A WORD FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Dr Quek Swee Hwa, Founding Principal of BGST, has fulfilled many roles in many different parts of the world during his long and active career: as pastor, scholar, teacher, musician, prison-minister, preacher, and Bible Lands tour guide. He will surely be known to everyone who reads these pages in at least one of his roles. In this piece he asks: Quo vadimus? Where are we going?

QUEK SWEE HWA

In 2003 during a visit I made to Regent College, Vancouver, the then Dean of Studies at Regent remarked to me, “Send us more BGST students. We like them!” Biblical Graduate School of Theology began in 1999 as a lay training school patterned after Regent College. We have been referred to as the counterpart of Regent at the other end of the Pacific rim. We have since moved on to develop our own version of lay training. As we mark this milestone in our development, we record our thanks to God for the phalanx of Regent Professors who helped us as visiting faculty at BGST.

What is BGST currently? Our focus leans heavily toward lay training. Our students receive training comparable to what clergy receive. Additionally, they are urged to reflect on their “secular” work, whatever that may be, and work out Christian perspectives to issues where the Bible provides important guidelines. As can be expected, our curriculum is broad and our teaching approach is sometimes different from that of a seminary. We are convinced that there is an untapped pool of people who can be trained and equipped with skills to be a blessing to their churches and to God’s work generally. Some may be interested to pursue a graduate programme. Others are content simply to deepen their understanding of the Bible and Theology or acquire skills in leading Bible studies and counselling. These are the types of students BGST wishes to train.

This simple vision launched an enterprise which has proved to be a blessing not only to the more than 2,000 over the past twenty years who have signed up for our courses, but to many more who have attended our public lectures and conferences. Praise God!

I welcome the opportunity of Biblical Graduate School of Theology’s 20th anniversary to take a hard look at our founding Vision. We need this to obtain our bearings as we move forward to the years ahead with God’s blessings on all our endeavours.
It has not been easy to put my thoughts down in writing. To do a mere Report would be easy enough. But to evaluate our performance as an institution of higher biblical and theological lay learning has been a challenge. Nevertheless, the gauntlet has been thrown down and I rise to the occasion in the realization that BGST is accountable to God and to all of our faithful supporters and prayer warriors to be wise stewards of all that God has given to us.

So, here is my “Report Card”:

1. It is appropriate to begin by thanking our Almighty God for our BGST Council. Over the past 20 years we have been blessed with excellent chairmen and Council members who have led BGST to where it is today. We thank them for their commitment to carry out our Vision in running a credible, quality, trans-denominational academic institution which remains anchored in the inerrant Word of God. They have managed well the funds God sent to us all these years and we have witnessed God’s answers to our prayers, often in the nick of time.

2. I believe we have achieved our objective of training the laity – 56% of our graduates are lay persons who have returned to their lay professions in the ‘marketplace’. I hope their training has helped them to be good witnesses for the Lord in their various professions, enabling them to think and act Christianly as doctors, teachers, business persons and so on in the corporate world. Many are serving in their churches as theologically informed lay leaders. They are supportive of their pastors and are now better equipped to perform whatever duties are open to them both in their churches and in parachurch organizations.

3. I am pleased that the rest of our graduates are lay persons who went on to serve in a ‘full-time’ capacity: 22% went into pastoral ministry and another 22% into theological education and missions.

4. It is significant that 80% of our graduates are Singaporeans. They form the bulk of our graduates who went into the ‘marketplace’. Many are serving cross-culturally in missionary work. The remaining 20% are foreign students who with one or two exceptions have all gone into the ‘full-time’ ministry.

5. BGST graduates are serving or have served in the following countries: Myanmar, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, USA, United Kingdom, France, South Africa, Chad Republic, Kenya, and Guatemala.

6. Befitting our character as a graduate institution, I am happy that 22 of our graduates have earned their doctoral degrees or are in the process of doing so. Three times this number went on to other types of further and higher studies after graduating from BGST. Six have either returned or will soon return with their doctoral degrees to strengthen our resident faculty at BGST. We have for a number of years already instituted a faculty renewal process so that we are able to be nimble in delivering solid, biblical teaching as well as being in the forefront of cutting edge biblical and theological research. We encourage our younger and older resident faculty to publish their research. We have by the grace of God been able to make our presence felt right up to the highest level of the academic world.

7. Equally important to us is our emphasis on spiritual formation and relevance to the times we live in. Our Faculty, both resident and adjunct, have brought BGST to where it is today. The breadth and depth of their scholarship has enabled BGST to provide a wide-ranging and exciting curriculum to whet the interest and appetite of our large student constituency.

8. This brings me to my final observation. All the above statistics concern our graduates only. If we include the bulk of our students, and these are very much within our Mission at BGST, we can thank God that we have started, promoted and are carrying on what we know is a vibrant, much-needed form of theological training. We have been doggedly supplying a theological educational niche which makes it possible for lay persons to commence training anytime in the year, taking into account the need for flexibility, and combining both distance learning with classroom teaching in an interactive learning experience. Our approach to education is andragogical, i.e., with a focus on adult learning in which emphasis is placed not on rote learning and examinations but on comprehension and writing of papers. We aim to do all this without any loss to the quality and standard of the training given.

We invite all who have supported us in the past to continue doing so and those who have not done so yet to come behind this Vision and Mission. Frankly, only through the grace of God and the generosity of God’s people have we been able to accomplish what we have done. We have brought together a sterling Faculty with impeccable credentials. We have engaged many busy professionals in theological training and look forward to doing so with many more. We have focussed stalwartly on the essentials of training, maximising our resources in terms of bringing and keeping together our current Faculty and building a library that is more than adequate for our current needs. All this requires the support and gifts of God’s People. Together we move forward into the future with the blessing of God and for the glory of His work in Singapore and beyond. To God alone be the glory and honour.