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# THE BURNING BUSH

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# **THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION**

Jeffrey Khoo

The God of Christianity is the God of History. He is the one, living and true God who controls the affairs of the world. Hence, the Protestant Reformation could not have happened by chance. This paper will attempt to trace how God was active in ordering the course of events which led to a return to biblical Christianity away from the corrupt system of Rome in the following countries—Germany, Switzerland, and Scotland.

## **Definition of “Reformation”, “Protestant”, “Providence”**

The term “Reformation” comes from the word “reform”. “Reformation” therefore speaks of “the act of forming again” with reference particularly to the “great religious revolution of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which gave rise to the various evangelical or Protestant organisations of Christendom.”<sup>1</sup> Cairns gives a narrower definition by defining it as “that movement of religious reform that resulted in the creation of the national Protestant churches between 1517 and 1545.”<sup>2</sup>

The term “Protestant” comes from the word “to protest”. Specifically, it has to do with “the faith of those who protest against the errors of the Church of Rome.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, the term “Protestant” is used today to describe the Reformation because Christianity was brought back to its biblical and original form during this period of history.

The word “providence” means “foresight, timely preparation, an ordering or intervention of God for this purpose, an occurrence attributed to God’s ordering or intervention.”<sup>4</sup>

## Reasons for the Protestant Reformation

### Moral Reason

The utter moral corruption of the Roman Catholic Church is arguably the most important reason for the Protestant Reformation. According to Schaff, “The scandalous lives of the popes whose names fill the last paragraph of the history of the Middle Ages would have excluded them from decent modern circles and exposed them to sentence as criminals.”<sup>5</sup>

Gross immorality prevailed in the Roman Catholic Church. It was not uncommon to find the priests living in luxury, indulging in wine, women and song. Taking advantage of the immoral and permissive situation, bishops sold “licences for concubinage” to their priests.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the Pope was the one who encouraged and promoted these vices only goes to show the extent of corruption in the Church.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore not surprising that Machiavelli, the political writer observed that the nearer one got to Rome, the more corruption one found. Even Luther himself, before his conversion, was flabbergasted by what he saw when he visited Rome in 1510. He was completely disillusioned with the Roman Catholic Church. Rome was not the “City of Saints” he thought it was. The time of judgement was ripe and God would no longer delay.

### Doctrinal Reason

The Roman Catholic system was not based on the fundamentals of the Christian Faith but on the traditions of men and the superstitions that inevitably came out of it. The Roman Catholic Church taught that salvation was not by grace through faith alone but by works. The seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, namely, Baptism, Eucharist, Confession, Marriage, Ordinance, Extreme Unction, and Penance, must be kept by every professing Catholic if he wanted to be justified before God and enter heaven. Erasmus in his book, *In Praise of Folly*, had this indictment against the Catholic system of merits and works,

It will be pretty to hear their pleas before the great tribunal. One will brag how he mortified his carnal appetite by feeding only upon fish; another will tell how many days he fasted and what severe penance he imposed upon himself; another will produce on his own behalf as many ceremonies as would load a fleet of merchantmen; another will plead that in threescore years he never so much as touched a piece of money, except he fingered it through a thick pair of gloves; another will testify his humility by

producing his sacred hood, so old and nasty that any seaman had rather stand bareheaded on the deck than put it on to defend his ears in the sharpest storms; another will tell his Judge he has lost his voice by singing holy hymns and anthems; and still another, that he has forgotten how to speak by having kept perpetual silence, in obedience to the Psalmist's injunction to take heed lest he should offend with his tongue. But the Saviour will set aside their fine excuses by saying, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; verily I know you not".<sup>8</sup>

With the absence of biblical teaching, superstition plagued the minds of the people. This led to the worship of sacred relics like bones, skulls, chins, teeth, hands, fingers, and other parts of the body of dead saints. The priests and monks filled their coffers in a lucrative business of mass producing and selling so-called "sacred relics" like the finger of the martyr Stephen, hair of the Virgin Mary and of Mary Magdalene, blood of the Apostles John and Thomas and even of Jesus Christ, fragments of Christ's seamless robe, and "bleeding wafers" for Holy Communion.<sup>9</sup>



*Figure of a dead Christ lying in a coffin in St Mary's Cathedral in Erfurt*

### The Renaissance

The Renaissance lasted from the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This remarkable period of time was characterised by "an awakening freedom of thought in the effort to secure relief from ecclesiastical abuses ... achieving freedom from the intellectual bondage to which the individual man had been subjected by the theology and hierarchy of the Church."<sup>10</sup>

The Renaissance promoted the study of Scripture in its original languages, and encouraged individual thinking which eventually

eliminated much superstition. It was during this period that the printing press was invented. The Lord in His perfect timing moved events to necessitate the spread of the Written Word to every household which hastened the reformation process. Indeed, the printing press could not have come at a better time.

It was during the Renaissance that man began to go back to their sources. This sparked off an intense study of the original languages in which the Bible was written. Two men in particular must be mentioned. They were John Reuchlin and Desiderius Erasmus. They were Renaissance scholars from Germany who “prepared the way for the Reformation and the modern study of the Greek and Hebrew Scripture.”<sup>11</sup>



*Johannes Gutenberg, inventor of the movable type printing press*

John Reuchlin (1455-1522) was master of the Hebrew language. He was the pioneer of Hebrew learning among Christians in Northern Europe. His Hebrew Grammar and Dictionary—*De Rudimentis Hebraicis*—became standard material for the study of the Hebrew language. What Reuchlin provided for Hebrew studies, Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) produced for Greek. He paved the way for the study of the Greek New Testament by establishing Greek pronunciation, by translating the works of the Church Fathers, and most importantly, by publishing his edition of the Greek New Testament. In preparing the ground for a primary study of the Holy Scriptures in the original languages, these two men did a great deal, by the direction of God, to promote the cause of the Protestant Reformation.

To say that the circumstances which led to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation were merely coincidental would be quite inadequate. God’s hand was moving and directing the course of events. The moral decline and doctrinal perversion of the Roman Catholic Church, together with the entrance of the Renaissance saw the end of Rome’s absolute papal

power. Most significantly, “The Greek edition of the New Testament and the printing press, – that invention which leaves all the centuries in two and yet binds all the centuries together – were the two chief providential instruments made ready for Martin Luther.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The German Reformation: Martin Luther**



*Portrait of Martin Luther by  
Lucas Cranach the Elder*

The mention of the name “Martin Luther” immediately causes one to think of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation movement. Luther was the first to activate the Reformation on a significant scale that was before impossible. God chose this man to stand for the Truth of the Holy Scriptures against the corrupt doctrines and powers of the Roman Catholic Church. Surely, the mettle of Luther’s character and courage was not forged overnight. The preparation of his heart, mind and soul was done during the best part of his life and God as the Master Workman was shaping him to fulfill a tremendous task that was to change the course of Church history.

#### **Luther’s Childhood**

Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483 in Eisleben. He was the son of a poor country farmer. They were a family who lived from hand to mouth. Luther himself said that his parents “worked their flesh off their bones”. He thus tasted the hardships of life since childhood. Schaff commented,

All the Reformers, like the Apostles and Evangelists, were men of humble origin, and gave proof that God’s Spirit working through his chosen instruments is mightier than armies and navies. But they were endowed with extraordinary talents and energy, and providentially prepared for their work. They were also aided by a combination of favorable circumstances without which they could not have accomplished their work. They made the Reformation, and the Reformation made them.<sup>13</sup>

Being born as a poor peasant allowed Luther to experience the



struggles and sufferings of the common people. The poor in those days were kept poor by corrupt feudal lords and by greedy priests who thrived on the gullibility and spiritual blindness of the people who in the first place were not taught what it meant to have a right relationship with God. It has been observed that

The hardships of Luther's youth and the want of refined breeding show their effects in his writings and actions. They limited his influence among the higher and cultivated classes, but increased his power over the middle and lower classes. He was a man of the people and for the people.<sup>14</sup>

Luther's parents were strict disciplinarians. The punishments which he often received sometimes drew blood. Even in school, he was not spared corporal punishment. This, in a way, prepared him for the hardships that were to come in the future. Miller said, "From an early age he was trained in the school of poverty, hardship, and suffering, for a future life of warfare."<sup>15</sup>

#### Luther's Education

By the providence of God, Luther received his tertiary education in one of the best universities in Germany—the University of Erfurt. He majored in scholastic philosophy and studied the writings of Aristotle, Scotus, Aquinas, Ockham, and Bonaventura. Such vain studies devoid of theology did not bring Luther any closer to God. Nevertheless, "in the wisdom of God, it was necessary that he should become conversant with these writings that he might be the better able, and have the better ground, to expose their utter worthlessness as to the service and worship God."<sup>16</sup>



*Luther's room in Wartburg where he translated the German Bible*

Luther's mastery of his mother tongue while in the university and the Greek language later in the University of Wittenberg, enabled him to translate the New Testament into German, thereby making the contents of the Bible accessible to the common people.

In 1503, Luther graduated with a Bachelor of Arts. In 1505, he was conferred the degree of Master of Theology. Finally in 1512, he got his Doctor of Theology. Although, his father's wish was for him to read law, Luther was more interested in theology and God made sure he pursued this course through a spate of divinely appointed occurrences.

### Luther's Conversion

A series of providential occurrences, namely, the death of his best friend, the accidental slash on his leg by a rapier and a terrible thunderstorm caused him to enter an Augustinian monastery in 1505. According to Schaff, the Augustinian monastery was "the cradle of the Lutheran Reformation."<sup>17</sup> It was during this trying period as a monk that he was brought to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.



*Augustinian monastery in Erfurt*

Luther was a sincere and devout monk. When he was in the monastery, he was very concerned about his salvation. At that point of time, he still had no peace in his heart and yearned for the assurance of salvation. He was taught by the Augustinian monks that he must work towards perfection if he wants to be accepted by God. He thus began to mortify his own body with zeal, thinking that this would get him to heaven. Luther himself wrote of his mortifications,

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I was indeed a pious monk, and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever a monk could obtain Heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it.<sup>18</sup>

Despite all his zealous works to purify himself, he could find no freedom from the bondage of sin which weighed so heavily upon him. It was at this time when Luther was in such a state of spiritual desperation that the Lord by His providential hand used two men—John Staupitz and an unknown elderly monk—to lead him to salvation.

Staupitz was Luther's spiritual father. "He directed him from his sins to the merits of Christ, from the law to the cross, from works to faith, from scholasticism to the study of the Scriptures..."<sup>19</sup> Although a ray of divine light shone into Luther's heart, he was still vexed with sin and guilt and found no way of escape from the terror of divine judgement that so plagued his soul. It was at this time of despair that he was visited by an old monk. Nobody is sure who this monk was and where he came from. Who knows he could be an angel sent by God. This old monk recited the Apostle's Creed and the part which read, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins", gripped Luther. He now understood that he had to believe that his sins have all been forgiven through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a turning point in Luther's life and the joy of salvation flooded his soul. "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Rom 1:17). "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1).



*Luther Eiche (Oak) marks the spot where he burned the papal bull*

We must conclude that the events leading to Luther's conversion were ordered by the Lord. It was at a most critical time of Luther's life when he gave up all hope of living and felt that he was about to die due to the terrible burden of sin which afflicted his soul relentlessly and mercilessly that the light of the gospel broke through and saved him. Luther must be convinced that good works and penance would get him nowhere, that only the blood of Jesus Christ is able to cleanse him from all sin and in Christ only must he trust for forgiveness and eternal life.

### Luther's Defence of the Faith



*Stained glass window depicting Luther upholding  
Sola Fide, Sola Gratia and Sola Scriptura*

The atrocities of the papal system were impressed upon Luther when he visited Rome in 1510. Luther was horrified by the prevailing corruption that he said, "let all who would lead a holy life depart from Rome. Everything is permitted in Rome except to be an honest man."<sup>20</sup> Luther saw how spiritually bankrupt the Church was. There was thus a vital need to reform the Church.

However before he could reform the Church, he must know the truth of the Holy Scriptures deeply and thoroughly. This avenue of preparation

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was given when he was conferred the degree of Doctor of Divinity, and became Professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg in 1512. In the University, he lectured on the Psalms, the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians which were his favourite books. His study of the Pauline epistles made him realise that biblical Christianity must be based on Scriptures and not on the traditions of men or the sayings of the Pope. Owing to the pure teaching of God’s Word in the German tongue, many of his students became Christians and also ardent supporters of the Reformation cause.



*An indulgence letter*

Luther was now fully prepared to spearhead the Reformation. It was at this point of time that John Tetzel entered history to provide the occasion for action. John Tetzel was an indulgence salesman. He was commissioned by the Pope to sell indulgence letters in order to rebuild St Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. Tetzel’s sales pitch was delivered most enticingly. He told the people, “The moment the money tinkles in my box, that moment the soul springs up out of purgatory.”<sup>21</sup>



*Coin slot at the top of box*



*Indulgence money box*

Having been prevented to enter Saxony, he conducted his business at the outskirts of the town, near Wittenberg. It was here that Luther encountered him and infuriated by this sort of trickery, it triggered him to do something about it. On October 31, 1517, Luther nailed his 95 theses to the doors of the castle-church in Wittenberg. Concerning this event, Schaff said,

No period in the history of the Christian Church has a more clear date set for its close than the Middle Ages. In whatever light the Protestant Reformation is regarded there can be no doubt that a new age began with the nailing of the Theses on the Church doors of Wittenberg.<sup>22</sup>

Nobody was willing to take up the challenges to debate Luther. They felt that the issue was not significant enough to warrant attention. However, the Theses were soon found throughout Germany and Europe through the help of the printing press. The hearts of the people were prepared by the Lord to receive Luther's message that the Pope's indulgence letters did not take away sins. Only God alone could remit sins. Every true Christian is forgiven of his sins solely by the atonement of Christ and the grace of God without any need for a letter of indulgence.



*Door of the castle-church in  
Wittenberg*

Although the Theses did not protest against the whole Roman Catholic system, just the indulgences, it marked “a state of transition from twilight to daylight.”<sup>23</sup> The Pope, angered by the Theses, subsequently excommunicated Luther on June 15, 1520. The papal bull of excommunication should strike terror to the heart of every Catholic but Luther had no fear of it because like David he came “in the name of the Lord of hosts.” (1 Sam 17:45). Luther himself in a letter wrote, “You may expect everything from me, except fear or recantation. I shall not flee, still less recant.”<sup>24</sup> Schaff commented, “Instead of causing Luther and his friends to be burnt, it was burnt by Luther.”<sup>25</sup>

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If a person wants to write about the German Reformation, he must not fail to mention Luther's testimony before the Diet of Worms (1521). It was here that the lone peasant monk filled with the Holy Spirit faced an august assembly of the representatives of the highest Church and State powers who were determined to have him retract all his beliefs. It was on the second day of the trial that Luther made this historic statement before the Diet,

Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the Pope nor the councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound in the Word of God: I cannot and will not recant anything since it is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against the conscience. Here I stand (I cannot do otherwise.) God help me! Amen.<sup>26</sup>

There were mixed responses from the Diet, but the common people, the patriotic nobles, the scholars of the school of Erasmus, and the rising generation of learned men applauded him. It was said that "the Germans everywhere are so addicted to Luther, that rather than he should be oppressed by the Pope's authority, a hundred thousand of the people will sacrifice their lives."<sup>27</sup>

Schaff observed that it was "the will of Providence to prepare the way, through the instrumentality of Luther, for



*A papal bull*



*Commemorative stone marking the spot where Luther defended his Reformation doctrines before the Diet of Worms*



*Monument of Luther in  
the city of Worms*

independent church-organizations and the development of new types of Christianity on the basis of the Word of God and freedom of thought.”<sup>28</sup> One cannot but concede that by human strength alone, a reformation of this magnitude, which led to a radical transformation of both Church and society, would have been impossible.

God often uses just one man to accomplish His holy purpose. In Scripture, we find the Lord using Moses mightily to deliver Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Then, there was young David who fought Goliath and Elijah who defeated the 450 prophets of Baal. In the same way, God saw it fit to raise a poor peasant to shake the foundations of the Roman Catholic Church in a way never before. The very fact that the might of Rome could not even prevent Luther from declaring truth speaks very loudly of

God’s sovereign hand in the whole affair. The process of the Reformation has only just begun. God’s providential hand can also be seen outside Germany.

### **The Swiss Reformation: Ulrich Zwingli**

“In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.” (2 Cor 13:1). If the Reformation only occurred in Germany, it might be fair for sceptics to conclude that there was nothing providential about the whole movement. But God would not allow His work to be regarded in such a way for the Reformation did not occur only in Germany, it was also found in Switzerland. Zwingli was born seven weeks after Luther and was thus Luther’s contemporary. Zwingli, however, preceded Luther in his reformation endeavours. Zwingli himself said,

I began to preach the gospel in the year of grace 1516, that is to say, at a time when Luther’s name had never been heard in this country. It is not from Luther that I learnt the doctrine of Christ, but from the Word of God. If Luther preaches Christ, he does what I am doing; and that is all.<sup>29</sup>



This goes to show that the divine hand was involved in charting the progress of the Reformation. D’Augbigne well said, “There was no doubt a connecting link between these two men; but we must not look for it upon earth: it was above.”<sup>30</sup> Now, let us see how God prepared His man for the Reformation in Switzerland.

### Zwingli’s Childhood

Ulrich Zwingli was born into a shepherd’s family in the Swiss Alps in Zurich on New Year’s day 1484. During summertime, Zwingli would follow his father to graze their sheep in the summits of the Alps. The beauty of creation drew Zwingli to his Creator. Surely, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.” (Ps 19:1). One of his friends once remarked that Zwingli being brought so near to heaven on these sublime Alpine heights contracted something heavenly and divine.<sup>31</sup>

The winter season would often find the young Zwingli in rapt attention as he listened to his pious grandmother tell the stories of the Bible. As much as the biblical Timothy was influenced towards God by his godly grandmother Lois, so was Zwingli by his grandmother. God’s provision of godly parents reveals His providential grace and desire for us to walk towards a holy goal and direction.

### Zwingli’s Education and Conversion

God endowed Zwingli with a sharp and methodical mind. His intelligence was discovered when he was still a young boy of ten. He was later very successful in his studies at Basel, Berne and Vienna. He enjoyed reading Erasmus and therefore had humanistic tendencies. However, the Lord had implanted in His appointed servant, an intense



*Statue of Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich*

desire to know His Word. So, Zwingli, addicted himself to the study of the Bible. He learned Greek, translated Paul's epistles and memorised them.

Zwingli studied theology under Thomas Wittenbach. Just as Luther received the salvation light from Staupitz, Zwingli was directed to the gospel by Wittenbach. Zwingli's heart was challenged by the Word of God. Filled with the Holy Spirit and with holy zeal, he took a strong stand against the doctrinal and ecclesiastical corruptions of Rome.

### Zwingli's Defence of the Faith

The more Zwingli studied the Scriptures, the more He was persuaded that the Roman Catholic Church was a handmaid of the devil. In 1506 he was ordained into the gospel ministry and became the pastor of the church in Glarus. As a pastor, he faithfully and courageously exposed the corruptions of the Roman Catholic Church. This started the Reformation in Switzerland.

In 1518, he was promoted to become the pastor of the Cathedral Church in Zurich. It was in Zurich that he was convicted that the Bible and the Bible alone was the "touchstone" of all Christian beliefs and practices. Zwingli, as with all the reformers, were men of one book—the Holy Bible. He was known for his systematic treatment of the Scriptures. He preferred to preach a series of expository messages from particular books of the Bible than to dwell on topics. In Zurich, he covered the whole New Testament (except the book of Revelation)



*Cathedral Church in Zurich*

in four years. Zwingli had a very high view on the inerrancy of Scripture. He would not preach anything he could not prove from the Bible. Zwingli believed that the God of the Bible will redirect people to Himself when the pure, unadulterated Word is preached. Thus, he did not expose the corruptions of the Roman Catholic Church initially but preached against the sins of the human heart for there is where the root problem lies. Man must be brought to see the light before they can appreciate the darkness that is found in the world.

In 1522, Zwingli's reformation efforts gained public support. The Reformation in Germany was ignited when Tetzel started selling the Pope's indulgence letters which led to Luther's 95 Theses. The Reformation in Switzerland, on the other hand, began at the festival of Lent when people were required by the Roman Catholic Church to fast. However, instead of fasting, the reformers in Zurich held a sausage feast. By so doing, they defied the tradition and authority of the Roman Catholic Church, claiming the Bible and the Bible alone to be their sole and supreme authority of faith and life.

In 1523, Zwingli published his 67 Conclusions or Articles which were the Swiss equivalent of Luther's 95 Theses. While Luther's 95 Theses concentrated on the abuses of indulgence letters, the 67 Articles centred on Christ as the only Saviour of the world. Here, we see the Reformation developing in a progressive manner. During the Swiss Reformation, the people became more rooted in Christology through Zwingli. The God of the Bible is a God of order and not of confusion. We see such divine order in the Reformation movement. We shall see later on the Lord raising John Calvin to systematise the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith.

Zwingli issued a challenge to his opponents to debate the 67 Articles he had laid down. The request was accepted and a conference for discussion held on January 29, 1523. Miller rightly observed that "This was the first of those public disputations which under the overruling providence of God, so rapidly advanced the progress of the Reformation."<sup>32</sup> The Senate of Zurich invited all opponents of the Articles to refute them on the basis of Scripture and not the customs or traditions of men. During the meeting, none of Zwingli's opponents dared to debate him. The Roman Catholic theologians who so fervently assailed Zwingli's propositions and slandered his character in secret, now surprisingly chose to remain silent in public. Why this was so is



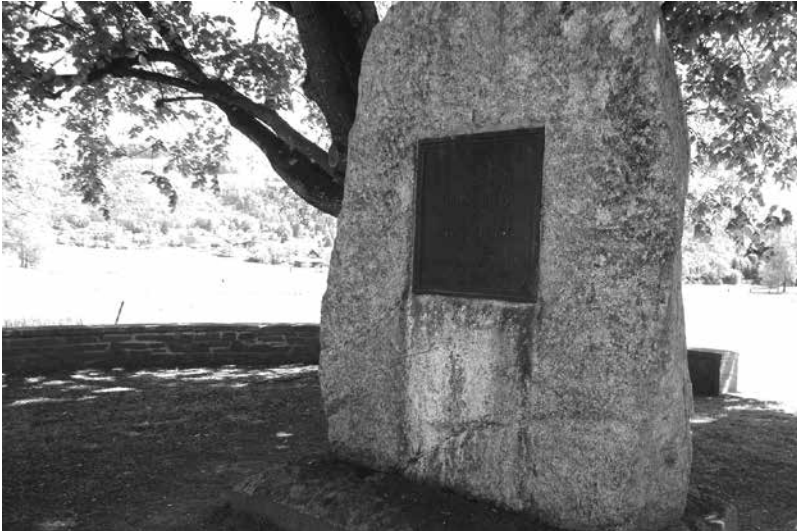
*Zwingli's house near the Cathedral Church*

quite easy to explain. They could not refute Zwingli because they had no knowledge of the Bible and were simply too lazy to study the truth. Since none dared to say anything against Zwingli or his doctrines, the Lord moved the Senate to pass this edict:

That since Master Ulric Zwingle had publicly and repeatedly challenged the adversaries of his doctrine to confute them by Scriptural arguments, and since, notwithstanding, no one had undertaken to do so, he should continue to announce and preach the Word of God, just as heretofore. Likewise that all other ministers of religion, whether resident in the city or country, should abstain from teaching any tenet which they could not prove from Scripture; that they should refrain, too from making charges of heresy and other scandalous allegations on pain of severe punishment.<sup>33</sup>

The cooperative aspect of God's sovereign will is evident here. As the Psalmist say, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." (Ps 76:10).

While the German Reformation brought the masses back to the pure and unadulterated gospel, the Swiss Reformation under Zwingli restored the Bible to its rightful place. The absolute authority and total sufficiency of the Bible as the only basis for faith and practice was one doctrine which Zwingli constantly stressed. The forte of Zwingli's reformation was his constant appeal to Scripture. Miller correctly concluded that "One line of Scripture far outweighs ten thousand reasons."<sup>34</sup> The Reformation torch was now passed to John Calvin. It was he whom the Lord used to systematise the Christian Religion.



*Memorial stone at Kappel where Zwingli died in battle in 1531*

### **The Swiss French Reformation**

In the previous chapter, we saw the progress of the Reformation in German Switzerland. We now proceed to French Switzerland. We find here a man by the name of John Calvin who carried on where Zwingli left off. By the providence of God, Calvin gave a greater impetus to the Reformation movement.

As we study about God's providential hand in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation now through Calvin, we want to acknowledge that Calvin was the one who saw clearly the higher hand of God over the events of the world and affairs of man. Calvin's consciousness of God's providential hand is evident by his very own confession. Calvin testified,

As David was taken from the sheepfold and elevated to the rank of supreme authority; so God having taken me from my originally obscure and humble condition, has reckoned me worthy of being invested with the honorable office of a preacher and minister of the gospel. When I was yet a very little boy, my father had destined me for the study of theology. But afterwards, when he considered that the legal profession commonly raised those who follow it, to wealth, this prospect induced him suddenly to change his purpose. Thus it came to pass, that I was withdrawn from the study of philosophy and was put to the study of law. To this pursuit I endeavored faithfully to apply myself, in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of his providence, at length gave



*John Calvin*

a different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more burdened in such matters than might have been expected from one of my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that though I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardor.<sup>35</sup>

It was God's purpose that Calvin should be, first and foremost, a theologian. Calvin clearly takes the lead among the systematic teachers of Christian doctrine. His theology stems from a thorough knowledge of the Bible. He was undoubtedly the ablest exegete among the reformers and his commentaries are rated to be one of the very best in expounding the Christian Faith both in ancient and modern times. How did God make Calvin into the theologian of the Protestant Reformation?

#### Calvin's Education

John Calvin was born on July 10, 1509, 25 years after Luther and Zwingli. While Luther and Zwingli spent much time opposing the Roman Catholic Church and preaching salvation in Christ alone, the teaching aspect of the ministry was somewhat lacking. The task of deepening

*THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION*

the roots of the Reformation Movement on the Word of God was thus providentially entrusted to Calvin. The Church cannot survive without doctrine. As the Apostle Paul told Timothy, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” (1 Tim 4:16).

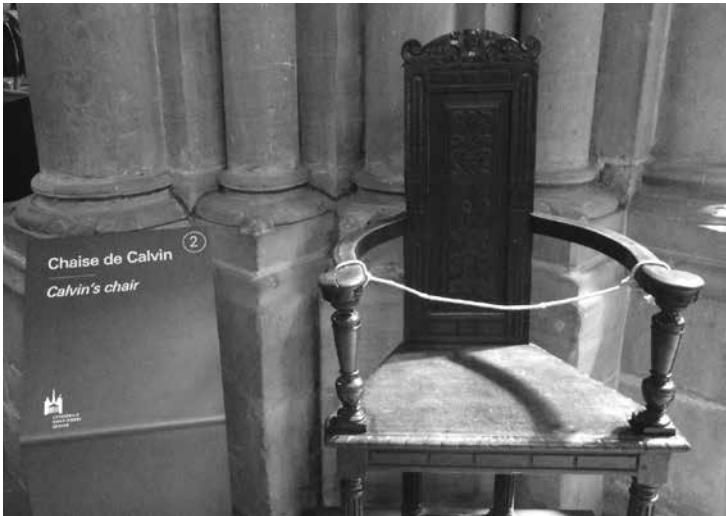
His achievements in theology found its beginnings while he was still studying. Calvin received the best education—in the humanities, law, philosophy and theology—which France at that time could give. He was educated in these three leading Universities—Orleans, Bourges, and Paris—from 1528 to 1533. He started out studying for the priesthood, but later switched to law because his father wanted him to be a lawyer. After the death of his father, he returned with increased zeal to the study of humanities and subsequently to theology.



*The ‘Accusative’ John Calvin*

Calvin made such great progress in his studies that he was called upon occasionally to take the place of his professors when they were absent. He avoided the carnal activities and noisy excitements of life as a student, and spent his leisure time enjoying the company of like-minded fellow students. However, some of his fellow students dubbed him the “accusative” case because he was so strict and severe in his conduct.

After Calvin completed his elementary course, he moved to the College de Montaigu, which was renowned for two things: the strictness of discipline and the taste of school meals. Neither was welcomed by its students. Calvin, however, thrived in such a school. It was there that the foundation for his future ministry was laid. Each morning at four was the morning service. This was followed by a lecture until six and then there was the morning mass. After breakfast, the main class of the day came, from eight to ten in the morning, and then an hour was given to discussion of the subject. Lunch was then taken followed by the public reading of the Scriptures or a biography of a saint. Then another hour of revision was spent to ensure that the morning lecture had been fully understood. Siesta took place from one to two in the afternoon, but was often accompanied by more public readings. From three to five, the main class for the afternoon was held. This was followed by prayers, discussion of the afternoon lessons and supper with more readings.



*Replica of Calvin's chair*



Before bedtime at eight or nine, more time was devoted to questions and discussions.

It must have been a cruel life for the students there, but for someone of Calvin's God-given intellect and discipline, it was the kind of challenge he welcomed. Surely, it would have been physically, mentally and spiritually impossible for him to have sustained the output which characterised his life and ministry without these foundations being laid while he was under training. God saw to it that His servant would come out fully equipped for the task appointed for him.

### Calvin's Conversion and Call

Calvin's conversion was not a dramatic one. It was a gradual and natural affair. Calvin was an extremely devout Roman Catholic and lived a pious life. At that time, Reformation was in the air and Calvin searched the Scriptures to find out whether the Reformation claims were true or not. By the grace of God, the more Calvin studied the Bible, the more he became convinced that the Roman Catholic system was not of God. His conversion as Schaff said was, therefore, "a change from Romanism to Protestantism, from papal superstition to evangelical faith, from scholastic traditionalism to biblical simplicity."<sup>36</sup> Calvin's conversion was not by any direct human influence but as Calvin said, "God Himself produced the change. He instantly submitted my heart to obedience." The exact time and place of his conversion remain a mystery.

Calvin's conversion to the Protestant Faith and his call to reform the Church could be seen as simultaneous. God had already predestined Calvin to be saved and to take a lead in the Reformation. The Lord thereby equipped His servant in an extraordinary way for the ministry of reforming the Church. Know that the reformers "belong not to the regular order of priests, but to the irregular order of the prophets whom God calls directly by his Spirit from the plough or the shepherd's staff or the workshop or the study. So he raises and endows men with rare genius.... All good gifts come from God; but the gift of genius is exceptional, and cannot be derived or propagated by ordinary descent."<sup>37</sup> Calvin belonged to such a class.

### Calvin's Defence of the Faith

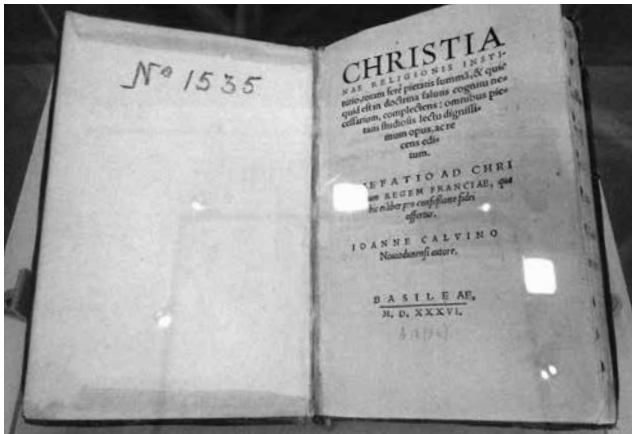
Calvin's first confrontation happened before a large assembly in the Church of Mathurins on November 1, 1533. His friend, Nicolas Cop,

having been elected Rector of the University of Paris, was required to deliver his inaugural speech. Cop requested Calvin to write his speech. The speech called for a reformation. It spoke against the scholastic theologians who were described as people still unregenerate. Calvin said,

They teach nothing of faith, nothing of the love of God, nothing of the remission of sins, nothing of grace, nothing of justification; or if they do so, they pervert and undermine it all by their laws and sophistries. I beg you, who are here present, not to tolerate any longer these heresies and abuses.<sup>38</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church was infuriated by such an audacious rebuke. Cop, worried for his life, fled to Basel. Calvin escaped by lowering himself through a window using bedsheets and disguised as a farmer.

From 1533–1536, Calvin laboured as a traveling evangelist in Southern France, Switzerland, and Italy. During this time, he also wrote a book which was a systematic defence of the Christian Faith. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was published in 1536. He was only 26 years old when he completed the first edition of his *Institutes*. Schaff wrote,



*1st edition of Calvin's Institutes*

This book is a masterpiece of a precocious genius of commanding intellect and spiritual depth and power. It is one of the few truly classical productions in the history of theology and has given its author the double title of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas of the Reformed Church.<sup>39</sup>

Calvin's book was instrumental in spreading the Reformed doctrines far and wide. Felice said, "This was the first theological and literary monument of the French Reformation, spreading abroad in the

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schools, the castles of the gentry, and the houses of the burghers, even the workshops of the people, the Institutes became the most powerful of preachers.<sup>740</sup>

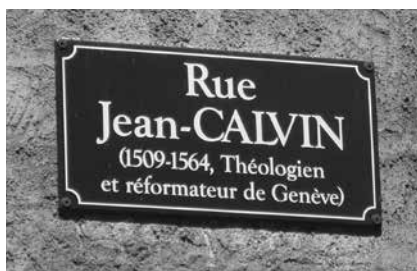
Now, in Geneva, the Reformation had already begun through a French evangelist by the name of William Farel. Farel's fiery preaching led to many conversions. However, Farel did not think himself to be adequately equipped to further the work of reformation in Geneva. When he heard that Calvin had come to Geneva, he thought that this must be God's higher plan that in such an opportune time, He had provided such a famous theologian for the reformation work in Geneva.



*Reformed church in Strassburg*

Geneva was, however, only a stopover for Calvin who was on his way to Strassburg where he wanted to spend all his time in peace, studying and writing. He did not know anyone in Geneva and thus did not expect anyone to call on him. But Farel who knew him through his *Institutes* visited him and asked him to stay in Geneva to pastor the church there. However, the more Farel shared about the work in Geneva, the more Calvin shrank from the task presented to him. Timid by nature, Calvin declined the offer because he felt he was too young, inexperienced in practical matters, and generally unfit for the work. He insisted that he needed more time to study. He told Farel that this was his final decision and would entertain no further discussion. The elderly Farel then “rose from his chair, and, straightening himself out of his full height as his long beard swept his chest, he directed his piercing look full at the young

man before him and thundered: ‘May God curse your studies if now in her time of need you refuse to lend your aid to His Church.’” Calvin was stunned by Farel’s words of imprecation. He testified, “I was so stricken with terror, that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken.”<sup>41</sup> As Moses could not effectively excuse himself from God’s appointment to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, neither could Calvin resist God’s call to do the reformation work in Geneva.



*Street sign in Geneva  
named after Calvin*

Calvin and Farel tried to make Geneva a model Christian city and therefore instituted many drastic changes. The people, however, were not ready for the strict reforms. So in 1538, both of them were banished from Geneva. Calvin then went to Strassburg and there pastored a church and spent time writing. His stay in Strassburg was going to be a temporary one. God was going to put Calvin back in Geneva after He had prepared the heart of the people in that city to accept a thorough reformation.

Calvin had no desire to return to Geneva after being so badly treated by the people there. As the saying goes, “Man proposes but God disposes”. Calvin might have plans to stay in Strassburg for the rest of his life but God’s will was for him to return to Geneva. True enough, by the direction of God, Calvin returned to Geneva on September 13, 1541. Kuiper rightly observed,

We can similarly see the wonderful providences of God in bringing John Calvin to Geneva. This free and independent city with its democratic institutions was at that time, of all the places in the world, the most admirably fitted to be the scene of the great reformatory labors of Calvin. His entire life up to this time was one long preparation for the task which was now awaiting him in Geneva, and which was to be of world-wide significance.<sup>42</sup>



*St Peter's Church in Geneva where Calvin was pastor*

Calvin's most significant achievement in Geneva was the establishment of the Geneva Academy where men from all over Europe were being trained for the ministry. Many Protestants from various European countries fled to Geneva because of persecution and there, they were schooled in the Academy which equipped them to bring the light of the gospel to every corner of Europe.

It is significant to note that Calvin was a sickly man who suffered many painful diseases. Yet, he was able to accomplish so much for the Reformation and this must be attributed to the God whom Calvin served, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Without doubt, the Holy Spirit was Calvin's source of power and strength. His deep love for his Saviour was unmistakable. In all his achievements, he gave all the glory to God. In the face of trials and persecutions, he encouraged himself and others with the words of Paul, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31). Knowing that his heavenly Father is sovereign and watching over him kept him going. To rob God of the glory due to His name was unthinkable to Calvin. Felix Bungener said,

Let us not give him praise which he would not have accepted. God alone creates; a man is great only because God thinks fit to accomplish great things by his instrumentality. Never did any man understand this better than Calvin. It cost him no effort to refer all glory to God. Nothing indicates that he was ever tempted to appropriate to himself the smallest portion of it. Luther, in many a passage, complacently dwells on the thought that a petty monk, as he says, has so well stirred the whole world. Calvin will never say such a thing; he never seems to say it, even the deepest recesses of his heart; everywhere you see the man, who applies all things – to the smallest

as to the greatest – the idea *it is God who does all and is all*.<sup>43</sup>

Calvin's contribution to the Protestant Faith remains till this day. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* has since been the mainstay in Reformed theological studies. A theologian is no theologian if he has not read Calvin.

### **The Scottish Reformation: John Knox**

The saying that “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church”, is very true in the case of the Scottish Reformation. Before John Knox, the famous Scottish reformer came into the scene, Scottish soil was already drenched with the blood of Scottish saints who died for their faith in the hands of the Roman Catholic Church. The more the Roman Catholic Church tried to exterminate God's servants, the more the Lord raised others to replace them. The reformers prior to Knox braved the fire and the sword. God had appointed Knox to establish the Reformation in Scotland on a more permanent scale.

#### **Knox's Education**

John Knox was born in the year 1505 to a middle-class home. His parents were wealthy enough to afford him a good education. At the age of 16 years, he graduated from the University of Glasgow. He excelled in philosophy and scholastic theology. His proficiency in these two areas was necessary if he was going to defend Reformed theology. God made sure his servant would be trained appropriately and adequately for the task that would be before him.

#### **Knox's Call**

Knox initially resisted God's call to enter the ministry. Later, circumstances made him realise he could not escape God's appointment unless he wanted to incur God's displeasure. Miller recounted how Knox struggled within himself whether he should enter the ministry,

The charge of declaring “the whole counsel of God, keeping nothing back,”... with all the consequences to which the preachers of the Protestant doctrines were then exposed, filled his mind with anxiety and fear. He evidently passed through much conflict of mind on this occasion; for though he possessed great strength of character, being naturally bold, upright, and independent, he was thoroughly honest, conscientious, and modest. But when he felt satisfied that he had the call of God to engage in His work, he resolved to undertake it with all its responsibilities, and say,



*Reformation wall in Geneva featuring Farel, Calvin, Beza and Knox (L-R)*

with the apostle: “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24).<sup>44</sup>

### Knox’s Defence of the Faith

One very outstanding feature of Knox was his powerful preaching. Kuiper comments, “The preaching of Knox was powerful. His style was direct, vigorous and plain. Frequently, he employed sparkling wit and cutting satire.”<sup>45</sup> It was said of Knox’s preaching that “others lop off branches but this man strikes at the root.”<sup>46</sup> He was a pulpit-pounding preacher who spoke with an intense zeal and with deep conviction.

Knox preached his first sermon in the Parish Church of St Andrew’s. In his sermon, he spared no effort to prove that the Pope was the Man of Sin, the Antichrist, the Beast spoken of in the book of Revelation. He struck at the root of the corruption in Rome. Many were convinced and converted after they heard him.

The Roman Catholic Church sought to destroy John Knox. The Lord allowed Knox to be taken captive for a while by the French navy under the direction of the queen dowager, Mary of Guise. During his captivity, the French spared no effort to force him to denounce the Christian Faith and embrace Catholicism. Knox mentioned in his *History of the Reformation in Scotland* how on one occasion a

“glorious painted lady”—an image of Mary—was presented to him to be kissed. “Trouble me not” said he to the bearer; “such an idol is accursed, and therefore I will not touch it.” “Thou shalt handle it” said several Frenchmen, at the same time thrusting it violently to his face and putting it between his hands. Knox then took the idol and, spying his opportunity, cast it into the river, at the same time crying, “Let her save herself; she is light enough; let her learn to swim.” After this ... no Scotsman was urged with that idolatry.<sup>47</sup>

Of the captivity, Miller wrote,

The Lord had no doubt important lessons to teach His beloved servant and his associates by their rigorous confinement. To escape the persecution ..., he was obliged to conceal himself, and to remove from place to place, to provide for his safety.... He was detained nineteen months a galley-slave in French waters. Not one of his associates suffered death!<sup>48</sup>

This surely must be due to God’s providential protection of His servant.

Knox after his release went to England and then to France where



he was warmly welcomed by Calvin. The two were contemporaries and were very similar in their doctrinal persuasions. A deep friendship soon developed between the two even though they were quite different from each other in their character. Miller said, "Knox was a rough, unbending, impassioned, impetuous man, but full of humour. Calvin was calm, severe, often irritable, but never impassioned; rising in pure intellect above all his compeers."<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, both were knitted in their work towards a common goal—the defence of the Christian Faith through the preaching and teaching of the unadulterated Scriptures to the glory of God. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." (Ps 133:1).

Meanwhile, the Lord prepared the hearts of certain nobles in Scotland to receive the gospel. In view of this, Knox returned to Scotland to minister to these people. Knox explained through Scripture the fallacies of the Roman Catholic Church and encouraged them to separate themselves from her. The nobles were thoroughly persuaded by the truth and became Protestants. Among them were Lord Lorne, Lord Erskine, Lord James Stewart, the Earl of Mariscall, the Earl of Glencairn, John Erskine of Dun and William Maitland of Lithington. Miller commented that "These were diligent in attending the sermons of Knox, and helping him in his work. With such a body-guard the Reformer became free and indefatigable in preaching, not only in the capital, but in the provinces."<sup>50</sup> The Lord thus raised these important men from high places because he foresaw that Knox would need all the help he could get in the impending storm ahead. Owing to fresh persecution, Knox had to withdraw to Geneva for the time being.

Knox's brief visit to his homeland sparked off a rapid progress in the Reformation. People from all classes began to assemble together for worship, for the reading of the Word and for prayer. The nobles then drafted the "First Covenant". In this covenant they promised before "the majesty of God and His congregation, to apply their whole power, substance, and their whole lives, to maintain, set forward, and establish the most blessed Word of God and His congregation."<sup>51</sup>

The Roman Catholic priests retaliated by putting many Protestants to death. But martyrdom only increased the number of Protestants. The people were leaving the Catholic Church in droves, and openly uniting with the Reformers. The queen dowager, a staunch Roman Catholic, was prevented from executing anything drastic by the nobles.

In this opportune period of time, Knox wasted no time in preaching against the idolatry of the mass and the worship of images. As a result, many saw the light and were converted and destroyed their idolatrous statues and images. The queen became very angry and vowed to exterminate all the Reformers. She raised an army of considerable size for this purpose. By the providence of God, a massacre was prevented when the queen dowager suddenly died. This was a turning point in the Scottish Reformation for it paved the way for the establishment of the Reformation without hindrance. Scotland, through the powerful preaching of Knox was ready to cast off the bondage of Rome, and rid its hold over the country.

The providence of God was evident in the Scottish Reformation through John Knox. This can be seen in the divine protection of Knox during his captivity, in the raising of the nobles to assist in the Reformation and in the timely death of the queen dowager. The Scottish Reformation reiterates what Daniel had said, “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding” (Dan 2:20-21).

## **Conclusion**

All history is God’s history. The God of Christianity is the God of history. He is all-knowing, all-seeing and all-wise. The Westminster Confession of Faith states,

God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his wisdom, power, justice, goodness and mercy.<sup>52</sup>

God is sovereign and He is in control. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation is an excellent example of God’s sovereign providence over the affairs of mankind. Nothing happens by chance. God “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” (Eph 1:11).

We have discussed how the Lord had providentially guided and guarded the Reformers, namely, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and Knox. The prophet Jeremiah was told by the Lord, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified

thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.” (Jer 1:5). Surely, the Reformers were prophets in their own right. They were specially chosen by God to bring the world back to biblical Christianity in the midst of dark superstition and crass idolatry in the Roman Catholic Church. In each case, the Lord required only one man, empowered by His Spirit, to go against the might of the Roman Catholic Church with all its pomp, wealth and glory. This should humble us and cause us to view in awe the power of the almighty God.

There are many things we can learn from the Protestant Reformation. I would just like to mention one pertinent lesson: the necessity to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3). The Reformation did not and should not end in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Reformation must remain a movement. It must continue today because we are living in a world that is full of unbelief and where apostasy is rampant in many Christian churches. The good fight of faith must continue until Jesus returns.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary*, sv “Reformation”.

<sup>2</sup> Earle E Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries*, rev ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 227.

<sup>3</sup> *Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary*, sv “Protestant”.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, sv “Providence”.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), VI:781.

<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, sv “Reformation”.

<sup>7</sup> Philip McNair, “Seeds of Revival,” in *The History of Christianity*, ed Tim Dowley (Herts: Lion, 1977), 346.

<sup>8</sup> S M Houghton, *Sketches from Church History* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980), 78.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

<sup>10</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VI:559.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 625.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 781.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 105.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Miller, *Miller's Church History from First to Twentieth Century*

(London: Pickering and Inglis, nd), 612.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 615.

<sup>17</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VII:113.

<sup>18</sup> Miller, *Miller's Church History from First to Twentieth Century*, 620.

<sup>19</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VII:119.

<sup>20</sup> Miller, *Miller's Church History from First to Twentieth Century*, 627.

<sup>21</sup> Houghton, *Sketches from Church History*, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VI:768.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, VII: 158.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, VII:294.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, VII:229.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, VII:304-5.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, VII:308.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, VII:309.

<sup>29</sup> J H Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 258.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>31</sup> D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, 259.

<sup>32</sup> Miller, *Miller's Church History from First to Twentieth Century*, 756.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 759.

<sup>34</sup> Miller, *Miller's Church History from First to Twentieth Century*, 765.

<sup>35</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VIII:296-7.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, VIII:310.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, VIII:316.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, VIII:318.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, VIII:329.

<sup>40</sup> Miller, *Miller's Church History from First to Twentieth Century*, 914.

<sup>41</sup> Denis R Janz, ed, *A Reformation Reader* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999), 209.

<sup>42</sup> B K Kuiper, *The Church in History* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 193.

<sup>43</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, VIII:280.

<sup>44</sup> Miller, *Miller's Church History from First to Twentieth Century*, 1001.

<sup>45</sup> Kuiper, *The Church in History*, 217.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Houghton, *Sketches from Church History*, 125-6.



*Pilgrims at Lutherhaus, Wittenberg*

<sup>48</sup> Miller, *Miller's Church History from First to Twentieth Century*, 1002-3.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 1003.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 1004.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 1004-5.

<sup>52</sup> A A Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1869), 91.

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# **DEAN BURGON AND THE TRADITIONAL TEXT**

Joseph Poon

The aim of this article is to provide an overview of Dean John William Burgon's defence of the Traditional Text and critique of Westcott and Hort's Revised Text. In so doing, this article seeks to provide concrete arguments used by Burgon to refute allegations raised against the reliability of the Traditional Text. At the same time, it will present Burgon's critical review of the Aleph (Codex Sinaiticus) and B (Codex Vaticanus) manuscripts.

It is important to note that the Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph) and Codex Vaticanus (B) were the two major manuscripts used by Westcott and Hort to produce their revised New Testament Greek Text in 1881. Almost all modern English Bible versions are based upon Greek texts which are virtually the same as this 1881 Revised Text of Westcott and Hort. Pickering says, "The two most popular manual editions of the text today, Nestle-Aland and U.B.S. (United Bible Societies) really vary little from the W-H (Westcott-Hort) text."<sup>1</sup>

Since the modern editions of the Greek text are used in most Bible seminaries, and are the texts that underlie the modern versions read by so many today, it is crucial that Christians have a clear understanding of the quality of these texts. Dean Burgon proved how corrupt the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus were, and in so doing proved the unreliability of Westcott and Hort's new Greek Text and their Revised Version of the English Bible. Burgon argued for the authenticity of the Traditional Text and the reliability of the King James Bible which was based on the Traditional Text.

## **The Need to Defend the Traditional Text**

Burgon's concern was that "every one ... whether an expert or a mere beginner, seemed to consider himself competent to pass sentence" on what is or is not God's Word.<sup>2</sup> What was supposedly "God's Word" as claimed by textual critics was in a constant flux as evidenced by

Tischendorf's 3572 contradictory and ever-changing "conclusions" from 1859 to 1872.<sup>3</sup> And what were hailed as "principles of sound criticism" (eg by Hort) were devoid of axiomatic proof for universal acceptance. To Burgon, speculation had no place in answering questions relating to God's inspired Word.<sup>4</sup> What Burgon saw in the work of the textual critics of his day was at best "subtle divination" because of their baseless assumptions of being able to "recognize" a true reading.<sup>5</sup> What was truly troubling to Burgon was that this new school of textual criticism was gaining popularity and acceptance.

Hence, Burgon set forth to prove that the modern critics' "corrections" were really corruptions of the authentic text, and established the fact that the Traditional Text was indeed the Standard Text and vastly superior to Westcott and Hort's Revised Text.

### **Burgon's Defence of the Traditional Text**

#### **Antiquity and Predominance**

One of the bold allegations against the Traditional Text is that it was absent until after the fifth or sixth century. But Burgon proved that this is absolutely untrue. He proved this statistically by a systematic examination of quotations found in the writings of the early church fathers who died before AD 400. In addition, he diligently tabulated proof that the early fathers favoured the Traditional Text and Textus Receptus.<sup>6</sup> Hence, not only did the Textus Receptus readings exist before 400 AD, they were the favoured and predominant readings.

In the same vein, Burgon diligently proved the antiquity of the Traditional Text by citing the witness of the early Syriac versions and Western Text. Substantiated by data, Burgon examined and confirmed that the Traditional Text was already in predominant use by the fifth century. This is because the Peshitto version, which was strongly established in the fifth century, is mainly in agreement with the Traditional Text.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, as Burgon traced the possible intentional corruptions made by "interlopers and usurpers" in the earliest Church, he also traced how these errors would have been rejected along the way. The Text of the New Testament would have been gradually purified from the fourth to the eighth century. So, since the Latin texts also did show the Traditional Text forms in its uncorrupted versions, it is a confirmation of the Traditional Text's antiquity.



But Burgon was careful to point out that purity is more important than antiquity. He astutely pointed out that “antiquity alone affords no security that the manuscript in our hand is not infected with the corruption which sprang up largely in the first and second centuries.”<sup>8</sup> The point of defence Burgon made here is that although critics claimed that the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus are of greater antiquity than the Traditional Text (and this has been proven not to be the case), it is the purity on top of its antiquity that makes the Traditional Text far superior.

#### Unbroken Succession

Moreover, Burgon pointed out that while corruption did occur in the earliest times, the Traditional Text was handed down continuously and purely. This is attested by its predominant use by the majority of the early church fathers without break or interval. As a result, this pure text established itself as God’s Word through the successive reception as such by these church fathers.<sup>9</sup>

Hort attempted to overthrow the antiquity of the Traditional Text by claiming that a recension or revision took place at Antioch in the middle of the fourth century. But the proven reception and uninterrupted usage of the Traditional Text naturally demolished Hort’s claims of a recension. Burgon also rightly dismissed Hort’s recension theory by arguing that “the utter absence of one particle of evidence, traditional or otherwise, that it ever did take place, must be laid to be fatal to the hypothesis that it did. It is simply incredible that an incident of such magnitude and interest would leave no trace of itself in history.”<sup>10</sup> Hort’s claim that “the Syrian Text (ie Textus Receptus) must *in fact* be the result of a recension” was met with a witty retort by Burgon who said Hort’s “must in fact” should really read “may in fiction”. Burgon not only debunked the recension theory but he also firmly established the Traditional Text’s direct and successive linkage back to the Originals.

#### Variety of Evidence

Burgon submitted evidence of overwhelming support for the Textus Receptus. He cited the combined testimony of the Uncials and the whole body of the Cursives. These are found over a span of 1000 years in at least more than a dozen countries, and yet share uniquely similar characteristics. These facts alone attest to the “irrefragable evidence” that they represent a common identity. The Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, on the other hand, cannot boast any such characteristics.

Instead they possess only an abundance of errors.

In short, Burgon built his case for the Traditional Text to be most trustworthy as attested by both fact and logic. He rightly reasoned that the Traditional Text certainly exhibits authenticity because of the variety of independent witnesses that testify in its favour, and they come from different countries speaking different languages.<sup>11</sup>

#### Overwhelming Support by Numbers

Burgon dismissed the critic's argument that "witnesses ought to be weighed and not counted" as mere excuse to cover up the colossal disagreements among their witnesses.<sup>12</sup> Here, he pointed out that the great bulk of witnesses demonstrate unflinching testimony in agreement with the Traditional Text readings. Because of the prevalent use of the Holy Scriptures in the church, copies of them abounded everywhere. And though many copies were destroyed by age, war, accident, etc, 63 Uncials, 737 Cursives, and 414 Lectionaries containing the Gospels alone are known to have survived. In addition, there was the multitude of ecclesiastical writers and their quotations. All these favour the Traditional Text readings, thus constituting the majority and outnumbering all other texts.<sup>13</sup> Hence, on top of antiquity, there is immense consistent agreement of witnesses for the Traditional Text. Burgon soundly argued that since the Author of Scripture has bountifully furnished His Church with more than 2,300 copies of the Gospels in the Traditional Text, there is no credible reason why the Church should reject these traditional apographs in favour of the contradictory and error-filled manuscripts of Westcott and Hort, namely the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

But over and above the abundance of facts and logic based upon overwhelming statistical evidence that supports the Traditional Text, there stands a crucial factor in determining the authentic text—that of faith and doctrine. Ultimately, as Burgon succinctly pointed out, "the course of doctrine pursued in the history of the Universal Church is immeasurably in their favor."<sup>14</sup> Miller stated it this way, "The Great Giver of the Inspired Word is also the Preserver of it in the witness and keeping of the Holy Writ."<sup>15</sup>

## Burgon's Critique of Westcott and Hort's Revised Greek Text

### Antiquity Alone Insufficient

Burgon accurately argued, "a reading is to be adopted not because it is old, but because it is best attested, and therefore the oldest."<sup>16</sup> And he carefully clarified that the verdict of Antiquity cannot be based simply on one single authority but to a "body of ancient authorities". This is regardless of how old that document may be. He rightly affirmed that if the components in any body of ancient authority are consistently corrupt, then this body is unworthy to be accepted. And he provided a list of such unworthy manuscripts which included the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus.<sup>17</sup> These codices which Westcott and Hort used chiefly for their Revised Greek Text exhibit a plethora of disagreements between themselves and their readings differ significantly from the Traditional Text in many places. Hence claiming antiquity is useless, given that they have been proven over and over again to be bad witnesses.<sup>18</sup>

### Riddled With Corruptions

Both the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus were shown by Burgon to be corrupt and hence untrustworthy. Burgon showed how the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus omitted words, clauses and sentences which the early Church Fathers had received as authentic and authoritative words, clauses and sentences as found in the Traditional Text.<sup>19</sup> And yet, modern critics would adopt these errors and call them "various readings" instead of "corrupt readings".<sup>20</sup> Tischendorf, Tregelles, Alford and others for instance dismissed the last 12 verses of St. Mark's Gospel as spurious. However, Burgon proved through internal as well as external evidences that Mark 16:9-20 is Scripture.<sup>21</sup> He showed how all extant manuscripts contained Mark's last 12 verses, and that it was only the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus that did not contain them.<sup>22</sup> Not only such omissions, there are other corruptions in the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus which include many transpositional errors involving the intentional and arbitrary inversion of word orders.<sup>23</sup> Yet, such tampering of sacred Scripture is passed off as lawful in the name of "critical ingenuity" of style and elegance.

### Additions and Substitutions

There were also unauthorised additions and substitutions in the corrupt manuscripts. This kind of corruption occurred when God's

Words were substituted by man's words or phrases. Some may be trivial while others serious, but their cumulative force is significant.<sup>24</sup> Other general additions or substitutions were pointed out by Burgon. In this kind of corruption, explanatory words; comments; or interpretations, were allowed to surreptitiously insinuate themselves into the text. These "various readings" and the unauthorised substitution of words are seen to be especially frequent in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. There were also intentional and premeditated corruptions introduced by heretics who were bent on promoting their own false teachings. Such men already sought to do this during and immediately after the Apostolic Age. The Docetists and Gnostics were examples.<sup>25</sup> Burgon exposed the many blatant attempts by these heretics to distort the Scriptures in order to corrupt the text. He firmly asserted that these do violence to the true text of Scripture and should be rejected instead of treasured as alternative readings

#### Based on False Theories

Burgon highlighted the fallacy of "shorter and more difficult reading". He plainly pointed out that where sheer clerical errors have occurred, the readings are not difficult but simply wrong, if not impossible. For example, Luke 19:37 in Codex Vaticanus is a grammatical impossibility.<sup>26</sup> Yet Westcott and Hort were enthralled by the "possibilities" such "readings" could offer. Despite Hort's admission of such possible blunders, he pleaded for readers to consider these errors as "readings" which possess interesting antithetical possibilities.<sup>27</sup> So, as Burgon rightly pointed out, it is inexplicable that Hort found such errors "attractive".

Arguing on the basis of the abundance of evidence, Burgon rightly asserted that the burden lies with modern critics to disprove his arguments. He rightly dismissed Westcott and Hort's rank speculative approach and called their theories as products of "cloudland".

#### Conclusion

In defending the Traditional Text's trustworthiness and successive linkage to the autographs, Burgon provided sound and ample proof. He not only meticulously refuted attacks against its lack of antiquity but also proved its purity. He successfully debunked the recension theory and established the Traditional Text's uninterrupted transmission in the apographs. This fact is further attested not only by the diverse variety of

evidence across geography and time, but also the abundant unfaltering majority of manuscripts that favour this text.

Burgon's critique of the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, and hence the Westcott and Hort Revised Greek Text, was based upon clear reasoning and backed by factual data. By demonstrating how scandalously corrupt the manuscripts promoted by Westcott and Hort were, Burgon demolished the claim that antiquity alone is the key test of trustworthiness. Burgon also astutely exposed how untenable the recension hypothesis is by pointing out that there is not a single shred of evidence for such a "recension" in history. With such overwhelming facts against the codices of Westcott and Hort, it can only be concluded that the respect they received from their promoters is nothing short of superstitious veneration. The Traditional Text on the other hand has emerged triumphant as the Text received by all the faithful because of its orthodoxy and history.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Wilber N Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text I*. Available at [http://www.revisedstandard.net/text/WNP/id\\_2.html#\\_ftnref24](http://www.revisedstandard.net/text/WNP/id_2.html#_ftnref24). Accessed: May 13, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Dean Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, Volume I (Collingswood: Dean Burgon Society, 1998), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 97, 101-102.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 128-130.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>10</sup> Dean Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (Collingswood: Dean Burgon Society Press, nd), 293-294.

<sup>11</sup> These witnesses are "(a) dotted over at least 10<sup>00</sup> years: (b) they evidently belong to so many divers countries, - Greece, Constantinople, Asia Minor, Palestine, Syria, Alexandria, and other parts of Africa, not to say Sicily, Southern Italy, Gaul, England, and Ireland . . ." Ibid, 50-51.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 206-207.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Miller, *A Guide to Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Collingswood: Dean Burgon Society, 1979), 119.

<sup>16</sup> Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 78. Codex Vaticanus for instance does not contain in the Gospels alone, 2<sup>37</sup> words, 4<sup>52</sup> clauses, 7<sup>48</sup> whole sentences which are found in the Traditional Text.

<sup>20</sup> Dean Burgon, *The Causes of Corruption of the Traditional Text*, Volume II (Collingswood: Dean Burgon Society, 1998), 128-156.

<sup>21</sup> Only the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus omit Mark 16:9-20, but every known Uncial and Cursive, every known Lectionary contain these verses. Their united and unequivocal testimony to these verses are clear from the prominent position in its sanctioned reading in its entirety at the Church's key festivals like Easter and Ascension. Dean Burgon, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (Collingswood: Dean Burgon Society, 2002), 191-212, 242.

<sup>22</sup> Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, 78.

<sup>23</sup> Burgon, *The Causes of Corruption of the Traditional Text*, 157-163.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 164-165.

<sup>25</sup> Burgon, *The Causes of Corruption of the Traditional Text*, 191-210.

<sup>26</sup> Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, 66.

<sup>27</sup> Burgon, *The Causes of Corruption of the Traditional Text*, 55.

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# THE GUIDANCE OF DIVINE GRACE IN THE LIFE OF THE SAINTS

D Breure

## Fifth Chapter of the Canons of Dordt

Article 4: Although the weakness of the flesh cannot prevail against the power of God, who confirms and preserves true believers in a state of grace, yet converts are not always so influenced and actuated by the Spirit of God, as not in some particular instances sinfully to deviate from the guidance of divine grace, so as to be seduced by, and comply with the lusts of the flesh; they must, therefore, be constant in watching and prayer that they be not led into temptation. When these are neglected, they are not only liable to be drawn into great and heinous sins by Satan, the world and the flesh, but sometimes by the righteous permission of God actually fall into these evils. This the lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints described in Holy Scripture demonstrates.

Article 5: By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their consciences, and sometimes lose the sense of God's favor for a time, until on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines upon them.

“But God is faithful, mercifully strengthening them in the grace once conferred on them and powerfully preserving them in it to the end.” Congregation, in the former sermon on Article 3 of Chapter 5, we have seen the above. There is perseverance of the saints. It very simply means this: If tonight you will confess, “Yes I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ Who stood there as Man, He is the One I should cling to and the gospel tells me that I may have Him”. If tonight you can say this, you will have eternal life. Whether you said this 10, 50 or 80 years ago, you will have eternal life. Guaranteed! “God will preserve the grace once given and I will inherit heaven.”

What can go wrong then? Nothing, right? What could go wrong? Well, everything! But how is that possible? Well...

## **My Salvation I Will Never Lose, Nothing Can Go Wrong Here**

But because of that, I want to live to the glory of God and I want to live close to Him. However, when it comes to that, a lot can go wrong causing God's Name to be dishonoured and which will cause my joy in God to be spoilt. That has everything to do with what is mentioned in Article 4 "the guidance of divine grace". You may also say "the guidance of the Holy Ghost", guiding the saints.

To make it clear, let me use throughout my sermon the following example. Dogs are walked outside using a leash which can extend to five or even ten metres. It is really not the intention for the dog to walk that far. It would be nice if the dog walks beside you. But if a dog does not want to do that, he can stretch the leash a lot, till you pull the leash taut. It could also be the case that the leash has reached its maximum and the dog can't walk any farther. In that case, the dog will realise this, look at his master and walk back to him.

This, in many ways, also happens in the guidance of divine grace, the guidance of the Holy Ghost in the life of the saints. The Holy Ghost would like to guide you in such a way that you always walk close to Him. That gives the most joy and security and glory to God. But saints can also stretch the leash very far. Saints can wander away very far from God and fall into sin and this can sometimes go on for a very long time, till the Holy Ghost pulls the leash taut. You get a shock, you look around you and you realise, "I have wandered a long way from God. How different my life used to be. I made a mess of my life." You get a shock and you run back to God. However, in the meantime you have caused God's Name to be dishonoured. For a long time you have lost the joy in God. It was dark in your heart and is it not so that you want to avoid that? I hope we are not just content with an entrance ticket to heaven. You should not want God's Name to be dishonoured, even if you have this entrance ticket. You do not wish that because of misconduct of the saints some people may look down on God and His church—"If this is the kind of people that call themselves Christians, I will not have anything to do with that church."

How can we avoid that? How can we avoid dishonouring God's Name and how can we prevent this deep joy in God from fading away?



## **Watch and Pray**

The Bible is very clear about this: watch and pray. Watch and be alert about anything that you encounter in life. This is so important because Satan prefers to come in disguise. This is logical of course. An enemy will not come running in the field kilometres away shouting to you, “Hello, here is the enemy.” Satan knows how to disguise himself. He once did this as a snake with Eve. He once did it through the mouth of Peter, Jesus Christ’s own disciple. It looked so innocent. It seemed not to cause any harm, people advised you to do that. Even worse, a Peter, a child of God, convinces you that you can do it. There is no danger. And that deed also seemed so lucrative: some income, some pleasure for yourself. Watch! Check with the Scripture in hand whether what you are doing is right.

But Satan can also suddenly take you by surprise. You are in a dilemma. Something happens that has an enormous impact on your lust, your longings. Watch! Be very sceptical. Analyse what could be the result also on the long run, in your spiritual life, not only for yourself but also for your family. Watch! Be on the alert for anything that crosses your path daily. If you look into the world, is Satan looking with you? But also be watchful from within yourself. Watch for sinful thoughts that seem to sprout from within you. Because, even if you cannot see Satan and you sit quietly in your room, everything can still go wrong. Something that crosses your mind. Lusts! Watch especially yourself and the source of sins that is in your heart.

Watch and pray. Pray to God that He will make you strong because we are so weak that not for a moment God could leave us alone. If you really believe that, and you have concluded from reading the Scripture and your own experience that any moment you can fall into sin, then you want to pray, “Lord, keep me safe. Lord, please let me not fall victim to Satan’s tricks and temptation. Lord, keep me safe from my own sinful thoughts and feelings.” If you realise that, you would realise how much danger lurks out there in the world; you would never leave your home before you have prayed. So much can go wrong in a day. “Why would I not curse? Why would I not look at other women? Why would I not be able to steal?” If you believe that, you will never leave your home until you have prayed. And if you believe that, you end the day with giving thanks to God for having kept you from committing those sins. Of course, it does not mean you have not sinned at all. There were again so many

thoughts but “Lord, You have kept me from far more sins.” Watch and pray.

But even if I did not experience all these things, there is still much more that can go wrong. How can it still be possible for you to fall into sin? That happens when watching in prayer becomes sloppy because you are too busy. That is the excuse that we mostly come up with. Still, this is only a minor cause. There is a far deeper cause why watching and praying are lost, namely,

### **Self-Esteem**

How was it possible that Peter denied his Rabbi three times? Because Peter thought, “I will go with You to jail, I will never deny You. There is a lot more I will do for You.” Self-esteem. Peter thought too highly of himself.

How could David have committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah? He had not gone with his army to war. Did he think his army could handle this without him? There was no need for him to be there. My army can do that by themselves.

Self-esteem is the final death blow for a watchful life in prayer. Examine yourself. And the worse is that for a long time all seem well.... You have done well in church, you have worked hard in the many ministries. You are really proud of yourself. Self-esteem! You start to think, “Well, I am like that, I have that privilege, I am that good.... And one step further is the danger that lurks in our church. We find that everything in our church is going well. Good numbers, good pastors, you are really proud of your church. Your prayer for your church is getting less and less because everything is fine anyway. Watch and pray! Who knows Satan is waiting for an opportunity to bring havoc and division in our church over what seems like a small matter. Watch and pray. If you do not do that and your self-esteem keeps you away from prayer, you will fall. Fall into sin.

### **To Fall into Sin**

If this happens, the leash stretches. You wander away from God and the Lord Jesus Christ. You are stretching the leash of guidance of divine grace further and further and you fall into sin. You will say, “Yes, but we always sin.” You are right. Everything is spoilt by sin. Everything is corrupt. Even if we try to live to the glory of God, it is

not pure. Sin is like the beating of our heart. A heartbeat on a monitor, however, sometimes shows peaks. Then your heart is a little bit more active. Our sinfulness is like a heart that beats. It always beats, but then suddenly there is such a peak. You fall into sin, a decision that you make, something you have done. A peak in something you have said, a sneer, abusive language, a sudden anger. Or ... you kept quiet when you ought to speak up; you deny, you have no guts to speak. You fall....

Or ... it could be something you thought, a sudden urge, a lust, a plan. You fall.... It can sometimes take you by surprise, sometimes it happens after a lot of deliberation with Satan, who tries to defuse your opposition and then, you fall for it. Have you fallen? Who has never fallen? The leash has been stretched to the maximum. The guidance of divine grace has been stretched to the limit and I wandered away from God. Is that bad? Do you really have to worry about that? Well, what we think is certainly not decisive. We should listen to what God has to say about this. That is decisive! And if you listen, you could take Article 5 and read, "By such enormous sins (even if it was in the spur of the moment), however, they very highly offend God...".

That is very clear and speaks very much for itself—to very highly offend God. God indeed can be very highly offended by His children. Do you know why? Because of what God has done for them. God has given them His grace—His Son as the Mediator and Sacrifice for their sins. He gave His Son as food and drink for eternal life. He gave them faith to embrace the Son of God and to fall into His arms. He gave them so much that it must be very sad that *His children* wander away and fall into sin. Example: if the child of your neighbour is rude to you, you will probably tell him off and not give it another thought. But if your own child is rude to you, to his or her mother, isn't that much worse?

"They very highly offend God and incur a deadly guilt." That means that you deserve it, that everything you have is taken away from you. It's like you have given a small child a precious gift, which the child does not seem to appreciate as it cannot look after it. What do you do? You take it away and you tell the child he will get it back maybe later when he has grown up. If God gives you His grace, and you stretch the leash and you fall into sin, don't you tell God that you cannot handle it? You show so clearly that you do not appreciate it and you are really asking God to take it away from you. Anyway you do not appreciate it and you don't know how to handle it.

## **Deadly Guilt**

If people tell you this, you probably will tell them off. “It’s not that bad. Offend God, deadly guilt? Come on, there must be people who are far worse than me.” This is how you deal with the situation, isn’t it? However, God will not let you get away with that so easily. God will show that He cannot overlook your sins because you have grieved the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost who lives in the saints and works in all rooms of your life, you have grieved Him—the Holy Ghost! Think of your mother. If you have grieved your mother, she will keep quiet and she will not say much anymore. You have grieved her.

The Holy Ghost will also be quiet and will not work in you anymore. He is withholding His influence and He keeps quiet. If that is the case, three things happen:

Your prayer life is disrupted. The chord of your prayer life unravels. It is getting less, it is getting less fervent, less intense and in the long run you sometimes skip praying. You tell yourself that “tonight I will pray longer.” Your prayer life suffers or do you deny that? That’s what we prefer to do. “Come on, my prayer life is OK” You don’t want to admit it to your husband, your wife or to the visiting Elder. The Elder asks you, “Do you still pray?”, You reply, “Yes”. The Elder asks you, “In your prayer, do you meet the Lord Jesus Christ?” And you have to admit that it is less easy to reply with a simple, “Yes”. Yes indeed, your prayer life has suffered somewhat. It has become hollow and empty. No wonder, because your conscience is injured. Something that is injured, hurts. Your conscience is eating you, you start to be affected by it. “Did I say that, did I do all these things, did I keep my mouth shut when I ought to speak up?”

Your conscience can make life for you pretty difficult. But, after some time, it’s getting less and you are inclined to say that fortunately your conscience is not bothering you that much anymore and fortunately you sleep better too. But is that so fortunate? Does this not mean that you have entered into a spiritual coma? Is that the reason why your conscience does not bother you anymore? The feeling of grace can disappear for some time. No, not the grace itself, but the feeling. The experience of grace: God’s nearness, the love of the Lord Jesus Christ and of His communion, and of your love for Him. That is all gone and you in fact start to doubt whether you are a child of God. You feel very uneasy about this but after some time you even get used to that. “Yes, I am not

sure whether I am a child of God, so be it. I hope that before I die, I will become one.” You can accept this kind of thinking that you are no longer sure of your salvation.

Where does this end? That we wander away, farther and farther. Think of that leash. We are in deep sleep. Don’t think now about a dog but about a sheep. That sheep that has wandered away from his shepherd. Think about all the animals that are around him. Where does this end up? A sleeping saint, whilst the devil roams about as a roaring lion, looking who he can devour. Where does this end? If it were not for Him who lives up there and prays. If it were not for Him who sits next to His Father and says, “Father, keep them safe in Your name. Father, I have purchased, I have paid and nobody shall take them out of My hand.” Oh, if that were not the case, that He who purchased me lives to pray for me and to intercede with the Father....

What happens then? He, through the Holy Ghost will pull the leash taut. Maybe through the help of a sermon (tonight may be), through a talk you have heard, or maybe through the visit of the Elder.

“You are that man”, or “Do you still remember how close you lived with the Lord not so long ago?”, or “God is all knowing and He knows your heart, what you have done, what you have lusted after, what you have said”, or “Be honest, do you really know what is humility?”, “Did you lately long to be at the Lord’s table and do you long to be with the Lord for ever?” And the Holy Ghost pulls the leash taut and tonight you get a shock. “Where am I? So far from God! I have become so lukewarm.” Did you never have this experience? You know, *that* is Grace. Grace that makes you sit up and make you realise, “I have wandered far away from God”. That is grace that you should praise. The grace that stays.

### **Praise about God’s Grace**

If the leash is pulled taut and you look around you in shock and you do not see the Lord Jesus Christ anymore, you run back to the Lord, thirsting for Him and His nearness and grace. This is what Article 5 says, “that they return into the right way of serious repentance”.

No, don’t try to find excuses. There should be only sadness, longing. I have received so much and I have all but thrown it away. God has been so good to me and I have been so terribly bad for Him. He is so merciful and I am so ungrateful. Returning to God, “Oh, that I may see You again

and oh, that You will show Your face to me again. Take away my sin and the guilt. Wash me in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the sacrifice of Your son, that can save all.”

“I will go to My Father and ...”. At one time in your life this happened for the first time right? Or don't you know. Must this first time still come, because you are still asleep? Not only are you asleep, but you are also unleashed and very far from God. You do not watch, you do not pray and you have no fear for eternity. You lie there, a victim for the king of darkness who can attack any moment. Wake up! If only you knew how dangerous it is for you. And you should know how lovingly the Lord Jesus Christ is calling you so that you will finally wake up for the first time and with a broken heart run to the Father.

If there was for you already a first time, then were there many more times you ran back? Again and again, you had to return with the difference, that every time you ran back you are more and more ashamed of yourself because you have received so many blessings. Returning to God deepens more every time. God accepts His children back. You know about the prodigal son. When he was still far away, the father had already seen him. When the son did not even see his father, the father had already seen his son coming from afar. Welcome back! Every time again. Even if it is the second, the twentieth, or two hundredth time. Welcome home to the Father's heart.

If then God's face shines on you, well you know how that feels. You are so touched, it makes you so joyous, it makes you so grateful that you love Him and that He welcomes you back. Then two wonders happen: The first wonder is that you praise the grace given to you, “Oh God, thank you for bringing me to my senses, that your Holy Ghost has stirred me, otherwise I would have wandered even farther. Otherwise I would still be asleep, I would have never returned. Oh wonder, that You pulled me back and woke me up.” That is the first wonder.

The second wonder is, “Lord, thank you that you wanted me back, even if it was the two hundredth or two thousandth time. That again I am welcomed and that You did not say that before coming back, I would first have to go through a probation period. I was unconditionally welcomed.” Have you experienced that? Your spiritual life is one big wonder. He once purchased me on the cross, because He once took me as a possession when He hung on the cross bleeding, because He received me from His Father who from before the beginning of the world had elected me. Is this

not beautiful? Is this not rich?

Or do you say that it is a little bit of a struggle to see it this way. Don't forget then that Satan is very clever and we are blind and foolish. First, Satan tries to convince us to sin. He will whisper, "You can do that, there is no harm in it, don't take it too seriously." And if you have finally succumbed, he will also tell you, "It's OK, don't think about it." But if the Holy Ghost wakes you up and the leash is pulled taut, the devil says, "Look what you have done to your family, to your marriage, look what a bad example you have been. Do you realise how you have sinned against God? This is so serious, there is no way back for you, at least not now. You have done a lot of harm..."

We are so sensitive to this kind of reasoning that we stay away from God. You stop at a far distance from God and you wait. Can I come back like this? But, you know from the former sermon on Article 3, "God is faithful, mercifully strengthening them in the grace once conferred on them and powerfully preserving them in it to the end." God did not elect you because of something in you. God also would never renounce you because of something in you. God did not elect you because He saw something in you. God will also never end because of something He sees in you. There is nothing you can do that will disappoint God. Thank God! It all was because of His own good pleasure. That being the case, I will never be renounced. I am and will always be welcomed. God is faithful.

But, the devil will not let you go so easily. He will ask you, "Has God indeed elected you? You may think so but is that really true? I think that is not the case. If God had really elected you, you would never have done these things and certainly not for the second time. In my opinion, God has never elected you." The people who struggle with these thoughts suffer a lot. Kohlbrugge (an old church father) once said, "When these thoughts crossed my mind and when I totally lost sight how my spiritual life was, whether I was ever elected or that I had ever come to Jesus, I just said, 'Whether or not I have ever believed I don't know but today, let me then come to the Lord Jesus Christ for the first time in my life'."

Don't fret any longer whether in the past your faith was real. Just say, "Lord, if my faith was not real in the past, then today, I will truly believe for the first time in my life." And do ponder about your baptism. If sometimes, out of weakness, we fall into sin, don't stay in sin. Also, never doubt God's grace because baptism is the seal and witness that we have God's eternal grace." Every time we sin and repent, we can return.

We are welcome with Him.

Congregation, this is life's grace. This you must know and this must be the base (thread) in your life. Sometimes the thread unravels, but this is life's grace. And you will pray to God more faithfully and you intend now to really watch and pray until your recklessness gets the better of you and you fall again, until the Lord pulls the leash taut and you return to Him again. There is no end to this. This will go on till the Holy Ghost pulls the leash taut and at the same time rids me of my sinful nature and brings me to the Father's house with the many mansions to praise Him forever. Amen.



*The Reformed Church at Waarder, the Netherlands*

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*The Rev D Breure is the pastor of The Reformed Church at the village of Waarder (<http://www.hervormdwaarder.nl>). The above sermon was preached on April 6, 2014 at the Reformed Church of Waarder and translated by Gaby Buijs, a member of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, Singapore.*

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## THE CENTRE OF YOUR LIFE

Ezra Sae-Kwang Jang

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Ps 127:1)

Hello everyone. I am glad to meet all of you today. I thank God for the special opportunity to speak the Word of God here.

When I was asked to preach at the chapel hour, I was thinking and praying what message I can share with you. I started to think about my time of study at Far Eastern Bible College. It was so busy every day as you are busy now. So many things were going on like morning devotions, classes, quizzes, exams, papers, readings, daily duties, evangelism etc. I was a proctor too.

When I was studying here, there were so many concerns and questions in my heart too, such as: Am I able to finish my studies or not? Where should I go after my studies here? Where should I serve the LORD? Where do I get all the needs in my life?

Do you have the same questions that I had? All my concerns were about me.

Today, I am not going to ask you to study hard because I think you are already studying very hard. I am not going to ask you to believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour because I think you already believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour. I am sure you have a calling from God, that's why you are here to study. So, I am not going to ask you any of such questions today.

However, I would like to ask you a very basic and fundamental question today. The question is this: Who is the centre of your life? Is it you yourself or Christ?

So many people in this world believe that they can fulfill their dreams by their own effort. So they work very hard every day, morning and night. Can we through human effort fulfill our own dreams?

What does the Bible say? Firstly, “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it.” What does it mean? All human effort that does not rely on the blessing of God is useless. All our efforts are fruitless if God is not in them.

My family was living in America. My son loves the sand at the beach. He likes to touch the sand and build sandcastles. He always works hard to build the house on the sand. He does his best to build the house nicely as if he wants to live inside.

How long can the sandcastle last? When the waves come, the house that he has built disappears. All his energy, time, and effort come to nought. So he builds again. It disappears again.

Sometimes we fail to know on what kind of ground we are building our life. We think we can build a strong house. We think it will last forever. We think we know. We think we can do many things. It is just our thinking. Actually we cannot do anything without God’s blessings and grace. We have to remember that a house built without the blessing of the LORD is a house built upon sand. In everything, we must begin by seeking the blessing of the LORD.

What is your goal for this year? What is the purpose for studying here? What are you so busy about? What is your dream for your life? What is your plan? What kind of house do you want to build in your life?

Whatever your dream is, the LORD must build your house, not you. If the LORD builds your house, your house will be strong. It will not be shaken. It will not disappear. You will overcome no matter what challenges there are. We need to remember that the LORD has to lead us in every single step.

Brothers and sisters, the LORD has to build the house of your studies. He has to build the house of your ministry. He has to build the house of your church. He has to build the house of your family. He has to build the house of your school. He has to build the house of your future. He has to build the house of everything in your life. If the LORD does not build your house, your labour is in vain, meaningless, and useless. This is what the Bible says.

Who is building your house now? Is it just you yourself or is it Christ?

Let us remember one more thing. The Bible says, “Except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” What does it

mean? The Bible is not only talking about ‘building’, it also talks about ‘keeping’.

There was a watchman in every city. The role of a watchman is to watch the city. He is there to protect the city against enemies. The watchmen cannot sleep. However, can they really keep the city even though they watch the city for 24 hours? The Bible says that it is not enough. Their labour is in vain. No one can keep the city if the LORD does not help.

What are you trying to keep in your life? Do you think that you can keep the city of your life with your own power? Do you think that you can really keep the city of your studies, health, family, and ministry with your own strength? Do you think that you can really keep the city of everything with your own effort? It is impossible if the LORD is not in them. This is what the Bible says.

Psalms 127:1 is the confession of Solomon. Who is Solomon? God gave him special wisdom. There was none like him in history. He was the wisest man in the world. As Solomon was looking at his life, he realised that life was vanity and meaningless with his own effort. He realised that no one can build the house and keep the city without God’s blessing. The LORD has to help everything from the very beginning until the very end. Everything is by God’s grace.

We are like farmers. Farmers plough the field, plant the seeds, cut away weeds and apply fertilisers. But, they cannot make the crops grow. Who does it? God does. God sends rain and sunshine. God has to provide the needs. We have our parts to play in our lives, but God has to build and protect our life.

Let me ask you this morning. Who is the centre of your life? You yourself or Christ? If Christ is the centre of your life, you do not have to worry about anything. The LORD will build your life. The LORD will keep your life. The LORD will not pretend not to see the person who serves Christ as the centre of his life.

What would you like to do? How would you like to do it? Do you want to build your house with your own thinking and effort? If you are confident about it, you can try. But you will surely regret it. We have to remember that everything will be in vain with our own strength whether it is about studies, ministry, or health. Nothing belongs to us. The LORD has to build your future, dream, goal, plan, and everything. The LORD

has the special way to build and keep our life. The LORD has His own way to lead us.

I challenge you today. Let Christ be the centre of your life no matter what. Let Christ be your Master. Let Christ control your life every day and every moment. Let us not forget that our help comes from the LORD.

Let me conclude this message. I want you to remember two things this morning.

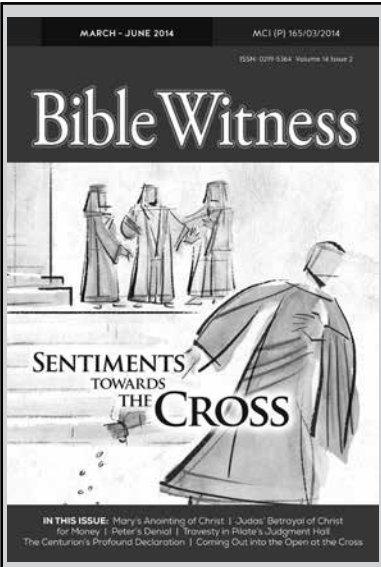
Who has to build your house? Who has to keep your city? The LORD must be the centre of your life.

Let us pray. Our Father, thank you for everything that you have given to us. Our life is yours. Our future is in your hand. Help us to remember all the time that Christ is the centre of our life. I pray that you may continue to build and keep the ministry of Far Eastern Bible College, faculty and students. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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*Dr Ezra Jang (BTh 2000) holds an MDiv from Pensacola Christian College and a ThD from California Graduate School of Theology. His sermon above was preached to FEBC students on February 10, 2014.*

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**Bible Witness** is a magazine for the nurture of individual spiritual life, a magazine for every Christian home, and a magazine for Bible study groups. Visit the Bible Witness website for discussion questions based on the articles in the magazine. You may print out the questions and use them to facilitate discussion in family worship, Bible study groups, etc. You may also use them for individual study.

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## College News

**Life Bible-Presbyterian Church (LBPC) filed a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lawsuit** against FEBC on 27 June 2013 (DC Suit 1956 of 2013/R). In this action, LBPC is claiming S\$250,000 as payments allegedly due as “equitable contribution” to maintenance costs incurred in relation to maintaining (for the period 4 March 1970 to 3 May 2008) the premises shared by LBPC and FEBC. The two-day trial in the State Court will commence on 24 July 2014. For background, please see “In the Interests of the Church” in *The Burning Bush* (January 2014): 50-54.

**FEBC opened again for another semester** with a day of prayer on Monday, 6 January 2014. The principal spoke from 2 Timothy 2:15, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” In order to train students for full-time Christian service, FEBC offers a full-orbed curriculum consisting of (1) Systematic Theology, (2) The Bible & Biblical Languages, (3) Church History, and (4) Pastoral Ministries. The courses last semester were taught by the **Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo**: Systematic Theology II (Biblical Anthropology), Life of Christ I, Greek Exegesis II; the **Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew**: Contemporary Theology IV, Hermeneutics, Homiletics, Hebrew Reading II; the **Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy**: Ezekiel, Pastoral Theology II, Elementary Hebrew II; the **Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo**: Bible Geography III, Hymn Leading II; the **Rev Stephen Khoo**: Church History I; the **Rev Tan Kian Sing**: Colossians & Philemon, **Mrs Ivy Tow**: Elementary Greek II; **Mrs Jemima Khoo**: Teaching Children, Pianoforte; **Miss Carol Lee**: Theological Research & Writing; **Mr Dennis Kabingue**: Greek Reading II; **Mrs Anne Lim**: Intensive English II; **Mrs Irene Lim**: Intermediate English II; and **Elder Han Soon Juan**: Advanced English II.

**Twelve new students from five countries** came to study at FEBC last semester: From **Indonesia**: Charyhon Shanta Rosa Sinaga, Deddy Crisno Manalu, Maritus, Mega Tuti Mawarniat Zega, Murniwati Mendrofafa; **Myanmar**: Van Bawi Hoe, Van Thawng Hup; **New Zealand**: Ahn Yewon; **Singapore**: Chan Siew Pang, Esther Leong; Joshua Yong,

and **Vietnam:** Huynh Ngoc Tan Phat. The five Indonesians were students at Calvary Batam Bible College under the Rev Kiantoro Lie. They are here to earn their degrees, to equip themselves for the Bible College work in Batam. Chan Siew Pang, a PhD (NUS), and member of Mt Gerizim BPC applied to be an off-campus, online student. Esther Leong from Tabernacle BPC studied full-time for a semester while waiting to enter the National University. Joshua Yong having completed a three-year stint as a missionary to Kenya (BCEA) began studies towards his ThM.

**FEBC had a total enrolment** of 498 students in the January-May 2014 semester: 92 day students (53 full-time and 39 part-time), 141 distance learning students, and 265 BTFE night class students. The residential students this semester come from 13 countries: Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

**Basic Theology for Everyone (BTFE)** night classes on Life of Christ I and Ezekiel I last semester were taught by the Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo and the Rev Prabhudas Koshy respectively. A total of 265 signed up for the classes.

**The Daily Vacation Bible College (DVBC)** last semester was held at the Resort Lautan Biru in Mersing, Malaysia, from May 5 to 8, 2014. (exam on May 10). A total of 76 signed up for the one-credit hour course on “Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology” taught by the Principal—the Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo.

**Clement Chew (MDiv 2013) taught two BMin courses**, (1) Theology of Worship and (2) Contemporary Christian Music, at the Bible College of East Africa (BCEA), Nairobi, Kenya from 19 to 30 May 2014. The BMin programme at BCEA is conducted by FEBC in cooperation with BCEA.

**FEBC has set up a channel in YouTube** (<http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCf2cO9IWk4vlSrY4b-QHvzg>). View the Golden Jubilee (1962-2012) historical video and other college videos therein.

**FEBC conducted her 1<sup>st</sup> Reformation Pilgrimage** from 14 to 24 May 2014. There were a total of 47 Christians from nine churches who participated in this pilgrimage led by Dr and Mrs Jeffrey Khoo. In a Reformation pilgrimage like this, Church History is studied live. Two credits are awarded to those who submit a research project after the trip. The pilgrims visited the famous historical sites of the 16<sup>th</sup>

Century Protestant Reformation in Germany (Wittenberg, Erfurt, Worms, Constance), France (Strasbourg), and Switzerland (Zurich, Geneva) and reviewed the life and work of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, William Farel, John Hus and others.



*Pilgrims at the Reformation Memorial in Worms*

**The 39<sup>th</sup> Graduation Service** was held on 11 May 2014 at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. The Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew, Academic Dean of FEBC, spoke on the topic, “Witnessing for Christ until He Comes” (Acts 1:8-11). We had a total of 26 graduands this round. **Certificate of Religious Knowledge (CertRK):** Chan May Ling, Leong Chee Meng, Michael Khoo, Sim Tse Fong, Yeak Choo Hui; **Certificate of Biblical Studies (CertBS):** Boi Yok Bin Robin, Chua Peng Hwa, Khoo Peng Keong, Lee Kim Lei, Lim Wee Chian Eric, Tan Eik Chor Christopher; **Diploma in Theology (DipTh):** Oh Ji Eun, Park Jung Il; **Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE):** Kiet Thaven, Kong Sing Soon; **Bachelor of Theology (BTh):** Ko Woong, Nguyen Van Hieu; **Master of Religious Education (MRE):** Daniel Kipngeno Yaban, Eio Tze Liang Samuel, John Kiprop Chemalan, Shadrack Kimutai Cheruiyot; **Master of Divinity (MDiv):** Ho Kee How, Koh Jian Wen Lynn, Koh Wee Yap Andrew, Philip Chittechathu Cherian; **Master of Theology (ThM):** Trinipilo Garsuta Lagapa.

**DEGREE GRADUATES 2014**



*Kiet Thaven  
(BRE)  
Cambodia*



*Kong Sing Soon  
(BRE)  
Sarawak*

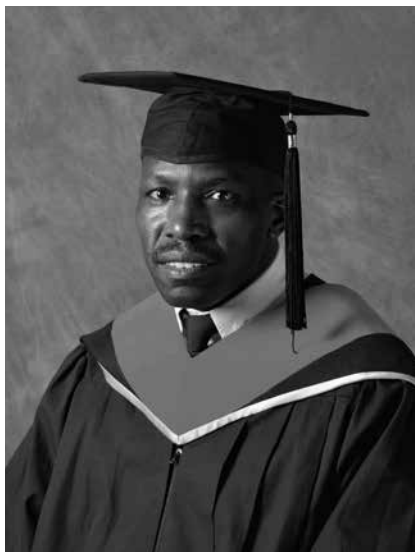


*Ko Woong  
(BTh)  
South Korea*



*Nguyen Van Hieu  
(BTh)  
Vietnam*

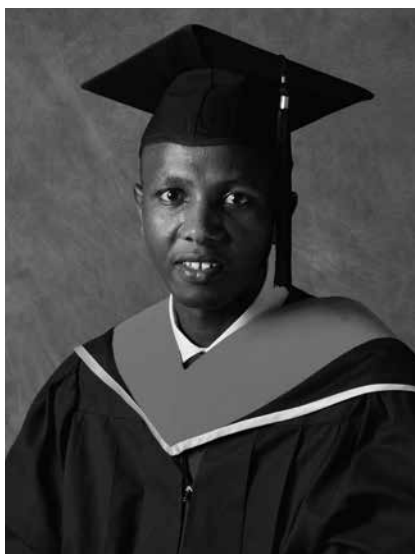




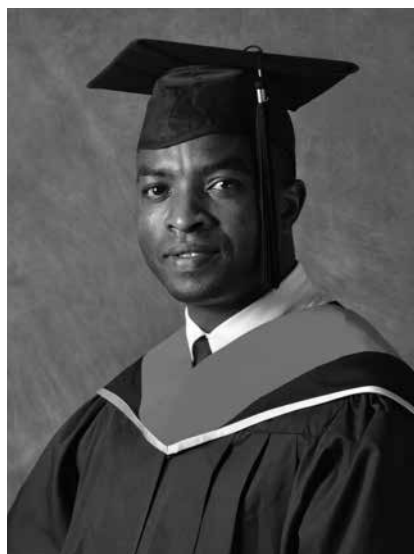
*Daniel Kipngeno Yaban  
(MRE)  
Kenya*



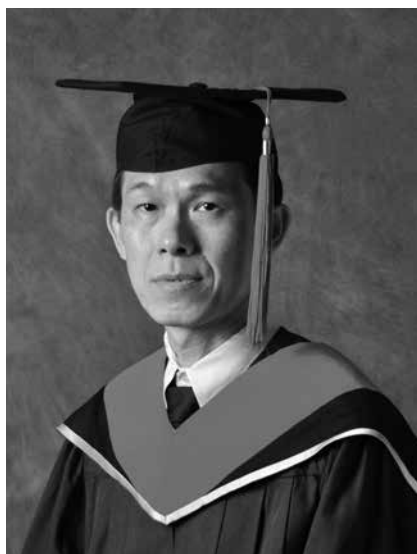
*Samuel Eio Tze Liang  
(MRE)  
Singapore*



*John Kiprop Chemalan  
(MRE)  
Kenya*



*Shadrack Kimutai Cheruiyot  
(MRE)  
Kenya*



*Ho Kee How  
(MDiv)  
Singapore*



*Lynn Koh Jianwen  
(MDiv)  
Singapore*



*Andrew Koh Wee Yap  
(MDiv)  
Singapore*



*Jose Trinipilo Lagapa  
(ThM)  
Philippines*

**Far Eastern Bible College  
Class of 2014**



**Daily Vacation Bible College  
Resort Lautan Biru, Mersing  
May 5-8, 2014**

