

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



NEWS

HOLIDAY



DO YOU KNOW THE SPACE-OUT COMPETITION?

In 2024, this competition took place in Hong Kong. This year, it will be held in Melbourne. In previous years, it has been organised in Tokyo and Taipei. But what is this competition about? What do the participants compete in?

During the competition, the finalists sit on the floor, on a blanket or on a towel. And then, for 90 minutes, they do - nothing. Their task is to relax as quickly and thoroughly as possible. They are not allowed to talk, laugh, look at their watches or play with their mobile phones. They must do nothing. After 90 minutes, they are medically examined. The participant with the slowest and most regular heartbeat is the winner.

This competition was initiated in Seoul in 2014 by an artist after her burnout. She wanted to get her South-Korean compatriots to think because many of them don't relax at all. They work long and hard, and even in their free time, the cell phone is always on. They even take it to bed with them, to be reachable 24/7.

Also in my country, Germany, people often don't settle down even in their leisure time. According to hotel owners in the Alps, the behavior of many holidaymakers has changed. Tourists used to arrive at the hotel, unpack their bags and put their belongings in the closet. Meanwhile, they no longer unpack. Questioned about this phenomenon, most tourists answered they did not unpack their bags "because they were too busy." I am surprised: they are on vacation and too busy to unpack their suitcase...?

But maybe this phenomenon isn't so weird. Our society is focused on being as efficient as possible. At work, you need to be efficient. Your savings should be invested as efficiently as possible. And then you want to use your leisure time as efficiently as possible. You want to see and experience as much as possible. You want to get as much recreation as possible. Actually, our behavior is not too different from the participants of the Space-Out Competition...

However, psychologists who deal with happiness have a different opinion. They come to the conclusion that people experience moments of happiness during their holidays, especially at moments when they are not goal-oriented. If they don't want to be as efficient as possible, get the most out of the moment. It is when you relax completely and want to achieve nothing, that moments of happiness arise. You cannot "make" such moments of happiness, you cannot produce them. They happen to you, sometimes unexpectedly. The only thing you can do is... doing nothing.

God did not order the world so that we are always on duty. The working days are followed by the rest of the Sabbath. God gives us a holy time of repose.

Whatever your plans for the summer are, I wish you rest.

Stefan Gradl

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Statement of Purpose

The LTS News is a newsletter for local and global alumni/ae and friends of the Lutheran Theological Seminary "LTS" in Hong Kong. Through stories about people and events at LTS, it aims to connect readers and create a sense of belonging to a broad LTS community even beyond graduation.

Donation

To make a donation to support LTS, there are three methods and receipts will be sent back afterwards.

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TRYING TO INCREASE TEACHER AND STUDENT EXCHANGE OPPORTUNITIES

Kenneth Ho-yin Tsang | The President



Facilitated by the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) and Areopagos (a Christian organization in Norway and Denmark that supports the work of the Tao Fung Shan Christian Centre), Dr. Dag Oredsson, Dr. Cynthia Chau, and I visited ten theological institutions, along with several churches and mission organizations in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, from April 20 to May 2. This trip aimed to explore the possibility of arranging teacher and student exchanges between LTS and those institutions. Having a strong international network and partnership is God's grace to LTS. After the pandemic, we resumed sending our students to partner institutions for exchange or to join their international programs. For instance, in the past two years, we arranged for students to join the "Bridging Gap" program organized by the Faculty of Religion and Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) and the Protestant Theological University (PThU), supported by Kerk in Actie in the Netherlands, and to participate in the international study program organized by the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) in Germany. We strongly believe that students would greatly benefit from this cross-geographical, cultural and institutional learning and living experience, no matter students study aboard or students from other institutions to LTS. Therefore, we are working on increasing the exchange opportunities.

The above effort echoes this year's LTS theme – "Treasure Different Cultures • Together We Serve." Compared to other seminaries in Hong Kong, LTS stands out for its multicultural context, featuring an international faculty team (including teachers from Hong Kong, Mainland, Germany, the USA, Finland, and Sweden) and a diverse student body (comprising students from Hong Kong, Mainland, Taiwan, the Mekong region, and others). Despite facing challenges, we regard it as a treasure since the "differences" often open our eyes, provide insights, remind us to be humble, and foster cooperation in unity with diversity. Moreover, witnessing God's works in different places and how Christian communities worldwide express their faith is always beneficial.

These viewpoints have been confirmed by the positive responses from the institutions we visited when they learned that LTS has a strong multicultural context and a vibrant Christian community life. They showed great interest in sending students to LTS for an exchange, as it not only provides their students the opportunity to learn in a Chinese context but also to be part of this "hub" of the Christian community, which includes students from Hong Kong, Mainland, and the Mekong region. Of course, students from European countries will also enrich our multicultural learning environment.

We understand that realizing our discussions depends on various factors, such as financial arrangements, accommodation and the possibility of allowing credit transfers. Yet, with God's grace and the support of our mission partners - like NMS and Areopagos this time - as a bridge, we are optimistic about expanding our "exchange" opportunities. ■



- 1 Dinner in Viborg with Bishop and LWF President Henrik Stubkjær, Denmark
- 2 University of Copenhagen, Denmark
- 3 Areopagos Oslo Office, Norway
- 4 Dinner with Leaders of NMS, Head Office, Norway
- 5 MF Norwegian School of Theology, Norway
- 6 VID Specialized University, Oslo, Norway
- 7 VID Specialized University - Stravanger, Norway
- 8 Lund's University, Sweden
- 9 Uppsala University, Sweden

NEITHER HOLIDAY NOR LEISURE...?

Joeson Ka-yu Wong | Assistant Professor (Old Testament)



I am given a challenging task: To write something about “Holiday and Leisure” from the Old Testament perspective. As you may know, I seldom have a holiday in true sense (weekdays working in the campus, and weekends writing and giving sermons). Actually, the real challenge is: The concept and practice of “holiday” is probably a product of Christianity. It appears to me (but I don’t claim any expertise in this regard) that in the ancient Israel, as a large portion of the populations were slaves or “employed” farmers and shepherds (working for their masters and / or landlords), most of them didn’t have “holiday” in the modern sense, i.e. legitimate and paid rest days. Also, apparently some of the scriptural verses emphasize very much on hardworking rather than having the “work-life balance” in our terms (e.g. Prov. 6:6-11; 10:4; 12:24, 27, etc.).

Having said that, the ancient Israelites had the Sabbath day and festivals. Insofar if they practised the teachings of Moses, every week they should keep the Sabbath day as “holy”, which was considered as “a sign” of the covenantal relationship between the Lord and the Israelites (Exod. 20:8; 31:13).¹ This day was consecrated to the Lord, and this commandment prohibited everybody, including slaves and livestock, to work on Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11). Deut. 5:14 clearly indicates the purpose, “so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you.”

If one also reads the pericope about the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-55), in particular Lev. 25:23 (“the land is mine”),

42 (“they are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt”), 55 (“For to me the Israelites are servants; they are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt”), the message is clear: Even though the lands were allotted to the twelve tribes of Israel, the Israelites only had the right to use (for accommodation, and consumption of produces, etc.). The ownership still belongs to the Lord. Even though a person sold himself / herself as a slave, his / her master only had the right to utilize his / her manpower. The “ownership” still belongs to the Lord. That explains why in the Year of Jubilee, lands could be redeemed, and servanthip could be released.

From this perspective, neither our employers (masters) nor ourselves own us but the Lord. The Lord commands us to take a rest day after every six days’ works. It is law as well as gospel. We have no right to exploit ourselves to strive for better profits, higher returns or improved efficiency at the costs of our well beings.

For leisure, probably not much can be found in the Old Testament except those not that nice drinking party and “spa” (e.g. Amos 6:5-6; Prov. 23:21). My favourite verse is Eccles. 9:9, “Enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.” True wisdom, isn’t it? ■

¹ William H.C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, AYB, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974, 491.



HOLIDAY AND LEISURE

A Moment of Leisure from Jesus

Solomon Hon-fai Wong | Associate Professor (New Testament)



I expect you are reading this article "at your leisure" - that is, when you have time, at your convenience, or with time at your disposal, but perhaps not while you are in the restroom (though, why not?). Leisure is often regarded as the opposite of work. It presupposes a type of work that is tedious and "non-divine." This implies that leisure is something-away-from-work. Yet I tend to believe leisure is rooted in the freedom to choose one's activities. When we take this conception of leisure to consider one typical morning of Jesus, that is, He wakes up early and goes to a quiet place to pray (Mark 1:35). We usually do not view this as leisure time for Jesus, because we do not associate prayer with leisure. But what if this was a sort of leisure for Jesus, especially when we define leisure not by what we do, but by the free choice we make? To explore this concept further, I will examine leisure through the dimensions of time, space, and self (time with self).

Time: leisure is most meaningfully experienced when we intentionally choose to set aside time for it. It is not simply about having time free from obligations but about actively dedicating time where we can engage in something that re-energises our body, mind and soul. Jesus' practice of waking early to pray demonstrates His top priority for making spiritual connection with God and Himself. Similarly, in our modern lives, leisure is when we spare the time to do activities that align with our personal passions or interests. This could mean playing music, reading a book, or engaging in sports like jogging. While time is fleeting, leisure gives us the power to reclaim it and use it for fulfilling pursuits.

Space: the spaces we take up during leisure are just as significant as the activity itself. The desert is for solitude while the party is for celebration. Jesus goes to a quiet place for prayer, showing how a right place can enhance the quality of our leisure. Parks in the city or a cozy corner at home will give us both relaxation and inspiration, while a football match or mountain trails will demand our stamina and energy. Space can also create atmosphere that can set free our mind and lead us into

a sense of detachment from stress and distractions. It becomes the vessel that allows us to fully embrace and enjoy moments of leisure, making them both enriching and restorative.



Self (time with self): leisure, as a self-chosen activity, often serves as a means to reconnect with our inner self. Spending time with oneself is a form of leisure that we sometimes overlook amidst the busyness and distractions of life. Jesus' time in prayer was an opportunity for introspection, spiritual growth and renewal. For us, leisure with self might take the form of journaling, meditating, engaging in self-talk. It could also mean simply being in "here and now." It is in these moments of solitude where we discover clarity, nurture self-awareness, and foster creativity. This time with oneself becomes an act of self-examination - akin to the Socratic "know-thyself" activity. It is one of the ways to get into contact with our inner world.

By exploring leisure through Jesus' morning ritual in terms of time, space and self, I view leisure not merely as a break from work, but as a cognitive concept. Leisure is undoubtedly embodied in activity, yet it can also be an inner movement of our being. It will undoubtedly exert a profound and renewing effect on us, enriching our lives, deepening our connection with ourselves, and allowing us to fully engage with the world around us. It invites us to pause, reflect, and choose moments of freedom, ultimately leading to greater fulfilment in life. ■

INTRODUCING OUR GUEST LECTURER

Robert Doornenbal | Overseas Visiting Scholar (Pastoral Theology)



When asked to introduce myself and tell about my experiences at the LTS, one word came immediately to my mind: grace. First of all, it is thanks to God's grace, His unmerited favour, that I am able to serve as a guest lecturer at the LTS, starting in the Fall of 2020, and up until the present day. There are also many 'graces' that I received at the LTS, a topic to which I will return later.

I subsequently designed practical theological courses on Global Christianity and on Ecotheology & Eco-ethics. My latest course is about Being Human in a VUCA world (VUCA = Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous). In my lectures, I attempt to address not just the students' minds, but also their "hearts" and "hands", and we are always touched by what happens during the intensive week.

During my active involvement in the LTS community, a fortnight during each Spring and Autumn, I have received many "graces" - undeserved and surprising favours - from students and colleagues. Sometimes these favours concern flavours: of special brewed coffee and tea, of exciting spicy Myanmar dishes, of the rich Chinese cuisine. But being graceful - the disposition to grant something freely - also shows itself in kind invitations to go along on a hike, a trip to downtown Hong Kong - sometimes including a Church service - or simply walking and talking heart-to-heart on the LTS premises.

One ethical nuance of the word grace connotes a willingness and openness toward others, and a sense of what is right and proper. This is also my experience at the LTS. I notice how students, teachers, and staff members listen respectfully, showing kindness, courtesy, and charm. Indeed, I have regularly encountered striking winsomeness and real beauty or in the words and attitudes of students, teachers, and staff members, and also in initiatives and actions of Presidents Emeritus Dr. Simon Chow and President Dr. Kenneth Tsang.

I also find that the Lutheran insight that we are "graced sinners" helps to keep our feet on the ground: nobody is perfect, we are "only human," and we all make mistakes. Sometimes, we need to apologise, the other time we need to be merciful and forgiving to others, and to ourselves. This is necessary in family life - I am grateful to be married with Margret for over thirty years, having two sons - and also within the LTS "Family."

Thanks be to God for his grace; thanks to you all, for being graceful! ■



My first visit to the LTS was in November 2019, when I was invited by - then - President Dr. Simon Chow to present a paper during an international theological conference. In my lecture about "mission-shaped" leadership, I incorporated some of my own experiences as pastor of a Dutch congregation of around 2,000 members (cf. *Theology & Life* No. 41, 2024, 169ff.). Since then, I have moved from the pastorate and congregational leadership to being a teacher in practical theology in three institutions, one of which is the LTS. The Dutch organisation that supports me in this last endeavour is Kerk in Actie (Church in Action), the diaconal-missionary branch of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.

During my stay at the LTS, I read the Catalogue with the course descriptions, asking myself, "Is there anything that I could 'add'?" Frankly, I was hesitant, being impressed by both the quality and the "breadth" - the many different topics - of the courses that are offered. I decided to start with a tryout: an elective course on the overarching theme of Pastoral Leadership. It proved to be relevant.

SERVANTS OF GOD

Volunteers at LTS: Elder Ma and Zabrina

Stefan Gradl | Assistant Professor (Missiology, Christian Education, Pastoral Theology)



Churches could not survive without volunteers. They are the backbone of congregational life. But volunteers are not only indispensable there. Volunteers also work in a wide variety of areas at the LTS. We would like to introduce two of them today: Elder Ma and Zabrina, a couple from a church in Tai Po.

Both began their work at LTS in 2019, but in different roles. Zabrina had planned to start as a volunteer, but decided to work part-time in the administration of LTS for a small amount of money - to be better integrated as a part-time employee. The administration became her area of responsibility. She hoped that her previous work experience in hospital administration could help increase the efficiency of the LTS administration. One example was - LTS News. The last English edition had been published years earlier but had stopped at a certain moment. Zabrina realized that there was a lack of means of communication to reach the many alumni and other interested parties who did not speak Chinese. She proposed to re-start the LTS News English Edition after the COVID-19 pandemic. Her vision to strengthen the Development Department in the Seminary was being shared. As such, she started her commitment in that area. She thanked LTS for giving her the opportunity to serve as a volunteer on the scenic campus soon after her chronic illness, which was good for her rehabilitation.

Simultaneously, Elder Ma began working as a volunteer at LTS. Upon his retirement in 2016, he had taken courses on Luther and Lutheranism at LTS. Now he changed roles and became a volunteer. His tasks were not clearly defined. He worked wherever he was needed. Whether in the extensive LTS garden, or tidying up the archive documents, or translating English into Chinese. He also brought with him rich experiences from his work as a civil servant. With that, he looked at LTS and pondered:

Does LTS need improvement in rules and regulations? What about the LTS insurance policies? Do they cover everything necessary? Should they be changed?

In 2022, Zabrina finally switched from her part-time status to volunteer basis.

The couple already knew LTS through their church community as the Chinese Rhenish Church is a member church of LTS. Elder Ma had already served as a member of the LTS Board all along.

Their work often pop up from various circumstances. When LTS needs an architect? Needs someone in repairing work? Wait a minute... we know someone! Wouldn't that fit? Or: this student from Mainland China can't find a connection here. Should we invite him?

This proves that there are something important which are contributed by both of them: making connections, building bridges. Instead of volunteers, you could just as well call them "connectors." Or, as they themselves say: "We are just servants of God". ■



MORE THAN A GUEST PLAY

Studying as a German pastor at LTS

Johannes Dieckow | Intercultural Study Program (ISP)



As a pastor from Germany, I spent the spring semester 2025 studying the Intercultural Study Program at LTS. Before that I worked for seven years as an ecumenical officer in the Church office of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). For me, this study tour is a great opportunity for me to have a reflection on theological issues from an Asian perspective. In addition to the academical work, life on the LTS campus is amazing as people from different cultures living together in good fellowship. It is an ideal playground to get in contact and to learn about life in East Asia.

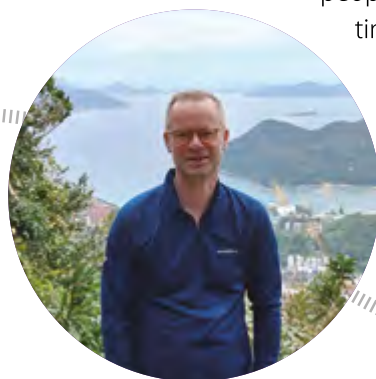
Taking courses like “Nationalism, Religion and Identity” and “Church History in Asia,” I could reflect profitably on topics related to my place of study. Particularly impressive to me was the course “History of Worship and Theology.” As a class activity, we visited worships of a Nepalese congregation and a Coptic congregation. And then we discussed how the form of worship correlated with the people and their respective culture. Another course enabling me to get an insight was “Ignatian Spirituality and Discernment.” Being a beginner in that kind of spiritual praxis, I discovered Ignatian meditation for me.

All in all, I would say that teaching and learning at LTS is more grounded in real life issues and more contextualized than it was in my study in Germany.

Not taking into account faculty members, I am the only European in spring semester 2025 at LTS. This sometimes kicked me out of my comfort zone and motivated me to adapt Asian culture very quickly - especially because it was my first time in Asia. Thankfully I could feel warmly welcomed and integrated by the students into the dormitory life from the first day. Enrolling a Cantonese Course at Hong Kong Language School also helped to get closer to the local culture (although I have to apologize for learning only very elementary things this time!).

Beyond studying at LTS, I used the time to network and to get in contact with people in Hong Kong. My encounters with representatives from the churches in Hong Kong were particularly inspiring. Being engaged in global ecumenism and especially in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), it was enriching for me to get a deeper insight in church life in Hong Kong and Mainland China. Encounters with people from the cultural scene and other institutions rounded off my picture. Last but not least, sharing lives with the LTS students has been one of the most enriching elements of my Hong Kong experience.

I am very thankful for having this semester at LTS. No doubt that it will be a great benefit for me in my further work in Germany. Therefore, I give thanks to LTS and all the people I met in Hong Kong. Actually, I wish more people from Europe could come to LTS for a study time. I believe that intercultural encounters and theological sharing will improve our fellowship as brothers and sisters in Christ in a global world. ■



TO BRIDGE THE GAPS

Building Bridges between the Continents: Bridging Gaps Programme

Polly Po-lei Lam | M.Div. Year 3



Choosing to step out of my comfort zone was a deliberate decision to pursue personal challenges and growth. I truly admire my courage and faith in taking this step, especially at an age where full-time studying is not typically expected, and with a body that is not as agile as it once was. In God, growth is a lifelong process, and there is no “perfect age” for learning. Every challenge and lesson on this journey affirms this truth.

Before going to the Netherlands, my knowledge of the country could have been improved. Aside from Dutch Lady milk from my childhood, images of beautiful windmills and flower fields, and the recent trend of cannabis legalization, I didn't know much about this land. It wasn't until I met Dr. Robert, a professor from the Netherlands at the LTS, that my understanding of the Netherlands expanded. From him, I saw the Dutch seriousness towards academia, which sparked my desire to participate in the Bridging Gaps Programme. I aimed to broaden my perspective on life through this experience.

Entering the classroom for “Peace, Trauma, and Religion,” I appreciated how this course genuinely immersed me in contextual theology. As someone who has specialized in theology for several years, entering a sociological context where my classmates did not necessarily share the same faith was a new experience. How could we reach a consensus on various issues? I particularly remember a day when Professor Dr. Fernando asked us to write down our definitions of peace. We then paired up to merge our definitions before joining a larger group of four to five people to reach a broader consensus. Although the process only lasted about 30 minutes, I felt a deep sense of joy from the interaction.

I brought lanterns and mooncakes from Hong Kong to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival with my classmates.

In my definition of peace, I use the Bible as a lens to view the world. But when we take away the Bible, what do my classmates define as “peace”? How can I contextualize, transforming subjective biblical terms into objective descriptions that can merge with the perspectives of classmates who don't share a biblical viewpoint?

In “Class and Context”, I vividly remember a video, shared by a classmate whose name is Pearl, that moved me to tears when seeing young lives in her country cruelly taken away. Listening to other classmates share the immense challenges their countries face - including religious hostility, colonialism's divisive control, military violence, the despair brought by prolonged civil wars, etc., I came to realize that no one is the sole victim. After several weeks of “Class and Context” class, I wrote a note:

“Every generation is born into different circumstances, perhaps living in collective pain or individual struggles, all searching for the light at the end of the tunnel. We strive to live with dignity and freedom on this earth, to find meaning in life. That everlasting light can only be found in Christ Jesus.”

Isn't this the public theology that we are all working towards today? Every moment we live is not just about breathing, but about living out a vibrant faith in the face of inevitable challenges. ■



TOWARDS A MYANMAR POLITICAL THEOLOGY

The Powerlessness of God as People-Political Struggle for Humanity

Ye Naing Oo | D.Th. student

Ye Naing Oo will defend his doctoral thesis at the end of this academic year. Here you can read a summary of his thoughts.



People have traditionally understood the power of God as omnipotent or all-powerful - meaning that God can do anything and whatever He desires. This is the concept of the transcendent God seated in heaven, unaffected by worldly affairs. Christians in Myanmar have grown up with this tradition, perceiving God as an all-powerful and all-perfect Being. Consequently, even the nightmares they endure are believed to have a divine purpose; God is thought to foreknow everything from beginning to end and remain untouched by human suffering. Within this framework, God is seen as the one who resolves worldly affairs from a distance. However, in reality, God works powerlessly with the people, for the people, and through the people in their struggle for democracy in Myanmar.

Indeed, the nature of God is ontologically and existentially powerless. These characteristics are evident in the life of Jesus Christ. When God became incarnate in Jesus, He had to empty Himself of His divinity. This ontological hiddenness of God is captured in the Greek word *Kenoo*, used in Phil. 2:7, which the RSV translates as “emptied himself.” Furthermore, when Jesus (the incarnate God) carried out His redemptive mission for humanity, He was existentially powerless - seen most profoundly in His suffering and death on the cross.

Accordingly, God is not distant from the plight of Myanmar people, who continue to endure suffering under the 2021 military coup while striving for justice and freedom. Only a

powerless God can truly be with and for the people, as His powerlessness brings Him closer to their reality. God’s presence amidst their struggles not only gives their suffering meaning but also fortifies them with the strength to endure and persist.

The “double powerlessness” of God is particularly evident in the case of the Myanmar people fighting for justice and freedom - ideals deeply cherished by all humanity. It may seem as though God is absent as people endure suffering and death in their struggles. This reflects the ontological powerlessness of God. Nevertheless, despite their hardships, the people of Myanmar remain determined to continue their fight. In the same paradoxical way God participated in the event of Jesus Christ - making Himself nothing - He is present in the people’s struggle. Furthermore, just as Jesus did not abandon the cross before His mission was fulfilled, the people of Myanmar press on relentlessly, even in the face of mounting suffering. This is the “powerlessness of powerlessness.” And yet, they never turn back. In the same way Christ’s resurrection emerged from His powerlessness, the commitment of the Myanmar people to their “Never Give Up Struggle” arises from their double powerlessness.

In this sense, the struggle of the Myanmar people and the resurrection of Jesus Christ are deeply interconnected in terms of action. If the resurrection signifies God’s victory over death, hatred, and injustice, then this victory continues to unfold today through people who refuse to surrender to dictators. The actions of the Myanmar people reflect what Jesus accomplished, following in His footsteps. Jesus’s death and resurrection are not events confined to the past but an ongoing process of life. In this way, Jesus remains alive in and through the people of Myanmar who suffer and fight for truth. Likewise, God’s work is realized in, through, and for the people. ■

WHY SEMINARY?

Stefan Gradl | Assistant Professor (Missiology, Christian Education, Pastoral Theology)



In our last edition (Winter 2024), my esteemed colleague Dr. Samuel Dubbelman answered this question. His answer can be summarised as follows: We are at seminary to listen to God's word of forgiveness of sins, to be renewed spiritually, and to serve God by telling that word of forgiveness of sins to others.

My spontaneous reaction to this thesis was ambivalent. Sure, I agree with everything he says. Who would deny that we should listen to God's Word, especially at a Lutheran seminary? I also gladly support the fact that this word is above all the unconditional forgiveness of sins. And that our students, when they leave LTS, should pass on God's Word as lay people, evangelists, pastors or whatever - of course!

And yet there is a resistance in me to this answer to the question "why seminary?" This answer seems very functional to me. It aims - at least that's how I understand it - to produce good ministers for the churches. Listening to the gospel and taking it further - that is what seminary is about.

However, I missed a certain aspect that seems to me to be crucial in studying theology. This aspect also distinguishes studying theology from studying engineering or law. So, I would like to add another angle to Dr. Dubbelman's view of the seminary: the seminary as a playground.

Playing is something purposeless, it creates a free space. And interestingly, it is precisely this purposeless activity that - especially in children - promotes development in all areas: from motor skills to cognitive, social and emotional aspects.

But what does "play" mean in the context of a seminary? It means trying out, testing, discovering. The world of theology is full of fascinating but different and often contradictory ideas, concepts and approaches. All of these invites you to play, to try things out: Do I find Karl Barth's

thoughts convincing? Am I attracted by the concept of situational ethics? Should we demythologise the Bible or rather not?

Most games are not played alone, but with several people. It's the same with theology: my opinions and convictions have to prove themselves in discussions with others, in discussions with fellow students and lecturers. Then it becomes clear which arguments are convincing and which positions are untenable.

Play is purposeless - and yet contributes greatly to the development of the personality. During puberty, for example, we try things out, take on different roles and find out what suits us and what is alien to us. Identity emerges. The seminary as a playground is exactly that: a place where your own theological identity takes shape through playing with others.

There may be many objections to the idea of the seminary as a playground. Isn't the study period for prospective church workers already far too short to give them the basic theological knowledge? Should there also be time for playing? Isn't the interest of the churches (which strongly support the LTS!) in maintaining well-trained employees more important than playing theological games for no particular purpose? And isn't this whole idea too westernised and individualistic?

I believe that it is in the interest of the churches to give seminary students time to play. Faith is always individual. Especially in today's world. Only ministers who have found their own individual faith are in a position to help others develop their own individual faith. And yes, the amount of material in theology studies is enormous, but knowing content is of no use if it is not reflected upon and if the student has not formed a well-founded opinion on the subject.

Come on, let's play! ■



MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

Helle Jukka | Assistant Professor (Missiology, Contextual Theology, Worship and Liturgy)



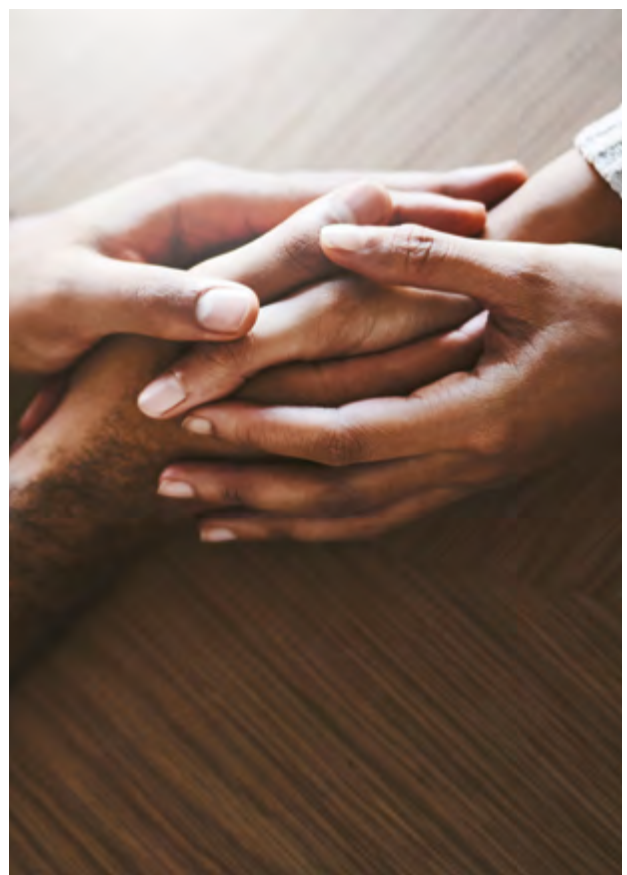
As I am writing this, we are still in shock because of the massive earthquake in Myanmar a couple of days ago. It is now clear that thousands of people have died. Some of our students from Myanmar have not been able to contact their loved ones who live there. The country, already torn by the ongoing civil war under the brutal military junta, was now struck by a giant force of nature.

What is the mission of the church when hope is under the ruins and rubble? In these times, questions like “why did this happen to me, or to my loved ones, or to my community” will inevitably arise. In addition, catastrophes may challenge the foundations of our faith: why does a good and loving God allow this to happen? When we think about the Church’s response in times of catastrophes, we might be tempted to give hasty responses to questions for which we most likely will have no satisfactory answers. However, the church is normally perceived as a teaching and preaching institution, which should always have answers and be capable of explaining God’s point of view or purpose for the crisis or difficulties at hand.

Perhaps the church needs to review this perception. I think that especially in times of unexpected catastrophes, regardless of whether on a personal level or a larger scale, such as natural calamities, the church should become more of a listening church. I suggest that our first response must be to be silent and listen to those who are suffering. We should not rush to give hasty answers to questions that have no sufficient answers. This kind of perception, of course, will lead the church and Christians to a place where we must step down from the position where we are expected to have the final say about the truth. We need less knowing and more humility.

Remember, human beings have two ears but only one mouth. Suffering people often need more listening ears than speaking and preaching mouths.

I remember vividly the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. I lived in Thailand when this calamity took place. Soon after that event, I, together with some colleagues, travelled to Phuket, southern Thailand, to visit those affected by the catastrophe. It was heartbreaking to meet with children who had lost a parent, both parents, or a sibling. We also saw parents who had lost their children. We heard stories about entire families engulfed by gigantic masses of water. Others were badly injured. I still remember running out of the hospital room to the corridor to weep there. It felt overwhelmingly wrong and unjust. There were no words of consolation to give to those who had lost something so dear to their



life. The best we could do was to stay near these people, even if only for a fleeting moment. Also, the prayers, if they were even muttered, were said silently, in the heart.

On Easter morning, God rolled away the stone from the tomb of Jesus. Why now did God not stop the devastating waves of the tsunami? Why did God not clear the rubble of the recent earthquake so that no one would have been buried under the ruins? Or better, why did God not prevent this catastrophe from happening altogether? I am afraid that we will never have sufficient answers. But here again, perhaps it is not the most important task of the church and us Christians to provide answers. Rather, our calling is to assume the role of the listener and the one who offers company and presence to our suffering fellow human beings.

Easter is the celebration of the resurrection of Christ.

We Christians rejoice that in the resurrection of Christ, God revealed that the powers of destruction shall not have the last word in our world. During suffering and trials, we may feel like Jesus's disciples; all hope has vanished. The nights of the first and second day after Christ's burial may feel very long. We may feel like the disciples, waiting in darkness. The morning of the third day seems to be in the distant future, or even out of our sight. We do not know when a new day with its clear skies will arrive. But because of the resurrection, the church's mission is the mission of hope. And this hope gives the church motivation to accompany suffering people with listening ears so that one day their dark night will also turn to a new dawn. Hence, the mission of the church is to hasten the arrival of the new dawn in difficult situations and the lives of our suffering fellow human beings. In the end, all will be well, because the future is God's future. ■

IN MEMORIAM OF SHERMAIN LAI

On 6 March, LTS received the news that Ms. Shermain Lai had died of cancer. Although not unexpected, the news came as a painful shock to all who knew her.

Shermain was a lecturer in Christian Education at LTS - and she put her heart and soul into it. Often, students don't consider Christian Education the most important field of study, but she persistently endeavoured to show the importance and relevance of Christian Education.

Her teaching was focussed on the students, on helping them to grow. She was a dedicated teacher, creative, always looking for new and better ways to teach. She not only loved teaching, but also her students. In her role as the dorm warden, she carried strong compassion on them.

Simultaneously, she also had a straight view on the students, be it as an individual or and as a group, she boldly addressed issues that were problematic in her view.

I remember how seriously she took the students. In my early days at LTS, she and I were "parents" of the same family. When something had to be planned, it was tempting for us - the "parents" - to decide it and just inform the students. But every time she reminded me: we can't making decision for the students, they have to do it on their own.

Shermain was a warm person and a wonderful colleague. Those who knew her will miss her dearly.



Stefan Greer



PRESIDENT

- ▶ President Dr. Tsang attended the Board Meeting and AGM of the Southeast Asian Theological Education Association (ATESEA) in Iloilo City, Philippine from March 9 to 13. At the conference, he was re-elected as the Director of the Association and serves as the Board Chairman for a term of three years.
- ▶ President Dr. Tsang attended the Rectors' Meeting and Seminar on "Partnership and Networking for a Sustainable and Competitative Educational System by Church-based Institutions" organized by United Evangelical Mission (UEM) in Indonesia from May 6 to 13.

FACULTY

- ▶ Dr. Sin-pan Ho, Dr. Stefan Gradl, Dr. Jukka Helle, Dr. Dag Oredsson and Hellen Bok travelled to Bangkok, Thailand, from May 6 to 9, to organize and attend the Annual Mekong Joint Theological Consultation with the theme "Religion and Social Justice: Challenges for Churches and Theology."

EVENTS

- ▶ Rev. Fr. Edward Chau, the Chairperson of Diocesan Commission of Interreligious Dialogue, Catholic Diocese of HK was invited as the speaker for the Friday Lecture Series on Religious Dialogue (I) "Harmony Comes from Suitability" - Aspects of Interreligious Dialogue" on January 24. About 75 participants joined the lecture.
- ▶ Rabbi Stanton Zamek of the Spiritual Leader of the United Jewish Congregation of HK was invited as the speaker for the Friday Lecture Series on Religious Dialogue (II) "A Very Brief Introduction to the Sources of Jewish Tradition" on February 28. More than 100 participants joined the lecture.
- ▶ Notto Reidar Thelle, professor emeritus of the University of Oslo, visited LTS to give a lecture titled "Karl-Ludvig Reichelt - Missionary and Pilgrim: His Legacy and Relevance for Our Time" on March 24.
- ▶ Dr. James D. Frankel of CUHK was invited as the speaker for the Friday Lecture Series on Religious Dialogue (III) "Islam Religion of Peace (Through Justice)" on March 28. 73 participants joined the lecture.
- ▶ The Annual Sacred Music Worship "The King of Tears" held on April 11 was successfully completed with more than 500 participants. In response to the appeal of the HK Christian Council, we urged participants to make donation for the "Emergency Relief for the Myanmar Earthquake".

- ▶ Dr. Torleif Elgvin, our overseas visiting scholar, was the speaker for the Public Lecture "The Dead Sea Scrolls – the Largest Textual Discovery of the 20th Century with New Light on Biblical Texts" on April 16. More than 80 participants joined the lecture.

- ▶ Dr. Xue Yu of CUHK was invited as the speaker for the Friday Lecture Series of Religious Dialogue (IV) "Buddhism and Interreligious Dialogue" on May 2 with about 65 participants.

VISTORS

- ▶ Rev. Paulina Parhiala (Executive Director, left 6th), Rev. Tero Massa (Regional Director, Asia, left 4th) and Rev. Leena Helle (Regional Program Manager, left 5th) from the Felm visited LTS on February 19.



- ▶ Rev. Zsolt Lázár, Dean of the Lutheran Diocese of West-Békés county, Hungary, visited LTS on March 15.



- ▶ Dr. Francis Borchardt, our former Associate Professor of Old Testament, returned to Hong Kong with his daughters to attend the doctoral thesis defense and visited LTS on March 17.

- ▶ Ms. Corrie van der Ven (Program Officer, Kerk in Actie) visited LTS on March 18.



- ▶ Our Emeritus Professor Dr. Theodore Zimmerman and his wife Jeney fled from the United States visited LTS on March 18 and 20. They took over the management of the US and Canada Friends of LTS and raised US\$51,250 to support our Dining Hall Renovation Project last year. Their love and unflinching support to LTS are much appreciated.



- ▶ Rev. Dr. Kati Kemppainen (Senior Advisor for Missiology of Felm) from the Finnish Mission visited LTS on March 19.

- ▶ Prof. Anne Fernald, the great-granddaughter of Dr. Oscar Wold, the first president of LTS, visited us on March 21. She is now teaching at the Fordham University in New York City. It is so amazing that the descendant of Dr. Wold connected the Seminary again about 100 years later.



- ▶ The Chairman of the Board of Directors of Areopagos, Rev. Poul Erik Knudsen (6th from left), Board members, co-workers and guests from Northern Europe visited LTS on March 27. From left: (1) Dr. Esther-Maria Guggenmos (Professor, Lund University); (2) Ms. Bodil Friis Skjøtt (Director, Aeropagos); (3) Rev. Einar Vegge (Director, Aeropagos); (4) Ms. Ingunn Myrtveit (Director, Aeropagos); (6) Rev. Poul Erik Knudsen (Chairman, Aeropagos); (9) Mr. Andreas Dybkjær-Andersson (International Manager, Aeropagos); (10) Mr. Peter N. Andersen (Director, Aeropagos); (11) Ms. Kristine Lyng (International Project Consultant, Aeropagos); (12) Dr. Ilse Paakkinen (Senior Program Advisor, Aeropagos); (13) Ms. Sheila Malik (Asia Director, Act Church of Sweden).



- ▶ Mr. Kong Chak-mun, centre-in-charge of the Lutheran Outreach Cambodia, together with youth of the Center visited LTS on April 16. They joined the Holy Week morning prayer and shared with us about the ministry in Cambodia during lunch time.

OBITUARY

- ▶ Rev. Dr. Philip Bauman, our former faculty member from Northfield, passed away at an age 87 on February 10 (USA Time). He was sent by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to serve in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of HK and LTS from 1967 to 1999, he had made great contribution to LTS. In addition to his contributions in teaching and the establishment of the Doctor of Ministry program in LTS, he also played a leading role in the campus relocation project (from Pak Tin to Tao Fung Shan). He made great effort in the fundraising work and then took up the task as the Project Director. Dr. Bauman's funeral was held on March 15. LTS is speechless with gratitude for his contribution and express our heartfelt condolences. We pray that God will comfort Dr. Bauman's family.
- ▶ Ms. Shermain Shuk-mei Lai passed away on March 6. Shermain served as a full-time lecturer (Christian Education) at LTS from 2015 to 2022. She was faithful, responsible and made great contributions. She was not only passionate in teaching, but also caring towards her colleagues and classmates. She was deeply loved by everyone. She resigned in 2022 from the teaching post she loved due

to illness; but did not cease to care for LTS and students during convalescence. We are grateful for her dedication and would also like to express our condolences and remembrance. Her funeral service was held on March 29 at the Methodist Church. Pray that our Lord will comfort her family.

- ▶ Rev. Dr. Royan Yuen, a former faculty member of LTS, passed away peacefully on April 19 (USA Time) in the United States of America. Dr. Yuen was a missionary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) who served at LTS from 2000 to 2005. In addition to teaching Old Testament at LTS, he was the honorary pastor of the Chinese Rhenish Church Tsz Wan Shan. We express our heartfelt thanks to his contribution and offer our deepest condolences to his family. May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with them all.

PRAY

- ▶ Pray for the reconstruction of Myanmar after the earthquake. May the Lord pour down grace and mercy!
- ▶ Pray for the enrollment of new students for the new school year. May the Lord select His servants and equip them to do His work.

WORDS OF PRESIDENT

May 29 is the Ascension Day and it is also the day our 2024-25 school year coming to an end. I would like to thank you all for your prayers and support over the past school year. I would also like to thank the teachers, staff and students for their hard work, which made our school year challenging but still fulfilling. According to the results of the "2024 Hong Kong Church Census" released earlier by the Church Renewal Movement, compared with 2019, the number of full-time theological students in HK decreased by 20.3%, the number of pastoral staff decreased by 310, and the number of core church leaders and service staff also dropped significantly. Certainly, these figures will bring anxiety and worry to the churches. In view of the challenges ahead, LTS as a theological seminary, has faith in God and will continue to hold our fort in the new academic year. Our strive is to optimize our theological education so that we could equip pastors and church leaders chosen by God. Certainly, they will be the new force in the churches and added impetus to the evangelism ministry.

Dr. Kenneth Tsang



Open My Eyes, Lord!

2025-2026 Fall Enrollment

Christian Leadership Program

Master of Arts in Theology (MA-T)

Pastoral Enhancement Programs

Master of Divinity with Theological Degree (MDIV-T)

Master of Arts in Classical Judaism (MA-CJ)

Master of Arts in Mission (MA-M)

Advanced Study Programs

Master of Theology (MTH)

Doctor of Theology (DTH)

2025 Entrance Exam (Sat)

Jun 21 [Deadline: Jun 2]

Aug 2 [Deadline: Jul 14]



Curriculum



Inquiry

*The above programs can be completed in English.