

NEWSLETTER

Asia Baptist Graduate Theological Seminary *“Equipping Leaders for Church and Society with quality and integrity”*

Website: www.abgts.org

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PANDEMIC GRADUATION

Graduations were held in the two Teaching Branches of ABGTS during the middle of this year: One at the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary which was held on May 21, 2021. While the other is at the Taiwan Baptist Theological Seminary that was conducted on June 28, 2021.

The five candidates from the Philippines are KHAUNG HAUNG, Master of Theology (Kachin State, Myanmar), T.L. SESANO NEIKHA, Master of Theology (Nagaland, India), JOHN SMITH, Master of Theology (Chin State, Myanmar), THANG KHAN KHAI, Master of Theology (Chin State, Myanmar), and TU RING, Doctor of Theology (Kachin State, Myanmar).



In Taiwan Miss QUFEN ZHAO was awarded the Doctor of Theology degree.

ABGTS-PHILIPPINES



Dr. Waldo Raposa,
A.D. ABGTS-Phils.

The previous year and the current year have proven to be difficult years for many seminaries around the world due to COVID-19. The brunt of the pandemic forced many seminaries to shut down their operations, at least temporarily until they can figure out the best way on how to handle their situation. ABGTS-Philippine ALC was not spared from the onslaught of the pandemic. Since the lockdown was enforced last year (March 15, 2020 to be exact), ABGTS-Philippine ALC received no new students. However, despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic, by the grace of God, ABGTS-Philippine ALC managed to keep its operation going. Last March, five of its students graduated, four with a ThM and one with a ThD. (Since the local government did not allow mass gatherings, ABGTS held a virtual graduation.) In addition, eight made successful defenses of their proposals. It also continues to provide scholarships to deserving students—thanks to Dr. Soon Tae Kwon for his kindness and untiring efforts in raising scholarships for ABGTS students. To date, the professors and the students continue to meet face-to-face in the seminar room, although some of them were forced to incorporate the inevitable—online learning, or at least the so-called “blended learning,” a combination of face-to-face learning and synchronous online learning. ABGTS has to adapt to

the changing situation. Whether online learning is now the new face of learning remains to be seen. In any case—and God willing—ABGTS-Philippine ALC is ready to adapt to the challenges caused by the pandemic.

ABGTS-THAILAND

Since the Corona Virus outbreak, the Thailand ALC was unable to conduct any seminars for their students in the Th.M. and Th.D. degree programs starting in September, 2020. The pandemic has not permitted the Seminary to hold any seminars in Thailand and in Vietnam, where they have extension program for ABGTS. Students are struggling with the pandemic and they are involved mostly these days taking care of their church and members. Given the uncertain pandemic situation, the ALC plan to conduct online seminars soon.



Dr. Stephen Tam
A.D. ABGTS-Thailand

Meanwhile the ongoing campus development and building construction project of the Seminary has stopped. The country has oftentimes experience lockdowns due to the surge of COVID-19 cases. The project is sourced by the ABGTS – G. Wilson Theological Education Development Program. This Endowment, aimed to support faculty and seminary development, is still being fund raised continually.



STUDENTS' CORNER

Admiring his guts to write and publish, I asked Francis what inspires him to write? Immediately he replied that he wanted to write because primarily he wants to glorify God by contributing to the body of Christ. Also writing is one of his ways to thank PBTS and ABGTS for training him. And, lastly writing helps him process his thoughts.

Francis Jr. S. Samdao, is a Doctor of Theology candidate of the ABGTS-Philippines. He is writing a dissertation titled, "Towards a Postmodern Understanding of Personhood: A Comparative Study Between James K.A. Smith's *Homo Liturgicus* and the Filipino Concept of *Pagkatao*."

Francis had already done one

journal article and four book reviews while studying in ABGTS- (1) "A Baptist Quadrilateral? A Filipino Outsider's Perspective on Baptist Identity" *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45, no.1 February 2021. (2.) Book Review of Samantha L. Miller, *Chrysolom's Devil: Demons, the Will and Virtue in Patristic Soteriology*. *Asia Journal of Theology* 35, no.1 April 2021 (3) Book Review of David Hunsicker, *The Making of Stanley Hauerwas: Bridging Barth and Post-liberalism*. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45, no.2 May 2021. (4) Book Review of Eamon Duffy, *A People's Tragedy: Studies in Reformation*. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 45, no.3 August 2021. Two more book reviews and one article are

coming out next month, "God willing," according to Francis.

Also, a newly graduate in the Master of Theology, Mr. John Smith from Myanmar, has published a book on January 13, 2020, titled, *Tinhnak a Ngeimi Nun* (A Life That Have A Purpose).

ABGTS is very much proud that there are emerging writers and authors being honed from the institution. This is to fulfill one of the advocacies of Dr. Chow Lien-Hwa, former president of ABGTS, that is the Seminary be a catalyst of developing scholars to contribute in the realm of writing and publication of academic books. -by eca-

LEARNING DURING A PANDEMIC

Fritz Melodi, Th.D. Candidate (ABGTS-Philippines)

Some months ago, an irate *barangay* (village) officer stopped a food delivery rider from entering the border as a violation of curfew. The reason, which has gained notoriety, was that his delivery of *lugaw*, (rice porridge) was "not essential". The rider argued that food, like *lugaw* was actually part of essential goods to be allowed during curfew. The officer, unfazed, responded that it was not, since people can live without *lugaw*. Amused and angry netizens who saw the video, began the hashtag *#lugawisessential*.

On October 22, 1939 in Oxford, England, C.S. Lewis delivered a sermon entitled "Learning in Wartime". In it, Lewis reflects on why as students in Oxford should they continue study and research within their own fields, while World War 2 raged in continental Europe. Should not their lives be suspended and fully preoccupied by war?

Lewis says, "*We have to inquire whether there is really any legitimate place for the activities of the scholar in a world such as this.*" Lewis is asking, is learning, like the famed *lugaw*, essential?

Lewis's experience of the onset of WWII and the COVID pandemic has its own parallels. The massive upheaval this pandemic has created on a global scale, often times makes us uneasy of the future. Are intellectual pursuits worth it or even sustainable, both economically and psychologically, especially in our volatile Filipino context? Should study and research still preoccupy us in the midst of this plague?

Lewis makes the point that the war, although significant is not ultimate. Lewis noticed that during his time in the frontline trenches of World War I, the more people were in the thick of the battle, the less people were even talking about it. Lewis says, "*The war will fail to absorb our whole attention because it is a finite object, and therefore intrinsically unfitted to support the whole attention of a human soul.*"

(Cont, page 4)



ABGTS-TAIWAN



Dr. Rachael Tan
A.D. ABGTS-Taiwan

Thank God for His abiding care and protection in the midst of the global pandemic! Qiu Fen Zhao (趙秋芬) graduated with the Doctor of Theology degree on June 28, 2021. Four of the Th.D. candidates who are based in China are all doing well despite the COVID-19 crisis. One D.Min. candidate who is residing here in Taiwan is applying for reinstatement.

Dr. Rei-Yi (Joshua) Tsai, who served as president of Taiwan Baptist Theological Seminary (TBTS) for 25 years and longtime ABGTS Treasurer, retired on July 30, 2021. Our former ABGTS Associate Dean, Dr. Kuo Tsai

(Joseph) Tan, is the new president of TBTS. Dr. Rachael Tan is now the Associate Dean of ABGTS-Taiwan.



FUNDRAISING PROMO

These promotional ABGTS T-shirts are designed by Dr. Waldo Raposa, A.D.-Philippines.

They will be available for sale soon. The proceeds will help build the Scholarship Fund of the Philippine ALC.



OUTGOING BOARD MEMBERS

ABGTS is truly blessed and grateful for these leaders and administrators who wholeheartedly served in the ABGTS Board. Dr. Sam Fong who was a representative of the Baptist Theological Seminary, Singapore ended his term in December 2020. Dr. Fong has served as Board Secretary for six years. Also, expecting retirement by July 30, 2021 as faculty and president of the Taiwan Baptist Theological Seminary is Dr. Tsai, Rei Yi. Dr. Tsai was a trustee member since 1996. Then later he was elected as ABGTS Treasurer in August 2003.

On the other hand the Board welcome Dr. Joseph Kuo Tsai Tan, president elect of Taiwan Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Tan has been serving as Academic Dean for ABGTS. The Taiwan seminary will hold a recognition ceremony to honor the 41 years service of Dr. Tsai and at the same time the inauguration of Dr. Tan as incoming president on July 30, 2021.



NEW TREASURER



Elected by the Board during their triennial meeting on February 2, 2021, Mrs. Maria Theresa Yambao is the new Treasurer of ABGTS.

Mrs. Yambao is the current Chairwoman of the Board of Trustees of the Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines. She works in the national government of the Philippines in the Commission of Audit as Supervising Auditor, State Auditor V.

2021-2024 BOARD OFFICERS

Chairman: Dr. Chaiwat Chawmuangman
 Vice Chairman: Dr. Gary Barkley
 Secretary: Dr. Armando Canoy
 Treasurer: Mrs. Maria Theresa Yambao
 Members at Large: Dr. Garry Choong Kee
 Dr. Tsai Rei Yi

Dr. Chaiwat Chawmuangman (President, Thailand BTS), Dr. Gary Barkley (Chancellor, Seinan Gakuin University, Fukuoka, Japan), Dr. Armando Canoy (President, Philippine BTS), Mrs. Maria Theresa Yambao, Chairwoman, BOT of PBTS), Dr. Garry Choong Kee, (Academic Dean, Singapore BTS), Dr. Tsai Rei-Yi, President Taiwan BTS). Dr. Joseph Tan (President-elect, Taiwan BTS is assuming the post of Dr. Tsai by August 1, 2021.

Also elected for another term as president is Dr. Graham Walker, Jr., USA. For the Vice President-Development is Dr. Soon Tae Kwon (Germany).

Serving as Interim Deans are Dr. Joseph Tan (2021), Dr. Stephen Tam (2022), Dr. Waldo Raposa (2023).

As soon as Dr. Joseph Tan will step up as president of Taiwan BTS, Dr. Rachael Tan will assume the ABGTS Deanship role and the Associate Dean for Taiwan ALC.

At the Triennial meeting on February 2, 2021, the Board also recognized the new members of the Board from Singapore Baptist Theological Seminary: Dr. Peter Lin (President) and Dr. Garry Choong, who was introduced earlier.



Board Meeting, Photo by Dr. Armand Canoy

PRAISES & PRAYER NEEDS

1. The building property in Hong Kong is undergoing a major maintenance repair. Pray for the contractor and for good health and that they will complete the job without any delay.
2. Continuous fundraising campaign for students scholarships, operations, and for the ongoing building repairs. The estimated cost of the repair is HKD50,000.00 to 60,000.00 (\$8,000.00)
3. Pray for wisdom and financial needs of students in the Philippine Branch who are writing their theses.
4. Pray for the Associate Deans: Dr. Rachael Tan (Taiwan), Dr. Stephen Tam (Thailand), and Dr. Waldo Raposa (Philippines)
5. Praise God for our ABGTS partners and donors.
6. Adding the 2021 graduates, ABGTS has now a total of 254 graduates and 5 Doctor of Divinity.

Melodi , Learning during pandemic, p2)

The COVID pandemic, likewise, though significant for our time, but from the long perspective of history is just another aggravation to the human story, such as Lewis's own WWI and II. This of course does not mean that we should be detached from the urgent demands of the pandemic. We should be fully present and fully engaged. However, so as not to fall into despair, we need to be paradoxical in our imagination. We must be fully present and yet, acknowledge that a future, full of

hope in Christ still holds a promise for us.

So while the pandemic continues on, as a sign of our hope promised by Christ, one continues on the activities of study and research. God, as Lewis affirms, does not give this appetite for learning in vain. Learning as a vocation from God, has its own mysterious relevance, especially in the age of social media and misinformation.

A life given to study, engaging with seemingly trivial details and arguments, disciplines the human soul and readies us to engage the crises of the present day and the work of the future. It is part of our human and humanizing work in this dehumanizing time. Thus to continue on studying despite the psychological and economic pressures, signifies a courageous "YES!" to Christ's future hope in the midst of crisis of the present.

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