

Your Monthly Newsletter

WINDOW TO BGST AUGUST

2021



DIGITAL DISRUPTIONS & THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN THE LIGHT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A Singaporean Case Study

BY DR LAI PAK WAH

This paper was presented at the Annual Conference of the Global Network for Digital Theology
“Gone Digital: How Digitality Disrupts Theology” 14 – 16 July 2021

What has Digital Learning got to do with Theological Education?

During the onset of COVID-19, a meme went viral on social media asking, “Who led the digital transformation of your company: your CEO, CTO or COVID-19?” The answer was obvious. In a mere few weeks, the whole world, including seminaries, stumbled into digital learning as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns. This remains the case for many schools, including BGST. Many of us are now examining the opportunities and roles that digital learning plays in theological education.

This paradigm shift is occurring within a broader context: from the enrolment decline in Western seminaries, the rise of digital training alternatives, and the disruptive challenges of Industrial Revolution 4.0 to the shifts in global geopolitics.

SHIFTING SANDS OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

ADOPTION & DISRUPTION

While digital distance education is mainstream in North American seminaries, the adoption rate is far less in Asia, due either to the lack of resources or a preference for in-person teaching. In Singapore, for example, BGST was the only school that adopted a Blended Learning approach to train our students prior to the pandemic.¹

The COVID-19 pandemic changed everything, of course. Almost overnight, seminaries worldwide became online schools. Having discovered the benefits of online learning, many have continued to employ these training modes even when pandemic restrictions have eased.²

This being said, the real long-term disruptors of theological seminaries are neither pandemics nor other seminaries. Rather, they are the alternative modes of training delivered through digital platforms, such as FaithlifeTV and SeminaryNow which can offer training anytime, anywhere at a fraction of the cost. Due to their investments in fixed assets and faculty, it will be difficult for traditional seminaries to match the disruptive prices of the new platforms.³

These digital platforms are only one facet of the broader impact that digital disruptions are making on theological education. The advent of Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4) is heralding a rapid merging of the “physical, digital and biological worlds” that will fundamentally change the way we work and live.⁴ To help future generations flourish in this new environment, Institutes of Higher Learning must transform themselves into nimble institutes of lifelong learning that can help students pick up new competencies to retool themselves regularly.⁵ The challenge for seminaries is similar and two-fold. Firstly, how do we prepare Christians to engage the new ways of living and the ethical challenges that IR4 inadvertently poses? Secondly, how might the emerging educational technologies inform the way we educate and disciple Christians? We shall focus on the second question as we explore the merits of digital learning for seminaries.

DIGITAL LEARNING AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

a) TECHNOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Up until the 2000s, discourse about digital learning was the domain of educators. As they see it, the impact of computing on classroom learning has largely been marginal. Larry Cuban puts it this way: “computer meets classroom, classroom wins.”⁶ This being said, educational technology did contribute to the progress of one sphere of higher education: distance education. This has been employed extensively by many theological colleges to train laypeople and church leaders who don’t have the time or means for full time training.⁷

b) NEW VOICES

The last decade, however, has seen a new voice entering the fold: the developers of new educational technologies or business models, from Khan Academy and AltSchool, to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) platforms such as edX and Coursera. These make varied claims from how digital technologies enhance learning to even reinvent higher education. At first glance, these new players offer much promise for transforming the face of education. edX, for example, delivers more than 2,800 courses to 34 million students worldwide.⁸ Previously, such courses would be available only to the privileged few enrolled physically in the universities.⁹

These being said, Neil Selwyn observes that these newcomers have very little understanding of the nature of education itself. There is also significant conflict of interest between their commercial goals and those of public education.¹⁰ Nonetheless, Selwyn believes these

technologies are here to stay and much reflection is needed on how human teachers can partner them. This involves identifying aspects of human teaching that are irreplaceable.¹¹

c) ADDITIONAL CONCERNS IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Besides these concerns, many theological educators also reject digital learning on theological grounds. As they see it, “the fact that Christ took on human flesh indicates that theological education, too, should take place in the flesh, in a face-to-face environment.” Jones et al, however, have pointed out that much of the Apostle Paul’s teachings were actually conveyed through his epistles. No doubt, the apostle did not regard the written word as “a primary medium of his apostleship.” Nevertheless, like his Greco-Roman peers, he did assume that his letters can not only convey his teachings but also mediate his social presence and authority to his readers.¹²

Theological education, however, is not just about helping students acquire cognitive content. It is also about the discipleship and formation of the students. For this reason, Jones et al stress the importance of recruiting online faculty who are theologically competent and also have the spiritual maturity to be a model for and to mentor their students.¹³

I turn now to BGST, where I shall give an account of how we have incorporated these manifold concerns in our introduction of digital learning in the school.

DIGITAL LEARNING FOR ADULT THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: THE CASE OF BGST

BGST’s educational vision is to equip the whole people of God – both ministry workers and the laity. Since most of our students are marketplace professionals, the school is structured to provide part-time studies. All our classes are taught in the evenings or on weekends. Self-paced learning courses are also made available through multi-media formats. Both approaches provided flexibility for our students while maintained a high degree of in-person contact between lecturers and students.

In 2013, BGST adopted Blended Learning to introduce more flexibility for our courses. By providing the lectures online for self-paced learning, we were able to not only reduce the number of in-person sessions needed to complete a course, but also devote more time to higher order learning activities during the tutorials, such as case discussions, debates or project presentations.

When COVID-19 struck, BGST, like most seminaries, repivoted to Zoom based online learning. This continued until now due to the uncertainties that still prevail. The only exceptions were courses that would benefit better from an in-person learning experience, such as spiritual direction.

With the global adoption of digital learning, there is now less resistance from Christians to learn digitally. For BGST, these present three areas of development:

- 1) We hope to extend our training ministry to the region through Zoom classes, so that those who previously could not attend our classes due to time and financial constraints, can now do so.
- 2) To help our students adapt to the manifold social, political, cultural and technological shifts mentioned earlier, we are introducing more interdisciplinary courses focused on real world problems,

such as *Christians in a Disruptive and Digital World*.

- 3) Finally, we shall explore the potential of educational platforms as a means of extending our ministry to less privileged in Asia.

To read Dr Lai's full paper, please refer to this **direct link** in our bgstexperience.edu.sg website.

¹ The majority of our core courses adopt a model where lectures are delivered digitally through the Moodle platform while tutorials are still conducted in-person.

² In my knowledge, at least 4 seminaries in Singapore and Malaysia have begun building up video production and online learning capabilities.

³ Joshua Gans, *The Disruption Dilemma* (MIT, 2017)., 66.

⁴ 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', World Economic Forum, accessed 10 June 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/focus/fourth-industrial-revolution/>.

⁵ Arthur Poh, 'For S'pore to Thrive, Education Must Move out of Its Ivory Tower', Text, For S'pore to thrive, education must move out of its ivory tower, 10 June 2021, <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/for-spore-to-thrive-education-must-move-out-of-its-ivory-tower>; World Economic Forum, 'Education 4.0', World Economic Forum, accessed 11 June 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/projects/learning-4-0/>.

⁶ Larry Cuban, 'Computers Meet Classroom; Classroom Wins', Computers Meet Classroom; Classroom Wins, accessed 12 June 2021, <https://www.edweek.org/technology/opinion-computers-meet-classroom-classroom-wins/1992/11>.

⁷ *The Institute Tie* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1900)., 105.

⁸ 'EdX Schools and Partners', n.d., <https://www.edx.org/schools-partners>.

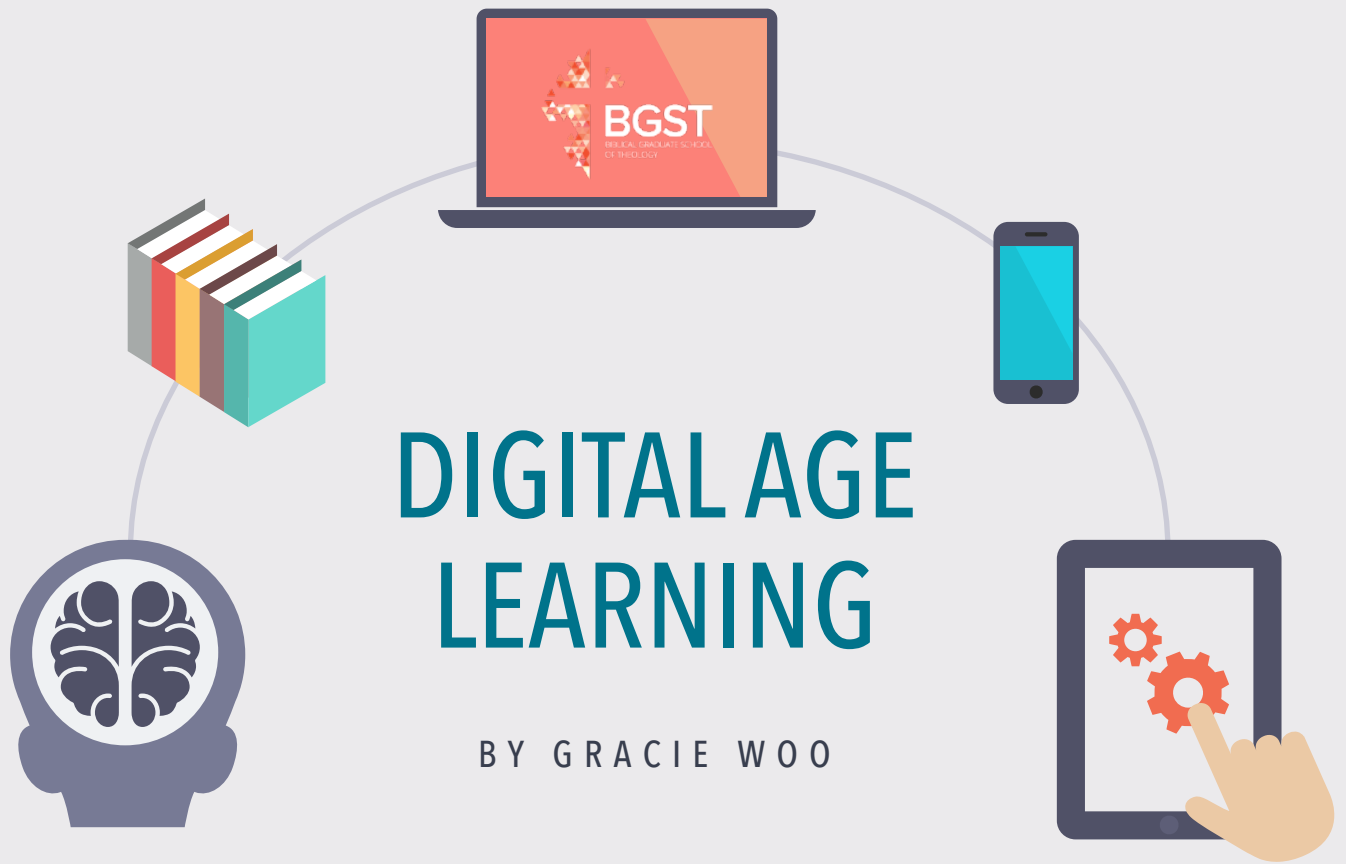
⁹ Anant Agarwal, 'Why Massively Open Online Courses (Still) Matter', YouTube, TED, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYwTA5RA9eU>.

¹⁰ Neil Selwyn, *Is Technology Good for Education?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016)., Chapters 1-5.

¹¹ Neil Selwyn, *Should Robots Replace Teachers?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019)., Chapter 5.

¹² Jones et al., *Teaching the World*., Chapters 2-3.

¹³ Ibid., Chapters 6-7.



DIGITAL AGE LEARNING

BY GRACIE WOO

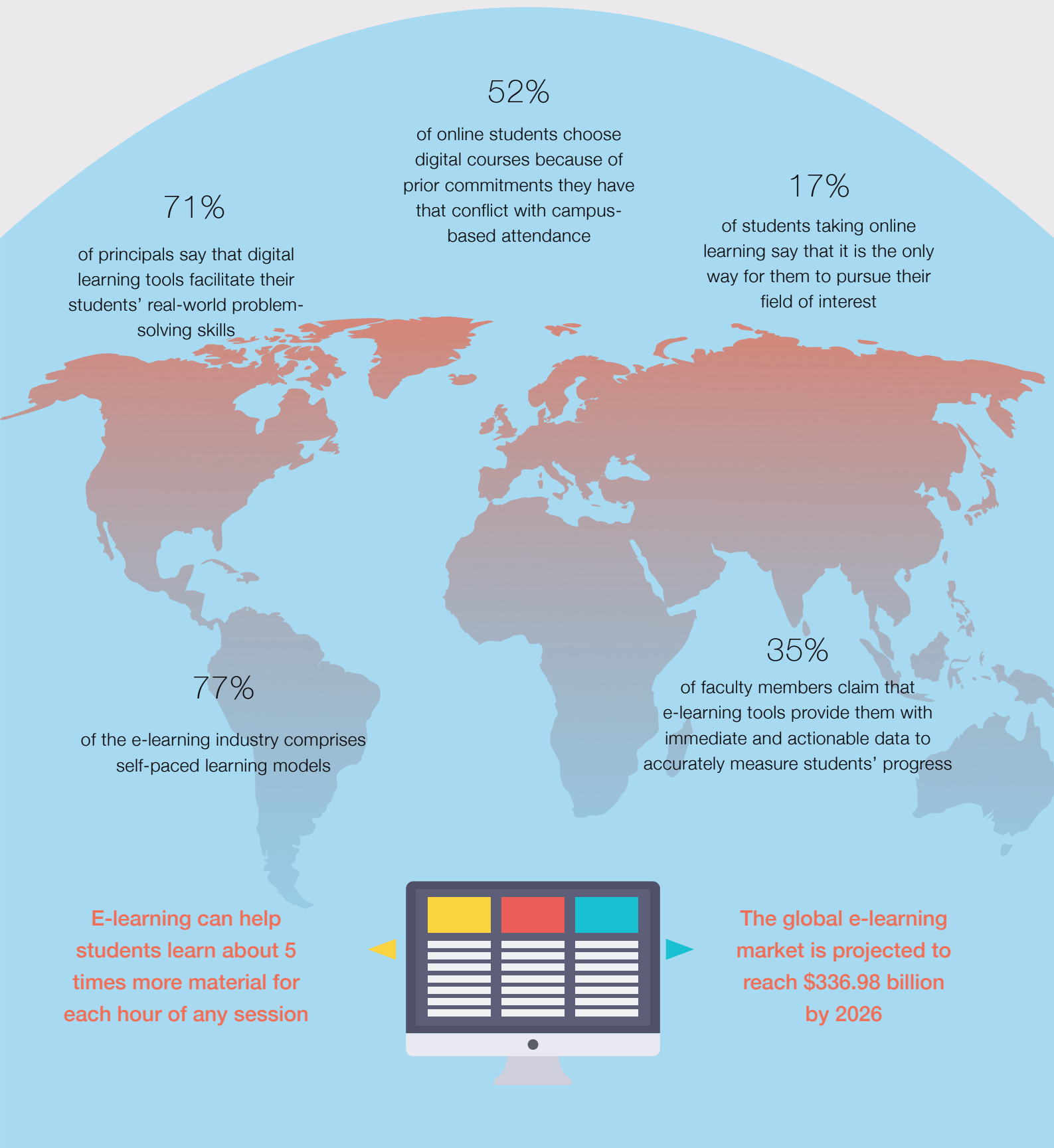
The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformation and thrust many global citizens into a new virtual environment. Many organisations have either adopted, adapted or developed innovation applications for various business processes, and for learning. E-learning has in fact increased productivity, efficiency and revenue. It has helped to reduce CO2 emissions and save energy. However, it is also widening the gap between the adopters and the laggards.

E-learning has the ability to transcend geography, to be tailored to the needs of its users, and to bring together a community of learners, instructors, and content providers in a network centred on knowledge exchange.

While we are still in the early stages of digital transformation, we certainly look forward to new ways of working, convening, playing and studying.

Benefits of E-Learning

HERE IS SOME INFORMATION THAT SEEM TO POINT THE WAY FORWARD FOR
BOTH SINGAPORE AND BGST



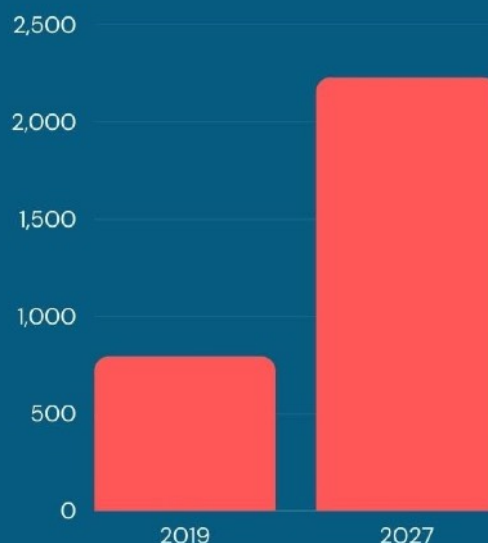
In Asia e-learning will be adopted rapidly. According to a report by Market Research, LMS adoptions in the Asia-Pacific region is expected to accelerate rapidly in the coming years, with the highest compound annual growth rate of over 20 per cent during the years 2019 to 2027.



Microlearning started gaining traction in late 2018, and it is a trend where learners choose bite-sized learning modules (less than 10 mins) for eLearning. By 2018, this microlearning approach accounts for 60.7% of e-Learning. This is deduced from Deloitte's report, Leading in Learning, where they found that the modern learner has 1% of a typical workweek to focus on training and development.

Singapore's Growing E-learning Market

USD Million



"The e-learning market has developed in the last 10 years and is growing actively. The number of players in this market is also escalating with the rising number of private and public higher education institutions, educational and testing firms, education ministries, and quality assertion and authorization agencies."

Source: ReportLinker

Singapore has been very advanced in pushing e-learning, so a typical Singaporean student is already familiar with digital learning. Theological education should therefore explore the possibilities of tapping on this familiarity and see where we can optimise this approach to learning without compromise in areas of mentoring and spiritual direction, for example.

BGST, since its early years, has been innovative in this aspect and generations of students would by now be familiar with our Moodle platform for postgraduate programmes. We are now poised to take this to new heights and we are sure that current students and new users would welcome our next move to improve the BGST learner experience in the years to come.

Theology for Life Digital Learning Platform



Watch out for the launch of our new **Theology for Life Digital Learning Platform**, on 27 August 2021. More details to come on our various social media platforms!

References:

- <https://www.shiftelearning.com/blog/bid/301248/15-facts-and-stats-that-reveal-the-power-of-elearning>
- <https://www.guide2research.com/research/elearning-statistics>
- <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2020/09/26/2099550/0/en/Singapore-E-Learning-Market-Forecast-to-2027-COVID-19-Impact-and-Regional-Analysis-By-Delivery-Mode-Learning-Mode-and-End-User.html>

Courses

STARTING IN AUGUST

Old Testament Foundations I (OT101)

Have a better understanding of the Pentateuch and Old Testament Historical Books and how to apply their teaching to the modern world.



STARTS AUGUST 3, 2021



7:15PM - 10PM



DR PHILIP SATTERTHWAITE

Lecturer



bgst.edu.sg/course/146

Vocation, Work & Ministry: Theology of Work (MM101)

Understand the context of God's design for us and the Bible's teaching on work and vocation and learn to see seamlessly between our daily work and the other areas of our lives.



STARTS AUGUST 12, 2021



7:15PM - 10PM



MR MICHAEL LOW

Lecturer



bgst.edu.sg/course/157

History of Christianity 1 (CH101)

Be familiarised with the rich theological and spiritual legacy of the Western, Orthodox and Oriental Churches and understand their relevance for our Protestant faith.



STARTS AUGUST 16, 2021



7:15PM - 10PM



DR LAI PAK WAH

Lecturer



bgst.edu.sg/course/147



BGST.EDU.SG/COURSES

2021

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

BGST.EDU.SG/EVENTS

3 Sep

TFL PLATFORM
LAUNCH

THEOLOGY FOR LIFE DIGITAL LEARNING PLATFORM LAUNCH

Details coming soon.

11 Sep

VIRTUAL
PUBLIC
LECTURE

"SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP AS DISCIPLESHIP"

Speaker: Rev Dr Wesley Hill

Time: 9:30am - 11:30am SGT (GMT +8 HRS)

Register at bgst.edu.sg/events/details/230

17 Sep

ORIENTATION

BGST ORIENTATION

Time: 8:00pm SGT (GMT +8 HRS)

Register at bgst.edu.sg/events/details/231



ANNOUNCEMENTS

BGST OPERATING HOURS

BGST office hours will be from 10 am - 4 pm until 31 Aug 2021

REGISTRATION DEADLINE

Please note that there is a registration deadline for all courses w.e.f. 1 August 2021. Do sign up as soon as you are able, at least 3 working days before the start date of the course. This will allow us to enrol you properly and to ensure that you are not missed out when disseminating information, links etc.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

NAME CHANGE FOR CERTIFICATE PROGRAMMES

Our Certificate in Biblical Studies ("CBS") and Certificate in Theological Studies ("CTS") programmes will be renamed the **Graduate Certificate in Biblical Studies ("GCBS")** and the **Graduate Certificate in Theological Studies ("GCTS")** respectively, from the start of AY2021/22.

This better reflects the graduate level at which the individual courses are taught. Minimum requirements for entry remain unchanged.

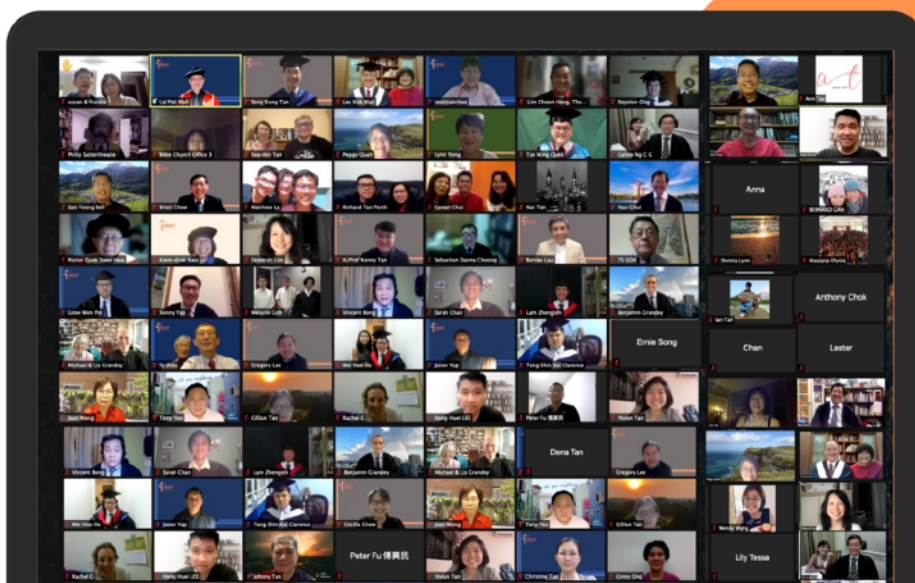
WE'RE HIRING

Marketing & Project Executive (MPE)

Full details of this position at
bgst.edu.sg/bgstcareer-opportunities

Send your CV to
chow_cecilia@bgst.edu.sg

Embark on a
rewarding career
with us



THANK YOU

For celebrating with us on our

30th Convocation

live via Zoom!

aug-sep

FACULTY SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

DR KWA KIEM KIOK



DR LAI PAK WAH



MR LEOW WEN PIN



8
AUG

LIVING HOPE METHODIST CHURCH

Righteousness Exalts a Nation

6
13
20
28
AUG

BETHANY EFC

Christian Spirituality for Everyday Life Lectures

22
AUG

MT CARMEL BP CHURCH

TBC (Mandarin)

1,8
AUG

3:16 CHURCH

Sermon on Inclusion

7
AUG

SENG KANG METHODIST CHURCH

Leadership Workshop on Inclusion

15
AUG

GRACE METHODIST CHURCH

Loving Persons with Disabilities

21
AUG

SINGAPORE LIFE CHURCH

Sermon on 2 Tim 4: 1-5

5
SEP

BETHANY EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH

Sermon on Ruth 1

26
SEP

BARTLEY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Loving Children with Disabilities

aug-sep

FACULTY SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

MR QUEK TZE-MING



8
AUG

ZION BISHAN BP CHURCH

The Council and Another Journey (Acts 15:1-16:5)

15
AUG

ZION BISHAN BP CHURCH

Entering European Union (Acts 16:6-17:15)

12
SEP

ZION BISHAN BP CHURCH

Dangerous Preaching causes Uproar and Death (Acts 19:21-20:16)

26
SEP

ZION BISHAN BP CHURCH

Paul Going Up to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-22:29)

DR PHILIP
SATTERTHWAITE



1
AUG

PRINSEP STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Burnt Offering (Lev 1)

8
AUG

PRINSEP STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Clean and Unclean (Lev 2)

15
AUG

PRINSEP STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Day of Atonement (Lev 16)

22
AUG

PRINSEP STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

What does Holiness look like? (Lev 19)

29
AUG

PRINSEP STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Sabbatical Years and the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25)

5
SEP

PRINSEP STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Covenant Blessings and Curses (Lev 26)



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2021

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