUARY 2017

Education Fund (Church / Organization)

九龍國際浸信會	11,632.00	許鋒威	1,000.00
又新浸信會	6,000.00	陳偉倫	200.00
上水浸信會	15,000.00	陳偉權	500.00
上環浸信會	5,500.00	陳麗英	500.00
大埔浸信會	12,000.00	陸彩萍	20,000.00
元朗浸信會	25,000.00	勞家怡	500.00
屯門浸信教會	500.00	曾慶忠	500.00
以馬內利浸信會	4,300.00	馮德華、鄧如玉	200.00
佐敦浸信會	10,000.00	馮慶麟	300.00
香港(西區)潮語浸信會	5,000.00	黃永康	3,000.00
香港浸信教會	117,250.00	黃華娟	100.00
香港堅尼地城浸信教會	1,200.00	黃雅忠	10,000.00
恩典浸信會	10,000.00	楊玉環	10,000.00
荃灣浸信會	42,500.00	溫祥、黎琮珍	500.00
將軍澳浸信會	500.00	葉煥章	300.00
深荃浸信會	500.00	劉永生、鍾梓萍	300.00
富安浸信會禧年堂	9,000.00	劉建紅	600.00
置富浸信教會	6,000.00	劉振鵬伉儷	30,000.00
銅鑼灣浸信會	3,500.00	蔡淑儀	3,000.00
廣源邨禧年浸信會	15,000.00	蔡慧英	200.00
錫安浸信會	8,509.25	鄧志昆伉儷	1,200.00
灣仔浸信會	10,000.00	鄧炳光伉儷	1,000.00
觀塘浸信會	1,966.00	鄭鵬程	300.00
基督教四方福音會彩坪堂	1,000.00	盧靜宜	500.00
基督教宣道會華基堂	2,000.00	薛聲明	2,000.00
啟關基金	500.00	羅佩珊	100.00
無名氏	11,500.00	羅凱慈	500.00
	<u>HK\$ 335,857.25</u>	羅榮忠	30,000.00
		譚嘉敏	2,000.00
		關志偉	100.00
		關德華伉儷	200.00

Education Fund (Individual Donor)

仇勁剛	1,000.00	主知名	300.00
方志強	200.00	無名氏	2,000.00
王永珍	1,000.00	無名氏	2,000.00
王紹良	700.00	無名氏	1,000.00
王群	800.00	無名氏	300.00
白智信伉儷	500.00	無名氏	18,000.00
伍志龍	500.00	無名氏	4,000.00
朱活平伉儷	300.00	無名氏	1,000.00
何仲儀	1,000.00	無名氏	2,000.00
何偉明	200.00	無名氏	8,000.00
何錦燕	1,000.00	無名氏	500.00
何鎮東伉儷	10,000.00	無名氏	400.00
何譚惠如	1,000.00	無名氏	30,000.00
吳炳榮伉儷	8,000.00	無名氏	500.00
吳國傑伉儷	500.00	無名氏	200.00
洪錦漢	100.00	無名氏	10,000.00
洪鷹輪	200.00	無名氏	300.00
胡文恩伉儷	500.00	無名氏	80.00
唐榮敏伉儷	10,000.00	無名氏	32.30
徐詩雅	300.00		<u>HK\$ 241,712.30</u>
張愛美	2,000.00		
曹啟明伉儷	400.00	Academic Development Fund	
梁桂華	1,000.00	無名氏	<u>HK\$ 4,000.00</u>
梁麗嫦	300.00		

Lay Theological Education Program

岑麗嫻	3,000.00
蔡艷桃	500.00
	<u>HK\$ 3,500.00</u>

Theological Education for Filipino

Leaders Program

陳麗英	200.00
溫祥、黎琮珍	400.00
	<u>HK\$ 600.00</u>

Distance Education Program

Ernest & Sylvia Ho	1,000.00
無名氏	444.00
無名氏	500.00
	<u>HK\$ 1,944.00</u>

DE: Special Need Training Program

無名氏	<u>HK\$ 10,000.00</u>
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Campus Maintenance and Repairs

陳喜謙	5,000.00
鄭尚珍	500.00
	<u>HK\$ 5,500.00</u>

Spiritual Revival Concert

Kwan Yee Man	500.00
Philip Chu	2,000.00
吳凱詩	200.00
李明珠	1,000.00
李雪梅	1,000.00
林威烈	3,000.00
唐榮敏伉儷	2,000.00
區振光	1,000.00
張啟明伉儷	500.00
梁志美	2,000.00
梁耀明伉儷	300.00
陳樹安伉儷	2,500.00
馮峰慶	1,000.00
楊梵城	2,000.00
楊謝金玉	2,000.00
趙海澎伉儷	20,000.00
鄭尚珍	1,000.00
黎穎儀	500.00
蕭懿明	500.00
羅耀嫦	10,000.00
	<u>HK\$ 53,000.00</u>

Scholarship and Bursary Fund

香港中華基督教青年會	11,000.00
林潔珍(基督教倫理獎)	10,000.00
無名氏	10,000.00
	<u>HK\$ 31,000.00</u>

President Samuel Tang Memorial Bursary Fund

真理基金會	<u>HK\$ 200,000.00</u>
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Precious Moments



January 17, 2017 *Spiritual Formation Day*

The second day of the spring term in the 2016-17 school year was the Spiritual Formation Day on the theme of "Justice and Prayer." In the morning seminar, the speaker was Dr. Freeman Huen, the seminary's Assistant Professor of Practical Theology (Social Ethics) while Rev. Brian Lam, the Chaplain, was the respondent.

There was a group sharing session in the afternoon. Each group, led by a teacher who served as the spiritual mentor, discussed what "just prayer" is and together prayed for the society of Hong Kong and its future.



January 17-20 *Accreditation of Degree Program by ATESEA*

Three accreditors from the Association of Theological Education in South East Asia were on campus to once again assess the academic standards of the seminary's degree programs. Besides the Doctor of Theology Program that was launched in 2013 (the seminary did not apply for accreditation because we do not have any graduates), all our degree programs (Main Campus Program and the Lay Theological Education Department) have been re-accredited. The accreditors ranked the seminary high in terms of academic level, curriculum structure, amenities, administration, financial resources, and communication effectiveness.

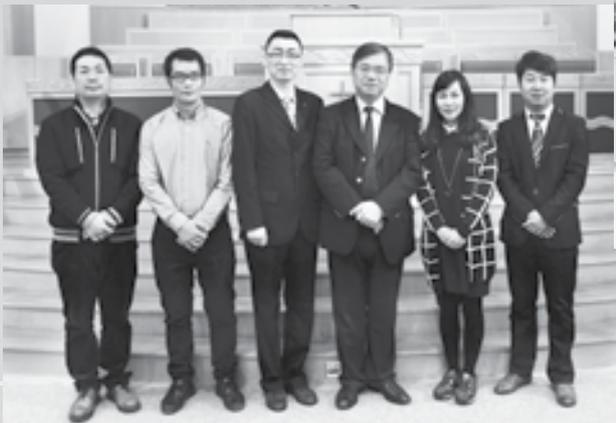


The accreditation team met with recent alumni.



February 9 Mainland students introduced themselves in the morning chapel

In recent years, the Chinese Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement has sent Christian scholars and seminary students to HKBTS for research and further studies. Now the number of students has increased to six. We have specially arranged for four of them to introduce themselves to the teachers and students of the seminary so that the seminary community can understand more about them and enhance mutual support and friendship development that will last throughout the course of their studies and beyond.



Mainland Chinese students and President Cho after the morning chapel service.



After the morning chapel, local students came to shake hands and share their appreciation.



February 15-16 Experiencing Seminary Life Camp

The camp was held from February 15 through 16 and the contents included getting to know HKBTS, students' sharing of God's call, singing praise, message, sit-in classroom lesson, workshop on "Discernment • Christian Life • God's Call," and an exchange with professors and students. Participants can have an in-depth understanding of God's call, full-time ministry, the seminary's learning atmosphere, the academic programs and students' lives through various sessions.



March 23 Second All-Seminary Prayer Meeting in Spring Term

This meeting was prepared by the Spiritual Devotion Department of the Student Union on the theme of "The Way to Go." In recent months, there have been a number of school children committing suicides. In the prayer meeting, we prayed especially for students, parents, educators, and educational policies. We also prayed that God will help our churches to lead the younger generation to "step onto the right path."

