

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS OF
FEAST/APTS OVER ITS FIRST FIFTY YEARS
(1964-2014)

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Introduction

As Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS) celebrates its Golden Jubilee in 2014, it is fitting to reflect on the academic development of the seminary and the principles that have guided that development over the years. As an outgrowth of Pentecostal missions, the development of APTS is representative of the efforts of Pentecostal missionaries to conserve the fruits of evangelism and church planting which had accelerated in Asia and the Pacific following World War II. As Bill Menzies and John Carter observe:

A common pattern of pioneer missionary endeavor in those early years was to plant churches and identify potential young national leaders. The nurturing of these leaders led inevitably to the formation of Bible schools. Some of these efforts were certainly quite modest, amounting to little more than amplified Sunday school programs but, eventually, many Bible institutes caught hold as the value of their alumni became readily apparent.¹

The development of three-year Bible institutes was common across the nations of the world wherever Assemblies of God missionaries went, in keeping with the missions strategy of the Department of Foreign Missions (DFM—now Assemblies of God World Missions, (AGWM) of the US Assemblies of God. So by the 1950s and 60s, most of the countries of Asia offered Bible institute

¹ Menzies, William W. and John F. Carter, *Zeal with Knowledge: The First Forty Years of FEAST/APTS*. Baguio City, Philippines: APTS Press, 2004, 9.

programs, usually modeled after the curriculum of Assemblies of God Bible schools in the United States. The leaders who gave birth to these schools and their vision for ministry training did so in recognition of the importance of formal education in preparing pastors and church leaders, and saw this in terms of their commitment to the *indigenous principle* as articulated by missions leaders such as Melvin Hodges and others,² which mandated that missionary endeavors and leadership must eventually give way to that of the national church and its leadership. Thus, the training of national church leaders was considered a matter of first priority.

Development of Advanced Schools

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Department of Foreign Missions of the US Assemblies of God (DFM-USA) began to develop “advanced schools” in various regions of the world, including Africa, Latin America, Europe, Eurasia and Asia. A primary goal of these schools was to train nationals to serve as faculty members in the Bible institutes of the region.

The impetus for the establishment of an advanced school in Asia came initially from the vision of Maynard Ketcham, DFM Field Secretary for the Far East (now Asia Pacific), who saw the need for an advanced school to augment the training provided by the national Bible institutes, many of which offered a very basic curriculum of Bible study. This vision was further supported and encouraged by participants at the 1960 Far East Conference of DFM-USA missionaries held in Hong Kong in 1960. Participants in the conference, who were missionaries representing many of the countries of Southeast Asia, enthusiastically approved the creation of the Far East Advanced School of Theology (FEAST) to be located in Manila, Philippines.³

As indicated by the name, the curriculum of the various Bible institutes of the region focused on in-depth Bible study, while theology courses were oriented toward teaching the doctrines of the Assemblies of God. In many instances, it would be more appropriate to consider

² Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church*, (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1953; reprint edition, 1976); Charles H. Kraft & Tom N. Wisley, eds., *Readings in Dynamic Indigenity*, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979); T. Stanley Soltau, *Missions at the Crossroads*, (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1954); *The Indigenous Church: A Report from the Fields* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960).

³ Menzies and Carter, 12.

this “indoctrination” rather than “education” in the broader sense since the key purpose was to prepare leaders for immediate ministry. Equipping students to critically evaluate theological propositions was viewed neither as important nor beneficial to this endeavor as compared to teaching students the Word of God and how to communicate it effectively for evangelistic and church planting purposes. There was also a strong focus on practical ministry experiences. In fact, in some cases, schools required every student to plant a church before they could graduate.⁴ The effect was to thrust newly trained church leaders into ministry quickly and, thus, advance the cause of bringing the Gospel to new places.

However, it was also realized that a basic Bible institute education would not adequately prepare national leaders for the task of preparing the next generation of church leaders. Some needed to receive advanced training so they could become the Bible school instructors and key church leaders for the emerging national church, and thus the need for advanced schools such as FEAST.

The Original FEAST Curriculum

The curriculum of FEAST was intended to supplement the three-year Bible Institute Diploma that was received at the national Bible institutes. Admission to FEAST required the completion of at least 94 credits at the Bible institute level. But since the Bible institute programs were neither standardized nor always academically sufficient, students often had to make up deficiencies by taking additional courses after they arrived.

Originally, FEAST the curriculum consisted of a Bachelor of Theology (B.Th.) degree program that required two years of study beyond the three-year Bible institute diploma. The curriculum included not only courses in Bible and theology, but also such subjects as philosophy, church history, ethics, church administration and teaching. Electives included various subjects of psychology, creative writing and Gospel radio broadcasting, no doubt related to the fact that the studios of the Far East Broadcasting Company (FEBC) were located near the campus, whose mission was to was to broadcast the gospel message by radio throughout the region. In short, the FEAST curriculum was intended to give the student a well-rounded general education, as well as advanced education in Bible and theology. The inclusion of general

⁴ Personal communication with alumni of these schools.

education subjects conformed to the American approach to higher education, which incorporates general studies into a bachelor's degree program. This is in contrast to the British/European approach where courses are concentrated within the named major and general education is assumed to have been completed at the secondary level (e.g. a British B.Th. would only include courses related generally to theology). All courses were taught in the English medium, and, although a minimum competency in English was required of all students, some had to study English on a non-credit basis in addition to other subjects.

In 1966, after receiving approval from the Philippine government to award "religious degrees," a one-year Bachelor of Religious Education (B.R.E) was added to the curriculum.⁵ This was followed by a Bachelor of Biblical Studies (B.B.S) in the mid-1970s. These programs served FEAST until 1978 when it became apparent that graduate degree programs were needed as more and more students who had received a bachelor's degree were interested in further study and were going abroad, often to the US, and to non-Pentecostal seminaries. Many who did so did not return to Asia for ministry. Also, by then a number of national Bible schools had begun to offer four-year bachelor's degrees themselves. In keeping with the accreditation guideline that instructors should have at least one level of degree above the level they were teaching, these schools looked to APTS to provide masters level education for those who would become their faculty.⁶ So, in 1978, master's degrees in Theological Studies (M.T.S) and Christian Education (M.R.E) were added. Admission to the M.R.E. program required the student to hold a B.R.E., or B.A. in Bible (including 12 credits in Christian Education). The M.T.S. required the B.B.S or a B.A. in Bible (with 6 credits in New Testament Greek).⁷ Students with secular degrees had to fulfill additional prerequisites in appropriate subjects. Students needing to fulfill prerequisites were encouraged to complete the college-level correspondence courses developed by the International Correspondence Institute (ICI – now Global University of the Assemblies of God). ICI had its main office in Brussels Belgium at the time, but also had a major national office in Manila, which facilitated its relationship to FEAST.⁸ Since the ICI program was intended for correspondence study (the early terminology for what later became known as distance education), it suited the needs of these

⁵ Menzies & Carter, 23.

⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁷ APTS Catalog, 1979-81, 23-25.

⁸ Ibid, 11.

students well since they could complete the prerequisites without leaving home or, sometimes, while concurrently enrolled at FEAST.

By 1982, the M.R.E. had become a Master of Arts in Christian Education (M.A.C.E.), while the M.T.S. became a Master of Arts in Biblical Studies (M.A.B.S). Also, for the first time, a 96-credit Master of Divinity (M.Div.) Degree began to be offered.⁹

These developments were undertaken as FEAST continued to pursue one of its primary goals—to train the faculty for the national Assemblies of God Bible schools. Indeed, as further developments will indicate, throughout the history of FEAST/APTS, the school has sought to develop programs that were explicitly designed to enhance the ministries of the national churches and Bible schools of the region.

FEAST Becomes APTS

In 1986, FEAST moved from its original home on the campus of Bethel Bible Institute in Metro-Manila to a permanent ten-acre campus in Baguio City, 150 miles north of Manila in the Cordillera mountain range. Baguio was known as a university city, where several national universities were located. This move enabled the ongoing development of the school by providing both usable facilities and room for expansion.

These developments were accelerated when Dr. William Menzies, distinguished Assemblies of God educator who had served as a faculty member and administrator at several Assemblies of God schools in the US, came to be president in 1989. Menzies had previously served a term as interim president of FEAST in 1984-85 and came with a vision for the development of the school into a full-fledged seminary. Thus, in 1989, the Board approved a change of name for the school from FEAST to Asia Pacific Theological Seminary (APTS). The designation “seminary” reflected the intention to focus exclusively on graduate level education. Thus, APTS began to phase-out the undergraduate programs that had served the region so well over the previous twenty five years in order to focus on the next academic level. This change occurred first at the Baguio campus where the bachelor’s programs were eliminated from the 1989-91 catalog¹⁰ and eventually in the extension program, as well, where students were given longer to complete their degrees. However, the undergraduate degree programs

⁹ FEAST catalog, 1982-83, 35-36.

¹⁰ APTS catalog, 1989-91, 15-16.

were fully discontinued by 1995, with the last bachelor's degree awarded in 1997.

As the school entered the decade of the 90s, with a new president, a new academic dean and several new faculty members, the academic programs underwent a number of changes. The two M.A. programs in Christian Education and Biblical Studies were eliminated in favor of a more generic M.A. in Ministry that required 36 credits, and an M.A. in Theology requiring 48 credits.¹¹ The M.A. in Ministry was also the degree program that was offered in the extension program, while the M.A. in Theology was offered only at the residence campus (although it was possible for students to begin in the extension program and transfer to the main campus to complete this degree). At the same time, the 96-credit M.Div. program was modified to provide either a concentration in ministry or theology.¹² Students completing either M.A. could transfer these credits into the M.Div. to complete that degree. While admission to the M.A. program required thirty six prerequisite credits in Bible, ministry and theology from an undergraduate degree program, the M.Div. required only the completion of a bachelor's degree. Thus, students who had completed only a secular degree could enter the M.Div. program.

In 1996, in order to serve students with secular degrees but no previous theological training who did not wish to commit to a full three-year M.Div. program, a Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies (Grad-Cert) was added. The Grad-Cert was a flexible program requiring twenty four credits in ministry, biblical studies, theology and a basic research course that could be completed without regard to the prerequisites needed for the M.A. degree program.¹³ However, students could apply these credits to the M.A. if they wished to fulfill the prerequisites and continue their study. At the same time, "Graduate Certificate Concentrations" were added within the M.A. and M.Div. programs in Bible School Ministry, Christian Education, Missions and Pastoral Counseling. Each of these certificates required fifteen credits, in effect, constituting a graduate minor in the respective programs.

From the mid-1990s until the present, the requirements for the M.A. Ministry, M.A. Theology and M.Div. have remained basically unchanged. However, in 2000, an M.A. in Intercultural studies (36 credits) and an M.A. in Intercultural Studies, Islamic Studies

¹¹ APTS catalog, 1993-96, 32-33.

¹² *Ibid.*, 35.

¹³ APTS Catalog, 1996-99, 38.

Concentration (48 credits) were added to the curriculum.¹⁴ Both of these programs benefitted from the short-term training programs in missions and Islamic studies that began to be offered in the mid-1990s that are described in more detail below. For a brief period, 2003-2006, APTS provided a 72-credit “Exemption Track” for the M.Div. for those who held an undergraduate degree in Bible, theology, ministry or missions and had a minimum of “three-years full-time credentialed ministry.”¹⁵ This option was dropped in subsequent catalogs due to reservations expressed by some faculty to this provision,¹⁶ but reappeared in the latest catalog (2013-2016), now requiring seventy eight credits and carrying the additional prerequisite of “Competency in a Biblical language-validated by competency exam.”¹⁷ The rationale for this exception from the usual 96-credit M.Div. program is that students who have completed an undergraduate degree from a Bible school have already completed significant study in theology compared to those who enter the M.Div. from a secular degree background. However, it is apparent that the APTS faculty reevaluated the basis on which such an exception could be granted and added additional requirements to strengthen the program.

The AGST Th.M./D.Min. Program

In essence since its inception, APTS has viewed its mission as “staying one step ahead” of the development of the national Bible schools so it could fulfill its primary purpose of training faculty members for those schools. This was not only true for APTS, but for other Evangelical seminaries in the region who were members of the Asia Theological Association (ATA) and its affiliated post-graduate school, the Asia Graduate School of Theology (AGST). AGST was established by ATA as a consortium of its member schools in the various regions it served with the goal to develop post-graduate academic programs to train seminary faculty. The Philippine-Area AGST included most of the Evangelical seminaries located in the nation, including APTS as a founding member.

In 1991, AGST launched its first post-graduate program, a Th.M./D.Min in Pastoral Ministries, with APTS as the host institution. While the modular classes were held on the APTS campus, faculty members from other AGST-member institutions came to teach in the

¹⁴ APTS Catalog, 2000-2003.

¹⁵ APTS Catalog, 2003-2006, 45.

¹⁶ Personal communication with academic leaders.

¹⁷ APTS Catalog, 2013-2016, 45-46.

program. The importance of offering the Th.M. degree was that it is the minimum academic level needed for faculty to teach at the master's degree level in a seminary, and all the Evangelical churches of the region were seeking to qualify national faculty to teach in their schools. The program also provided the option to complete a D.Min. degree for those wishing to continue after the Th.M. Two of the students in this initial program were in the faculty development program of APTS. One completed the Th.M. before pursuing a Ph.D. elsewhere and another completed the AGST Th.M. and D.Min. degrees. Both continued to serve the seminary as faculty, including several years after they completed their doctoral degrees.

Development of Short-term Ministry Training Programs

During the same period that APTS was beginning to expand its curriculum to include post-graduate programs, it was also developing short-term specialized training in key ministry areas to be offered during the summer break period. The pattern was to partner with existing ministries that wanted to expand the base of resource people for their own ministry endeavors, by providing needed training in selected areas. Beginning in 1991, the first such program was the Asian Institute for Media Ministries (AIMM) offered in cooperation with AP2000, the regional media ministry of AGWM located in Manila that was developing radio and television programs for the Asia Pacific region. This three-week program, offered every few years, brought interested individuals from across Asia Pacific to learn how to use radio, TV and print media in their ministries and to partner with AP2000 in ministry projects.¹⁸

In 1996, the Asian Institute for Youth Studies (AIYS) was initiated in cooperation with AP Campus Challenge, the AGWM ministry that focused on developing university and youth ministries for the region.¹⁹ This was followed in 1997 by the Missions Training Program (MTP) developed in cooperation with the Assemblies of God Asian Missions Association (AGAMA) that had for years envisioned the development of a program to train Asian missionaries.²⁰ APTS provided an ideal setting for this eight-week intensive missionary training experience that has continued in various forms until now. Of special note is the 12-week China Studies Program that provided the opportunity for students to spend time in China under the supervision

¹⁸ Menzies & Carter, 91.

¹⁹ Ibid, 92.

²⁰ Ibid, 92-93.

of an APTS faculty member who was also working to China. The program provided hands-on experience in ministry in a restricted environment and the opportunity to gain an understanding of the Chinese context. Unfortunately, only a few students actually participated in this opportunity over the years and it ceased to be offered in 2007.²¹ Nevertheless, it foreshadowed developments a decade later that focused the attention of APTS on programs for China, as described later in the paper.

The MTP was followed in 1998 by the eight-week Institute of Islamic Studies (IIS) developed in cooperation with the Center for Ministry to Muslims (CMM), now known as Global Initiative, an agency of AGWM located in Springfield, Missouri. APTS provided the facilities while CMM structured the curriculum and recruited instructors, including both highly respected academics and ministry practitioners, to give students a well-rounded preparation for ministry in Muslim contexts. This was likely the first such training program offered anywhere in the world, although there have been many others developed since. Over the fifteen years since its initial session, there have been over six hundred participants from over forty nations involved in the IIS.

Similar programs developed over the past decade include the Institute for Buddhist Studies (IBS), which was offered both at APTS and in Thailand (a major Buddhist nation), the Leadership Development Institute (LDI) and, in recent years, a program in Christian Counseling offered in cooperation with Trevecca Nazarene University of Nashville, Tennessee.

Perhaps the most significant recent short-term training program is one in the Chinese language for students from the house churches of China that has been offered for several years. Nearly 100 students have come for this two month program in ministry and theological studies. For many of these students, this was their first formal education in these areas.

A common element in these programs has been the provision of APTS academic credit for participants who completed appropriate undergraduate or graduate assignments. For undergraduate students, a transcript was provided for transfer of credit to another school offering undergraduate education, while graduate credit was recorded on an APTS graduate transcript. This allowed APTS students to include these courses in their graduate programs. For instance, students completing

²¹ APTS Catalog, 2007-2010.

the M.A. in Missions were allowed to participate in the MTP, while those pursuing an M.A. in Missions with an Islamic Concentration were encouraged to participate in the IIS. Thus, APTS found a way to integrate these short-term training experiences into its broader curriculum.

Development of the Post-Graduate Curriculum

By the mid-1990s, many of the national Assemblies of God schools in Asia Pacific began to look toward the development of their own graduate programs, thus prompting APTS to consider the development of its own post-graduate programs. Having hosted the AGST Th.M/D.Min program in Pastoral Studies in the early 1990s, and with its ongoing cooperation with AGST programs hosted by other Evangelical seminaries in the Philippines, the value of such programs was readily apparent. Of particular interest among the APTS constituency was the development of post-graduate programs that focused on Pentecostal theology and ministry. Thus, in 2000 the Th.M. in Pentecostal/Charismatic Studies was launched, followed in 2002 by a D.Min in Pentecostal Ministries. As a continuing member of the AGST consortium, some members had encouraged APTS to incorporate these programs under the AGST covering, but others were hesitant to develop programs that represented a particular theological viewpoint. Thus, the APTS administration, both wishing to avoid any controversy within the AGST family while also responding to the needs of its own constituency, decided to offer the programs as APTS degrees, not AGST degrees.

No doubt, the Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph.D.) is generally considered the apex of academic training in any field²² and the most desirable level of education for seminary faculty members. Thus, the leadership of APTS had sought for some time for a way for Asian students to pursue a Ph.D. without the need to go abroad for studies in the US or Europe. This goal was achieved in 2000 with the signing of an agreement with the University of Bangor, a campus of the University of Wales in the UK, for a cooperative Ph.D. program wherein students could remain at APTS under the supervision of an

²² Doctoral degrees in named disciplines such as the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), Doctor of Missiology (D.Miss.) and Doctor of Theology (Th.D.) are often considered equivalent to the Ph.D. as terminal academic degrees at the highest level in these disciplines, but because these degrees may also be oriented more toward specific professional training than academic research, the Ph.D. is often preferred because its value is unambiguously recognized.

APTS faculty member while also working with a co-supervisor at Bangor to complete a Ph.D. dissertation. In keeping with the European approach to doctoral study, Ph.D. students did not have to complete course work as part of their Ph.D. studies, but needed only to complete an acceptable dissertation as part of a three-year research project.²³ This arrangement with the University of Wales has subsequently been discontinued, as the UK government has discouraged such out-of-country arrangements for UK universities, but several students who enrolled through the APTS program did complete their degrees. At present, APTS is considering the development of its own Ph.D. program with the assistance of the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA), one of its accrediting bodies.

Conclusion

The development of the curriculum of APTS from its inception in 1964 over the past 50 years is the story of a school with a clear vision and commitment to the goal of serving its missionary and national church constituencies through the development of programs that aided in their development. The bachelor's degree program served the region for three decades, supplementing the three-year diploma programs offered in most nations, and the graduate programs have now been available for more than three decades. A variety of special programs for training in specific ministry areas supplemented the graduate programs, and when national schools in the Asia Pacific region began to develop their own graduate programs, APTS initiated post-graduate programs.

To some extent, it might be said that APTS has substantially accomplished its original purposes and could now leave the task to others. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that today's student body has changed over the years and some of the nations from which students have come through the years are no longer represented as prominently as they once were, since they can now find graduate and, sometimes post-graduate programs, readily available within their own national context.

But, in keeping with the approach it has taken throughout its existence, the seminary continually seeks to renew and reinvent itself to address new areas of need. As APTS looks forward to its sixth decade of ministry, it has begun to focus on nations that previously were not

²³ Menzies & Carter, 108.

able to access theological education, such as China, and to the development of cooperative programs with other schools that could benefit from the resources, experience and vision of a school that many would still consider the “Flagship Assemblies of God School” in the Asia Pacific region. As such, I am sure that the future will be as productive in initiating new programs of academic and ministry training to suit the emerging Asia Pacific Pentecostal church world, as it has been over its first half-century of ministry. Surely, its motto, “Zeal with Knowledge” will continue to give inspiration to these efforts.