

Theological Education among the Filipino Diaspora in Hong Kong

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This article will discuss a case study of theological education among the Filipino church leaders in Hong Kong in three parts. The first section will consist of a brief discussion of the Filipino diaspora phenomenon and seminary education by an extension program of theological education. The second section will present an extension program developed in Hong Kong for the diaspora Filipino churches. The final part will present conclusions and implications of the study.

The Filipino Diaspora¹ Phenomenon

The Filipino diaspora, as it is known today, is the result of many contributing factors. Many Filipinos leave the country for different reasons; the most common reason has to do with making a better life. The Philippine government also encourages its citizens to go overseas in search of employment. In the recent decades, the Philippine government found it necessary for Filipinos to work abroad to ease the unemployment in the country and to aid the faltering economy.² Another reason for the Filipino diaspora has to do with a high demand for various types of jobs that became available from the mid-1970s.³ Filipinos are now dispersed all over the world holding different types of jobs. According to Amador A. Remigio Jr.,

1. "Filipino Diaspora" is a descriptive term referring to the "people in the Philippines being dispersed into foreign lands." For more discussion of this term, see the "Introduction" of Luis Pantoja Jr., Sadiri Joy Tira, and Enoch Wan, eds., *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence* (Manila: Lifechange Publishing, 2004), xx-viii.

2. Loretta Ann P. Rosales, "Legislative Agenda on Filipino Migrant Workers," Philippine European Solidarity Centre, <http://www.philsol.nl/fora/NL99a-Rosales.htm> (accessed April 21, 2010). See also the footnote below.

3. Amador A. Remigio Jr., "A Demographic Survey of the Filipino Diaspora" in *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence*, 15.

Today, Filipinos are represented in every industry. There are nurses in the hospitals of New York, engineers with Boeing in Seattle-Tacoma, doctors in Libya, architects in Dubai, bartenders in Milan, laborers in the oilfields of Saudi Arabia, entertainers in Tokyo, maids in Singapore and Hong Kong. Filipino seamen are working in cruise ships and oil tankers. There are also hundreds of Filipino scholars studying in universities around the world.⁴

Filipinos have indeed penetrated the world; they can be seen in many countries. As a result, the Philippines has emerged as the nation that has sent out a seven-million strong work force all over the world. In addition, a Filipino senator declared the following,

With 700,000 annual departures churned by this labor export policy, covering both land and sea-based workers, we have multiplied our global labor strength to a whopping seven million spread in 181 countries. These seven million Filipinos constitute 10% of our population and almost 20% of our productive age population. According to the POEA data, 4.2 million are classified as overseas contract workers (OCWs) who work on fixed terms of six months to two years. These constitute the bulk of excess labor, which the Philippine economy cannot absorb.⁵

For the reasons enumerated above, many Filipinos have come to work in Hong Kong. They are a part of the vast work force of Filipinos deployed all over the world. There arose, therefore, a big challenge for the Filipino church in Hong Kong to minister to them. The Filipino church in Hong Kong, however, was unable to rely on simply importing trained leaders from the Philippines to minister to the diaspora Filipinos in Hong Kong. Increasingly, inviting pastors from the Philippines to work in Hong Kong is becoming difficult due to immigration policies and financial status of the local churches in Hong Kong.

Therefore, a question arose, "What about training the local Filipino Christians in Hong Kong to minister to the diaspora Filipinos?" Although there are theological institutions in Hong Kong, they predominantly cater to the Chinese population or they are denominationally aligned. In Hong Kong, there is no theological training available for Filipino Baptists. Therefore, considering the need to train the local church leaders and the employment nature of the prospective Filipino students in Hong Kong, seminary education by extension was proposed.

4. Remigio, "A Demographic Survey," 15.

5. Rosales, "Legislative Agenda" (accessed April 21, 2010).

Seminary Education by Extension: Advantages and Limitations

Seminary education by extension is a non-residential form of theological education. Its aim is to bring the seminary to where students are by offering off-campus classes. Classes are held in local churches whose leaders are to be trained. It follows the same curriculum with the residential school but uses a different approach to learning. Weldon Viertel explains the four fundamental principles of extension training:

The student rather than the teacher is primarily responsible for the acquisition of knowledge. (2) Study guides assist the student's acquisition of knowledge. (3) Education is taken to the student rather than requiring the student to move to a central campus. (4) Students of various academic backgrounds are admitted to study at their own level without excluding any by high-level prerequisites.⁶

The extension program explained above is applicable to the situation of the church leaders in Hong Kong. Most Filipinos in Hong Kong have come to work rather than to study because they need to send money to their families. Through the extension program, they can be equipped for Christian leadership, without giving up their employment. In other words, they do not have to stop working to be in a seminary for three years. In fact, many church members can enroll because they can be trained for ministry without having to quit their current job.

Viertel further discusses the advantages of the extension program. He points out that the extension program has strengths because: (1) it combines practical and theoretical training; (2) it is inclusive; (3) it does not remove students from their environment; (4) it is economical; (5) it encourages a pastoral attitude; (6) it encourages individual competency; (7) it can be perpetuated easily; (8) it increases the number of leaders being prepared; and (9) it permits teachers to participate in church development.⁷

Having presented these nine advantages, one must also consider the limitations of this program. According to Viertel, there will be at least four limitations found in the above model of theological education by extension.⁸ First, the relationship between the student and teacher will be greatly affected by the limited hours of classroom contact. They will meet once a week for two hours for a period of twelve weeks. This duration may not be enough for the student to have consultation time

6. Weldon E. Viertel, *A Guide to Seminary Education by Extension*, (Baguio City: n.p., n.d.), 5.

7. Viertel, *A Guide*," 6-8.

8. Viertel, *A Guide*," 8-9.

with his/her teacher. Second, most of the extension students will be part-time. In the Philippines, the extension program students are usually full-time pastors. In Hong Kong, most will be full-time domestic helpers. Much of their study time could be taken away by their jobs and other responsibilities. Third, because the extension students will be working and studying at the same time, they are likely to study at odd hours. They will resort to studying whenever there is available time and therefore will not be able to focus on their studies as well as the residential students might. Fourth, unlike the residential school, the extension program is not likely to have adequate library facilities. The extension students will be encouraged to build their own libraries. Moreover, since part-time students have little time for research, they will need to be given self-study materials. In Hong Kong, theological teachers use emails to distribute handouts with hyperlinks, so that their students can save time by following the link to do research.

The presence of many Filipinos in Hong Kong and the burgeoning of theological education to meet their needs more effectively gave rise to the establishment of TEFL (Theological Education for Filipino Leaders). The following is a case study presented during the Lausanne Consultation held in Seoul, Korea at Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology in November of 2009.

A Case Study of Theological Education for the Filipino Church Leaders in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is one of the favorite destinations of Filipino workers, especially women. Currently, there are around 140,000 OFWs (Overseas Foreign Workers) in Hong Kong.⁹ It rates number two among the top ten countries of destination.¹⁰ The Filipino workers in Hong Kong are mostly women because of the demand for domestic helpers; they are composed of 95% domestic helpers, 99% of whom are women. Hong Kong is very near to the Philippines; it only takes one hour and forty-five minutes to reach the Philippines by airplane and, there is no time difference. Many of these Filipinas come to Hong Kong to earn money, so that they can offer a better life to their children and/or parents and siblings. The remuneration is very good and the working conditions are better than other countries. Because many of them do not have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, Hong Kong becomes a ripe mission field. Testimonies of the baptism candidates show that

9. "Filipinos in Hong Kong," "Wikipedia," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filipinos_in_Hong_Kong (accessed October 13, 2009).

10. Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz, "The Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) Phenomenon," in *Scattered*, 38.

they became Christians in Hong Kong. It is also interesting to note that God is using Christian Filipino workers in Hong Kong to reach the non-believing Filipino workers.

TEFL is a program for laypeople in Hong Kong. It is sponsored by the Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary (HKBTS) in cooperation with the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary (PBTS) in Baguio.¹¹ TEFL is used as a venue in Hong Kong through which to address the questions raised by Rosalinda Dimapilis-Baldoz in the book, *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence*.¹² One of the questions is, "Has the church already positioned itself strategically in this flow of Filipinos all over the world?" There are several Filipino churches in Hong Kong ready to meet the needs of the OFWs. However, because the total number of the OFWs in Hong Kong is so big, more churches and more trained leaders must be involved. TEFL's conviction is that producing well-equipped laypeople capable of leading others in the church is an important aspect of global mission strategy. "Every Baptist is a Missionary"¹³ is a phrase made popular by Johann Oncken, a pioneer European Baptist church planter. Now, it has inspired to do missions in Hong Kong.

Historical Development of TEFL Program in Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary (HKBTS)¹⁴

Before TEFL officially began, classes were offered by the Seminary Education by Extension (SEE) program of the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary called Philippine School of Christian Ministry (PSCM). These classes were taught by a number of Baptist pastors in Hong Kong. They were Ms. Ellen Caballero Spaeth, Pastors Joselito Penaredondo, Danilo and Mary Lou Borlado, Bernyse and Manette Monteclaro, and Tim Lardizabal. The classes were conducted in local churches. However, in 2002, the HKBTS became involved when Rev. Ting Yik Leung of Sha Tin Baptist Church expressed a concern to Dr. Alfred Kong, President of HKBTS, about a need to offer theological training for some Filipino pastors. At that time, the only seminary that taught classes in English in Hong Kong was a Lutheran Seminary. Therefore, Rev. Leung

11. Jerry E. Juergens, "Theological Education for Filipino Leaders Program" (paper presented at the Filipino International Network Conference, Baguio City: Philippines, January 5, 2006).

12. Dimapilis-Baldoz, "OFW," 8.

13. "Johann Gerhard Oncken," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Gerhard_Oncken (accessed October 13, 2009).

14. Juergens, "TEFL History Information" (unpublished paper, Hong Kong, October 13, 2009).

inquired about the possibility of the HKBTS providing an English language track.

President Kong convened a meeting with his English speaking faculty and asked if they could offer an English track. The faculty's response was negative because of their teaching load. Instead, they suggested launching a layperson's program by recruiting faculty from the local Baptist churches that use English and the local Filipino Baptist Churches. Thus, the new program was to be called the Lay Theological Division of the HKBTS.

Pastor Joselito M. Penaredondo of the Filipino congregation of Sha Tin Baptist Church, a graduate of the PBTS, drafted a proposal in consultation with his senior pastor, Rev. Leung, on February 7, 2002. He submitted the proposal on March 29, 2002. The HKBTS in response asked Dr. Jerry Juergens to design a proposal to be submitted to Dr. Joshua Cho, Academic Dean of the HKBTS at that time, and to Ms. Anna Tam, Director of the Lay Theological Division of the HKBTS, in order to obtain the approval of HKBTS. This proposal was drafted on May 2, 2002 and was approved by the administrators of the HKBTS. The proposal was then discussed by a group of Filipino pastors at a meeting on May 20, 2002. During another meeting on June 11, 2002 with Dr. Joyce J. Abugan (Director of SEE) at the PBTS in Baguio, the joint venture of TEFL was approved. A second proposal drafted on July 30, 2002 was discussed by the Filipino pastors and the PBTS officers who attended the Asia Baptist Graduate School of Theological Seminary (ABGTS) meeting in Hong Kong on July 30, 2002.

Finally, the TEFL classes officially opened on January 12, 2003. Only two classes were held on Sunday nights. A total of fifty-one students were enrolled at this time. On January 5, at Applied Theological Education Center (ATEC) a formal convocation for the new program was held. The event included a speech from President Kong of the HKBTS and distribution of the PSCM certificates and textbooks for the first quarter classes.

The Growth of TEFL

The mission/vision of TEFL is to provide a quality theological education to the leaders of the Filipino churches in Hong Kong. This education targets God-called, church-supported men and women for ministry in Hong Kong, Philippines, and beyond.¹⁵ In the beginning, TEFL offered two programs: Certificate in Church Leadership (CCL, 2003)¹⁶

15. Juergens, "Theological Education," 1.

16. Juergens, "Theological Education," 2.

and Diploma in Church Leadership (DCL, 2003).¹⁷ As the needs of the local churches grew, offering additional theological training became necessary.

Since TEFL first began in 2003, many church leaders have been trained for the benefit of the local churches in Hong Kong. Even though the original teachers of TEFL have left Hong Kong to serve in other places, new teachers have come in their place. However, their educational level had to be upgraded to provide higher levels of training to students. As the number of graduates from TEFL grew, there was a need to offer higher degrees or additional training to upgrade the graduates who minister in Hong Kong. In June of 2008, when the PBTS's leadership was in Hong Kong, a proposal of upgrading some of the TEFL teachers was made. In July 2008, TEFL launched a Bachelor of Theology program. Dr. Lilian Molato worked as a liaison between the PBTS and TEFL. Three administrators from the PBTS (Drs. Joyce Abugan, Lizette Knight, and Anthony dela Fuente) officially launched the current Bachelor of Theology program. With this addition, graduates of DCL and other church leaders who had basic university training began to enroll in the enhanced TEFL programs. In this program, the classroom, teachers, students, and funding come from Hong Kong, while the degree is granted by the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary. Although TEFL is a program of the HKBTS, it has a formal relationship with the SEE program of the PBTS. The academic and other records are transferred to the PBTS.¹⁸

Then, in June of 2009, TEFL held its third graduation ceremony at the HKBTS. Dr. Anthony dela Fuente was invited as the graduation speaker. He and Dr. Gilbert Montecastro (Registrar of the PBTS), and some of the faculty of TEFL explored more on the idea of upgrading the faculty members of TEFL. Dr. Knight, the newly installed Dean of Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary, came to Hong Kong in July 2009. She and Dr. Jerry Juergens worked out a plan to offer MDiv through TEFL. In August of 2009, Dr. Lilian Molato visited the PBTS in Baguio and discussed the plan with its leadership, who subsequently approved it. In January 2010, TEFL officially began its Master of Divinity program. In an effort to upgrade the current teachers who are lacking some courses toward MDiv, the PBTS has approved to begin MDiv tract. MDiv classes are for TEFL teachers, pastors, and others who are qualified.

Although TEFL started with a few students, most of whom worked as domestic helpers, through the Bachelor of Theology and Master of

17. Juergens, "Theological Education," 2.

18. Juergens, "Theological Education," 2.

Divinity programs, TEFL will be able to reach more Filipino residents, skilled workers, as well as people of other ethnic backgrounds. There is a possibility of offering classes on weekdays in addition to the classes offered on Sundays. Graduates are currently serving in Baptist and other evangelical churches in Hong Kong as preachers, team leaders in missions, and ministers of evangelism, Christian education, music, and more.

An Overview of TEFL Program

TEFL follows the curriculum of the PBTS in Baguio, Philippines. The Master of Divinity degree has 106 units.¹⁹ Specifically, this degree requires twenty-four units in biblical studies area, sixteen units in historical-theological area, thirty units in practical theology area, four units in research and design, twenty-two units in electives, and ten units in field education. The Bachelor of Theology degree requires a total of seventy-two units plus seventy-four units of basic college/university studies. This comprises sixteen units in biblical studies area, twelve units in historical-theological area, twenty-six units in practical theology area, eight units of electives, and ten units in field education.

Diploma in Church Leadership is awarded to a student if he or she has completed thirty-two units of the basic courses offered by TEFL. The student must take courses in combination of three areas of studies, preferably eight units in biblical studies area, eight units in historical-theological area, twelve units in practical theology area, and four units of electives. Certificate in Church Leadership is awarded to a student who has completed at least sixteen units of the basic courses offered. This usually covers one year of study, preferably a combination of four units in biblical studies area, four units in historical-theological area, six units in practical theology area, and two units of electives.

In terms of administration, TEFL is ultimately in the hands of the HKBTS. President Kong took a great interest in the program. In fact, the original concept was his dream. The HKBTS Trustees approved the basic structure and design of TEFL, but the day-to-day operations are carried out by the TEFL Director (who is a professor emeritus of the HKBTS). The seminary also employs a part-time assistant, who also serves as registrar.²⁰ In 2007, a part-time associate director was added to the staff, hence enabling the program's growth. Policy decisions are

19. "2008-09 Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary Student Handbook and Catalog," Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines, p. 22.

20. Juergens, "Theological Education," 3.

made by an advisory council composed of selected local Filipino Baptist pastors. The council meets approximately every two months.

Financial matters are carried out within the HKBTS finance guidelines and policies. Tuition is adequate to provide a standard honorarium given to those who teach. The TEFL budget is subsidized in the following ways. One source of funding comes from a number of local Chinese Christians who are interested in providing theological education to the Filipinos in Hong Kong. Some of them provide full scholarships for their own domestic workers. A second source of financial support is from the HKBTS; this portion covers the salaries of the director, associate director, and assistant.²¹ A third source is from the Filipino Baptist church in Hong Kong; they have recently begun raising funds in their respective churches. Some of these churches support TEFL by providing scholarships to their own members.

In the beginning, the tuition for TEFL program was similar to that of its sister organization, the PBTS SEE program. Full-time students and part-time students paid a different amount, and Baptist students paid less than did the non-Baptist students. For one course per quarter, part-time Baptist students paid 315 in Hong Kong dollars (HKD). Full-time Baptist students paid 540 HKD for two courses per quarter, thereby saving 90 HKD. Since we are a Baptist seminary supported by the local Baptist churches in Hong Kong, we gave a tuition reduction to all Baptist students. Others paid 405 and 720 HKD respectively. However, students from the churches that made financial contribution to TEFL paid the Baptist tuition rate.²²

Presently, tuition is 315 HKD per course for all students; there is no distinction whether full-time or part-time, Baptist or non-Baptist. There has been no tuition increase since TEFL began in 2002. TEFL gives scholarships to the students who are financially supported by their churches. The TEFL scholarship fund (largely composed of designated donations from the local Chinese Christians) offers a matching amount to the fund donated by the student's church. For example, if a church decides to contribute 100 HKD for its student member, the TEFL scholarship will match that amount by providing the student with an additional 100 HKD. The criteria for awarding scholarships are entirely within the prerogative of the local Filipino churches. If a church commits to supporting the student in leadership training, TEFL will commit to matching that church's support.²³ Recently, however, this scholarship matching has stopped. Instead, scholarships are given to students whom

21. Juergens, "Theological Education," 3.

22. Juergens, "Theological Education," 3.

23. Juergens, "Theological Education," 4.

the TEFL Advisory Council deems to be in deep need. Most of the churches that support their student members are now paying half of their tuition fees.

The teachers of the TEFL courses are largely composed of the pastors from the Filipino churches in Hong Kong and have completed at least MDiv.²⁴ In 2007, a husband and wife team, both of whom hold Doctor of Theology degrees, was added to the existing teachers, thus enabling the program to offer more courses in BTh and MDiv levels. Most of the textbooks used in class come from the Seminary Education by Extension program of the PBTS. The languages used to teach are English and “Tagalog.” The practical examples and case studies are taken from Filipino experiences.²⁵

Conclusion

As explained above, TEFL plays an important role in reaching out to the Filipino diaspora in Hong Kong, China, and beyond for several reasons. First, it provides opportunity for pastors and/or workers of churches to receive theological training. Second, it provides theological training for church leaders whom God has already placed strategically in households and environments that are their mission fields. Many domestic helpers witness Jesus Christ when they meet other Filipinas in the markets and on trains and buses. This method is effective because the theologically trained Filipino diaspora are ministering to those who live in the same buildings with them. They also help one another by providing food and assistance. The use of mobile phones is the primary means of keeping in touch with the “kababayans” (countrymen).

Third, TEFL gives them an opportunity to study while working. Fourth, even after the TEFL graduates leave Hong Kong, they will be able to use their training wherever they go. Some of them will leave Hong Kong to be in another country of employment, others will go back to the Philippines. Wherever they go, they will take with them the training they had received. Today, TEFL has students from other countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, South Africa, and Nepal. TEFL also trains the Chinese Christians in Hong Kong. Amazingly, God is using them as witnesses in mono-cultural and/or cross-cultural missions, even while they are studying.

Finally, TEFL concept can be duplicated and contextualized in other places in the world. Wherever there is a seminary such as the HKBTS, willing to reach out and train the international Christians in

24. Juergens, “Theological Education,” 1.

25. Juergens, “Theological Education,” 2.

its country, this program can be implemented. Furthermore, through a mutually trusting relation and careful planning between a seminary of the hosting country and a seminary of the diaspora people, the quality of theological education and ministry training given to the diaspora Christians can be enhanced.

Appendix A: Curricula

*Master of Divinity*²⁶

100 Biblical Area (24 Units)

BI 151 Biblical Introduction

BI 152 Hermeneutics I

GR 161 Greek Tools

HE 161 Hebrew Tools

NT151 New Testament Survey I

NT152 New Testament Survey II

NT 153 New Testament Survey III

_____ New Testament Elective

OT 151 Old Testament History I

OT 152 Old Testament History II

OT 153 Old Testament History III

_____ Old Testament Elective

200 Historical–Theological Area (16 Units)

ET 251 Christian Ethics

HT 251 Asian Religious Traditions

HT 252 Baptist History & Doctrine.

HT 261 Church History I

HT 262 Church History II

TH 251 Theology and Culture

TH 261 Systematic Theology I

TH 262 Systematic Theology II

300 Practical Area (30 Units)

CC 351 Principles of Biblical Preaching I

CC 352 Principles of Biblical Preaching II

CC 361 Preaching Lab

CE 351 Principles of Christian Education

CE 352 Education Administration & SEE Principles

26. “2008-09 Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary Student Handbook and Catalog,” Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines, p. 22.

CE 353 Principles of Teaching I
 EV 351 Evangelism & Discipleship
 EV 361 Church Planting & Church Growth
 MI 351 Missiology
 ML 351 Ministerial Leadership I
 ML 352 Ministerial Leadership II
 MM 351 Introduction to Church Music
 MM 352 Leading Congregational Singing
 PC 351 Introduction to Pastoral Care & Counseling
 PC 352 Marriage and Family

Research and Design (4 Units)
 Or 361 Literary Research
 OR 362 *Writing Research Papers*

Other Requirements

Electives: 22 Units
 Field Education: 6 Units
 Internship: 4 Units

(Note: Courses in italics are not offered in the regular TEFL program but may be offered by special arrangement.)

Total Units for Master of Divinity: 106

Bachelor of Theology²⁷

Requirement: Applicants must have completed at least 74 units of basic college/university studies.

100 Biblical Area (16 Units)

BI 151 Biblical Introduction
 BI 152 Hermeneutics I
 NT 151 New Testament Survey I
 NT 152 New Testament Survey II
 NT 153 New Testament Survey III
 OT 151 Old Testament History I
 OT 152 Old Testament History II
 OT 153 Old Testament History III

200 Historical–Theological Area (12 Units)

27. “2008-2009 Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary,” 35.

ET 251 Christian Ethics
HT 252 Baptist History & Doctrine
TH 261 Church History I
HT 262 Church History II
TH 261 Systematic Theology I
TH 262 Systematic Theology II

300 Practical Area (26 Units)

CC 351 Principles of Biblical Preaching I
CC 352 Principles of Biblical Preaching II
CC 361 Preaching Lab
CE 351 Principles of Christian Education
CE 352 Education Administration & SEE Principles
EV 361 Church Planting & Church Growth
MI 351 Missiology
ML 351 Ministerial Leadership I
ML 352 Ministerial Leadership II
MM 351 Introduction to Church Music
MM 352 Leading Congregational Singing
PC 351 Introduction to Pastoral Care & Counseling
PC 352 Marriage and Family

Other Requirements

Electives: 8 Units

Field Education: 6 Units

Internship: 4 Units

Total Units for Bachelor of Theology: 72