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THE BURNING BUSH

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WAS THE REFORMATION A MISTAKE?

Jeffrey Khoo

“The Reformation of the sixteenth century is, next to the introduction of Christianity, the greatest event in history”, so said Church historian Philip Schaff.¹ Yet 500 years later, Protestants are disavowing the Reformation—instead of seeing it as the greatest event in the history of the Church next to Pentecost, they see it as the greatest mistake.

The Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) of 1994 led the way. It undermined the 16th Century Reformation, calling the separation then a “sin” so as to forge a new Catholic-Protestant unity and cooperation for the 21st century.² Another betrayal came from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). On 31 October 1999 the LWF signed a “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” with the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) without having the Catholics recant the dogmas of the Council of Trent.³ By so doing, the Lutherans of the LWF effectively undermined the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Luther is rolling in his grave.

The RCC has not changed a single iota of its dogma since the Reformation.⁴ The RCC has yet to renounce its anti-Reformation Council of Trent (1545-1563).⁵ Trent pronounced 125 anathemas against Protestants. For instance, Canon XII on Justification states, “If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.”

The Council of Trent still stands and continues to define what the RCC believes. Pope John Paul II in 1995 said, “The dogmatic affirmations of the Council of Trent naturally preserve all their value.” He praised Trent as “a great event in the history of the church” and that the Council’s declarations continue to define the doctrinal convictions of the RCC.⁶ Lest there be any doubt, the incumbent Pope Francis affirms the Council of Trent. On the 450th anniversary of the Council, Pope Francis said that the Catholic Faith is “distinctly” and “better perceived” by the

Council of Trent. He went on to say that the RCC today actively “revives and reflects upon the most glorious Tridentine doctrine.”⁷ It is clear that the RCC of today is still the same RCC of yesterday. There is no change in essence or in dogma. If there is a change, it is only in tactic. Since they can no longer burn, they seduce.⁸

The ECT and LWF say it is sin to divide. There is no sin in Biblical division. Jesus Himself said, “*Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division*” (Luke 12:51) for “*what concord hath Christ with Belial?*” (2 Cor 6:15). Biblical separation is no sin for it is commanded, “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers ... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord*” (2 Cor 6:14, 17).

Now it must be said that unity is to be commended, but unity cannot be had at the expense of truth (John 17:17). The call for unity is often made in the name of love, but we ask, what kind of love? It goes without saying that it must be the love that is defined by truth, for love “*rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth*” (1 Cor 13:6). What is truth? The Apostle John says, “*thy word is truth.*” (John 17:17b). Therefore, the ECT and LWF unity with the RCC is totally out of line because the RCC remains unclean and void of the truth. It is clear what we must do; the Lord says, “*Touch not the unclean thing*” (2 Cor 6:17b).

The Reformation was a special movement raised of God to reform a most deformed Church in a very dark age. It was a movement entirely based upon the Biblical foundations of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone), *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone), and *Solus Christus* (Christ Alone). Now, let us look at the Solas of the Reformation vis-à-vis the beliefs and traditions of the RCC.

Sola Scriptura

The RCC does not believe that the Christian Faith should be based on Scripture alone. To the RCC, human traditions must be added to Holy Scripture. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states,

“Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture ... are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out of the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal.” ... As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, “does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the Holy

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Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”⁹

For the RCC, it is not Scripture alone but Scripture plus tradition, and usually tradition trumps Scripture. For example, the tradition of indulgences which came into existence only in 1095 allowed a person to buy forgiveness and even time off purgatory by purchasing a letter of indulgence (a discount coupon for sins committed or yet to be committed). In 1516, Tetzel the indulgence salesman went about with this jingle, “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul in purgatory springs.” (Today, you can get time off purgatory if you follow the Pope’s tweets.)¹⁰ This drew the ire of Martin Luther who nailed his 95 theses on the castle door of Wittenberg on 31 October 1517 in protest. He vehemently opposed the peddling of forgiveness, for salvation is free, paid for in full by the blood of Christ (Rom 3:24, 8:32; 1 Pet 1:18-19)!

By what authority did Martin Luther preach and teach that salvation is free and cannot be bought or sold? It is by the authority of Scripture, and Scripture alone. In 1521, in Worms, he was given an ultimatum to recant his teachings and writings, and his “Here I Stand” has become the battle cry of the Reformation,

Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen.

Indeed, this is precisely what God demands of His people—to believe and obey the Bible and the Bible alone, no matter what any human being or authority might say. “*Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.*” (Rom 3:4). The Christian appeal is always, “*Thus saith the Lord*”, “*It is written*”. Why? It is because “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*” (2 Tim 3:16-17). The Lord Jesus enjoined the Jews who were blinded by their man-made traditions to “*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*” (John 5:39).

The Bible’s absolute authority over man and Church is well stated in

the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) Chapter 1, Article 4,

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.¹¹

And Article 8,

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.¹²

And thus as a Reformation and Reformed school of theology, the Far Eastern Bible College affirms without apology in section 4.1.1 of its Constitution:

We believe in the divine, Verbal Plenary Inspiration (Autographs) and Verbal Plenary Preservation (Apographs) of the Scriptures in the original languages, their consequent inerrancy and infallibility, and as the perfect Word of God, the supreme and final authority in faith and life (2 Tim 3:16, 2 Pet 1:20-21, Ps 12:6-7, Matt 5:18, 24:35).

Sola Gratia

The RCC does not believe that salvation is purely by the grace of God alone. It teaches that man must do good to show himself worthy or deserving of salvation. In other words, man must work for his salvation. One way of doing so is to keep the seven sacraments of the RCC, namely, Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Marriage, Ordination, and Extreme Unction. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are *necessary for salvation*.”¹³

Luther himself did all he could to find salvation through ordination as an Augustinian monk, and he confessed,

I was indeed a good monk, and kept the rules of my order so strictly that I can say: if ever a monk got to heaven through monasticism, I should have been that man. All my brothers in the monastery who know me will testify to this. I would have become a martyr through fasting, prayer, reading and other good works had I remained a monk very much longer.¹⁴

However, the more he worked for his salvation, the more desperate

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and miserable he became for he found no acquittal from guilt, no forgiveness of sins, no reprieve from the judgement to come no matter what he did and how hard he tried.

Hence, Luther after his conversion appealed to Scripture and proved that salvation is by the pure grace and mercy of God alone. *“For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”* (Rom 9:15-16). *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”* (Tit 3:5).

How then is this grace of God received? Not by works but by faith and faith alone.

Sola Fide

The RCC believes that justification comes by faith and works, but the Reformation teaches that justification comes by faith alone. Luther who found no salvation by works finally found salvation by faith as taught in Romans 1:17, *“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”* The Scriptures state clearly, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”* (Eph 2:8-9). Abraham, the father of faith, is an excellent example of a man justified by faith alone, *“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.”* (Rom 4:1-3). *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom 5:1).

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q33) states, “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.”¹⁵ It is clear from Scripture that God declares the repentant sinner righteous by means of faith alone, on account of the righteousness of Christ alone. But for the RCC it is not faith alone, neither is it Christ alone.

Solus Christus

The RCC does not see Jesus Christ as sole Mediator and Saviour; Mary is considered “Co-Mediatrix”. It is well known that Catholics do not rely solely on Jesus, for they are particularly fond of Mary. They go to Mary especially when their prayers to Jesus are not answered. They are confident that Mary as “Mother of God” would get Jesus to hear and answer their prayers. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states,

The Virgin Mary ... is acknowledged and honoured as being truly the Mother of God and of the redeemer... She is “clearly the mother of the members of the Christ”... since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of the head. Mary, Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church.¹⁶

It goes on to state,

This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly ... Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation ... Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.¹⁷

What does the Bible say? The Bible in no uncertain terms says that there is only one Mediator and identifies Him as Christ Jesus, “*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 2:5). Mary did not die for our sins, Jesus did, and hence only He can intercede and bring us the gifts of eternal salvation, “*But this man [Jesus], because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*” (Heb 7:24-25). Jesus Himself said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*” (John 14:6).

The RCC says Mary is Mediatrix, but lo and behold Mary had never taken upon herself such a title and role. Mary had never seen herself as Saviour, only a sinner. In fact in her Magnificat, she confessed her need of a Saviour, “*And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*” (Luke 1:46-47). There is no question Mary knew Jesus as her God and Saviour. It is all about Jesus, not her. If Mary were here, she would surely denounce the Mariolatry that is found in the RCC today.

What is more is that nowhere in the Bible do we find any of the Apostles telling us to pray to Mary or seek the intercession of Mary.

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The last time Mary was mentioned in the Bible is in Acts 1:14. The rest of the Bible says nothing about her. This silence is telling. What we do find throughout the Bible is Jesus. Only Jesus, always Jesus! The Apostle Peter himself said, “*Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*” (Acts 4:10-12).

No Mistake!

The RCC through the Council of Trent anathematizes Protestants who believe in *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, and *Solus Christus*.¹⁸ Know that a gospel that is not *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, *Solus Christus* is no gospel at all. The Apostle Paul warned against those who would pervert the gospel of Christ and preach another gospel, “*As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*” (Gal 1:9). Let it be categorically stated that it is the gospel of the Reformation and not the RCC that saves. Remember Luther’s “Here I Stand”. “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*” (Gal 5:1). Make no mistake about it, **the Reformation was no mistake**. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Notes

¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 7:1.

² “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium”, *Catholic International* 5 (1994): 384-94.

³ For an analysis, see “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective” (St Louis: The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 1999). The Joint Declaration is appended in the paper.

⁴ Mary Ann Collins, *Catholicism Unveiled* (New York: iUniverse, 2004), 43. Collins, a former Catholic nun, wrote, “The declarations and anathemas of the Council of Trent have never been revoked. On the contrary, the decrees of the Council of Trent are confirmed by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992).”

⁵ The Council of Trent, <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/index.htm>, accessed 24 June 2017.

⁶ “Church rightly condemned aspects of the Protestant reformation in 1600’s but...”,

The Catholic News, 9 July 1995, 5.

⁷ “Pope Francis echoes Pope Benedict, underlines continuity of Council of Trent, Vatican II”, *Catholic World News*, 25 November 2013.

⁸ The moral corruption in the RCC is widespread. The homosexual scandal in the RCC is exposed in Donald B Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000). The pedophile scandal is clearly documented in “Church allowed abuse by priests for years”, *The Boston Globe*, 6 January 2002. Fifteen years later, the scandal continues, “Hundreds of church sex abuse victims continue to come forward”, *The Boston Globe*, 6 January 2017.

⁹ Geoffrey Chapman, trans, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Cassell Imprint, 1994), 25.

¹⁰ “Vatican offers ‘time off purgatory’ to followers of Pope Francis tweets”, *The Guardian*, 16 July 2013. “In its latest attempt to keep up with the times the Vatican has married one of its oldest traditions to the world of social media by offering ‘indulgences’ to followers of Pope Francis’ tweets.”

¹¹ *The Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms* (London: Wickliffe Press, 1958), 21.

¹² *Ibid*, 23.

¹³ *Ibid*, 259. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁴ Denis R Janz, ed, *A Reformation Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 77.

¹⁵ *The Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, 296.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 220.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 221.

¹⁸ Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), xii.

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TOWARDS A HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE DOCTRINE OF BIBLICAL PRESERVATION (PART TWO)

Samuel Tze-Liang Eio

***Sola Scriptura* Post-Westminster: Polemical Writings, Institutes and Confessions in and after 1646**

“Is the Preservation of Scripture a Doctrine Worth Dying For?” asked Michael Koech.¹ He quoted the well-loved puritan writer Thomas Watson (ca.1620-1686) as saying,

We may know the Scripture to be the Word of God by its *miraculous preservation* in all ages. The holy Scriptures are the richest jewel that Christ has left us; and the church of God has so kept these public records of heaven, that they have not been lost. The Word of God has never wanted enemies to oppose, and, if possible, to extirpate it. They have given out a law concerning Scripture, as Pharaoh did the midwives, concerning the Hebrew women’s children, to strangle it in the birth; but God has preserved this blessed Book inviolable to this day. The devil and his agents have been blowing at Scripture light, but could never blow it out; a clear sign that it was lighted from heaven. Nor has the church of God, in all revolutions and changes, kept the Scripture that it should not be lost only, but that it should not be depraved. The letter of Scripture has been preserved without any corruption, in the original tongue. The Scriptures were not corrupted before Christ’s time, for then Christ would not have sent the Jews to them. He said, ‘Search the Scriptures.’ He knew these sacred springs were not muddied with human fancies.²

Koech observed that in this passage Thomas Watson deliberately used the word “preserve” or “preservation” thrice. Koech remarks: “The inerrancy of the Bible is commonly held by true believers, and it must be added that the Bible is inerrant precisely because it has been preserved”.³ Indeed, Scripture is the word of God because God is the Divine Author of Scripture.

This high regard which post-Reformation saints like Watson,

Owen and Turretin had for the Bible has been quoted at length by the FEBC's Principal Jeffrey Khoo and alumnus such as Shin Yeong Gil who cited Owen's comment on Isaiah 59:21 as "the great charter of the church's preservation of truth".⁴ Shin also noted that Gausson's work, *Theopneustia*, could be considered a literary starting point for the twinning of the Biblical doctrines of inspiration and preservation.⁵ However, the doctrine which Koech calls the "Preservation of Scripture" was one that did emerge from the English Protestants' historical dispute with the Church of Rome. During that period in Church history, many were tortured and murdered as a result of the lustful struggle for power. Especially in the political realm of Henry VIII, the English Bible was widely though secretly distributed. Yet, fearing an internal uprising because of the revolts which had happened on the Continent (eg the alleged link between the publication of Luther's Bible and the peasant revolt in Germany), the head of the newly-formed English Church passed a decree in 1539 confiscating all vernacular Bibles of the Reformation, and persecuting Bible scholars and translators like William Tyndale to death. This was soon followed by the bloody reign of Mary and Philip (1553-1558) during which time no vernacular Bibles were printed. So, in the light of the historical record, Koech's question might be rephrased: "Is possessing and reading a Bible in your native language something worth dying for?" Nevertheless, Koech seems to be focusing on far weightier issues that *underlie* the production of those vernacular Bibles.

What are these issues then? As noted earlier in the first part, William Whitaker (1548-1595), Thomas Cartwright (ca 1535-1603), and John Jewel (1522-1571), all English church leaders of the first tier of post-Reformation saints, and "returnees" of the Elizabethan era (1558-1602), fought the *early* skirmishes over the issue of the divine preservation of Scripture. They did this less "formally" through their sermons (eg Cartwright and Jewell), but certainly more formally through disputations, sometimes employing long-drawn apologetic treatises against the Roman Catholic scholars who tried to controvert certain issues in their writings (eg Whitaker, Jewel, Fulke). The "controversial" issues at that time included the canon of the Protestants, and the vernacular Bibles translated from the original languages (instead of the Latin Vulgate), from which the Protestants subsequently rejected the unbiblical doctrines, sacraments and practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

These heated and often published scholarly debates consequently

led to an attack against the integrity of the Scriptures in the original languages, with the Papists alleging that the extant manuscripts had been corrupted from their pristine original condition – documents which no one on either side had seen, except perhaps the earliest of the church fathers – thus questioning the Protestants’ reliance on these sources for their Scriptures. Following the declaration of Trent, the Catholics used this argument in favour of their own Latin Vulgate – which, they claimed, was more *authentic* due to a more ancient, traceable genealogy and hence, of greater reliability and authority than the allegedly “corrupt” apographs from which the Protestants derived their source text for translating their vernacular Bibles. This initial attempt to undermine the Protestant Scriptures’ purity and integrity (in the original languages) appears to have been unsuccessful in the 16th century; nevertheless, still recognising it as a legitimate threat to the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, the Protestant answer to this philippic was the doctrine of divine preservation of the Scriptures. Consequently, this *schutzlehre* (protective doctrine) can be found in the Protestant writings well before the Westminster Assembly of 1646, as has been shown previously. Later, in the 17th century, using historical-critical methods, Jesuit scholars would make a spectacular comeback by using historical criticism but this time with more devastating onslaught against *Sola Scriptura*.

Prior to the Westminster Assembly, though, it seems for some an enigma why no formal resolution of these important issues on textual matters could be addressed in many of the Reformed creeds and systems of theology that were being confessed by various circles of Protestants, especially those on the continent. Richard Muller speculates that 17th century “orthodoxy was hard put to maintain the once simple argument of the Reformers in the face of the complexity of the textual problem”.⁶ Presbyterian pastor and writer Douglas Wilson notes that these Reformers and post-Reformation saints of the 16th and 17th centuries preferred not to approach the more textual problem on the basis of neutral science, but rather, as confessing believers.⁷ But some other commentators are not so favourably disposed.⁸

One Reformed credal statement on the Doctrine of Scripture which pays special attention as to how “God, from a special care...commanded His servants...to commit His revealed word to writing” is the Belgic Confession of 1561. “Of the written word of God,” it simply states that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that

men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit, as the apostle Peter says; and that afterwards God, *from a special care* which He has for us and our salvation, *commanded His servants* the Prophets and Apostles, to *commit His revealed word to writing*; and *He himself wrote with His own finger the two tables* of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scripture [*emphases mine*].⁹

Thus, the *Confessio Belgica* as it is sometimes known recognises the Divine inspiration and inscripturation as a distinct process from its transmission and Divine preservation, but all for the believers' benefit. It seems to underscore the value of writing over any oral or unwritten traditions, which authority the Church of Rome claimed to possess. More importantly, it highlights the example which God Himself set as a standard for the written word as something which believers themselves must hold in highest regard. It subsequently attaches equal importance of the canonical scriptures (the external witness) together with the implicit and internal testimony (or witness) of the Holy Spirit – and thus unsubscribes from the explicit approval of any ecclesiastical tradition. And thus, the Belgic Confession (*Confessio Belgica*), 1561, Articles III, IV, and V states:

Of the Written Word of God: We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of man, but that men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit, as the apostle Peter says; and that afterwards God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants the Prophets and Apostles, to commit His revealed word to writing; and He himself wrote with His own finger the two tables of the law. Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scripture.

...the Old and the New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged.... We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, ...¹⁰

Westminster Divines on the Doctrine of Providential Preservation

A second generation of post-Reformation saints now rose up to confront a new development, during the Jacobean period. In his systematically-arranged catechism, the Irish Primate, James Ussher (1581- 1656), better known for his famous Biblical chronology, enquires,

“[What are] some of those Reasons which prove that God is the Author of the Holy Scripture?” The answer in Ussher’s catechism included fifteen reasons, but the concluding reason was this: “Fifteenthly, *The marvellous preservation of the Scriptures*. Though none in time to be so ancient, nor none so much oppugned; yet *God hath still by his Providence preserved them, and every part of them*” [*emphases mine*].¹¹

When the Westminster divines met in 1646, their purpose was to discuss the thorny issues in textual criticism, undoubtedly raised through the various post-Tridentine polemical disputes with Jesuits. This, perhaps, is a point that many miss when considering the other serious controversies in the period leading up to it, especially the soteriological problems (due to Arminianism and Amyraldianism) that had begun to undermine the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ; subsequently, the Synod of Dordt (1614-1618) stressed the monergistic aspects of one’s salvation under the Reformed orthodox position and reaffirmed the doctrines of grace taught by Calvin. On a similar vein, one may observe that the Westminster statement (I:8a) emphasises that it is God Himself Who “by His singular care and providence, kept [the Scriptures] pure in all ages”, and, that in response to the claims of the Roman Catholic church in advocating the Latin Vulgate’s primacy and reliability – by holding it up as “authentic” – affirmed here instead that the Protestant Scriptures contained in the copies which the church received “are therefore authentical” because God Himself did the work of preserving His words.

Therefore, to the Westminster divines, God is not only the Author of Holy Scripture Who revealed and inspired, but also the Author Who preserves and guards His own words, down to the last jot and tittle, quoting Matthew 5:18. Reformed church historian, Richard Muller, concerning this point, aptly elucidated:¹²

By “original” and “authentic” text, the Protestant orthodox do not mean the autographa which no one can possess but the apographa in the original tongue which are the source of all versions. The Jews throughout history and the church in the time of Christ regarded the Hebrew of the Old Testament as authentic and for nearly six centuries after Christ, the Greek of the New Testament was viewed as authentic without dispute. It is important to note that the Reformed orthodox insistence on the identification of the Hebrew and Greek texts as alone authentic does not demand direct reference to autographa in those languages: the “original and authentic text” of Scripture means, beyond the autograph copies, the

legitimate tradition of Hebrew and Greek apographa.¹³

Thus, the theology behind this seventeenth-century Westminster statement against the “modern” challenge of textual criticism on the inspiration and preservation of Scriptures could be viewed at once as a most mature, and God-exalting expression of the Reformed and orthodox position on Scripture’s Divine preservation.

One of the original members of the Westminster Assembly, John Lightfoot, writes, “The same power and care of God that preserves the church would preserve the Scriptures pure to it: and He that did, and could, preserve the whole could preserve every part, so that not so much as a tittle should perish.”¹⁴ Additionally commenting on Lightfoot’s credentials as “perhaps the greatest biblical scholar to take part in the work of the Assembly”, Douglas Taylor notes of Lightfoot’s denouncement of Rome’s claiming of credit in giving the Protestants the Scriptures,

No, it was the work of the Lord, and the mercy of the Lord; and it is marvellous in our eyes.... As far as we owe our receiving of Scripture to men, we are least beholden to the Romish church. They put us off with a Latin translation, barbarous and wild. But we have a surer word, the sacred Hebrew and divine Greek. And the Hebrew we owe to the Jews, and the Greek to the Greek church, rather than the Roman.¹⁵

To this, Taylor avers: “This [declaration from John Lightfoot] confirms what orthodox Christians have always believed: that the Scriptures were preserved in actual use, in the bosom of the church, not hidden away in some obscure corner.”¹⁶

John Owen on the Doctrine of Biblical Preservation

Nevertheless, during the period that followed Westminster, some liberal-minded Protestant scholars were not content with leaving the text underlying the Authorised Version as it was, and were pressing for a revision to the Authorised Version. Indeed, throughout this period within the various Protestant groups there was no small degree of controversy concerning the extent of inspiration. Following the *zeitgeist* of the time, which eventually led to the development of the Enlightenment criticism, textual scholarship wanted answers for the numerous apparent variations found in the extant manuscripts, and even the issue of the Masoretic text’s vowel-pointing became a point of strong contention.

The puritan scholar, John Owen (1616–1683), therefore, wrote

mightily to defend the Bible from these attacks. According to Khoo, John Owen, the respected systematic theologian of the Puritan tradition, did battle royal against the rationalists (forerunners of the modern textual critics) of his day.

Owen explained that the divine inspiration of the Scriptures concerns the words, not simply the doctrines. Owen argued for word-inspiration and not thought-inspiration: “It is the *graphe* that is *theopneustos* (2 Tim 3:16), ‘the writing, or word written, is by inspiration from God.’ Not only the doctrine in it, but the *graphe* itself, or the ‘doctrine as written,’ is so from Him. Hence, the providence of God hath manifested itself no less concerned in the preservation of the writings than of the doctrine contained in them; the writing itself being the product of his own eternal counsel for the preservation of the doctrine (387).”¹⁷

Khoo concludes:

Thus the Scriptures bind our conscience to affirm its veracity and authenticity purely by our faith in them. “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb 11:3). “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17).

Elsewhere, Owen wrote, “We do so receive, embrace, believe, and submit unto it, because of the authority of God who speaks it, or gave it forth as his mind and will, evidencing itself by the Spirit in and with that Word, unto our minds and consciences: or, because that the Scripture, being brought unto us by the good providence of God, in ways of his appointment and preservation, it doth evidence itself infallibly unto our consciences to be the word of the living God (410).”¹⁸

The Catholic Encyclopaedia gives its account of events immediately post-Westminster:

This was a time when English theologians were much divided as to the extent of the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, some going so far as to adopt the narrow view that even the vowel-points and accents of the Masoretic text “must come under our consideration as being such from God” (Owen, “Works”, XVI, 303). John Owen had just prepared to that effect a tract on “The Divine Original Authority and self-evidencing Light and Purity of the Scriptures”, when he was confronted by Walton’s “Prolegomena”, in which a much more liberal view was held. He set out to refute it, and published to that purpose a new tract: “Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew Text of the Scriptures, with Considerations of the Prolegomena and Appendix to the late *Biblia Polyglotta*”.¹⁹

Owen, according to the Catholics, was charged with keeping to

“the narrow view”, seen as unpopular and even “unscholarly” with more liberal-minded theologians of his time, such as Brian Walton. It must be remembered that Walton’s crowning work, the *London Polyglot*, was even praised by historical-textual critic Richard Simon. Owen vehemently opposed some points which Walton raised in the *Prolegomena* of his Polyglot. The latter seemed to posit numerous “corruptions in the originals of the Scripture” and to voice “opinions prejudicial to the authority of the originals”. Despite acknowledging the “great usefulness of the Biblia Polyglotta” in the field of textual criticism, the learned Puritan’s lofty regard for the established Hebrew and Greek texts that underlay the Authorised Version, and his apparent antipathy toward those who dared to cast doubt upon it, or destabilise its authority, are evident.

In Owen’s own words:

Afterward, considering what I had written about the providence of God in the preservation of the original copies of the Scripture in the foregoing discourse, fearing lest, from that great appearance of variations in the original copies, and those of all the translations..., there might some unconquerable objections against the truth of what I had asserted.... I shall crave leave to deliver my thoughts to some things contained in them, ... to the prejudice of the certainty of divine truth, as continued unto us, through the providence of God, in the originals of the Scripture.

What Walton was attempting to show was that the traditional text contained elements of what must have seemed as “secondary” inspiration by the interpolation of the Masoretic Jews – such an inference, in Owen’s view, was tantamount to an attack on verbal inspiration of Scripture. Though Walton did not openly admit to making such a conclusion, it seems clear by Owen’s vigorous response to Walton’s work and to the subsequent “independent findings” of Catholic-backed Protestant scholars on the Continent that the overall game plan could only be masterminded by the Evil One.

One prominent Catholic-supported ‘independent’ researcher on the Continent was Louis Cappel (1585–1658), not to be confused with Richard Capel, the Westminster divine. A French protestant (Huguenot) and scholar of Hebrew in the school of Saumur, Louis Cappel at one point contended against the Buxtorfs on the issue of the co-inspiration of the vowel points found in the Masoretic text.²⁰

Calvinist scholar Friedrich Spanheim further notes of the protestant

scholar Louis Cappel who initially debated against the co-inspiration of vowel-pointings in the Hebrew Massoretic text with the Hebraist Buxtorf (by alleging they were later insertions, not found in the originals) – noting how Cappel’s textual criticism eventually “created [for] him the hatred for those of his Sect”; despite the fact that Cappel’s work was initially suppressed by Protestant institutions (“Geneva, Sedan and Leiden”), it was supported and eventually published by the Catholic priests “to show that Protestants have no certain principle of their Religion having rejected the Tradition of the [Roman Catholic] Church.” Indeed, the challenge posed by enlightenment textual criticism was a keen weapon against the Protestant tenet of *Sola Scriptura*, effectively undermining Protestant insistence of the Scriptures’ authority. Yet, the Criticism of the enlightenment was in reality a double-edged sword in that it was seen somewhat as an embarrassment even by certain conservatives within the Roman church. Hans Küng a former Roman Catholic monk, records how “Simon’s 1678 critical history of the Old Testament was immediately confiscated on the initiative of the famous [French] court bishop and preacher Bossuet.”²¹

Douglas Taylor notes that for Cappel’s espousal of erroneous views of providential preservation, he was soundly refuted by John Owen; Taylor cautions the reader on how,

[as] Owen pointed out, it was a dangerous and unnecessary concession to disbelief in providential preservation. Dangerous because “it will not be found so easy a matter, upon a supposition of such a corruption in the originals as is pleaded for, to evince unquestionably that the whole saving doctrine itself, at first given out from God, continues entire and incorrupt.” [The Divine Original of Scripture,” Works, xvi, p. 302.]; unnecessary, because the preservation of the Scripture was a fact and required no such concession. The only guarantee of the preservation of the saving doctrine of the gospel was the preservation of Scripture in its integrity.²²

Francis Turretin and the Institutes of Elenctic Theology

Francis Turretin (1683-1687) was a leading figure in the development of Reformed doctrine on the Continent. It was under John Diodati, that a young Italian by name of Francis Turretin studied. The latter would eventually rise to take the chair that was once John Calvin’s in Geneva and refine his teacher’s thesis against the threat of textual criticism. Well-schooled in Calvin’s teachings, and not only

witnessed but having lived through the theological malaise that afflicted the notorious School of Samur, Francis Turretin embarked on his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. This work was to be a fortress for the Reformed church against the attacks of the Jesuits and their allies, the rationalists, hence its polemical nature. Carol Lee's essay commended Turretin's thorough exposition "on the early confessional doctrine of Biblical preservation" and for the unequivocal manner in which Turretin understood it to mean "entire preservation": "Nor can we readily believe that God, who dictated and inspired each and every word to these inspired men, would not take care of their entire preservation."²³ Shin Yeong Gil ventures even further than Lee by drawing the logical connection that Turretin's *Institutes* actually support the *very same* doctrine of special providential preservation as found in the 1646 Westminster Confession of Faith, which "shows that the Hebrew OT and the Greek NT are the only authentic Scriptures".²⁴ Indeed, Turretin wrote in his *Institutes*:

Of the Holy Scriptures

FOURTH QUESTION: THE AUTHORITY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES—Are the holy Scriptures truly authentic and divine? We affirm.

The first question may seem hardly necessary among Christians who should consider as an incontrovertible truth the fact that the Scriptures are inspired of God (*theopneuston*) as the primary foundation of faith. Rather the question is whether in writing they were so acted upon and inspired by the Holy Spirit (both as to the things themselves and as to the words) as to be kept free from all error and that their writings are truly authentic and divine. Our adversaries deny this; we affirm it.... The word "Scripture" is used in two senses: either materially, with regard to the doctrine delivered; or formally with regard to the writing and mode of delivery. In the former sense (as we said before), we hold it to be necessary simply and absolutely, so that the church can never spar it. The Bible proves itself divine, not only authoritatively and in the manner of an artless argument or testimony, when it proclaims itself God-inspired (*theopneuston*).

...

SIXTH QUESTION: From what source does the divine authority of the Scriptures become known to us?" Does it depend upon the testimony of the church either as to itself or as to us? We deny against the papists.

...the Spirit that testifies in us concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures is not peculiar to individuals with regard to the principle and origin.

Rather he is common to the whole church and so to all believers in whom he works the same faith, although he is such subjectively with regard to each individual because he is given separately to each believer.

...

TENTH QUESTION: THE PURITY OF THE SOURCES—Have the original texts of the Old and New Testaments come down to us pure and uncorrupted? We affirm against the papists.

By the original texts, we do not mean the autographs written by the hand of Moses, of the prophets and of the apostles, which certainly do not now exist. We mean their apographs which are so called because they set forth to us the word of God in the very words of those who wrote under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Rather, the question is: have the original texts (or the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts) been so corrupted either by copyists through carelessness (or by the Jews and heretics through malice) that they can no longer be regarded as the judge of controversies and the rule to which all the versions must be applied? The papists affirm, we deny it.

The providence of God proves that the sources have not been corrupted. The following arguments prove that the sources have not been corrupted. (1) The providence of God which could not permit books which it willed to be written by inspiration (*theopneustois*) for the salvation of men (and to continue unto the end of the world that they might draw from them waters of salvation) to become so corrupted as to render them unfit for this purpose.... (2) The fidelity of the Christian church and unceasing labor in preserving the manuscripts. (3) The religion of the Jews who have bestowed upon the sacred manuscripts great care and labor amounting even to superstition.... (4) The carefulness of the Masoretes not only about verses and words, but also about single letters (which, together with all the variations of punctuation and writing, they not only counted, but also wrote down, so that no ground or even suspicion of corruption could arise). (5) The multitude of copies; for as the manuscripts were scattered far and wide, how could they all be corrupted either by the carelessness of librarians or the wickedness of enemies?... (6) If the sources had been corrupted, it must have been done before Christ or after, neither of which is true. Not before because Christ would not have passed it over in silence (for he does censure the various departures in doctrine), nor could he bear to use corrupted books.... Not afterward, both because the copies circulated among Christians would have rendered such attempts futile, and because no trace of any such corruption appears.... (7) The Jews neither would nor could corrupt the sources....” Turretin argues that if the Jews had corrupted

any scripture it would have been concerning the Messiah and prophecy used by Christians. On the other hand, Christians would immediately have noticed any changes made by the Jews since the time of Christ. A corruption differs from a variant reading. We acknowledge that many variant readings occur both in the Old and New Testament arising from a comparison of different manuscripts, but we deny corruption (at least corruption that is universal).”

...

SIXTEENTH QUESTION: THE PERFECTION OF THE SCRIPTURES: Do the Scriptures so perfectly contain all things necessary to salvation that there is no need of unwritten (agraphois) traditions after it? We affirm against the papist.

In order to shun more easily the tribunal of the Scriptures which they know to be opposed to them, the papists endeavor not only to overthrow their authentical (*authentian*) and integrity, but also to impeach their perfection and perspicuity. Hence arises this question concerning the perfection of the Scriptures between us.

The question relates only to things necessary to salvation – whether they belong to faith or to practice; whether all these things are so contained in the Scriptures that they can be a total and adequate rule of faith and practice (which we maintain and our opponents deny).

The question then amounts to this – whether the Scripture perfectly contains all (not absolutely), but necessary to salvation; not expressly and in so many words, but equivalently and by legitimate inference, as to leave no place for any unwritten (*agraphon*) word containing doctrinal or moral traditions. Is the Scripture a complete and adequate rule of faith and practice or only a partial and inadequate rule? We maintain the former; the papists the latter, holding that unwritten traditions pertaining to faith and practice are to be received with the same regard and reverence as the Scriptures.... We give to the Scriptures such a sufficiency and perfection as is immediate and explicit. There is no need to have recourse to any tradition independent of them.... Finally, they were intended to be the contract of the covenant between God and us.²⁵

Turretin certainly saw the Hebrew and Greek editions of the Scriptures referred to by the Westminster Assembly to be “authentic from the very first and were always considered to be so by the Jewish and Christian church many centuries after Christ.”²⁶

The Doctrine of Biblical Preservation in Reformed Confessions

When the Reformation started on the Continent, the Spirit of the Lord moved men and women to come out from under the yoke of

superstition and ignorance which the Roman church had placed them under for centuries. This was done by the Holy Spirit speaking through the words inspired and preserved. The Reformed confessions affirmed the present infallibility and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures and their sole and supreme authority in faith and practice. The Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675) Canons I, II and III state,

I. God, the Supreme Judge, not only **took care** to have His word, which is the “power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Rom. 1:16), committed to writing by Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles, but has also **watched and cherished** it with **paternal care** ever **since it was written up to the present time**, so that **it could not be corrupted** by craft of Satan or fraud of man. Therefore the Church justly ascribes it to His singular grace and goodness that she has, and will have to the end of the world, a “sure word of prophecy” and “Holy Scriptures” (2 Tim. 3:15), from which, though heaven and earth perish, “one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass” (Matt. 5:18).

II. But, in particular, the Hebrew Original of the Old Testament, which we have received and to this day do retain as handed down by the Jewish Church, unto whom formerly “were committed the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2), is, not only in its consonants, but in its vowels—either the vowel points themselves, or at least the power of the points—not only in its matter, but in its words, inspired of God, thus forming, together with the Original of the New Testament, the sole and complete rule of our faith and life; and to its standard, as to a Lydian stone, all extant versions, oriental and occidental, ought to be applied, and where ever they differ, be conformed.

III. Therefore we can by no means approve the opinion of those who declare that the text which the Hebrew Original exhibits was determined by man’s will alone, and do not scruple at all to remodel a Hebrew reading which they consider unsuitable, and amend it from the Greek Versions of the LXX and others, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Chaldee Targums, or even from other sources, yea, sometimes from their own reason alone; and furthermore, they do not acknowledge any other reading to be genuine except that which can be educed by the critical power of the human judgment from the collation of editions with each other and with the various readings of the Hebrew Original itself—which, they maintain, has been corrupted in various ways; and finally, they affirm that besides the Hebrew edition of the present time, there are in the Versions of the ancient interpreters which differ from our Hebrew context other Hebrew Originals, since these Versions are also indicative of ancient Hebrew Originals differing from each other. Thus they bring

the foundation of our faith and its inviolable authority into perilous hazard.

Ferguson notes that the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* was drafted towards the end of the Confessional era of Protestant orthodoxy, “amidst the rising tide of text-critical challenges” and observes that, compared with the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646/7, this 1675 Swiss Reformed creed is even more explicit that we have all the Words of God perfectly preserved for us today to the jot and tittle. It extended the doctrine of inspiration and perfect preservation to the very Hebrew vowel points and argued that those who accept variant readings, “bring the foundation of our faith and its inviolable authority into perilous hazard.”²⁷

Notes

¹ Michael Koech, “Is the Preservation of Scripture a Doctrine Worth Dying For?” *The Burning Bush* 12 (2006): 96-101.

² Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth and Trust, 1965), 27. Koech notes that Watson’s work was first published in 1672 and considers Watson to be a firm supporter of the doctrine of Biblical preservation.

³ Koech, “Is the Preservation of Scripture a Doctrine Worth Dying For?”, 97.

⁴ John Owen, “Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of Scripture,” *Works*, 16:381, quoted in the essay extracted from the ThM thesis of Shin Yeong Gil, “God’s Promise to Preserve His Word: Psalm 12:5-7,” *The Burning Bush* 6 (2000): 170. See also Jeffrey Khoo, ed, *Forever Infallible and Inerrant: Remembering God’s Extraordinary Providence in Preserving His Inspired Words through the Traditional and Reformation Texts Underlying the King James Bible* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2011).

⁵ Shin Yeong Gil, “God’s Promise to Preserve His Word: Psalm 12:5-7,” 150.

⁶ Richard A Muller, “The Canon of Scripture and Its Integrity,” in *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy ca 1520 to ca 1725, Volume Two: Holy Scripture: the Cognitive Foundation of Reformed Theology*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 397. Muller notes how some textual problems raised during that period also had the Protestant scholars somewhat baffled.

⁷ Douglas Wilson, *Mother Kirk: Essays and Forays in Practical Ecclesiology* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2001), 53-4.

⁸ For instance, Henry Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 67. Virkler first notes how the Council of Trent (1545-1563) “drew up a list of decrees setting forth the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church and criticizing Protestantism.” Concerning the hermeneutical scene in the later half of the 16th century and into the late 17th, Virkler comments gloomily on Post-Tridentine events: “In response, Protestants began developing creeds to define their own position. At one point nearly every important city had its own favourite creed, with bitter theological controversies prevailing. Hermeneutical methods were often poor during

A HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF BIBLICAL PRESERVATION (PART TWO)

the time, for exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics, and often degenerated into mere proof-texting. Farrar describes theologians of that day as reading ‘the Bible by the unnatural glare of theological hatred.’”

⁹ Andrea Ferrari, *John Diodati’s Doctrine of Holy Scripture: considered especially on the basis of his Theses theologicae de Sacra Scriptura of 1596* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 39. Ferrari points out that the “*Confessio Belgica* was composed by the martyr Guy de Bres, and Theodore Beza (of the Genevan school which Calvin founded and taught) himself translated it from French into Latin.”

¹⁰ The Belgic Confession (*Confessio Belgica*), 1561, Articles III, IV, and V. One notes however, that no attempt is made to specify which books are the canonical scriptures. This seeming reluctance to be more specific was to be a ‘future’ point of contention between Rome and the English protestants as well, since the Forty-Two Articles of the Anglican Church (1552/3) did not specify the books, and, as we have noted in Bishop Jewel’s *Apology* and defense thereof.

¹¹ James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity: The Sum and Substance of the Christian Religion* (London: Jonathan Robinson, 1702), 8.

¹² J S Candlish, “The Doctrine of the Westminster Confession on Scripture,” *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 26 (January 1877) as cited in Letis, *The Majority Text*, 174.

¹³ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 433.

¹⁴ John Lightfoot, *The Whole Works of Rev John Lightfoot* (London: J F Dove, 1822-25), 408, as cited in Ferguson.

¹⁵ Douglas Taylor, “Pure Words, Preserved Words: The Doctrine of Providential Preservation,” *British Reformed Journal* 8 (October-December 1994): 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Jeffrey Khoo, “John Owen on the Perfect Bible,” *The Burning Bush* (2004): 76.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, sv “Brian Walton” by Kevin Knight.

²⁰ See John Woodbridge, “Biblical Authority: Towards an Evaluation of the Rogers and McKim Proposal,” *Trinity Journal* 1 (1980): 202. Swiss Hebraist, Johannes Buxtorf (1599-1664), defended the preservation of even the Hebrew vowel points against the attack of Louis Cappel with studies published in 1624 [anonymously] and 1650. Buxtorf also affirmed the purity of the Received Text in 1620, “From the extremity of the East to the extremity of the West the word of God is read with one mouth and in one manner; and in all the books that there are in Asia, Africa, and Europe, there is discernible a full agreement, without any difference whatever.” Cited in Henry Charles Fox, *On the Revision of the Authorised Version of the Scriptures: With an Account of the Revision Now* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1875), 10.

²¹ Hans Küng, *The Catholic Church: A Short History*, trans. John Bowden (Modern Library, 2003), 150.

²² Douglas W Taylor, “Pure Words, Preserved Words: The Doctrine of Providential

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Preservation,” *British Reformed Journal* 8 (October-December 1994), 13.

²³ Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:71 as cited in Carol Lee, “A Child of God Looks at the Doctrine of Verbal Plenary Preservation,” *The Burning Bush* 11 (July 2005): 76.


²⁴ Shin Yeong Gil, “God’s Promise to Preserve His Word (Ps 12:5-7),” *The Burning Bush* 6, no. 2 (July 2000): 150, 171.

²⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1992), 1:114.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ See Jeffrey Khoo, ed, *Forever Infallible and Inerrant: Remembering God’s Extraordinary Providence in Preserving His Inspired Words through the Traditional and Reformation Texts Underlying the King James Bible* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2011), 510-43.

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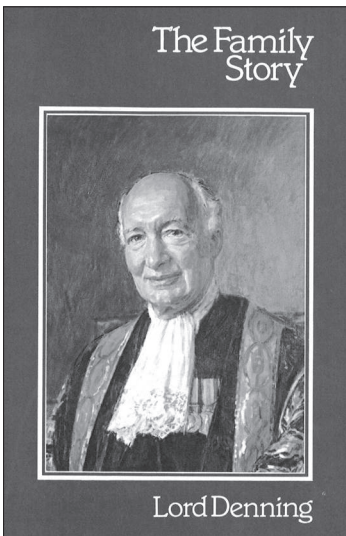
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LORD DENNING: A CHRISTIAN AND A JUDGE

Jeffrey Khoo



Lord Denning was one of the finest judges England has ever had, and to many the greatest in the 20th century. Lord Bingham called him “a legend in his own lifetime.” What made Denning such a judge par excellence? There were no doubt a number of factors, but one cannot escape the fact that his Christian faith played a vital role.

I first came to know about Lord Denning through Andrew Phang’s article on the subject in the July 2005 and January 2006 issues of the *Global Journal of Classic Theology*—an online journal edited by Dr John Warwick Montgomery—published then by Trinity College and Seminary (Newburgh,

Indiana, USA) my PhD alma mater. The Honourable Justice Andrew Phang is a Judge of Appeal in the Supreme Court of Singapore, and the title of his article is “A Passion for Justice: The Natural Law Foundations of Lord Denning’s Thought and Work”.¹ Justice Phang’s article piqued my curiosity, and so I purchased a couple of biographies, namely, Denning’s autobiography *The Family Story* (1981) and Iris Freeman’s *Lord Denning: A Life* (1993) and read them with great interest.² Let me share with you what I have learned about Lord Denning from Andrew Phang and those two books.

Christian Upbringing

Lord Denning was born Alfred Thompson Denning in 1899. His parents were devout Anglicans. In his autobiography *The Family Story* he recounted how his father would read to him John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s*

Progress. The stories and illustrations in *Pilgrim's Progress* stuck in his mind throughout his life. He recalled, "We pored over the picture of Apollyon barring the way to Christian ... The etching shows the hideous Apollyon with his darts: and the bold Christian with his shield and his sword."³ For those who do not know, *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) is a puritan classic and considered "the second best book in all the world" (the first of course being the Bible itself). Bunyan's classic spoke vividly of man's utter depravity and sinfulness, his hopeless and condemned condition and his desperate need for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is likely that young Denning received faith in Christ through the gospel told to him in that good book.

Education and Career

Lord Denning excelled in his studies. He graduated from Oxford in 1920 with first class honours in Mathematics. Math however was not his cup of tea. Denning wanted to do law, "I felt that is what I would like to do. I would like to become a barrister as I told Mother long ago!" Hence, he returned to Oxford to study jurisprudence, and was eventually called to the Bar in 1923. He rose to become King's Counsel in 1938 and High Court judge in 1944. In 1948, he made it to the Court of Appeal and in 1957 the House of Lords. In 1962, he returned to the Court of Appeal as its presiding judge—Master of the Rolls. As Master of the Rolls, Denning was the highest ranking judge second only to the Lord Chief Justice. He served as Master of the Rolls until his retirement in 1982.

Belief in God

What has life taught Denning? "The most important thing that life has taught me is to believe in God."⁴ Lord Denning's belief in the God of the Bible would play a big part in his work as a lawyer and then as a judge. In a BBC Home Service broadcast in 1943 he testified, "My belief in God is due in part to my upbringing—to what I have been taught—and in part to what I have found out in going through life ... My experience as a lawyer has verified what I was taught about God. Many people think that religion and law have nothing in common ... People who think that have a wrong idea both of law and religion. The aim of the law is to see that truth is observed and that justice is done between man and man ... But what is truth and what is justice? On those two cardinal questions religion and law meet. The spirit of truth and justice is not something you can see. It is not temporal but eternal."⁵

Denning humbly confessed that life must be lived in utter dependence on God: "I do know that in the great experiences of life, and indeed in the small ones too, such strength as I have is of God, and the weakness is mine. Need I enumerate the experiences? Take the hard things. When faced with a task on which great issues depend; when high hopes lie shattered; when anxiety gnaws deep; or when overwhelmed by grief; where can I turn for help but to God? Or take the joyful things: A hard task attempted or done; the happiness of family life; or the beauty of nature; where can I turn for thankfulness but to God? All experiences convince me, not only that God is ever-present, but also that it is by contact with the spirit of God that the spirit in Man reaches its highest and wisest plane."⁶ Indeed, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.*" (Prov 9:10).

Law and Religion

Lord Denning did not believe that law and religion could be separated. He criticised those who had a false philosophy of religion, who thought that religion had nothing to do with the life here and now, but only the life hereafter. Denning said that religion, law and morals are "very dependent on one another. Without religion there can be no morality: and without morality there can be no law."⁷ Indeed, "Worship is the mother of all virtues."

How does man know what is truth or justice? Denning's answer was spiritual: "It is not the produce of his intellect, but of his spirit ... How, then, is the right spirit created in man? ... Religion, or rather the Christian religion, is concerned with the creation of a spirit out of which right acts will naturally flow."⁸ To Denning, the greatness of the common law of England was because "the law has been moulded for centuries by Judges who have been brought up in the Christian faith. The precepts of religion, consciously or unconsciously, have been their guide in the administration of justice."⁹ Freeman says, "To people all over the world, [Denning] imparted his belief that English justice, founded in the Christian religion, was fundamental to English liberty."¹⁰

Denning felt strongly, "If religion perishes in the land, truth and justice will also. We have already strayed too far from the faith of our fathers. Let us return to it, for it is the only thing that can save us."¹¹ Phang opines, "Lord Denning's greatest contribution ... was not merely 'the law' that he left behind but, rather, the spirit of justice that

was guided by a *supernatural force*. Denning never wavered from the conviction that this was always so.” (emphasis mine).¹²

The Bible and Its Decalogue

I learned from my teacher the Rev Dr Timothy Tow that English law is based upon Roman law and Roman law is based upon the Law of Moses as found in the Bible.¹³ What makes English law so great? That could be the underlying reason above all.¹⁴

The Bible is indispensable to every Christian lawyer and judge. As a devout Christian, Denning always had the Bible in hand. In *The Family Story*, he wrote, “In coming upon legal obstacles, it is not enough to keep your law books dry. It is as well to have a Bible ready to hand too. It is the most tattered book in my library. I have drawn upon it constantly.”¹⁵ Phang cites one instance, “In the context of *family law*, Lord Denning does refer to the Bible. He also asserts that ‘[t]he only basis for a sound family life is a Christian marriage — the personal union of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others on either side, for better or for worse, so long as both shall live ... Whilst accepting the principle of divorce when a marriage has irretrievably broken down, we should do all we can to maintain the Christian concept of marriage’.”¹⁶

Denning believed English Law has its foundation in the Ten Commandments. He condemned sin and “[s]in is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q14). He spoke against abortion, euthanasia and suicide. He condemned homosexuality which he considered to be of a different category than adultery or fornication. Denning explained, “Natural sin is, of course, deplorable, but unnatural vice is worse; because, as the law says, it strikes at the integrity of the human race.”¹⁷ Freeman says, “Denning had no doubt that homosexuality was wrongful. The Bible called it ‘an abomination’, and ‘it was an offence not to be named among Christians’ ... He recommended that the law should continue to condemn ‘this evil for the evil it is’.”¹⁸

Effective Speech

Lord Denning was a most effective communicator. According to Lord Edmund-Davies, Denning’s “familiarity with Biblical texts which he acquired at an early age did much to form and, indeed, to transform his style of speaking, so that in later life his judgments and addresses

have (like most parts of the New Testament) consisted of sentences of remarkable clarity and brevity, frequently declining to recognise any need for an accompanying verb.”¹⁹

To seminary students who are honing their homiletical skills, here is good advice from Lord Denning, “You are not supposed to read your speech: but you can use notes. You must prepare beforehand what you are to say—otherwise you will muff it. I always prepared carefully. I did research. I made notes. I tried always to introduce some little story or incident—so as to give colour to my arguments. But when I got up to speak, I put my notes aside. I did not look at them. I trusted to my memory. Your speech loses much of its effectiveness if you read it or if you keep looking down at notes. ... Above all, speak clearly and distinctly.”²⁰

Keeping the Faith

Lord Denning was once asked, “When are you going to retire?” Like the founder of Far Eastern Bible College—the late Rev Dr Timothy Tow—who did not believe in retirement, his reply was, “I am going to stay as long as I can do the job ... Every Christian virtue except resignation.”²¹ Indeed in God’s service, whatever your vocation, there is no retirement. Freeman reveals that even at 83, it was hard for Denning “to give up the work he loved. He had no intention of settling into leisurely retirement.”²²

Denning said that at the end of his life, he would like to be able to say, “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith*”, a quote from 2 Timothy 4:7. Phang avers, “He can, and ought to, say it.”²³ Denning was called home on 5 March 1999, 100 years old.

How would people remember Lord Denning? Freeman answers insightfully, “Unlike most judges, his memorial will be more than the body of doctrine found in his judgments. The influence of his speeches, reproduced in his books, was immense; but if he is remembered for them alone, it will be as a prophet, as a wise man rather than a judge.”²⁴

Lord Denning is a good model of a Christian judge. Let me conclude with what Denning said in his farewell speech as Master of the Rolls, “Four things a man must learn to do if he could make his record true: to think without confusion clearly, to act from honest motives purely, to love his fellow man sincerely, and trust in God and heaven securely.”²⁵ In Denning we see a display of the good that God requires

of man: “*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*” (Mic 6:8).



Notes

¹ Andrew Phang, “A Passion for Justice (Part One)”, *Global Journal of Classic Theology* (July 2005), “A Passion for Justice (Part Two)”, *Global Journal of Classic Theology* (January 2006) in <http://www.globaljournalct.com>, accessed on 22 February 2017.

² Lord Denning, *The Family Story* (London: Butterworths, 1981); Iris Freeman, *Lord Denning: A Life* (London: Hutchinson, 1993).

³ Denning, *The Family Story*, 11, 12.

⁴ Phang, “The Natural Law Foundations of Lord Denning’s Thought and Work”, *The Denning Law Journal* 14 (1999): 161.

⁵ Cited in Phang, “A Passion for Justice (Part I)”, footnote 32.

⁶ *Ibid*, footnote 39.

⁷ Freeman, *Lord Denning*, 404.

⁸ Cited in Phang, “A Passion for Justice (Part I)”, footnote 32.

⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁰ Freeman, *Lord Denning*, 404.

¹¹ Denning, *The Family Story*, 183.

¹² Phang, “The Natural Law Foundations of Lord Denning’s Thought and Work”, 177.

¹³ See Timothy Tow, *God’s Holy Law* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, nd); Roger Sherman Galer, *Old Testament Law Classified as in Modern Legal Systems*, ed Timothy Tow (Singapore Far Eastern Bible College, 2002). See also Francis Nigel Lee, “The Biblical and Historical Background of the Common Law” in www.originofnations.com.

org/books,%20papers/commonlaw2.pdf, accessed on 22 February 2017.

¹⁴ Augusto Zimmerman, “A Law above the Law”, *Glocal Conversations* (November 2013): 86-98. For an exposition of the Decalogue, see Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973).

¹⁵ Denning, *The Family Story*, 181.

¹⁶ Phang, “A Passion for Justice (Part II)”, footnotes 216-219.

¹⁷ Cited in Freeman, *Lord Denning*, 249.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Lord Edmund-Davies, “Lord Denning: Christian Advocate and Judge”, *The Denning Law Journal* 1 (1986): 41, 42.

²⁰ Denning, *The Family Story*, 186.

²¹ Cited in Freeman, *Lord Denning*, 358.

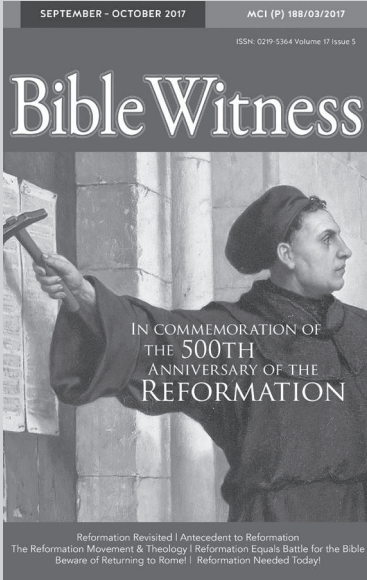
²² *Ibid.*, 406.

²³ Cited in Phang, “The Natural Law Foundations of Lord Denning’s Thought and Work”, 177.

²⁴ Freeman, *Lord Denning*, 403.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 397.

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I KNOW MY CALLING: A TESTIMONY

Cornelius Koshy

Foreword

“And the child did minister unto the LORD before Eli the priest.” (1 Sam 2:11). Hannah dedicated Samuel to the LORD, and he lived with Eli the priest in Shiloh, in the house of the LORD. The young Samuel grew up in the house of the LORD, and faithfully served the LORD under Eli, proving and confirming his mother’s vow of him. The quoted words are said thrice—in verse 11, in verse 18, and in chapter 3 verse 1. This repetition reveals three things: (1) young Samuel’s faithful ministry through his growing years, (2) a confirmation of his mother’s vow, and (3) a proof of his dedication to the LORD. The latter point strikes as critical because the young Samuel ministered in knowledge that his mother, Hannah, had dedicated him to serve in the house of the LORD all the days of his life and he therefore faithfully ministered to confirm his dedication.

Although I have always been well acquainted with the life of Samuel, I only realised in late 2016 that my life bore striking similarities to that of Samuel. Like Samuel, my parents vowed to the LORD that they would bring me up for His service. Like Samuel who served in Shiloh as a young child, I have served in Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church (BPC) as a child to the present day with my family. Like Samuel who heard God calling him in the quiet of the night but misrecognised God’s voice as Eli’s, I heard the LORD’s call on a few occasions but failed to respond to his call. Using the life of Samuel as a stepping stone to my story, the rest of my testimony seeks to demonstrate the conviction I have: Since God has called me to give my life *“unto the LORD all the days of [my] life”*, I obediently rise to the call (1 Sam 1:11).

I begin writing primarily as a personal effort to confirm the LORD’s call in my heart. I write to my heart, and I address my soul. I will face and fight the fears which fester within until I know the LORD’s will for me. At the same time, there is a secondary purpose for which I write.

I write to stir my friends in the LORD, both within Gethsemane and without, to contemplate their position in this ephemeral world, and to likewise give their entire selves, or at the very least, more of themselves, towards the LORD's eternal kingdom.

This is the testimony of my calling into the ministry.

To the hurried reader, my specific calling into the ministry is found at the final part of this testimony.

Should I Erase the Foreword of My Life?

In some ways, I feel like retracting all that is written above.

The Christian Faith as the Symbolic Foreword of Life

Most testimonies conventionally begin with an outlining of the writer's growing years and his peculiar familial or societal circumstances, which goes something to the effect of, "My name is Cornelius Koshy and I was born into a family of five, the eldest to a younger brother and sister; whose father is the pastor of a small Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore, and whose mother is a stay-home mum, but also actively serves in various ministries alongside my father. I received Jesus Christ as my Saviour and LORD as a child and have affirmed my faith..."

To qualify, there is nothing incorrect about such an introduction. In fact, such an introduction clearly establishes, from the onset, the writer's background and circumstances concisely. Nonetheless, I hesitate to do so because to outline my life in this way will only reveal just how different my growing years were from the vast majority of Singaporeans—a fact which I do admit and yet actively challenge because I am as human as the average Singaporean, and I am Christian as any other (genuine) Christian. I attended public schools and university like most Singaporeans, and I am a sinner and in need of the same salvation Christians receive through Jesus Christ. However, in some ways, I have implied the opposite in my foreword—I have aligned myself with young Samuel's unique consecration and showed that I am different from most people—and that is why I feel like retracting it all. But I cannot push these facts of life to the side lines just because I want to be categorised as "normal". These factors are, undeniably, largely responsible in shaping my entire self and in effecting this present decision.

This struggle I have, to both keep and erase the foreword, is symbolic of the precise struggle I have in heeding (and running away

from) the call into full-time ministry. To illustrate the struggle, I broaden this struggle slightly, and include all who were brought up in a Christian (not just professing) home. As Christian children, there are many things in this world which we cannot and do not want to be part of, because it is clearly, or even subtly, against God's Word. Christian children, by virtue of the covenant grace extended to the household of faith and their obedience to parents' counsel, will be different from everyone else. We are, however, conveniently branded as weird, or assisted with the explanation, "He's Christian, that's why he cannot" do this or that. I am sure that the following imagination has once crossed your mind, just as it has crossed mine: How simple and fuss-free life would be, of course in a base and earthly sense, if the symbolic foreword of life—our Christian faith—was erased. Imagine not having to foreword yourself as a "Christian" to anyone, and not being committed to the Word of God to direct your life, or not being accountable to God for your words and actions. But stop there, because we know that this imagination is vain, for we have measured them all in earthly ways. My point is simply this: the foreword or the Christian preamble to our lives is an unavoidable fact, yet we are prone to erase that away, whether consciously or not, to have an easier, more worldly life.

Narrowing this common Christian experience back to my struggle of being consecrated as a child, my contemplation to remove the foreword is symbolic of a real struggle I face: to escape the reality that my parents have consecrated me at birth. I grew up knowing of my consecration and I have, since a child, actively made life decisions bearing my consecration and the future work in mind. But, at the same time, I waver in acknowledging my consecration because: is being a Christian not different enough; must I be more different than others, even from other Christians? Am I to give my life to God's work just because my parents decided it to be? It seems too easy an entrance and too weak a resistance.

The Problem of Self-Will above God's Will

At this juncture, it is evident to the reader that I have an obsessive concern to be "normal". If I peel off the layers of questions I have one by one, an underlying frustration at the very core of this obsession is uncovered.

(1) Question: Why am I different?

Answer: I am a Christian, specifically, one who was consecrated at

birth, brought up by parents who wanted me to be in the full-time ministry, who have taught me to view things of life through a spiritual lens, and in relation to the full-time ministry.

- (2) Question: How can I possibly enter the full-time ministry just because my parents consecrated me from birth?

Answer: Quite plainly, no—my parents' dedication does not dictate God to call me. It is God's discretion to choose whom He wills to serve.

- (3) Question: Can't it be someone else who truly wants to give his life to God?

Answer: Yes, anyone who sincerely desires to serve God full time can serve Him if God calls him.

- (4) The underlying frustration surfaces: Why did God choose me to serve him?

The same frustration can be rephrased: Why did God impress upon my parents' hearts, in the nine months when I was in my mother's womb, to consecrate me for service?

To whom shall I turn to for the answer other than my parents? I am certain, nonetheless, that even if I receive that golden answer from the horse's mouth, I will rebut again in my heart with a refusal to accede because "I" was not involved in the decision-making process.

At the core of my frustration, I have prized my self-will above God's will. And pride rests too comfortably in the seat of self-will. My self-will resists any intruding disturbance, like the fact of my consecration, to shake and topple my pride. I want to do what I want; I want to live comfortably without having to answer to God, or my parents, about a consecration which I did not assent to.

The Sovereign Will of God

Albeit my parents' decision to consecrate me, I must acknowledge that it is not their self-will to consecrate me, but the hand of God which worked through my parents. My parents might have said that they consecrated me, but it is God who orchestrated the circumstances preceding my conception and implanted the thought in their hearts to consecrate me for service. My parents were but instruments of God's plan. The desire to be "normal" is just an excuse to hide an inflated pride. My obsession with this desire then shows how self-willed I am, even to

the extent of insubmission to the will of God.

The next two chapters elaborate on the lessons I draw on the sovereignty of God from the perspectives of Hannah and Elkanah. The following chapter then reveals Samuel's unwavering obedience to the will of God, which I receive for immediate application.

Hannah's Perspective on the Sovereignty of God

"[A]nd Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children ... but the LORD had shut up [Hannah's] womb... her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb ... so [Peninnah] provoked her; ... and [Hannah] was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life ..." (1 Sam 1:2-11).

Sorrow of Heart or Sovereignty of God?

It is easy to invite scepticism into this discussion on the sovereignty of God and conclude that it is, in fact, the mockery Hannah suffered from Peninnah's provocation that compelled Hannah to make the vow. In the extract above, Hannah's sorrow and bitterness are evident. Not even Elkanah's special love for Hannah could alleviate her sorrow; she was inconsolable because of her inability to conceive children like her adversary. It was in this barren and sorrowful state that she pled and vowed before the LORD. One might thus add: What pathetic state this is—to consecrate her child only because of her physical inadequacy?

I do not doubt that Hannah was deeply sorrowful. Very possibly, desperation and the "bitterness of soul" were in some ways contributory to her decision to consecrate Samuel. But to conclude the matter as that is to also suggest that Hannah was hopeless in her state. Dejected as she was, Hannah's eyes were but fixed on the sovereign LORD from whom she drew hope and strength. Barren as she was, Hannah's fruitfulness was in her trust in the LORD who would remember and hear her prayer. Two points on God's sovereignty, from Hannah's vow-making, are noteworthy, and these two points ultimately show that the matter of Samuel's consecration was not a mere desperate act, or out of an envious spirit. On the contrary, it was a vow made out of an anchored

faith in a sovereign God who is in control. In application, my parents' consecration of me was neither a trivial nor pitiful matter. Instead, it was a premeditated decision made through solemn prayer and hopeful trust in the LORD.

Submitting to God's Sovereignty:
Acknowledging God as Giver of Life

A young wife may mourn over her barren womb and remain in her despair; she may blame and pity herself as useless; she may translate her self-pity into frustration with and jealousy of her adversaries who gloat in the fruitfulness of their wombs. Human as Hannah was, she did experience the "bitterness of soul". Nonetheless, she rose above her sorrow, set her eyes toward heaven, and placed her self-will under God's will. Simply, Hannah submitted herself to the sovereignty of God. We know this because she acknowledged that conception and having children were *not* by the innate power of her womb, but given by God. In verse 11, she prayed that God would "*give unto thine handmaid a man child*". Hannah acknowledged God as the creator of life.

This acknowledgement—that the sovereignty of God presumes God as the creator and giver of life—recurs in this account. Although the book of 1 Samuel was written by the prophet Samuel, (of course we also know, retrospectively, that all Scripture is inspired of God, and that holy men of God spoke and wrote through the empowering of the Holy Spirit,) how else could Samuel have known Hannah's ordeal prior to his birth, than through Hannah's own words and testimony to Samuel! In verse 27, Hannah acknowledged God as the giver when she confessed, "*the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him*". Samuel's language to describe this account places God as the giver of life. Samuel wrote that when Elkanah knew Hannah, "*the LORD remembered her*" (1 Sam 1:19). The very name, "Samuel", means "I have asked of the LORD", an acknowledgement that the child is a gift from God (1 Sam 1:20). After Samuel was given to the tabernacle, and Hannah bore more children, Samuel recorded that it was "*the LORD [that] visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bare three sons and two daughters*" (1 Sam 2:21). From a barren womb to a fruitful one—such fertility was bestowed upon by God; it was "*the LORD [that] had shut up her womb*". God opens and closes the womb; He chooses to whom he bestows life and when to do so. In Hannah's case, the life of Samuel was decided by God to be given at His appointed time, and for a special purpose: a consecrated child who

was destined to be the first prophet of Israel. In application, my life is given *by God* through my parents. It belongs to God, the giver of life, and it is in his sovereign will that I was to be consecrated at birth, to serve my God with my life.

Submitting to God's Sovereignty: Trusting God That He Will Give

The second point I have builds upon the former, and it is to trust the sovereignty of God. I am sure Hannah trusted, despite her sorrow, because why else would she have prayed to God if she did not trust that God would answer her prayer for a child? Unlike Hannah who anticipated God's answer, we as readers of her story, have a complete picture of God's sovereignty at a glance. When Hannah prayed the LORD to "*remember me, and not forget thine handmaid*", Samuel recorded that "*the LORD remembered her*" in verse 19. When Hannah brought Samuel to Shiloh, she told Eli the priest that "*the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him*". What great trust in the sovereignty of God Hannah must have had. We as readers may glance over and miss the factor of trust that Hannah possessed in anticipation of God's answer. This testimony of Hannah teaches that the sovereignty of God gives us the assurance that our asking of the LORD will be remembered, and answered.

Thus, when I re-examined the litany of questions I had in the previous chapter, in light of Hannah's perspective on God's sovereignty, my questions clearly stemmed from a heart that neither acknowledged God as sovereign, nor trusted God's sovereignty (of course, the second outcome was built upon the first—I cannot trust God as sovereign without first acknowledging Him as sovereign). These issues I had—self-will over God's will, not trusting in God's sovereignty, a questioning spirit, insubmission—all come hand-in-hand. Identifying one issue will soon expose the other. Conquering one issue must then lead to the conquest of others if I want complete victory in this matter.

Conception and Consecration Converges to Declare God's Sovereignty

It is necessary that a distinction be made between the conception of Samuel and the consecration of Samuel. They are different events altogether. However, when it comes to acknowledging the sovereignty of God, both conception and consecration unanimously declare the sovereignty of God. Conception is the gift from a sovereign God, as established in the preceding point. Consecration is an act which declares

one's trust in and thankfulness to a sovereign God who gives life. A Christian, who acknowledges the sovereignty of God, sees all that God has given him as originating from God and so they belong to God. Consequently, the Christian happily consecrates it back to God so that the gift may be used for whatever purpose God decides. The connection between conception and consecration is made twice, one in verse 11 and the other in verses 27 and 28. In verse 11, "... *give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD ...*", the verb "give" connects the events of conception and consecration together. Verses 27 and 28, "*the LORD hath given me ... Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD*" show that giving and returning are encoded in the conception and consecration of a child.

Bringing both points on God's sovereignty together, consecration is an act of a trusting faith in the sovereignty of God as the giver of life. The consecrated child's life becomes a living (and breathing and walking) testament to the sovereignty of God. His life is to fulfil the special purpose which God has for him. At this point in Hannah's and Samuel's life, God's purpose for Samuel has yet to be made known, so I will not go into the topic of God's purpose for the consecrated child just yet. But for the current discussion on consecration, it is crucial that I acknowledge the sovereignty of God in my parents' consecration of me. It was not a trivial, nor ceremonial, or worse, miscalculated matter. My conception and life was given by God, and I was consecrated to be given to God and His work. The breath I inhale was ordained in the sovereign will of God; the breath I exhale must testify that sovereign will of God.

Hannah's Song of Praise: A Paroxysm of God's Sovereignty

The account of Samuel is interrupted, in the first ten verses of 1 Samuel 2, by a sudden exultation of praise, which is better known as Hannah's song of praise. This paroxysm of praise is packed with declarations of God's sovereignty, and includes statements which allude to Christ's resurrection and God's final victory over His enemies. At first glance, this may be almost laughable: to think that a very natural, biological phenomenon, the conception of a child—which is in fact the creative act of God taken for granted—can stir Hannah to burst out with praise that extends into Christology and Eschatology. To the sympathetic reader, however, such bold declarations of praise can only spring from a heart which has endured great suffering; a heart not wavering, but

trusting the sovereignty of God and, finally, tasting the sweet goodness of God. Hannah progresses beyond just an acknowledgement of God's sovereignty; Hannah has *experienced* God's sovereignty and being filled with the blessing of God in her life, she sings,

*My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD:
My mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy
salvation.*

*There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee:
neither is there any rock like our God.*

*Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of
your mouth:*

*for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are
weighed.*

*The bows of the mighty men are broken,
and they that stumbled are girded with strength.*

*They that were full have hired out themselves for bread;
and they that were hungry ceased:*

*so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children
is waxed feeble.*

*The LORD killeth and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave,
and bringeth up.*

*The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and
lifteth up.*

*He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from
the dunghill,*

*to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of
glory:*

*for the pillars of the earth are the LORD's and he hath set the world
upon them.*

*He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in
darkness;*

for by strength shall no man prevail.

The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces;

out of heaven shall he thunder upon them:

the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth;

and he shall give strength unto his king,

and exalt the horn of his anointed.

(1 Sam 2:1-10, emphasis mine)

The underlined statements make clear parallels to all that have been discussed. A closer study of this song is not relevant to the intent of this writing, but I make three quick observations on Hannah's song of praise, based on the underlined statements, before moving onto Elkanah's perspective on the sovereignty of God: (1) To question the God of knowledge is to be proud; (2) The mother becomes feeble because she uses her children to gloat instead of praising the Giver of life; but the barren trusts in the sovereign will of God and is rewarded; (3) God decides, not us, to give life and to take life away.

Elkanah's Perspective on God's Sovereignty

"And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the LORD establish his word. ..." (1 Sam 1:23).

It was time, once again, for Elkanah's family to return to Shiloh for the annual sacrifice. But Hannah requested to remain at home to wean the child Samuel before he was to be sent to the house of the LORD for service. Elkanah, as the head of the family, probably felt a slight tinge of sadness that his favourite of the two wives was not joining him this year. The phrase, "Do what seemeth thee good", seems to suggest that Elkanah relented to Hannah's request. However, he made a statement that shifted the focus away from Hannah's effort of bringing up the child, to the sovereignty of God: *"only the LORD establish his word"*.

Relying on God's Sovereignty: Only the LORD Can Establish His Word

In other words, Elkanah was saying, "You do anything and everything that you deem good for the child. Stay home, nurse him, bring him up in the fear of the LORD, prepare him for service in the house of the LORD. But remember, it is not your tarrying, or your weaning, that will establish Samuel as a servant of the LORD; it is *only the LORD* that will establish his word". Of course, I am sure Elkanah was not recommending a hands-off approach, leaving the child Samuel to be divinely nurtured without the parental responsibility of Elkanah and Hannah. On the contrary, Elkanah was affirming that, no matter how meticulous they might be, the LORD, and only the LORD, was the one who would fulfil His will for Samuel, and that Hannah must rely on the sovereignty of God in her upbringing of Samuel.

This verse resounds with the undertones of the great doctrine of God's sovereignty and Man's responsibility. Hannah diligently nurtured Samuel: "*So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, ... and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh ...*" (1 Sam 1:23-24). During this time, she must have been unreserved in her care for Samuel, telling the greatness of God, singing songs of God and preparing the consecrated Samuel for His service. Yet, if the LORD did not establish His word in Samuel, all of Hannah's effort would have been of none effect. We know, however, that the LORD did establish His word in Samuel, and that the sovereign hand of God was behind Hannah's diligent upbringing. In 1 Samuel 3:19, we read that "*the LORD was with him*", which confirms that God was with Samuel throughout his growing years.

Reflecting on my life, I can unequivocally speak of the diligence my parents have devoted to nurture me in the ways of God. Some read the upbringing as severe strictness, others as precautionary; some read it as conservative, and others as restraining. Whatever opinions you may have of my upbringing, I know that my parents have, to the best of their ability, brought me up under the authority of God's Word. God's Word was the rule of the house because my parents themselves knew that without the Word of God as the foundation of the family, the house would collapse at the slightest tremor.

Still, even with all their human effort, there were times they could not bring me up. For whatever reasons they suffered lack, be it poverty or emotional distress, call of duty or human weaknesses, God's sovereign hand held mine; "*only the LORD establish his word*". They knew this truth too, often repeating to me that whatever they lacked in my upbringing was covered for by God; "*the LORD was with*" me.

When I recognise my parents' reliance on God's sovereignty, it raises two responses within: (1) a deep gratitude for the hand of God in my life, and (2) only the LORD can establish me into the ministry.

The Obedience of Samuel

It puzzles me that Samuel remains silent throughout his growing years. As a child, did he not find it strange that his life was different from other Israelite kids? We do not get insights into Samuel's thoughts as a child. The Scriptures just tell us that his parents consecrated him,

Eli received him into the house of the LORD, and that he “*ministered before the LORD*”. Compare Samuel’s silence to this writer’s incessant questioning at the outset. A submissive Samuel is contrasted with a self-willed writer; a silent Samuel serving the LORD is contrasted with a disgruntled writer questioning his consecration.

“*[T]he LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. ... And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered. Speak; for thy servant heareth*” (1 Sam 3:4, 5, 10)

First Recorded Words of Samuel: Pure Obedience

When we finally read Samuel’s first recorded words in chapter three (after two chapters of silence), they are words expressing swift obedience and humble servitude: “*Here am I*”. Samuel hears a voice calling him, and he readily responds. I struggle to find a modern-day equivalent of a response which sufficiently carries the tones of servitude packed in this three-word phrase. But to illustrate Samuel’s readiness, his reply would sound like, “Yes, I’m here”. Of course, few today speak with such formality and completeness. The politest form available to most of us would be a simple “Yes”, or a convenient, “Ya”. My point is adequately made with this comparison—young Samuel portrays a willing, and almost unmatched, character of obedience.

The rest of this account is full of indicators of Samuel’s obedience. Samuel runs to Eli on the first call, a mark of swift obedience. The shortness of the sentence, “*And he went and lay down*”, is positioned immediately after Eli bade him to return to sleep, thus showing Samuel’s immediate obedience. The pattern of call and misrecognition occurred thrice, and each time Samuel patiently attended to Eli, showing his continued obedience.

Yes, Samuel was young; yes, Samuel possessed that which we call a “child-like” faith. One may then be quick to dismiss this quality of obedience as mere naivety on the part of young Samuel. After all, most children also possess an unquestioning obedience to their parents, but later outgrow their childish innocence. However, the rest of the book of 1 Samuel quashes such thoughts: it records no less than an entire life—from consecration to death—of unwavering loyalty and obedience to God

amidst a disobedient and idolatrous Israel.

An Entire Life of Unwavering Obedience

It is necessary, at this juncture, to note that Samuel's obedience was not just an obedience to a man, but an obedience to God. His servitude and humility to obey presupposes his obedience to God's will that he is to be a servant in the house of the LORD. In the third repetition of the phrase, "*And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli*" (1 Sam 3:1, emphasis mine), which occurs at the top of this account, it is evident that Samuel's ministering, and obedience to Eli was "*unto the LORD*". In fact, this verse elucidates the order of Samuel's obedience: obedience unto the LORD followed by obedience before Eli.

This short account, of young Samuel's obedience to Eli, was a foretaste of an entire life of obedience to God. In the following section, I pick out key verses, starting from Samuel's ministry in 1 Samuel 4 to his death in 1 Samuel 25, which show his continued loyalty and obedience to God.

The life of Samuel was steadfast in obedience to God, amidst a people who repeatedly disobeyed God. The people's repentance was temporary for soon the people returned to idolatry and transgressed God's commandments. When the people asked Samuel for a king, Samuel was unwilling, and "*[the] thing displeased Samuel*" (1 Sam 8:6). God was also displeased with his people, but he said to Samuel, "*Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee*" (1 Sam 8:7). Despite the frustration Samuel might have harboured within, he obeyed God's instruction and he "*told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king*" (1 Sam 8:10). In contrast to Samuel's obedience, the persistent rebellion of the people was a clear mark of defiance against God and their disobedience is recorded, "*Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us*" (1 Sam 8:19).

On another occasion, when God sent thunder and rain on the day of their wheat harvest as a sign of His anger against his people's disobedience, Samuel spoke, "*Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way*" (1 Sam 12:23). His loyalties were with God, and regardless of his personal frustration with the people, he stuck to God's commandment for him to pray for the people and to patiently guide them to God.

Likewise, when God rejected Saul after the battle against the Amalekites, and chose David to be king, “*Samuel did that which the LORD spake*” (1 Sam 16:4). These three accounts display Samuel’s continued obedience to God in his life, always doing what God wants instead of the people’s desires. Even when it was against Samuel’s personal wish, he arrested his personal desire so that God’s will may be executed. Bringing back into consideration Samuel’s obedience to Eli as a child, his life in its entirety teaches that obedience is not a temporary or a self-convenient quality, but a life-long and God-pleasing quality. Additionally, Samuel’s obedience grips steadfast irrespective of the Israelites’ diverging attitudes towards the commandments of God.

Judgement against Disobedience

As the prophet and judge of Israel, Samuel was a living testimony of the importance of obedience. I highlight three accounts of Samuel’s judgement against the people’s disobedience. These prove just how crucial the obedience to God, and not personal desire nor Christian works, is in a Christian’s life.

Just after God sent thunder and rain on the day of wheat harvest, Samuel reminded the people of their rebellion against God: “*ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king.*” (1 Sam 12:12). He tells the people that “[*if*] *ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God: but if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers.*” (1 Sam 12:14, 15 emphasis mine). Disobedience to God is equated to a rebellion against the commandment of the LORD. That is how severe disobedience is, and it is worthy of the judgement of the LORD.

Moreover, an obedience to God must be an obedience to every word God instructs. After the battle of the Amalekites, King Saul did not heed every word of God’s commandment to “*destroy all that they have, and spare them not*” (1 Sam 15:3). When Samuel arrived at the remains of the battlefield, he asked, “*What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? ... Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the*

spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD?” (1 Sam 15:14-19). Saul sheepishly replied, “Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me ... But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal.” (1 Sam 15:20-21). Saul tried to explain his case of disobedience, that it was done so that he could better please God with the sacrifice of the battle spoil. To Saul’s version of (partial) obedience, Samuel uttered the now-famous verses, “Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam 15:22-23). Obedience must be complete, and not picked and chosen based on one’s preferences. Obedience cannot be compromised for supposed “better” worship, sacrifices, or any other seemingly Christian acts. A Christian’s preoccupation must solely be total obedience to God, because anything short of this is rebellion against the commandment of God.

In Samuel’s words, Saul’s rebellion was compared to the sin of witchcraft: *“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft”*. I find this likening purposeful because it foretells the sin of witchcraft which Saul, with his continued disobedience, eventually entangled himself with. Samuel had passed away at this point, and Saul was deeply afraid because of the ensuing threat by the Philistines to attack and destroy Israel, a prophecy already prophesied by God in 1 Samuel 15:26–28. He visited the witch at Endor to wake Samuel up from the dead and to seek his counsel. In an emphatic reply to Saul, the awakened Samuel said, *“Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD ... therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day”* (1 Sam 28:18). The present trouble Saul faced was caused by a simple, and yet consequential, disobedience to the voice of the LORD. His convenient and self-pleasing sin of disobedience was to have a lasting defeat to the nation of Israel. This shows that the consequences of disobedience are not limited to the perpetrator, but it often ripples beyond to perturb others around, and in Saul’s case, an entire nation.

Obedience or Lack Thereof Reflects the Object of Fear

At the root of one’s disobedience lies the question, “Who do you fear—God or Man?” This relationship between obedience and the object of fear recurs in the same quoted accounts. Saul admits *“I have sinned:*

for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice” (1 Sam 15:24, emphasis mine). In Samuel’s judgement, he says, “if ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD” and again, “Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king” (1 Sam 12:14, 24-25). It is evidently clear that the fear of God compels one towards obedience of the same, while the fear of man pushes one towards disobedience which is rebellion against God in a bid to please man.

This conversation on the relationship between the obedience and the fear of God is necessary because herein lies yet another reason for my resistance against God’s call. In revision of the abovementioned points, I (1) possessed a self-willed pride that was unwilling to acknowledge the sovereignty of God in my life, (2) failed to recognise that my conception and consecration are both acts of God’s sovereignty, (3) did not rely on the LORD to establish His word, and (4) feared man more than I feared God. And so in summary my resistance was a rebellion against the commandment of the LORD; otherwise put, I was just plain ol’ disobedient.

In Application: Immediate Obedience

I have drawn lessons on obedience from the life of Samuel, to which I now respond and apply in my life. Just as Samuel ran to Eli in obedience to the call, I run to the presence of God to receive instructions for immediate application. Just as Samuel obediently followed Eli’s instruction to reply the next time God calls, I will obediently respond, “*Speak; for thy servant heareth*”. For to delay any further is to disobey: “*I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments*” (Ps 119:60).

Lessons learnt from Samuel’s obedience

As a brief closure to the lessons learnt from Samuel, I list the lessons on obedience which I have learnt from the life of Samuel: (1) My obedience must be life-long, not periodic; (2) My obedience must be to every word God instructs; (3) Disobedience is a rebellion against the commandment of the LORD; (4) I have to obey God regardless of surrounding pressures; (5) The fear of God compels me to obey Him, while the fear of Man only leads to disobedience.

A Story of Disobedience

National Service – Singapore Police Force

Looking back at my younger life, I used to possess a similar unquestioning obedience to the sovereign will of God. I grew up with clear knowledge of my consecration, that I was to serve God with my life. I used to say to the curious inquisitor, without hesitation, that I wanted to serve God full-time. My friends from secondary school and junior college, and some in Gethsemane, can attest to my desire to serve God. However, sometime during my National Service (NS) in the Singapore Police Force, I was distracted by the offers of financial stability, and by the promises of a more comfortable life. Of course, they were all measured in an earthly sense. The moment my eyes were taken off the sovereign hand of God in my life, I stopped being obedient to the will of God. All the younger years of obedience meant nothing because my covetous eye sought after riches and fame.

Allow me to recount this story of how I learned the importance of (1) a lifelong obedience, as opposed to periodic obedience, (2) being obedient irrespective of surrounding influences and/ or opposition, (3) fearing God and not man.

The Offer of a Scholarship

On a night in August 2013, I was the only one left in the office. The rest had left an hour before, and I was left finishing a report for an operation I had oversight of. My office was in the basement of Bedok Police Division ('G' Division), in a space directly adjacent to the Division Operations Room. It was an atypical office space: three rows of terminals facing gigantic screens that filled the entire wall. My office was to be the contingency command post for the Division in an emergency.

The office was quiet, and I heard the doors from the corridor aisle open. I knew someone was to enter the room shortly. The door opened, and he was my direct supervisor, the Head of Operations and Training in 'G' Division. We called him HOT for short. My vocation was Staff Officer (SO) to Head Operations and Training, with SO HOT as a quick and very pun-able pseudonym attached to my vocation. Despite the supposed tone of surprise in his remark, "Oh, you're still here", from the look on his face I was sure he was expecting to see me in the office. Moreover, it was rare for him to come down to the basement at that hour, especially when everyone else had left. HOT must have seen my "online"

status in the office communicator, or one of the emails which I had recently sent out. He walked very quickly, to the other end of the room. HOT always walked very fast (and back then I used to think that his brisk walking correlated to how quickly his brilliant mind worked). Because of the layout of the command post-turned-office, it was only convenient for him to sit two rows behind mine, and at the other end of the room. I was seated in the first row, in a seat closest to the door from which he entered.

I think he wanted to get to know me better, and I too wanted to know my supervisor better, being relatively new to the vocation. I was only two months into this vocation, freshly commissioned from the Officer Cadet Training in the Police Training Command. We picked up the conversation well, he asked what my post-NS study plans were, and I asked him how his life as a senior officer was. It was in this conversation that he said he had been impressed with the work I was doing, as well as with my attitude toward the given tasks, and that if I ever considered applying for the local or overseas scholarships with the force, he would highly recommend and support the application. HOT was an overseas scholar himself, and to have a scholar recommend an applicant made the proposition very enticing. He then elaborated on all the perks of being a scholar: job security because of the minimum five to six years of service-bond with the force, waived tuition fees coupled with monthly student stipends, future financial stability with the relatively high salaries scholars receive, high job satisfaction with the work the force does in safeguarding and protecting lives etc. The thought of it was both overwhelming and alluring. The cherry on the cake was with a final compliment he offered: HOT said that it was hard to find people with the attitude and calibre I possessed, and that I had even outmatched some regular, full-time officers; I remember him saying that he would pick me over them anytime. With such a persuasive pitch and flattering words, it is no wonder that all desires of full-time service in the house of the LORD vanished within me. All I could think of were the possibilities of being a scholar with the force, and having a comfortable, worry-free life.

This conversation with HOT remains vivid to this day because it was the day my perspectives towards the full-time ministry shifted. From an earnest desire to give my life to the LORD, my thoughts and desires were now fixed on being a scholar with the force. Instead of obeying God's will, I started fuelling my self-will with disobedient imaginations of a life in blue. (I must add that with every conscientious contemplation

over the scholarship, there was a deliberate decision on my part to ignore the Holy Spirit's reminder of my consecration. Every time I entertained the imagination of being an officer with the force, I allowed my heart to defiantly refuse obedience to God's sovereignty.) Nonetheless, I knew it was too big a decision to make there and then, and so I gave the reply most people do when they cannot commit—"I want to keep my options open for now." The conversation eased away comfortably, and I turned my swivel chair back to where my desktop terminal was to continue typing. HOT had, by that time, whipped his laptop open and was typing away too.

After a few minutes, I heard the closing of his laptop and the sound of the velcro peeling off his black Crumpler messenger bag. HOT was packing up to leave. I turned around on my swivel chair to face the door at that end of the room. As parting words from the door, he said that he was serious about his offer and that if I did make up my mind I could tell him, and he would link me up with the recruiting department. Later that night, he dropped me a message to take the next day off—I still have a screenshot of that message to this day.

Close Friendships

Fast forward a few months, and it was the start of the new year, January 2014. Because of the nature of my vocation, I had to work with the different branches within the Division, including the Commanding Officers of Neighbourhood Police Centres in 'G' Division, and had, by that time, earned a good reputation amongst all. I was identified by the Commander (Cmdr) of 'G' Division and was reassigned to be his SO in the new year, while still holding on to some responsibilities of the SO HOT vocation. This new vocation as SO Cmdr was more of a secretariat role, but it was an equally enriching experience as the previous vocation. I moved up to the second floor of the Division, and worked in an attached room to Cmdr's office, with only a wall separating HOT and I. Anyone who wanted to speak to Cmdr had to first knock on mine, and so that increased the contact I had with officers within the division, and even with officers without. By that time, my friendship with HOT was strong and he became more of a colleague than a superior to me. Things were way comfortable, to the extent that we called contractors to drill a hole in the wall separating both of our offices, with the excuse that it would better facilitate communication between the Command wing and the Operations wing. The true reason, however, was that both of us

would enjoy convenient chats through the new hole. The “hole-in-the-wall” is still there to this day, long after both of us left the Division. In a humorous yet sentimental angle, the hole is the indelible mark of our friendship and time spent together in the force.

My relationship with Cmdr was just as good. He trusted me with duties, valued my opinions on matters in the Division, and we had no problems striking an easy conversation with each other. We had meals together whenever he was not engaged in a meeting or involved in daily “fire-fighting”—a term frequently used in civil service organisations. Although such opportunities were rare (Cmdr was constantly busy), we did have a few shared meals in the six months of NS I was left with. One morning, there was a planned fire-drill in the Division, and since fire-drills are typically a long-drawn process of waiting and taking roll, Cmdr pulled me out of the office and drove us to a nearby Starbucks for morning breakfast to escape the drill altogether. I narrate these accounts, the “hole-in-the-wall” and fire drill incidents, to show how close I had become with my superiors. This intimacy we shared was a large factor which caused me to compromise my obedience to God—a point which I bring up again soon.

Just as it was with HOT, the topics of joining the force and scholarships were frequently discussed with Cmdr, and Cmdr was just as persuasive as HOT. By this time, my heart was more inclined to join the force than to serve God for the same financially-alluring reasons. This time, when Cmdr proposed to me, I told him of my desire to go into the full-time ministry, but that I was not yet sure. My uncertainty of God’s will for me was my weakness, and Cmdr, out of sincere concern for my future, tapped into my thoughts to find out more of the idea of full-time service. He managed to dig in deep into how I felt about the matter, partly because the friendship we shared encouraged me to voice my thoughts. He uncovered an underlying fear I had: the fear of disappointing my parents who consecrated me.

Dinner with Cmdr and My Family

It was true. I never wanted to hurt my parents, whose only desire for me was that I give my life to full-time service, just as they did with theirs. Cmdr was smart; he gathered that my parents were the only hurdle that stood between the scholarship and I. And he was right. My heart was already lulled into joining the force. I was sure that once the “parent

hurdle” was cleared, I would be signing on the scholarship papers.

“Shall I have dinner one day with your family then?” he threw it out one night as he drove me home from the station. I was surprised at his candidness, but even more excited at the prospects of having Cmdr over at my place for dinner. Was it not an honour to have a high-ranking officer from the force over for dinner with my family?

In a previous breakfast together, Cmdr had identified some similarities between his family and mine. We both had immigrant fathers—his father was from China and mine from India. We both had to strive for excellence, and to do things very very well. He observed that it could be that our immigrant fathers knew that opportunities must not be taken for granted in a foreign land, and so their fighting spirit was passed on to us. Possibly true.

Cmdr was clear with his intentions for dinner. He said that it would be a nice get-to-know session, but of course he had a greater agenda which was to speak to and convince my parents in hopes that they would be supportive of my scholarship application. My parents were very willing to have Cmdr over, and without having to say much about the objective of the visit, they surmised what the dinner conversation was going to be about. By that time, I had had a few conversations with my parents on the offers for scholarship, and they knew I was faltering from the resolve I had when I was younger which was to serve God full-time. I too knew their thoughts concerning a bond-scholarship because they had repeatedly shared their strong opinion against it as I grew up—they had consecrated me for full-time service and I was to serve God, and not join secular jobs; how the mandatory service bond would hinder me from serving God with my life; the LORD would provide for all my needs, including my university tuition fees; I should not join unless I was absolutely sure it was God’s will for me—and I regularly rehearsed these reasons in my mind.

On a night in April 2014, we had dinner together. An officer from Tampines NPC drove Cmdr and me to my place while Cmdr’s wife and daughter (his son was just about eight months and was left with their family’s nanny) came on their own. Cmdr’s wife brought dessert—a luscious cake from Awfully Chocolate and Haagen Daz ice cream. My mum made soup, pasta and pizza, the tried and tested menu which she frequently cooked when guests came.

Introductions were effortless, and soon we were tightly squeezed around the dinner table—Cmdr at one end and my dad at the other. Just as my mum was passing the soup bowls round the table, I noticed she did not seem her usual self. She seemed preoccupied and troubled. This was most obvious, in my observation, when she distributed the cutlery. She mixed them up and did not pass the correct ones to the guests. On hindsight, I think she was nervous to face the conversation topic over dinner. My mum could have carried a conflicted heart: on one hand, willing and happy to entertain the officer who had been most kind to me; and on the other, troubled over how distracted from full-time service I had become.

Just as Cmdr had intended, he offered his proposition to my dad. My dad first explained that the decision was mine to make, but as parents, they had a God-given duty to guide and counsel me when they find my decision unwise. He explained the struggles in allowing me to accept a bond-scholarship: (1) I would be bonded to the force for five to six years, and it would be difficult for me to break the bond if I were to receive God's call into the ministry during this time; (2) If I were to break the bond, they would not be able to afford the penalty sum; (3) As such, due to the bond I would have to be obligated to give precedence to police work above all things, even in situations where my faith might be unduly compromised. The conversation was not as succinct as the summary above, but it circled around these three main issues. At one point, to my shock, Cmdr even offered to give my family an interest-free loan to pay the penalty should I receive God's call and decide to break the bond halfway through.

The dinner conversation ended amicably: Cmdr understood the reasons behind my parents' wariness of scholarships and my parents were glad to have Cmdr and his family over for dinner. I cannot recall the conversations with my parents that ensued immediately after the dinner, but on the Saturday after the dinner, I was committed to fast and pray to know God's will for me.

By the Mercy of God

It did not take long for me to decide. By lunchtime on Sunday, I decided against the scholarship because my parents' reasoning was true: I had no conviction that the force was appointed by God for me, and I knew I was attracted by the financial allurements. The bonded-

scholarship would only incapacitate me from serving God full-time, should God call me in the future. To sign up for it was thus to run ahead of God. I had a late lunch that day.

As I recount this episode, and consider how the LORD has since altered my perspectives towards His sovereignty and my consecration, I confess that I was blinded by the prospects of worldly comfort when contemplating to apply for the scholarship. As I reflect, I find that another key factor that caused me to be enticed by the financial allurements was the friendship I had with my superiors and with many other officers in the force. These friendships formed the emotional link between the force and me, and it was difficult to break ties with a community of officers with whom I shared memories with. It is truly by the mercies of God that I did not sign on with the force. My parents were instrumental in arresting my disobedience there and then, and I praise God for their guidance and counsel in this decision-making.

Thus, unlike Samuel, whose obedience to the LORD remained steadfast, mine faltered the moment the treasures of the world were distractingly dangled in front of me. Unlike Samuel, who refused to be influenced by the people's thoughts, my obedience wavered when I considered the friendship of my colleagues and valued their opinions which went against the will of God. Samuel's obedience to God was due to his fear of God, and my disobedience was due to my failure to fear God. I was tempted by material comfort and human friendships; God was displaced by mammon.

Salvation and the Security of Spiritual Blessings

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ... According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world... Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will... Wherein he hath abounded toward us all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself... In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:3-12).

Spiritual Blessings Are Secured with Salvation

While this passage deals specifically with the doctrine of predestination, if the general salvific call of a sinner from sin is predestined, surely the specific callings that pertain to the other issues of life are likewise preordained. The past and future are talked of in the past tense, which shows that all matters of life have been decided upon and settled by God. He has *“blessed us with all spiritual blessings”*, *“abounded towards us all wisdom and prudence”*, *“made known unto us the mystery of his will”*, *“we have obtained an inheritance”*: these spiritual blessings are assured to believers, and expressed in a way as if we have already received them. This is the assurance I have: my salvation secures my spiritual blessings. To know that I have been predestined by God to be saved from sin confirms that all spiritual blessings will be (and has been) bestowed upon me.

A Christian knows that his salvation was preordained and predestined by God, that he was specially chosen before the foundation of the world to be adopted as His child; he knows that all mysteries of salvation are answered with a simple acknowledgement that it is by His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself. As a child of God he knows that as he has, by virtue of his salvation, already obtained an inheritance which he will receive in the fulness of time, and will face all other matters of life with a greater hope because these issues are, by corollary, likewise predestined by God according to His good pleasure. The certainty and culmination of spiritual blessings is as secure as if it had already happened. Salvation gives the Christian hope for all issues of life. Likewise, my salvation in Jesus Christ secures the spiritual blessings which I need in whichever service I am in.

Such was the security of salvation Samuel possessed. The very choosing of the nation of Israel as God’s people had secured the protection and care they needed. *“For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people”* (1 Sam 12:22). All fears regarding the effectiveness of my ministry instantly ceased because my salvation in Christ Jesus is the security I have, and that all the necessary spiritual endowment I require to serve Him will be bestowed upon me.

Strengthening the Faith of Timothy

“When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee,

which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner” (2 Tim 1:5-8).

Paul writes to Timothy to strengthen him in the ministry of the gospel. He comments on the three generations of unfeigned faith, beginning with grandmother Lois, mother Eunice and son Timothy (“in thee also”). However, Timothy’s faith had vestiges of fear in it. Paul reminds Timothy that we have not received the spirit of fear, implying that Timothy’s faith was mixed with fear. While his faith in Christ was pure and genuine, Timothy hesitated towards being a servant in the gospel. He seemed to have even forgotten the examples of confidence and boldness that his grandmother and mother had in their service for the LORD. Paul thus calls Timothy to recollect the unfeigned faith that Lois and Eunice possessed.

Remember the Faith of My Parents and Grandparents

Yet another way to dispel fear in my heart is to remember the unfeigned and persevering faith of my parents and grandparents. Just like how Timothy was called to remember the faith of Lois and Eunice, I must remember the faith of my parents Prabhudas Koshy and Carolyn Koshy, and of my grandparents Madakal K Koshy and Molly Koshy. Did not they also experience fears of their own? But they overcame their fears with the empowering of God. The lives of my parents and grandparents are living testaments of the power of God that can work in my life. The same God who provided for my grandparents, and for my parents, will provide for me. The same graces and mercies bestowed upon my grandparents and parents would be imparted to me. The fears my parents and grandparents had were dispelled with the empowering Spirit of God. Likewise my fears must vanish when I remember their faith and receive the power of God.

When I thus remember the lives and unfeigned faith of my grandparents and, with fondest memories, of my parents, all fear is dispelled because I am both witness and recipient of the enabling power of God which worked to overcome every discouraging setback, to instil in them the needed graces to enact their calling effectively.

Fear Stifles the Stirring of the Gift of God

God had bestowed upon Timothy the spiritual gifts necessary for the preaching of His Word. However, because of the fear which resided in Timothy's heart, the gifts were not honed and harnessed; they were left untouched and thus left ineffectual. Fear had stifled the stirring of his gifts. It is in these fear-infested waters that Paul exhorted Timothy to "stir up the gift of God."

Upon remembering the unfeigned faith of Lois and Eunice, the once fearful Timothy found strength and encouragement. Now, Timothy must employ his God-given talents. He must awake from dormancy and use his gifts to serve God. Timothy's gifts were bestowed by God, and Timothy had to stir them up and use them for the gospel.

When I examine the talents that God has graciously imparted in my growing years through my parents, and the skills honed in the education institutions I attended, I see that they are gifts yet to be stirred. While I have been serving the LORD with my talents, fear has stifled an effectual stirring of the gift of God. As with Hannah who received the gift of God in the child Samuel, and was a faithful steward in bringing him up in the knowledge of God before returning him to the house of the LORD, I have received gifts of God and must thus be a faithful steward of the gifts of God by honing and stirring them, to be returned as service in the ministry of the gospel.

Two Sides of the Same Coin: Fear and Shame of the Gospel

Paul exhorted Timothy, "*Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our LORD*". The fear that resided in Timothy seemed to have another facet to it—the shame of the gospel. Hiding behind his fears, on the flipside of the coin was the shame of the gospel. When I examine my own fears, I ask myself: am I ashamed of the gospel? I am not, and yet I am. If I am unashamed of the gospel of Christ, and truly believe in the power of God unto salvation, what are my fears in relation to the gospel of Christ? "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*" (Rom 1:16).

The wall of hindrance which my fears build thus reflects an element of shame I have towards the gospel of Christ. I am rebuked for my shame and fear of the gospel of Christ, and for not acknowledging nor believing the power of God unto salvation. How then can I still fear if I say I am

not ashamed of the gospel of Christ? I bid my fears depart.

Gifts of Power, of Love and of a Sound Mind

I like how 2 Timothy 1:7 begins with what we are not: *“God hath not given us the spirit of fear”*. In marked contrast to what we are not, “but” flips the focus to what we now possess: *“but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”*. Fear is negated and replaced with the gift of power, love and sound mind.

Will I be able to take on the grieving challenges of the ministry? God’s power is given to me. Will I become lonely in my fight for the truth of the gospel? The love of God accompanies me, and compels me to love others that they may hear, repent and believe. Will I be able to address the spiritual needs of God’s people in a wise and clear manner? A sound mind is given to me.

These three empowering gifts of power, love and sound mind are given to me that I may stir up my talents, and thus serve God effectively. With these thoughts, my fears are adequately allayed.

I Know My Calling

“[B]ut be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Tim 1:8). This verse deals specifically with Timothy, who is already a servant of God, serving alongside Paul. However, he needed spiritual strengthening, and Paul was God’s appointed encourager to Timothy. I hear the Holy Spirit’s convicting call through the words of Paul to Timothy.

The LORD calls me to be a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, to suffer that the truth of the gospel may continue in the church and be preached to all; to preach the Word of God for the salvation of sinners and for the sanctification of believers; to be an instrument through which the power of God—the gospel—may work effectually to the salvation of many. Like Timothy, I had fears. Like Timothy I needed a spiritual strengthening. And so, this passage from Timothy speaks to me most appropriately. The afflictions refer to specific trying and painful experiences that meet the preacher of the gospel and the servant of God. Knowing that Paul’s words to Timothy refer specifically to the ministry of the gospel, I am convinced that the LORD calls me into the ministry. The LORD calls me to be like Timothy, a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel of Christ.

Afflictions notwithstanding, the LORD calls me to serve Him “*according to the power of God*”. That is to say, the afflictions of the gospel will not exceed the power of God that He equips me with; there will be no affliction without the accompanying empowerment of God! This promise is assuring: that the spirit of power, which displaced the spirit of fear, will steer and propel me forward in the ministry come what may.

2 Timothy 1:9 says, “*Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began*”. This verse seals the truth in Ephesians 1:9, that my salvation is tightly linked to my calling. This two-fold calling—the call to salvation and the call to the ministry—were foreordained before the world began. He has both saved us and called us. In the verse, “called” can take two referents: (1) a calling out of sin and separated for holiness, and (2) a calling to be a preacher-partaker of the gospel of Christ. As established in the previous chapter, the context and position of Timothy suggests that the latter referent to be more relevant.

Hence, my salvation is the security of my calling and I am saved to serve my God. I cannot, however, resist this calling I receive. I have done nothing to work for my salvation, nor my calling into the ministry. The Word of God has constrained me to heed the call obediently. According to the purpose and grace of God, He has prepared my heart to be obedient to His sovereign will and placed a burden in my heart for the truth of the gospel to be preached. It is not my wilful entrance into the ministry, but the will of God revealed in His Word that compels my entrance. If it were by my own will, I would have walked away from this call altogether.

Allegiance to My Calling

In humble acquiescence to the sovereign will of God and in obedience to the call of God, I rise above my fears by the power of God bestowed upon me to be a partaker of the afflictions of the gospel. June 2017.

Cornelius Koshy holds a CertRK from the Far Eastern Bible College and a BA from the National University of Singapore, and is a member of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church. He is now a first year MDiv student at FEBC.

College News

FEBC reopened with a day of prayer on Monday, July 17, 2017. The Principal led in the singing of “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” from *Heavenly Melodies: Hymns, Choruses and Verses of Timothy Tow* published recently. All students received a free copy. The hymnbook was used every Monday morning at the Principal’s chapel last semester. *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”* (Col 3:16).



The July-November 2017 semester saw a total enrolment of 578 students: 95 day students (full-time: 52, part-time: 43), 304 students in the Basic Theology for Everyone (BTFE) night classes, and 179 distance learning students. The students come from 13 countries: Australia, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

There were ten new full-time students (five men and five ladies) last semester: Five from the Philippines—(1) Crisa Jane G Zagado, (2) Jenerose Brava Sagayoc, (3) Loreto Molhay Yubat, (4) Stephen Magbanua Gillegao, and (5) Theya Ba-a Lagapa; two from Myanmar—(6) Khun Seng Lahpai and (7) Myo Aung; and three from Singapore—(8)

COLLEGE NEWS

Cornelius Koshy, (9) Crayson Wong Pei Yu, and (10) Rachel Leong Ann Lee. Special mention goes to Cornelius who is the son of the Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy—a member of FEBC’s Board and Faculty. Rachel is the daughter of Elder John Leong of Tabernacle BPC who is the Secretary of FEBC’s Board of Directors. Cornelius and Rachel had just completed their studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) respectively, and have been convicted by the Lord to consecrate themselves to full-time service. Cornelius will be studying for his MDiv and Rachel her MRE. Then there is Theya the daughter of True Life BPC Filipino preacher Dr Jose Lagapa. Theya who just completed High School and scored highly in her SAT will be studying for her BTh. Besides Theya, we have Crisa Jane who is the younger sister of Dr Lagapa’s wife Celeste. Finally, we have Khun Seng the nephew of Dr Lazum Lonewah who is an FEBC alumnus and pastor of a Myanmar Baptist Church in California. We welcome all our new students to the FEBC family.



The lecturers/tutors and courses offered in the July-November 2017 semester were: **Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo:** Systematic Theology I (Theism), Greek Exegesis I, Life of Christ; **Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew:** Old Testament History I, Contemporary Theology III, Hebrew Reading I; **Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy:** Homiletics, Isaiah II, Romans; **Rev Stephen Khoo:** Church History II; **Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo:** Bible Geography II and Cults II; **Rev Tan Kian Sing:** Biblical Counselling, 2 Timothy; **Mrs Ivy Tow:** Greek Elementary I; **Mrs Jemima Khoo:** Introduction to Christian Education, Beginner Pianoforte; **Miss Carol Lee:** Sunday School Curriculum Development, Jesus the Master Teacher; **Dr Jose**

Lagapa: Book of James; **Mr Clement Chew:** Hebrew Elementary I; **Mr Dennis Kabingue:** Greek Reading I; **Miss Joycelyn Chng:** Hymnology II; **Mrs Anne Lim:** English Intensive I; **Mrs Irene Lim:** English Intermediate I; and **Eld Han Soon Juan:** English Advanced I.

The College has employed Samuel Goh with effect from 17 July 2017 as an IT Support Specialist. Samuel holds a BTh from FEBC and is also trained in IT Media and Design. He is the college's webmaster and data protection officer. His other duties include database processing, desktop typesetting and publishing, digitising and archiving print materials, editing audio-video lectures, facilitating distance learning, maintaining the college's computer systems and PA equipment etc. Samuel also preaches at church meetings and fellowship groups.

Dr John Whitcomb's Bible lectures at FEBC's Daily Vacation Bible College a couple of decades ago are being digitised. Our IT specialist Samuel Goh is now converting the audio cassettes into MP3. These lectures will be offered in FEBC's distance learning programme. IT staff—Murray Ong and Samuel Goh—are working towards enhancing our online offerings. The DipTh graduates of the Bible College of East Africa (BCEA) with high GPAs and recommended by their Principal Rev Dr Mark Kim may pursue their in-ministry BMin online. Matriculation is yearly in January. Apply early.

FEBC held an evangelistic service on the Lord's Day, 30 July 2017, at the FEBC Hall. The Principal preached the gospel from Proverbs 25:25, *“As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.”*



FEBC students learned to play the ukulele on 16 September 2017 under the tutelage of Mrs Annie Wong. The ukulele is a small and simple instrument that is easy to learn and play. Light and portable, it is useful in missions trips.



FEBC's 19th Holy Land Pilgrimage (Jordan and Israel), 3-16 December 2017, was led by Dr and Mrs Jeffrey Khoo. There were a total of 53 from eight churches and five countries.

Dr Jose Lagapa (Tutor in Biblical Studies at FEBC) is engaged in the following ministries in Mindanao, the Philippines, under True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church:

- (1) **Bible Equipping Seminar and Training (BEST)** (once every four months): Systematic Theology class to 25–30 village pastors for 4 days.



- (2) **Bible Conference for Pastors** (once in every 2 years): A conference with a Singaporean B-P minister as the speaker for a 3 days/2 nights conference attended by around 100–150 pastors.
- (3) **Young People’s Bible Conference** (once in every 2 years): A 3 days/2 nights conference attended by around 75–100 Christian youth leaders.
- (4) **Church Worker’s Workshop** (annual, every May): A workshop with invited facilitators to help Christian workers in serving the church e.g. Sunday School Teachers’ Workshop, estimated attendance is 150–200 workers.
- (5) **Vacation Bible School** (annual, every May): A joint ministry with Gingoog Fundamental Baptist Church in conducting their VBS for 3 days in currently 6 stations attended by around 400–450 children.
- (6) **Teens Bible Day Camp** (annual, every May): A camp for 75–100 youths of Gingoog Fundamental Baptist Church, outreaches and invited unbelievers.
- (7) **Bible Class for Every Christian** (annual, every May): A class of 40–50 adults of Gingoog Fundamental Baptist Church and outreaches from a book of the Bible.

The Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy (Lecturer in Biblical Studies at FEBC and Pastor of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church) spoke on “Biblical Separation” at a Bible Conference in the Philippines in commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the 16th Century Reformation. It was held at Central Mindanao University in Musuan, Bukidnon, 19-21 December 2017.



Students of the BEST programme in Mindanao, the Philippines

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)



FEBBC'S UKULELE CLASS 2017

*"Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.
...praise him with stringed instruments and organs." (Psalm 150:1, 4)*