



# The Burning Bush

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# THE BURNING BUSH

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# **THE REFORMATION SETS FREE: FROM ECCLESIASTICAL DARKNESS TO EVANGELICAL LIGHT**

Jeffrey Khoo

## **God's Providence in the Protestant Reformation**

The Protestant Reformation was a worldwide revival planned by God. Church History reveals that it was an orderly movement. God was the Architect and Engineer. He moved and led His people from out of the deadly darkness of Rome into Gospel light of His saving truth. In staging a revival, God often uses a man who would stand in the gap—His servant the prophet. There was a time in the Church when there was none just like in the days of Ezekiel, *“And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none”* (Ezek 22:30).

Not only was there no prophet, there were no faithful priests. There was increasing doctrinal and spiritual darkness in the Church which began in the 6<sup>th</sup> century and lasted for a thousand years. The Roman Church which began well did not remain well. It had failed God and His people. As Hosea said, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children”* (Hos 4:6).

In the fullness of time, God raised a new generation of faithful prophets and priests to revive and restore His Church to its original doctrinal purity and practice. How did it happen?

## **It Began in England with John Wycliffe**

The Reformation is often referred to as a 16<sup>th</sup> century event. It was not. It happened much earlier in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, not in Germany but in England. God raised up a prophet-scholar by the name of John Wycliffe. At 16 years of age, he matriculated as a student of Oxford University. He

was an excellent scholar with a brilliant mind, a silver tongue, and a sharp pen. He finally graduated from Oxford with his Doctor of Theology and became a professor there.

Being soundly converted to the gospel of Christ, Wycliffe in 1366 declared that Christ alone is Head of the Church, not the Pope. To him the Pope was an antichrist because of his worldliness and false religious practices. He was more interested in getting money than in saving souls. He criticised the monks for their laziness. Instead of toiling in the fields, they were begging in the streets. He refuted Transubstantiation as something contradictory to Scripture, and spoke against the unbiblical doctrines of Purgatory, the Confession Box, Indulgences, and the worship of saints and relics.

Wycliffe saw the urgent need for people to be educated with the truths of Scripture so that they would not act superstitiously or violently. Wycliffe realised that the best way of freeing the people from the superstitions of Rome was to get the people to read the Bible for themselves. However, there was no English Bible, only the Latin. Only the priests could read Latin, not the common people. Wycliffe got to work and he was the first to translate the whole Bible into English. Wycliffe knew Latin very well, but he did not know Hebrew or Greek. As such, he translated the Bible from the Latin instead of the Hebrew and Greek. Although the translation was not as accurate as could be since it was not from the original languages, it was accurate enough for God's purpose to be fulfilled—the people had to read for themselves the truth of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Now, it was not easy to mass-produce the Bible in Wycliffe's day because the printing press had not yet been invented (invented only in 1440). So, the Bible had to be painstakingly hand-copied. It would take about ten months to produce one Bible. It was also expensive. One copy would cost the buyer 5000 chickens. Since it was so costly, the Bible was sold in parts or in pages. Some could only pay a few cents just to have the New Testament to read for just a day. Wycliffe's Bible led many to see the Gospel light and turn away from the falsehoods of Rome.

To spread the gospel truth, Wycliffe formed the Order of Poor Preachers. These preachers were known as the Lollards. They used Wycliffe's Bible to preach the Word to the common folk. For reading the Bible and preaching the gospel to the people, many of these Lollards were burned to death. Many copies of Wycliffe's Bible were also burned. Nevertheless, the production of Wycliffe's Bible could not be stopped,

and the world today still has 200 copies of it. Faith is the victory, and the Bible is indestructible.

For spearheading the Reformation movement, Wycliffe was called “The morning star of the Reformation.” The Lord called him home in 1384. The Roman Church hated him so much that at the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, they dug up his bones, burned them, and threw the ashes into the river Swift, hoping that his witness would be shunned and forgotten. However, what we do know from Scripture is that the more the Truth is opposed, the more it will flourish. The Truth cannot be snuffed out. **“For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (2 Cor 13:8).**

### **From England to Europe: Wycliffe’s Influence on John Huss**

Wycliffe’s writings quickly reached Bohemia (modern-day Czech Republic) in 1360, and brought about the conversion of John Huss who was the forerunner of the Reformation in Europe.

How did the Gospel get into Bohemia? There were at Oxford, students from Bohemia who were also influenced by Wycliffe and brought his teachings back to their country. It was also due to a political marriage—King Richard II of England married Anne of Bohemia. Queen Anne loved God’s Word and Wycliffe’s writings. Through Queen Anne, Wycliffe’s writings entered Bohemia and influenced Huss.

Huss was an avid reader of God’s Word. The reading of God’s Word convicted him of his sins. Through the writings of Wycliffe, he saw the contrast between Jesus and the pope—Jesus wore a crown of thorns but the Pope wore a crown of gold. Jesus forgave sins freely but the Pope sold indulgences (forgiveness coupons) to the people.

John Huss became the Rector of Prague University at 34 years of age. Prague was one of top-ranking universities in Europe in those days together with the ones in Paris and Oxford. He also became a preacher at Bethlehem Chapel in Prague (1402–13). God placed him in a position to influence both scholars and laity. He was a powerful preacher proclaiming the gospel with great zeal and rebuking sin and superstition in the Roman Church.

Huss was asked whether he would obey the commands of the Pope. His reply, “Yes, so far as they agree with the doctrine of Christ, but when I see the contrary I will not obey them, even though you burn my body.” The Pope began to charge him for heresy and burned his books in public and tried to silence him.

Huss was finally summoned to the Council of Constance in 1414. The Emperor promised his safety, but it was a trap. As soon as he reached the city, he was thrown into prison and tortured for seven months. A kangaroo court was convened—they had convicted him before even proving his guilt or hearing his defence. In fact, his defence was drowned by shouts of “Recant, Recant!” He replied that he would not recant unless he was proved to be wrong from God’s Word. They sentenced him to death. He was to be burned at the stake. After sentence was passed, he knelt down and prayed the Lord to forgive his enemies: “Lord Jesus, pardon all my enemies for the sake of thy great mercy. Thou knowest that they have falsely accused me, brought forward false witnesses, and concocted false charges against me. Pardon them for the sake of thine infinite mercy.”

At the execution grounds, they placed a hat on his head with the words, “This is an arch-heretic,” and with pictures of demons tearing his soul. The archbishop then declared, “We commit thy soul to the devil.” Huss responded, “And I commit it to the Lord Jesus Christ.” He confessed, “I am willing patiently and publicly to endure this dreadful, shameful and cruel death for the sake of thy gospel and the preaching of thy Word.” And falling on his knees he cried, “Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.” It was 1415.

When he was burning, he also said something prophetic, “Today they burn a goose (Huss means “goose”) but out of these flames a swan would arise and no one will be able to stop him.” Indeed, a swan arose, and that swan would be Martin Luther.

### **The Goose Produced a Swan in Luther**

Martin Luther was that swan Huss had prophesied would come. The swan became a symbol of Lutheranism. The Lutheran Press bears the swan logo and proudly continues to “Trumpet the Swan!”

Luther graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Erfurt in 1503. In those days, after the first degree, the graduate proceeded to specialise in one of these three areas: (1) Medicine, (2) Law, (3) Theology. His father wanted him to study law, but Luther was interested in theology. In 1505, he was conferred the degree of Master of Theology. Finally in 1512, he got his Doctor of Theology from the University of Wittenberg. In the University, he excelled in his own German tongue and the Greek language.

A series of providential occurrences, namely, the death of his best friend, the accidental slash on his leg by a rapier and a terrible thunderstorm caused him to enter an Augustinian monastery in 1505.

According to Schaff, the Augustinian monastery was “the cradle of the Lutheran Reformation.” It was during this trying period as a monk that he was brought to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Luther was a sincere and devout monk. When he was in the monastery, he was very concerned about his salvation. At that point of time, he still had no peace in his heart and yearned for the assurance of salvation. He was taught by the Augustinian monks that he must work towards perfection if he wanted to be accepted by God. One of the practices was to read the Book of Rules every day in the Chapter Room—“A chapter a day keeps the devil away,” it is said. After reading, the monks would confess their sins to one another. Luther’s confessions were particularly long because he was so sensitive to his sinful self and would confess every little thing he felt he did wrong.

In the monastery, he would mortify his own body with zeal, thinking that this would earn his place in heaven. Luther himself wrote of his mortifications, “I was indeed a pious monk, and followed the rules of my order more strictly than I can express. If ever a monk could obtain Heaven by his monkish works, I should certainly have been entitled to it.” Despite all his zealous works to purify himself, he could find no freedom from the bondage of sin which weighed so heavily upon him.

The Lord had mercy on Luther and showed him the way to salvation. One day, in a state of depression, he heard an old monk recite the Apostle’s Creed and the part which read, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” This statement gripped Luther. He now understood that he had to believe that his sins have all been forgiven through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord led him to read 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.*” It was a turning point in Luther’s life and the joy of salvation flooded his soul. “*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rom 5:1).

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

Luther later became a professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg in 1512 and pastor of the Wittenberg City Church in 1514. At about that time, the Pope needed money to rebuild St Peter's Basilica in Rome. John Tetzel was commissioned by the Pope to sell specially blessed indulgence letters (forgiveness tickets) to raise money for the building project. Tetzel's sales pitch was delivered most enticingly. He told the people, "The moment the money tinkles in my box, that moment the soul springs up out of purgatory."

Luther was infuriated by this sort of trickery. On October 31, 1517, he nailed his 95 theses to the doors of the castle-church in Wittenberg to denounce Tetzel and Indulgences. His theses soon spread throughout Germany and Europe through the help of the printing press. The hearts of the people were prepared by the Lord to receive Luther's message that the Pope's indulgence letters did not take away sins. Only God alone could remit sins. Every true Christian is forgiven of his sins solely by the atonement of Christ and the grace of God without any need for a letter of indulgence.

In 1521, Luther was summoned by Emperor Charles V to appear before the Diet of Worms. Although Rome had promised Luther safe passage, Luther's friends warned him against going because they feared it could be a trap for John Huss had been promised the same but that promise was not honoured. But Luther replied his friends, "*If there are as many devils in Worms as tiles on the housetops I will still go there.*"

On April 17, 1521, the Diet of Worms was convened to try Luther for teaching the doctrines of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on Scripture alone. It was one poor, born-again monk versus 206 men of rank and power—the might of Rome. The presiding officer was Dr John von Eck who began the proceedings by asking Luther two questions. Pointing to a table displaying the writings of Luther, he asked (1) Are you the author of these writings? and (2) Are you willing to retract all the doctrines contained in these writings of which the Church disapproved? To the first question, Luther replied with a yes. To the second, he asked to be given time to think because he did not wish to reply unwisely or to say something that would be against the Word of God. Luther's request was granted. The meeting was adjourned until the next day.

Luther spent much of that night agonising in prayer. He prayed, "*O God, my God, be with me and protect me against my enemies of the world. Thou must do it, Thou alone, for in me is no strength. It is thy*



*cause, O God, not mine. On thee I rely, not on man, for that would be in vain. O God, dost Thou not hear? Do not hide thy face from me. Thou hast called me, now be my stay, I ask it in the Name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, my protector; my shield and my defence."*

April 18, 1521 was the greatest day in Luther's life. He was ready. Dr Eck asked Luther if he would recant his teachings and withdraw his writings. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Luther gave a reply that would shake the very foundations of the RCC till this day, *"Unless I am convinced by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments that I am in error—for popes and councils have often erred and contradicted themselves—I cannot withdraw, for I am subject to the Scriptures I have quoted; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. It is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against one's conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. So help me God."*

All hell broke loose. The assembly accused him of introducing a new doctrine and charged him for heresy. The Emperor stormed out of the hall shouting, *"How could one monk be right and 1000 years of Christendom be wrong."* Of course, the Emperor knew only of a Christendom that had been corrupted and was false. Luther was not introducing something new, but reintroducing the people to the good old liberating faith of the Lord Jesus Christ as taught in the Holy Scriptures, the sole and supreme authority of the Christian's beliefs and practices.

On April 25, 1521, Luther left Worms. Not long later, the Emperor declared him an outlaw and anyone who helped him with food and lodging would be charged with high treason. God often uses just one man to accomplish His holy purpose. In Scripture, we find the Lord using Moses mightily to deliver Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Then, there was young David who fought Goliath and Elijah who defeated the 450 prophets of Baal. In the same way, God saw it fit to raise an unknown peasant to shake the foundations of the Roman Empire in a way never before.

Luther's work was not done and his time was not up yet. The gospel was preached and defended. Now the Bible had to be translated. No Bible, no Reformation. On his way back to Wittenberg from Worms, Luther was "kidnapped" by his friend the Elector of Saxony, Frederick the Wise. Frederick brought him to his castle in Wartburg. This was for Luther's own safety because an assassination attempt had been planned. Luther resided in Wartburg Castle (1521–2).

It was God's hiding place for Luther so that he could do the work of translating the German Bible. Luther's command of the German language was impeccable. He also had good knowledge of Hebrew and Greek. He was thus most qualified for this task. He used Erasmus's Greek New Testament of 1519 (2d ed) for the job. Luther translated the NT in just 11 weeks. Luther said, "I fought the devil with ink." He did so through his writings and his translation of the Bible. The whole German Bible was finally completed in 1534. Luther's translation was in such excellent German that it influenced the development of the German language and prose just like the KJV influenced the English.

Luther kept himself busy with God's Word and work. He was a prolific writer, and more than 50 volumes of his writings (many translated into English) have been published today. He also wrote many hymns, the most famous being "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Luther died in 1546 in Eisleben, his birthplace. He died of sickness, and it is said that he finally departed after praying thrice, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit."

### **Luther the Evangelist Paved the Way for Calvin the Theologian**

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

John Calvin was born on July 10, 1509, 25 years after Luther. His conversion was not a dramatic one, unlike Luther's. It was a gradual and natural affair. Calvin was an extremely devout Roman Catholic and lived a pious life. At that time, Reformation was in the air and Calvin searched the Scriptures to find out whether the Reformation claims were true or not. By that time he had already completed his studies in law. After getting his law degree, he pursued theology. By the grace of God, the more Calvin studied the Bible, the more he became convinced that the Roman Catholic system was not of God. The exact time and place of his conversion remain a mystery.

The Church cannot survive without doctrine. As the Apostle Paul told Timothy, "*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee*" (1 Tim 4:16). It was God's purpose that Calvin should be, first and foremost, a theologian. In 1536 when he was just 26 years old, he published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* which was a systematic

defence of the Christian Faith. His Systematic Theology was instrumental in bringing about the French Reformation.

Calvin had become famous after his *Institutes* was published. After he published his *Institutes*, Calvin wanted to live in Strasbourg to continue his studying and writing. On his way there, he had to spend a night in Geneva. Now, Geneva had just become a Protestant city through the evangelistic ministry of another Frenchman by the name of William Farel. When Farel heard that Calvin was in town, he was very excited. He was convinced that Calvin should be the pastor-theologian of Geneva. Having been converted to the Reformation Faith, Geneva was badly in need of indoctrination. Who better than Calvin to take on this task?

Geneva was, however, only a stopover for Calvin. Calvin did not know anyone in Geneva and did not expect anyone to call on him. But Farel somehow got wind that Calvin was in town and paid him a visit. His mission was to persuade Calvin to stay in Geneva and be its pastor. However, the more Farel shared about the work in Geneva, the more Calvin shrank from the task presented to him. Timid by nature, Calvin declined the offer because he felt he was too young, inexperienced in practical matters, and generally unfit for the work. He insisted that he needed more time to study. He told Farel that this was his final decision and would entertain no further discussion. The elderly Farel then “rose from his chair, and, straightening himself out to his full height as his long beard swept his chest, he directed his piercing look full at the young man before him and thundered: ‘May God curse your studies if now in her time of need you refuse to lend your aid to His Church.’” Calvin was stunned by Farel’s words of imprecation. He testified, “I was so stricken with terror, that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken.” As Moses could not effectively excuse himself from God’s appointment to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, neither could Calvin resist God’s call to do the reformation work in Geneva.

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

It is significant to note that Calvin was a sickly man who suffered many painful diseases. Yet, he was able to accomplish so much for the Reformation and this must be attributed to the God whom Calvin served,

the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Without doubt, the Holy Spirit was Calvin's source of power and strength. His deep love for his Saviour was unmistakable. In all his achievements, he gave all the glory to God. In the face of trials and persecutions, he encouraged himself and others with the words of Paul, "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*" (Rom 8:31). It was his life verse. Knowing that his heavenly Father is sovereign and watching over him kept him going. To rob God of the glory due to His name was unthinkable to Calvin.

Calvin's contribution to the Protestant Faith remains till this day. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* has since been the mainstay in Reformed theological studies. A theologian is no theologian if he has not read Calvin. He died in 1564. He was 54 years of age when the Lord took him.

### **Reformation Returned to England to be Spread throughout the World through the English Bible**

William Tyndale was born a hundred years after Wycliffe died. He lived at a time when the priest did that which was right in his own eyes, and the people were totally ignorant of the Scriptures except for those who could get their hands on Wycliffe's Bible or portions of it. He admired the Lollards for their work of evangelism and Bible distribution.

Now the Renaissance had brought the study of the original languages into the University. Tyndale learned the languages in Oxford and Cambridge. Tyndale like Wycliffe was convinced that all the evils in the Church were a result of people's ignorance of the Scriptures and of salvation. The only solution was to open the eyes of the people by giving to them the Bible in their own language. Wycliffe had translated the Bible into English from the Latin, but Tyndale wanted the Bible translated from the original languages. God was to use Tyndale to translate one for England based on the inspired and preserved Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Tyndale said, "I defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spare my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost."

Tyndale went to London but found no help for his translation work there. In 1524, he went to Germany and settled in Wittenberg—the birthplace of the German Reformation. He spent about 10 months there, and completed his English NT. In 1527, Tyndale started translating the Old Testament from Hebrew. He was by this time denounced by the court as a rebel and a heretic. Although constantly on the run, he was finally

betrayed by a Judas. While in prison, he asked the prison warden to allow him to have his Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar, and Hebrew Dictionary so that he could continue in his translation work.

Tyndale was finally burned at the stake in 1536. As he was burning, he prayed, “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.” The Lord heard Tyndale’s prayer. In 1604, the Lord opened the eyes of the king of England—King James I—to commission the translation of an English Bible which would become the Authorised Version or what is now commonly known as the King James Version. Fifty four of the best and most outstanding scholars of the land were appointed to this task. It is significant to note the KJV is substantially Tyndale’s work. The KJV translators kept about 76% of Tyndale’s OT and 84% of his NT word for word. The KJV was finally published in 1611 and has since blessed multimillions all over the world. English has become the *lingua franca* of the world. And God in His providence used the KJV to spread His Gospel and His Truth all over the world. The KJV is still the bestselling Bible today after more than 400 years. How and why God used the KJV in such a great way is a whole new story in itself.

### **Time for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Reformation**

The Reformation must be remembered. Hebrews 13:7–8 says, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” Not only must the Reformation be remembered, it must be continued. As the saying goes, “The Church is Reformed and always Reforming.” Why? Because Satan does not rest and is still working hard to destroy God’s people. The Apostle Peter warned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Satan is a wily enemy and he is finding new ways to attack the Lord and His Word. The attack today is still on the Word of God. The battle is still for the Bible. Today, the attack is on the special providential preservation or the verbal and plenary preservation of the Scriptures, and in particular the Hebrew Masoretic Text and the Greek Textus Receptus on which the Authorised Version (KJV) is based. It is now time for a 21st Century Reformation to fight a good fight of faith: the good old Faith and the good old Book—the Reformed Faith and the Reformation Bible. “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way,

*and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein” (Jer 6:16). What do you say?*

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*The Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo is the Principal of Far Eastern Bible College and Pastor of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. The above message was delivered at the Sunset Gospel Hour Special Service commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church, 29 October 2017.*

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**Daily Vacation Bible College (DVBC)** on “Calvinism: The Old versus the New” was held from April 30 to May 5, 2018 and taught by Ko Ling Kang a BTh and MDiv graduate of FEBC. Ko also has a ThM in historical theology from Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids, USA). He currently serves as Preacher at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. This DVBC course sought to make an objective assessment of New Calvinism, examining its history, theology and practices and comparing them against true historic Calvinism, and ultimately against the truth of God’s Word. The ten lecture topics were: (1) John Calvin and Calvinism, (2) Spread of Calvinism, (3) Decline of Calvinism, (4) “Reformed Resurgence”, (5) Old vs New: Bible, (6) Old vs New: Spiritual Gifts, (7) Old vs New: Worship, (8) Old vs New: Separation/Ecumenism, (9) Old vs New: Missions & Evangelism, (10) Old vs New: Piety/Worldliness. Venue: Life Bible-Presbyterian Church sanctuary. Slightly over a hundred attended.

**FEBC’s 43<sup>rd</sup> Graduation Service** was held on the Lord’s Day, May 6, 2018 at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. The Rev Kiantoro Lie, pastor of Calvary Batam Bible-Presbyterian Church was the honoured speaker and his message was, “The Call to Pray and Evangelise” (John 15:16). The Class of 2018 are as follows: **Certificate of Religious Knowledge (CertRK):** Bng Teng Ho, Foo Siew Wei Cecilia, Kwa Lye Huat Harry, Loke Chi-Yen Kaylene, Patria Paris Solidum Yap Ming En Tim. **Certificate of Biblical Studies (CertBS):** Aw Choy Fong, Gan Ken En Samuel, Lim Lian Boh Michael, Yong Xuan Rui. **Diploma in Theology (DipTh):** Cing Sian Lian, Tan Bun Kuoy, Pek How Sian Vincent. **Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE):** Sim Myung Hyun.

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

Samuel Tze-Liang Eio

## A Brief Denominational Survey of Systematic Theologies

What do the systematic theology texts teach concerning the twin doctrines of divine inspiration and special providential preservation? The initial bibliography was suggested by Louis Berkhof.<sup>1</sup> Since most writers mention inspiration (positively, negatively or not at all), the focus is shifted more towards whether VPP as a doctrine was also conceptually alluded to in any systematic theology spanning the period of about a hundred to a hundred and fifty years, and in some cases, a little earlier. The organisation of these findings is done alphabetically by the major Protestant denominations, and ending with the contemporary evangelical theologies viz, Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Dispensationalist and Neo-Evangelical.<sup>2</sup>

### Anglican

Thomas Banks Strong (1861–1944), Vice-Chancellor at University of Oxford and Anglican Bishop of Ripon and Oxford, wrote in 1892 — *A Manual of Theology* — in which he made considerable appeal to Natural Theology. For the scheme of his book, he used as a central theme the incarnation of Jesus Christ. While apologising that the order was somewhat “unusual,” he still believed “that the unity which will result from [this] mode of treatment will fully make up for this defect.”<sup>3</sup> The concepts of both Biblical inspiration and preservation were never mentioned or discussed.

One finds a similar treatment with the work of Archbishop of Canterbury Edward White Benson (1829–1896) who, in *Living Theology* written in 1893, quoted Dr Westcott rather approvingly twice.<sup>4</sup> In his attempts to string together a collection of his printed homilies with some

loosely connected ecclesiastical themes, Archbishop Benson made no mention of either Biblical inspiration or preservation in his book.

In 1907, the British Congregationalist and Minister of City Temple in London, Reginald John Campbell (1867–1956), published *The New Theology*,<sup>5</sup> in which he scoffed at the doctrine of verbal inspiration,<sup>6</sup> and appeared unwilling to denote inspiration as an act of God the Holy Spirit but more a quality of spiritually-minded men. In Campbell's section on "The Bible and the Young," he portrayed the written Word in a lowly, denigrating manner. Scoffing, Campbell questioned, "Will anyone seriously maintain that the trickeries of Jacob and the butcheries following the Israelitish invasion of Canaan, not to speak of the obscenities which are to be found in so many parts of the Old Testament, are healthy reading for children, or a mark of divine inspiration?"<sup>7</sup>

Remarkably, it was the Unitarian theologian, James Drummond (1835–1918) who around the same time as Campbell (1908) published his *Studies in Christian Doctrine* which delved more extensively into a discussion on plenary inspiration, involving the creeds, papists and inerrancy.<sup>8</sup> Then, somewhat unexpectedly, beginning with a negative proposition that the Bible is fallible, Drummond proved that the opposite is true, though somewhat enigmatically.<sup>9</sup> In a deliberate, yet brilliantly scathing attack on the Hodges' inspired but nonexistent autographs, Drummond dryly remarked:

This is a grand controversial weapon; for the autographs are lost. It is however a weapon which turns and cuts the hand that wields it; for if we do not know what was originally written, the infallible authority of the existing Bible is gone, and the belief in the infallibility of perished autographs becomes a pious, but fruitless opinion. It is surely much more reasonable to suppose, with the Westminster Divines, that if God ever gave the world an infallible book, it was 'by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages'; for, if God himself was the author of the book, it is inconceivable that he would hand it over to instantaneous interpolation and corruption.<sup>10</sup>

However, Drummond went on to elaborate on textual-critical contributions only to digress into something that might be construed as an apparent denial of verbal inspiration: "The Bible can no longer be regarded as the miraculous exponent of a dogmatic revelation."<sup>11</sup> Hence, rather oddly, Drummond espoused some kind of incipient neo-orthodoxy when he nebulously opined:



Thus, it seems to me, the test of Christian doctrine must be found in Christ's spirit as a whole, rather than the exact words in which His teaching is recorded, and which are liable to the errors of transmission and translation, and may sometimes require a mind natively Oriental to extract from the figurative expression the precise meaning which was intended.<sup>12</sup>

The American Congregationalist, Henry Boynton Smith's (1815–1877) *System of Christian Theology* which was published in 1892 some two decades after his death appeared, among other things, to assume rather than to prove the Bible's infallible testimony. In addition, Smith allocated an entire chapter to "Scripture" (Chapter 5: "Divine Authority of the Record of Revelation" and another section on "Canon and Inspiration of Scriptures") with a helpful explanation of Augustine's "church authority" statement as "meaning not, that the church gave authority to the Scriptures, but gave to Augustine his authority for receiving them."<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Smith raised a threefold criticism of the RCC's position on Scripture. The doctrine of preservation was never mentioned explicitly, though perhaps it might have been implied. And, despite presenting the reader four views of inspiration, he finally endorsed an almost "mechanical" view of verbal inspiration. Nevertheless, Smith took this most supernatural view of plenary inspiration (ie, the "mechanical" view) as "expressing the simple and spontaneous faith of the church, both Jewish and Christian, as to the Sacred Books, *before speculation and Biblical criticism led to further distinctions.*" Perhaps the most thought-provoking remarks Smith made on Biblical criticism are found in the following:

And after all siftings and distinctions, the [mechanical] theory is maintained by eminent theologians and scholars. Gausson says: "The style of Moses, Ezekiel and Luke, is the style of God." Dr. Tregelles says: "I believe the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments to be verbally the Word of God as absolutely as were the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God upon two tables of stone."<sup>14</sup>

Writing in 1906, Clarence Augustine Beckwith (1849–1931), a minister of the United Churches (comprising Evangelical Reformed and Congregationalist) in America, offered only a very philosophical treatment with hardly any mention of inspiration and completely nothing of preservation, in *Realities of Christian Theology: An Interpretation of Christian Experience*.<sup>15</sup> If one compares these early 20<sup>th</sup> century theology

texts to a very recent 21<sup>st</sup> century one by the Anglican theologian Gerald Bray (b. 1948), entitled rather simply, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (published as recently as 2012), one might perhaps find that the trend is towards a more colloquial style of theological dialogue. Under his first section, “The Language of Love: God Has Spoken to Us,” Bray has written on what he terms as the transmission of recorded revelation:

From a theological standpoint, what matters most is that, from the time of Moses onward, God’s revelation to Israel through the prophets and others was recorded for posterity. How far this record corresponds to the original revelation is impossible to say because those to whom it was given are not available for comment. Most likely what we have is a distillation of what was originally revealed to them, giving us the substance of what God said but not every single word. ... But a written text cannot be so easily changed, even if copyists make mistakes in transcribing it. Writing offers a relatively fixed reference point that does not depend on the transmitter nearly as much as oral communication does, and it makes the texts accessible to people like us, who have no contact with the original author(s) or transmitter(s). If the Word of God is to be passed on intact from one generation to another, writing is the best way of doing it. Scholars like to emphasize the textual variants that occur in different manuscripts, and many claim that the existence of these variants disproves any theory of divine inspiration, but the truth is that very few of these variants have any importance for theology, and many of them can be disregarded because they do not affect the meaning at all. Uncertainties do remain, to be sure, but they are far fewer than critics like to claim or than would exist if we had to depend on oral transmission alone.<sup>16</sup>

As can be seen from this passage alone, the “embedded curriculum” is seen in the way in which Bray skilfully distinguishes the concepts of *ipssima verba* and *ipssima vox*, while addressing textual critical issues such as scribal errors and textual variants; overall, he seems in favour of a kind of plenary rather than verbal *and* plenary inspiration. Though neither inspiration nor preservation are overtly mentioned here, their concepts are nevertheless alluded to; as for inspiration, Bray thinks that the words in the Bible are not exactly those spoken by God or by Christ. Moreover, ignoring the divine and special providential aspects, the whole concept of verbal and plenary preservation is effectively couched in one conditional sentence (“If the Word of God is to be passed on intact from one generation to another, writing is the best way of doing it”). Then, in

a somewhat understated apologetic, Bray reassuringly explains to the informed lay reader that variants “can be disregarded because they do not affect the meaning at all.”<sup>17</sup>

### Baptist

When one thinks of famous Baptist theologians of the past, one thinks of John Gill (1697–1771) the eminent and prodigious Calvinist scholar who, it is said, “mastered the Latin classics and learned Greek by age eleven.” Gill taught himself everything; from logic to Hebrew, and this continued throughout his life. He was particularly fond of the Hebrew language and this fondness was expressed in his 1767 “Dissertation Concerning the Antiquity of the Hebrew Language, Letters, Vowel-Points, and Accents.”<sup>18</sup> In his prefatory remarks, the learned Gill defended the Masorettes’ practice of including vowel pointings in the Hebrew text:

The truth of the matter, ... is, that the pointing of the Bible was not their work; they considered it as of a divine original, and therefore dared not to make any alteration in it; but only observed, where there was an unusual punctuation ... so they found it, and so they left it; and that those who came after them might not dare to attempt an alteration. Punctuation was made before their time.<sup>19</sup>

However, Gill later also made clear he was not overzealously defending the present “perfection” of the Hebrew Bible he had, by expressing some degree of scepticism regarding any single “perfect” copy which could otherwise have been printed into the “perfect” text:

For I am not so great an enthusiast, for the integrity of the present printed Hebrew copy, as to imagine, that it is entirely clear of the mistakes of the transcribers in all places: to imagine this, is to suppose a miraculous interposition of Divine Providence attending the copiers of it, and that constant and universal; and if but one copier was under such an influence, that would be very extraordinary indeed, if his copy should be lighted on at the first printing of the *Hebrew* Bible; and besides, the first *Hebrew* Bible that was printed, was not printed from one copy, but from various copies collated; nor is there reason to believe, that the *Hebrew* text of the Old Testament, which is more ancient, should be preserved from the escapes of librarians, than the *Greek* of the New Testament, which it is too notorious are many; nor is suffering such escapes any contradiction to the Promise and the Providence of God, respecting the preservation of the Sacred Writings, since all of any moment is preserved in the several copies; so that what is omitted or stands wrong in one

copy, may be supplied and set right by another, which is a sufficient vindication of Divine Providence ... and besides, the Providence of God remarkably appears, in that the escapes suffered to be made do not affect any doctrine of faith, or any moral practice ... and after all, from, if from the present collation of manuscripts there should be published, what may be thought a more correct and perfect copy of the Hebrew text, we shall be beholden to the Jews for it, against whom the clamour rises so high: for whom were the manuscripts written, now collating, but by Jews?<sup>20</sup>

Although Gill did not seem to uphold the *present* perfection of the printed Hebrew text, it must be pointed out that he did not outrightly deny the existence of such a text either; for inasmuch as he has done independent study into the origins of the Hebrew Bible, the fact remains that his systematic theology writings did incorporate *a doctrine* of the divine preservation of the Scriptures, which, sadly, is absent in many systematic theologies today.

In 1767, Gill published his systematic theology — *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* — in which he wrote concerning the doctrine of Biblical preservation:

Eighthly, the antiquity and continuance of these writings may be improved into an argument in favour of them: Tertullian says, “That which is most ancient is most true.” Men from the beginning had knowledge of God, and of the way of salvation, and in what manner God was to be worshipped; which could not be without a revelation; though for some time it was not delivered in writing. The antediluvian patriarchs had it, and so the postdiluvian ones, to the times of Moses; whose writings are the first, and are more ancient than any profane writings, by many hundreds of years; the most early of that sort extant, are the poems of Homer and Hesiod, who flourished about the times of Isaiah; and the divine writings have been preserved notwithstanding the malice of men and devils, some of them some thousands of years, when other writings are lost and perished.<sup>21</sup>

Gill soundly and methodically defended the twin doctrines of divine inspiration and preservation, being evident in the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, during His earthly ministry:

Fifthly, from the integral parts of them; the Scriptures, containing all the books that were written by divine inspiration. The books of the Old Testament were complete and perfect in the times of Christ; not one was wanting, nor any mutilated and corrupted. The Jews, [Jesus] says, “have Moses and the prophets”; and He himself, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expounded in all the scriptures, the things concerning

Himself” (Luke 16:31, 24:27). So that they had not only the five books of Moses, but “all” the prophets, and “all” the scriptures of the Old Testament: nay, He affirms, that “till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle, shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled”, (Matt. 5:18). The Jews had the oracles of God committed to their care, (Rom. 3:2) and they have been faithful keepers of them, even some of them to superstition and scrupulous nicety, numbering not only the books and sections, but also the verses, and even the words and letters: and there never was nor now is, any reason to be given why they had corrupted, or would corrupt, any part of the Old Testament; on the coming of Christ it was not their interest to do it; and even before that it was translated into the Greek tongue, by which they would have been detected; and after the coming of Christ they could not do it if they would, copies of it being in the hands of Christians; who were able to correct what they should corrupt, had they done it: and whatever attempts may have been made by any under the Christian name, to corrupt some copies of either Testament, they may be, and have been detected; or whatever mistakes may be made, through the carelessness of transcribers of copies, they are to be corrected by other copies, which God, in his providence, has preserved; and, as it seems, for such purposes: so that we have a perfect canon, or rule of faith and practice. It is objected to the perfection of the books of the Old Testament, that the books of Nathan, Gad, and Iddo, the prophets mentioned therein, are lost; but then it should be proved that these were inspired writings, and, indeed, that they are lost; they may be the same, as some think, with the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. And it is also objected to those of the New Testament, that there was an epistle from Laodicea, (Col. 4:16) and another to the Corinthians, distinct from those we have (1 Cor. 5:9) neither of them now extant: as to the first, that is not an epistle “to” Laodicea, but “from” it; and may refer to one of the epistles, we have, written by the apostle Paul, when at that place: and as to that to the Corinthians, it does not appear to be another and distinct, but the same he was then writing: but admitting, for argument sake, though it is not to be granted, that some book, or part of the inspired writings is lost; let it be proved, if it can, that any essential article of faith is lost with it; or that there is any such article of faith wanting in the books we have: if this cannot be proved, then, notwithstanding the pretended defect, we have still a perfect rule of faith; which is what is contended for.<sup>22</sup>

However, from the time of John Gill, who straddled the late 17<sup>th</sup> century well into the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, one observes a marked reluctance in the writings of Baptist authors of systematic theologies to mention the doctrine of preservation more explicitly, albeit admitting the doctrine of

plenary inspiration readily. This is especially evident when one considers the following: The “First Part: A Treatise on Christian Doctrine” by John Leadley Dagg (1794–1884) in his *Baptist Manual of Theology*, Dagg used an analogy of Sunspots to describe the obscurities and apparent “blemishes” in the Word of God.<sup>23</sup> Concerning the Scriptures that have come down to us, Dagg seemed to think that a doctrine of providential preservation exists *because* the very enemies of true church *have been used* to transmit the words of Holy Writ:

In concluding this brief inquiry into the origin of the Bible, we may admire and adore the wonderful providence of God, which has made his enemies the preservers and witnesses of his revelation. The Jews, who killed the prophets and crucified the Son of God himself, have preserved and transmitted the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and are now witnesses to the world of its divine origin, and the truth of its prophecies. The Roman Catholic Church, the great Antichrist, or man of sin, drunk with the blood of the saints, has transmitted to us the Scriptures of the New Testament, and now gives, in the same two-fold manner, its testimony to this part of the Sacred Volume.<sup>24</sup>

However, other Baptist theologians did not seem as accommodating of the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration as Gill and Dagg, much less of special providential preservation — in fact, preservation was never mentioned unambiguously as a doctrine at all. Noteworthy examples include President Alvah Hovey (1820–1903) of the once nondenominational but now Baptist-supported Newton Theological Institution, and George Burman Foster (1858–1919), though the latter did however mention Christ’s “high regard for the doctrine of preservation” and allude to the church dogma of *providentia specialissima*.<sup>25</sup>

Alvah Hovey, in his *Manual of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics*, held to “dynamical inspiration” and seemed to refute “a few objections to our view [of the Bible’s] infallibility,” viz the following twelve:

- (1.) Because a belief in its infallibility leads to bibliolatry. (2.) Because this belief retards the progress of science. (3.) Because infallibility in the original Scriptures requires for its complement infallibility in all copies, translations, and, some would say, interpretations of them. For otherwise, we are told, the benefit of infallibility is lost to all but the primitive readers. But this, again, is a mistake; for the errors from transcription, translation etc, are such as can be detected, or at least estimated, and reduced to a minimum; while errors in the original revelation could not be measured. (4.) Because it has much obscure language. (5.) Because

it sometimes uses unsound arguments. (6.) Because it admits to some extent false interpretation. (7.) Because it teaches scientific errors. (8.) Because it teaches historical errors. (9.) Because it contains contradictory statements. (10.) Because it contains false prophecy. (11.) Because it teaches bad theology. (12.) Because it teaches bad morality.<sup>26</sup>

Most likely, Hovey's reasoning for point (3.) above could be construed as an outright rejection of the doctrine of special providential preservation, casting no less serious doubt on the divine inspiration of Scripture as well. Those who denied inspired *writings* but allowed for inspired *men* include Professor of Christian Theology at Colgate University, Hamilton, New York, William Newton Clarke (1841–1912) and Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918) of the Rochester Theological Seminary, the latter being famous for his book — *A Theology of the Social Gospel* — arguing that inspiration is not confined to Scripture of the past, but that same inspiration may be found in individuals today.<sup>27</sup> Both E H Johnson (1841–1906) of Crozer Theological Seminary and Augustus Hopkins Strong (1836–1921), President and Professor of Biblical Theology at Rochester Theological Seminary, had a similar case in presenting a doctrine of inspiration that is plenary but not verbal, and perhaps, while not affirming it overtly, they were not too quick to dismiss the doctrine of biblical preservation as entirely impossible.<sup>28</sup> Whereas, in contrast, Yale University Dwight Professor of Divinity Douglas Clyde MacIntosh (1877–1948) spoke of the traditional view of inspiration as “untenable” and argued in a way as to deny both inspiration and preservation altogether.<sup>29</sup>

Closer to our times, however, 20<sup>th</sup> century post-Warfield theologies written by Thomas Paul Simmons, while appearing to affirm verbal and plenary inspiration and the need for accurate translation, seemed to deny any kind of Biblical preservation in favour of modern textual criticism. Simmons in his *A Systematic Study of Bible Doctrine* wrote,

Let no one be disturbed by the fact that translations are not infallible. Our two great English translations (the King James or “Authorized Version” and the American Standard Version of 1901) are good basic translations. Such errors as they contain do not leave any doctrine of the Bible in doubt. Speaking of translations, the author wishes to make it clear that he does not recommend the most recent revision of the Bible under the sponsorship of the International Council of Religious Education known as the Revised Standard Version. This is manifestly the work of modernists who have done everything they dared to do

(and modernists are very daring) to obliterate the deity of Jesus Christ. This translation is neither sound nor scholarly, but is rather a piece of modernistic propaganda.<sup>30</sup>

In another place, he asked,

Of what value is the verbal inspiration of the original manuscripts of Scripture, since we do not have these original manuscripts, and since the great majority of people must depend on translations of the original languages, which translations cannot be held to be infallible?

(1) This objection is correct in stating that translations of the original languages of Scripture cannot be held to be infallible. Nowhere does God indicate that the translators were to be preserved from error. Verbal inspiration means the verbal inspiration of the original manuscripts of Scripture. ... (4) And the objection is wrong in supposing that an admittedly imperfect copy of an infallible original is not better than the same kind of copy of a fallible original. (5) The objection is wrong again in implying that we do not have a substantially accurate copy of the original. By means of comparison of the many ancient copies of the originals of the Scripture [sic], textual criticism has progressed to such a point that no doubt exists as to any important doctrine of the Bible. While God did not preserve the original manuscripts for us (and He must have had good reasons for not doing so), He has given us such an abundance of ancient copies that we can, with remarkable exactness, arrive at the reading, of the originals. (6) And the study of Hebrew and Greek has progressed to such a point and this knowledge has been made available to even the common people in such a way that all can be assured as to the meaning of the original language in nearly all cases.<sup>31</sup>

Claude Duval Cole (1885–1968) believed in verbal and plenary inspiration perhaps with an implied notion of a superintending Providence involved in the Bible’s transmission, in that “the Book came to us through human agency, but the human element was not allowed to hazard the accuracy or infallibility of the Book. The Bible is as accurate and infallible as if God had written it without the human agent.”<sup>32</sup> Cole under “Revelation and Inspiration” of “The Word of God” remarked,

This [passage, 2 Tim 3:16 in KJV] does not say the prophets were inspired; inspiration has to do with the words; the words of scripture came from God; they were God breathed. It is not our purpose to enter the controversy about theories of inspiration, except to say that we believe in the verbal inspiration of the scriptures, which means that the very words were selected by God, and the men spake as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit. They were not given conceptions or ideas of truth; they were given words of truth and directed by the Spirit to put



those words of truth in writing. The human element in the production of the Bible is fully recognized, the book came to us through human agency, but the human element was not allowed to hazard the accuracy or infallibility of the Book. The Bible is as accurate and infallible as if God had written it without the human agent. “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Pet. 1:21).<sup>33</sup>

### Dutch Reformed

The well-known work of Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) — *Gereformeerde dogmatiek (Reformed Dogmatics)* — does not seem to devote much space to a formal discussion of Biblical inspiration, and much less preservation. Bavinck held to the notion of “organic” inspiration. He clarified how the organic view of inspiration affirms the idea that the Holy Spirit

through the process of inscripturation, did not spurn anything human to serve as an organ of the divine. God’s revelation is not abstractly supernatural, but concrete, historical, flesh and blood; it is not high above us but descends into our situation. Divine revelation is now an ineradicable constituent of this cosmos in which we live.... The human has become an instrument of the divine; the natural has become a revelation of the supernatural; the visible has become a sign and seal of the invisible. In the process of inspiration and inscripturation, use has been made of all the gifts and forces resident in human nature. This helps account for such matters as differences in language and style, in character and in individuality, that are discernible in the books of the Bible. Similarly, the use of sources, the authors’ familiarity with earlier writings, their own inquiries, memory, reflection and life experience are all included by the organic view. The Holy Spirit did not suddenly descend on them from above but employed their whole personality as his instrument. Here too the saying “grace does not cancel out nature but perfects it” is applicable. The personality of the authors is not erased but maintained and sanctified.<sup>34</sup>

Bavinck held onto the notion of “organic” inspiration rather than “mechanical” inspiration as found in the Reformed creeds; the former process emphasises the role of the human writer over the divine, and results in the production of “a human word,” or “a totally human Scripture.”<sup>35</sup> Bavinck argued against reading the Word of God “atomistically, as though each word or letter by itself has its own divine meaning.” “The full humanity of the human language,” declared Bavinck

is taken seriously in the notion of organic inspiration. The history of the doctrine of inspiration shows progressive expansion of the notation even to the vowels and the punctuation (*inspiration punctualis*). This was followed by a progressive shrinking, from the punctuation to the words (verbal inspiration), from the word as idea to the subject matter of the word (*inspiration realis*), then from the subject matter to Scripture's religious-ethical content, to matters to the persons (*inspiratio personalis*), and finally from this to the denial of all inspiration as supernatural gift. *Travelling down this path leads nowhere but to a rejection of the Christian faith itself. ... Scripture's inspiration is plenary [emphases mine].*<sup>36</sup>

On a more positive note, Bavinck did make some rather refreshing, pithy insights into certain underlying issues, for instance, "The battle against the Bible is, in the first place, a revelation of the hostility of the human heart."<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, by stating that the apparent "difficulties" in Scripture are those "which Scripture itself presents against its own inspiration," Bavinck appeared to have made the Scriptural house divided against itself.<sup>38</sup> Together with his favourable disposition towards scientific investigation and his somewhat disproportionate emphasis on the human aspect of inspiration and inscription, Bavinck had actually diluted the doctrine of Scripture among those Reformed churches that imbibed his theology.

Thankfully, Bavinck was not the last word from the Dutch Reformed church on the inspiration and preservation of scriptures. The Dutch pastor, politician and theologian Gerrit Hendrik Kersten (1882–1948) in his 1980 theology text simply subtitled *A Systematic Treatment of Reformed Doctrine*, though somewhat less well-known than Bavinck's following the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformed creed, nevertheless had this to say concerning preservation:

Rome also denies the necessity of the written Word ... Bellarmin asserted that parts of Scripture have been lost ... (4) Scripture is an organic whole, of which no part is lost ... [T]he Lord, although it was not necessary for Him, permitted His Word to be written for our sake. God preserved the special revelation for about twenty-five centuries by a special care He exercised for us and our salvation ... (Belgic Conf. Art. 5).<sup>39</sup>

Unlike Bavinck, Kersten, who taught at the Rotterdam Theological School, pointed his readers back to the historical, orthodox position of the Reformed churches. This point of departure is significant, especially when one realises that Bavinck's own theological issues began with

the modernist training at Leiden. David Engelsma, quoting Bavinck's biographer, Hepp, mentions that a "severe struggle with doubt concerning Scripture was the effect of his Leiden training upon Bavinck." And in Bavinck's own words, "Leiden ... has often made me very poor, has deprived me of ... much that I now, in a later time, have learned to appreciate as indispensable for my own spiritual life, especially when I must make sermons." Furthermore, he added, "[Leiden's effect on its students is that] their childlike trust in the word of the apostles [i.e. Holy Scripture] is shaken."<sup>40</sup>

### Lutheran

The renowned German Lutheran church leader and theologian Karl Immanuel Nitzsch (1787–1868) published his *System of Christian Doctrine* in 1829, presenting his readers an intriguing "dichotomy" between the Scriptures and the Word of God. Nitzsch wrote:

the existing church is founded upon a belief in the Holy Scriptures ... it rests upon the living conviction of Christians, that Scripture ... has been furnished as a channel of traditional for the word of God, which in itself is one, intelligible and complete ... the sole basis of Scripture faith reposes, ... partly on the indestructible certainty that the actual being and existing state of these Scriptures are necessarily and immediately connected with that which the apostles ... had been and effectuated ... and partly upon that spiritual experience we have of the internal agreement, as well as of the difference of Scripture and the Word of God. ... A Scripture faith, in harmony with the belief in revelation and salvation, as already presupposed, exhibits, withal a species and an impress of teleological faith in providence. Scripture faith requires and presupposes that the God of revelation and redemption will, by some means or other, preserve the originality of the Gospel. Its language is,— Scripture cannot lie, because God's word is truth.<sup>41</sup>

As such, Nitzsch seemed to think that a genuine faith built on the Holy Scriptures presupposes the divine preservation of God's Word, which, in its "actual being and existing state" is "immediately connected with that which the apostles" had taught and propagated.

Along similar lines and just a generation later, the Danish bishop and academic Hans Lassen Martensen (1808–1884) would write on *Christian Dogmatics*, contrasting the differing views of inspiration and preservation held by Catholicism and Protestantism:

Inspiration ... [according to Protestantism] assigns exclusively to the beginning of the Church, to the period of its foundation; and, although

admits the relative validity of tradition, it yet regards the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament as *the only perfect, authentic and absolutely canonical preservation of the original fullness of the apostolic spirit*.<sup>42</sup>

Regarding this necessity of preservation, Martensen quoted Theirach's argument (although in context, it was rather meant to point out the latter's disastrous choice):

For it was not unknown to the Most High that a time would come ... that His Church would need a sacred, uncorrupted record accessible to all, such as His people under the Old Covenant had in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. For, if the Holy Scriptures are not the refuge to which the Church is directed to fly, since that which is called tradition has become the object of just offence and insoluble doubt, then the Church has no refuge at all, no secure position, and there would be left for her nothing but to wait to be a second time miraculously founded, or to look for a new mission of apostles.<sup>43</sup>

Isaak August Dorner (1809–1884) observed the shrinking of the certainty in Scripture, which rests on the testimony of the Holy Spirit, something which had come to be regarded as subjective at that time, in favour of objectivity. Dorner wrote:

It is no wonder that after 1750, in order not to begin with unproved presuppositions, the position was surrendered, that the Holy Scriptures produce immediately and of themselves the impression of their divine origin and inspiration, and that an endeavour was made to demonstrate their inspiration.<sup>44</sup>

Also, Dorner wrote:

Thus the attempts at making the Holy Writ (the formal principle alone) the scientific verification of Christianity, the foundation of Christian Doctrine, ended in the idea that the truth of Christianity ought to be proved by Biblicity by the inspiration of Scripture, and not merely that Christianity in its original purity should be so measured. It became evident that the opinion should be renounced that the truth of Christianity is already verified by its authority, indeed that its truth cannot be completely secured by the historical [critical] method, but may be altered in its contents; and that consequently Holy Scriptures cannot be the first thing, the divine origin of which is to be proved, in order for faith to begin. Paul in his mission to the heathen, did not commence by demanding, as the first article of faith, faith in his own divine authority or in the inspiration of the Old Testament; he preached repentance, and to the penitent he proclaimed the atonement in Christ.<sup>45</sup>

Professor of Systematic Theology at the Seminary of the General Synod of the Lutheran Church at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Milton Valentine (1825–1906), intended to, but did not finish writing his intended chapter “Authority of the Scriptures” and so his thoughts on “this burning question” were subsequently not included in the Introduction of his *Christian Theology*.<sup>46</sup> Valentine only referred to Providence in the created realm; however, he did argue rigorously for the authenticity and historicity of the New Testament.<sup>47</sup> Yet, amidst the tide of naturalistic theories like Darwin’s theory of evolution in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is perhaps Professor of Theology at Erlangen, Heinrich Friedrich Ferdinand Schmid’s (1811–1885) systematic theology *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (published in 1889) that stood firm and uncompromising in its fidelity to the historical tenets of Lutheran Reformed orthodoxy. Concerning attributes of the written word of God, Schmid mentioned:

Some theologians also add the following ... attributes: (1) Necessity; or, that it was necessary for the Word of God to be committed to writing, in order to preserve the purity of the heavenly doctrine. (2) Integrity and perpetuity; or, that the Sacred Scriptures have been preserved entire, and will be thus perpetually preserved. (3) Purity and uncorrupted state of its sources; or, that the Hebrew text in the Old Testament, and the Greek in the New, have not suffered in all copies, any corruption, either through malice or carelessness, but have been preserved by Divine Providence, free from all corruption. (4) Authentic dignity; or, that the Hebrew text alone of the Old Testament, and the Greek of the New, is to be regarded as authentic, nor is any version [translation] to be counted worthy of such supreme authority.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, writing near the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Schmid unequivocally acknowledged the doctrine’s existence and unique position in Lutheran theology.

### Methodist

Richard Watson (1781–1833), the distinguished British Methodist divine and writer, first began to publish his *Theological Institutes* in 1823, “the fruit of nine years labour” which “deservedly ranks among the ablest expositions of the Arminian system.”<sup>49</sup> In *Theological Institutes*, Watson, in a chapter devoted to “The Uncorrupted Preservation of the Books of Scripture,” first discussed canonicity from patristic writings (“Athanasius, Cyril, Epiphanius, Gregory Nazianzen etc. of catalogues

of Scripture”).<sup>50</sup> Concerning the remarkable preservation and integrity of the Old Testament apographs, Watson included a quotation from another well-known work, citing Bentley:

Lastly, the agreement of all the manuscripts of the Old Testament (amounting to nearly 1,150) which are known to be extant, is a clear proof of its uncorrupted preservation. These manuscripts, indeed, are not entire. ... But it is absolutely impossible that every manuscript, ... should or could be designedly altered or falsified in the same passages without detection either by Jews or Christians. The manuscripts now extant are, confessedly, liable to errors and mistakes from the carelessness, negligence, or inaccuracy of copyists; but they are not all uniformly incorrect throughout, nor in the same words or passages; but what is incorrect in one place is correct in another.<sup>51</sup>

Concerning the doctrine of Divine preservation of the New Testament apographs, Watson quoted from Horne’s *Introduction*:

Equally satisfactory is the evidence for the integrity and uncorruptness of the New Testament in any thing material. The testimonies ... how that it has been transmitted to us entire and uncorrupted. But, to be more particular, we remark that the uncorrupted preservation of the books of the New Testament is manifest, (1) from their contents ... (2) because a universal corruption of those writings was impossible, nor can the least vestige of such a corruption be found in history ... (3) from the agreement of all the manuscripts and (4) by the agreement of the ancient versions and quotations from it, which are made in the writings of the Christians of the first three centuries, and in those of the succeeding fathers of the Church.<sup>52</sup>

Another well-known 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodist theologian, Amos Binney (1802–1878), published a systematic theology as early as 1839 entitled *A Theological Compend*. In it Binney stated that the “wonderful preservation of the Scriptures” was in fact “further external evidence of their heavenly origin.”<sup>53</sup> Binney continued:

The Jews, from the beginning, have preserved the Old Testament with sacred diligence. / A particular tribe was even consecrated this express purpose. / Besides the copies in use, extra copies were kept in the archives of the temple, to which no person was admitted. / The manuscripts were transcribed with great caution and exactness. The alteration of a letter would condemn the copy. / The Samaritan Pentateuch, still extant, ... is a strong confirmation of their [the Hebrew MSS’] genuineness.

Concerning the New Testament, and with high regard for the Bible, Binney wrote before 1849:

There is scarcely a passage of the New Testament which is not quoted by the fathers, and by other writers of the first three centuries. It would not be possible for a Calvinist, or a Baptist, or a Methodist, or a Unitarian, to alter the Bible in the least to suit his sect, without being detected and exposed. / Copies of the NT were early distributed in various parts of the world. Many of these manuscripts are still extant, and essentially agree with each other. / During the first and second centuries, as was predicted, false Christs, false gospels, and false gospels everywhere abounded. These were all of short existence.

While millions of learned volumes, which promised immortality to their authors, have sunk into oblivion, the Bible has survived even against opposition such as no book ever knew. / The loftiest pretensions of learning, science and philosophy; the most malignant arts of wit, satire and scurrility, have been employed against the Bible in vain. / Thousands of times it has been condemned, banished, burned. Still it survives and will survive the dissolution of worlds.<sup>54</sup>

However, in light of significant textual critical “discoveries” in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Binney’s *Compend* would be considerably edited during his lifetime and republished in 1875 by his son-in-law Daniel Steele (1824–1914) as Binney’s *Theological Compend Improved* in which the above statements from his original work would be appended. To Binney’s earlier work were added the following paragraphs:

The *autograph* MSS. of the Hebrew Scriptures *are all lost*. The *oldest extant* belong to the *eighth and ninth centuries*. Yet there are circumstances attending their preservation and transmission, which prove their genuineness with *nearly as much certainty as if* the first copies were still in existence; such as, (1) The agreement of widely-scattered copies; (2) Of earlier versions; (3) Of quotations by early writers. The invention of printing is a great safeguard of the text: (1) By greatly multiplying copies; (2) By the difficulty in altering print with a pen.

The *oldest* MSS. of the New Testament, and of the Septuagint or Greek versions of the Old, are nearly fifteen hundred years old. *Of these*, the Alexandrian is now in the British Museum, the Vatican is in the Vatican library at Rome, and *the Sinaitic, discovered at Mount Sinai, (1859,)* is in St. Petersburg. *Eminent scholars* have spent their lives in the critical examination of these and hundreds of later MSS., and have found *many minute variations*, but a *substantial agreement*. *No doctrine of the Church is in the least shaken by all the various*

*readings*. ... [gives examples of some ‘insignificant’ textual variations in the NT] ...

When, therefore, we read of *one hundred and twenty thousand various readings* noted by Dr. Kennicott in the New Testament, we are to understand that they are of *no significance, so far as the meaning* is concerned, and we are to remember that in the writings of Terence (six pieces only) there are three thousand variations, though they have been copied many times less frequently. [Adds a quote from Bengel to his scholar] ... “If the Holy Scriptures, which have been so often copied, were absolutely without variations, this would be so great a miracle that faith in them would be no longer faith. I am astonished, on the contrary, that from all these transcriptions *there has not resulted a greater number of various readings*” [emphases mine].<sup>55</sup>

This writer reckons that this is evidence of that textual-critical leaven of “eminent scholars” which crept in in a matter of a single generation, profoundly influencing Methodist theology as seen in the additions to Binney’s *Compend*, and other circles of Protestant scholarship through “Old Princeton” men such as the Hodges (Charles, 1797–1878; Archibald Alexander, 1823–1886) and B B Warfield (1851–1921). Indeed, against the “old” fideistic apologetic of Binney was the changing of this new tide in favour of unbelieving textual criticism, and a desire to keep abreast with advances in the field.<sup>56</sup>

Thomas N Ralston’s (1806–1891) *Elements of Divinity* originally given as a series of printed lectures in 1847, was extensively revised and published in 1851 to include in Parts II, III and IV, “evidences, morals, and institutions of Christianity—topics entirely omitted in the former work [mostly found in Part I].”<sup>57</sup> Thus, instead of the usual prolegomena on revelation or the knowability of God, Ralston started directly with God. Rather curiously, throughout his lectures (or over some 46 chapters of Part I), Ralston seemed to assume throughout that Scriptures are wholly reliable and contain no error whatsoever. Indeed, Ralston made no formal attempt to define or explain “inspiration” until the second part (Chapters 44–47, or Part II: Book 1, Chapters 1–3), under “Evidences for Christianity,” classified as “preparatory evidence.” In the Chapter 48 (or Part II: Book 1, Chapter 4), he made several startling statements on Providence with respect to the established antiquity of supernatural revelation as “presumptive evidence.” There, Ralston, using logic, argues *for a special providential preservation of that supernatural revelation:*



Revelation is here placed in the outset upon high vantage-ground. It is not only shown to be entitled to great reverence and respect, but there arises at once a *prima facie* presumption of its truth. It can scarcely be thought possible that this antiquity could be so long and so generally claimed and admitted, and no effort made for its refutation, unless it had been founded in fact. And when this antiquity is admitted, the arguments in favor of revelation must occupy a position of commanding plausibility. Indeed, it will be difficult to show how a system such as revelation unfolds could originate at so early a period, or maintain the influence it has so long wielded, unless it had been divinely revealed, and was protected by a superintending Providence. The antiquity of the revelation of God invests it with an awe-inspiring majesty which must impress every reflecting mind. Amid the ceaseless flow of the tide of time, as age has succeeded age, the institutions and productions of human origin have been subject to continual mutation. Cities and empires have arisen and flourished for a season, but soon they have been subverted or blotted from existence; but the Bible of God, dating its origin anterior to all the records of human genius or national greatness, still survives in grandeur unimpaired. Though it has been the object of hatred and opposition, and subjected to the fiercest assaults in every age, it has suffered no diminution of its luster. Can a structure so imperishable in its nature be wholly of earth? What can be found in all the world of earthly origin that has weathered so many storms or passed through so many conflicts as the Bible, still exhibiting its fair proportions unmarred, its beauty untarnished, and its glory undimmed? What but the special superintendence of divine Providence can account for this wonderful preservation of the Bible amid the ravages of so many centuries? The fact that this book now exists after the conflict of ages, is powerful presumptive evidence of its divine origin.<sup>58</sup>

Ralston proceeded in the next chapter to examine the authority of Scriptures, and to “establish in their behalf what has generally been claimed for them by the Christian world, and what is essential to their character as a divine revelation,” by showing that they were (1) genuine, (2) authentic, (3) divinely inspired, and (4) preserved, and “handed down to us, essentially as they were originally given.”<sup>59</sup> Ralston mentioned:

We use the words genuineness, authenticity, and integrity, as applied to the writings of Scripture, each in a distinct and definite sense: 1. By the genuineness of Scripture, or of any particular portion of Scripture, or of any other composition, we mean that it is the production of the author whose name it bears. 2. By its authenticity, we mean that it is not fictitious; but contain a faithful record of facts as they transpired.

3. By its integrity, we mean that it has not been materially altered, but is essentially the same now as when originally given.

Ralston further wrote:

Genuineness and authenticity are one thing; divine inspiration is another thing. Genuineness and authenticity are essential to inspiration; but inspiration does not directly and necessarily follow from them. It may be deduced from them, as a plain and irresistible inference; but these things, however kindred, are not identical. By establishing the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures, we only claim that these writings are thereby placed upon a level with the productions of honest and faithful historians, who make a true record of facts, of which they have been personally cognizant, or which, from the satisfactory testimony of others, they believe to be true; and which record of facts has been transmitted to us uncorrupted, and in all things material, essentially the same as originally written.<sup>60</sup>

Ralston denied the possibility of the Christians deliberately attempting to corrupt the Old Testament, because the Jews would have exposed any such attempt to do so; Ralston averred:

Our Old Testament entirely corresponds with that which is now in the possession of the Jews, and which they testify, with united voice, is the same that they have ever had among them from the first receiving of their Scriptures, and which *they have ever watched over and preserved with the most scrupulous care*. This testimony alone is most indubitable, that *these Scriptures have not been corrupted or altered since the origin of Christianity* [emphases mine].<sup>61</sup>

Likewise, noting the antagonism between Christianity and Judaism, Ralston added:

And that the Jews have not corrupted their copies we are assured, not only by the sacredness with which they have always held their Scriptures, and the abhorrence with which they have ever looked upon the crime of corrupting or interpolating one jot or tittle of the sacred word, but by the fact that their attempt would instantly have been detected and exposed by the learned doctors with whom the early Christian Church abounded. Neither Jews nor Christians could have made any change in these writings without being detected by the other party. And that no change has been made we may be doubly assured, by the fact that Jews and Christians have, to this day, the same Old Testament, even as to each book, chapter, and verse.<sup>62</sup>

Ralston concluded the chapter, alluding to the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ concerning the Old Testament Scriptures. He said,

Though our Savior repeatedly reproved the Jews for neglecting and misconstruing the Scriptures, yet he never once intimated that they had corrupted or interpolated the sacred word. Hence the evidence is conclusive, that the Old Testament, as then in use among the Jews, was genuine and authentic; and if so, we are bound to accord the same divine authority to that volume, as now in our possession.<sup>63</sup>

He then proceeded to prove the authenticity and genuineness of the New Testament, against the false allegations of historical criticism, before defending the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration: “But, according to the view of inspiration we have presented, it seems the very words, as well as the thoughts, must have been inspired. This is precisely the doctrine we maintain.”<sup>64</sup> Ralston in his inimitable style (at once strangely reminiscent of Dean Burgon’s) continued:

Inspiration—plenary inspiration—was needed at every step—at every chapter, sentence, and word. It was needed to teach them what to write, and what not to write—to teach them how to write, and when to write—to teach them the thoughts to express, and the proper words to express those thoughts. It was needed for their own sake, to enable them to write as they did, and for the sake of the Church and the world, in all coming time, to give divine authority to the sacred record.

Abstract the idea of the inspiring Spirit guiding the pen of the sacred writer in every sentence, word, and letter, from the holy Gospels, and the heavenly unction—the divine power—of the book is gone. It is no longer the record of Heaven we trace—no longer the voice of God we hear. The Shekinah has left the mercy-seat; the divine sacrifice ceases to smoke upon the altar, and the glory has departed from the Christian temple.<sup>65</sup>

And further, Ralston argued concerning this divine authority of the Bible extending to *all* its parts:

The Christian mind has long been trained to contemplate the Bible as the “word of God”—not of man. . . . And if it be indeed the “word of God,” and not the mere word of man, then it follows that every portion of it, each book, chapter, and verse—was given under the influence of plenary inspiration—an inspiration including, to some extent, all these elements—superintendence, elevation, and suggestion.

...

But, according to the Bible view of the doctrine of divine inspiration, there is a sacredness and a divine impress upon every sentence and word of Holy Writ infinitely beyond what any human composition can claim. . . . Hence we conclude that the Scriptures are all given by plenary inspiration, embracing throughout the elements of “superintendence,

elevation, and suggestion,” in so high a sense that the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is the infallible word of God—“*one jot or tittle*” of which can never fail, but which, when heaven and earth shall pass away, shall still remain, enduring as the throne of Him by whose Spirit it was inspired [emphasis mine].<sup>66</sup>

However, nearer the turn of the century, in the wake of the discovery of the Codex Sinaiticus, the “dethroning” of the Authorised Version, and the establishment of the critical text underlying the Revised Version, Methodist systematic theologies began singing to a very different tune. The following two examples illustrate this disquieting trend.

The first instance, William Burt Pope (1822–1903), who taught at Didsbury Wesleyan College in Manchester, England from 1867 to 1886 and wrote *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, seemed to emphasise a “dynamical” theory of inspiration (ie, the Holy Spirit’s influence acted upon and through the faculties of the appointed person) over the “mechanical” or dictation theory.<sup>67</sup> Though stating that plenary inspiration was the Authority basis for Scripture during the Reformation, Pope also criticised the Reformers, saying, “Its leaders were lax in their first decisions. Luther insisted on a material inspiration, as to doctrine, and a formal, as to the manner, which was of less importance.”<sup>68</sup> Pope also opined somewhat sardonically, concerning verbal inspiration:

The Reformed Confessions were stronger ... The Anglican Articles are like the Lutherans more negative, the Westminster Confession more rigid. But the dogmatic divines of the new Churches tended gradually to the very highest rigour, as expressed in the Helvetic Formulary: thus Buxtorf maintained, irrationally, that the very vowel points of the Hebrew were inspired.<sup>69</sup>

And, while Pope outrightly denied the preservation of the autographs, he did write rather ambiguously concerning the preservation of the apographs, callously comparing them with other ancient literature, particularly noting how

the inspiring Spirit has watched over the vicissitudes incident to the transmission of human literature without superceding them. The consideration of this question, however, belongs to Biblical Criticism. It is enough here to say, that there are a few portions of Holy Scripture of which we can be sure that they lie before us precisely as they left the hand of the first writers.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, Pope seemed to believe that it was indeed *possible* to reconcile the reality of a less-than-perfect Bible containing errors with

a doctrine of plenary inspiration; he then apparently denied any form of supernatural preservation of the copies altogether while claiming that no vital doctrine was impaired in the least bit by variant readings:

The New Testament has not been shielded from the errors of transcription: mistakes sometimes arising from carelessness, sometimes from design, but *in neither case obviated by any continuous miracle*. In the New Testament we have some early manuscripts that supply a standard of judgement; but *it cannot be absolutely asserted that there are not errors now appearing even in all of them* and one or two seeming misstatements in historical allusion may be among the number. Here the only question that concerns us is, not how to reconcile inspiration with error in the Bible, but *inspiration with a Bible liable to corruption in the text*. That is a question not hard of solution. It is enough for the believer to accept the fact, and to admit all its consequences into his theory of inspiration. The holy men who wrote these books were inspired; *but their inspiration left no protective virtue in these documents themselves*. All we can say is, that *it has not pleased God to bind up His eternal truth absolutely and inseparably for good and evil with documents which perish in the using. The truth of the Bible is not staked upon the truth of every sentence that may be found in our copies of it*. Meanwhile, it may be affirmed, on the other hand, that so far as concerns the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever, *no corruptions of the written text have been suffered to interfere with its perfect presentation. Not one of all the multitude of various readings in the margins of both Testaments affects in the slightest degree the foundation of the doctrine on which man's salvation depends*. [emphases mine].<sup>71</sup>

Other published systematic theologies around the same time as Pope, such as well-known Methodist theologian and Professor of Systematic Theology in Drew Theological Seminary, New Jersey, John Miley (1819–1895), seemed to sidestep or overlook the issue of transmission of Scripture altogether.<sup>72</sup>

The second instance was that of Olin Alfred Curtis (1850–1918). Curtis who earned his doctorate at Boston University School of Theology before becoming Professor of Systematic Theology at Drew University (1896–1914) gave a protracted discourse on Biblical authority. Curtis explained: “The Bible is ultimate authority to the Church for several reasons: (1) because it has come down to the church by cogent spiritual method (2) because it is authority personally for every real member of the church; (3) because it has been made part of the Christian organism.”<sup>73</sup>

Yet, despite his threefold “indorsement” theory of inspiration, Curtis did not think it was necessary that the Bible be completely inerrant, or, that this concession implied that science gets the last word. Moreover, there was no mention by Curtis of preservation, which, to him, did not seem a necessary doctrine or safeguard, despite his brilliant conclusion emphasising the organic unity of Scriptures against neo-orthodoxy. According to Curtis, the first “indorsement” was the Holy Spirit’s actual use of Scriptures in the history of redemption; the second, the formation of the Canon of Scripture; and third, “the present relation of Christian consciousness to the Bible.” Because the Holy Spirit “brought these parts together into an organic record of redemption, and because he lives in the whole Bible today.” Furthermore, Curtis mentioned why we never say the Bible *contains* the Word of God. We say, “The Bible *is* the Word of God. Just as parts of the body are less significant than other parts, and yet all are required to make a complete bodily organism, so portions of scripture are less significant than other portions, and yet all come together to furnish the brotherhood in our Lord a full expression of the heart and mind and will of God in the salvation of man.”<sup>74</sup>

Equally “worthy” of mention is the manner in which popular Methodist pastor and writer Raymond Howard Huse (1880–1954) drew his readers’ attention to 2 Timothy 3:16, for Huse was clearly in favour of the Revised Version’s rendering: “Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof for correction, for instruction ....” The persona in Huse’s theology readily admits this as a test of the inspiration of scripture, rather than an unequivocal declaration, as it is rendered in the Authorised Version. Infallibility, according to the Professor-figure in Huse’s theology, is predicated *only* in salvific matters.<sup>75</sup> Huse also quoted Joseph Cooke in asserting that “[the Bible] is the infallible directory to eternal life,” and that a genuine fellowship with Christ will be aided by the Spirit of Truth to interpret and apply Scriptures. Hence, Huse’s theology did not appear to define the doctrine of inspiration (let alone preservation) clearly.

Thus, it appears that the majority of Methodist systematic theologies written from the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century do not exhibit a very favourable view towards the doctrines of verbal inspiration (though plenary inspiration is allowed for) and special providential preservation. Overall, one finds a “shrinking” or a gradual erosion of the authority of Scriptures in their preservation and infallibility, coupled with a pervasive

reluctance or general disinclination to address the concept of the Bible's perfection in matters other than salvific.

### Presbyterian

The Presbyterian minister John Brown (1722–1787) wrote a systematic theology subtitled “A Compendious View of Natural and Revealed Religion in Seven Books” which was published in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In it, Brown spoke of the “Revealed Standard of Religion,” quoting the early Christians who lived in the time of the Apostles and observing that most of these books being written for, or to, societies of Christians, could not possibly be forged or easily corrupted. Christians were so remarkably zealous for their sacred books “that no tortures could force them to destroy or give them up to destruction.”<sup>76</sup>

Concerning the integrity of the Old Testament in the Hebrew language, Brown wrote:

[S]ince the spread of Christianity, the Jews ... have been zealous, even to superstition, for *preserving them in their originals, pure and entire*. — About A.D. 500, when, through the general ignorance of the Christian doctors, they had a fair opportunity of corrupting them, we find their Massorite Rabbins zealously occupied in numbering and marking the letters, that so not one of them might be lost or altered, in that or any future age.

*The corrupting of the originals of either the Old or New Testament by Christians, is absolutely incredible.* Such were the multitudes of copies, readers, hearers, and even sects among them, that *none could have succeeded*, unless he could have made his alterations ... into the many thousands of different copies and into all the different memories of hearers and readers at once. — When Macedonius attempted to vitiate them in the 5th century, how quickly was the alarm sounded far and wide, — and the few corrupted copies detected, and corrected, or destroyed?

... The transcribers of these sacred books being no more infallibly inspired than our printers of them, the comparer of a multitude of copies cannot therefore fail to find a number of various readings. [Proceeds to give figures about textual variations]...*None of all the various readings detected in the Hebrew and Greek copies of our Bible deprive us of one article of our faith, or establish a contrary error; but chiefly relate to letters, accents, and the like. It is even an evidence of God's marvellous preservation of the Scriptures*, that the transcribers have been permitted to fall into so many trifling mistakes, and notwithstanding preserved from capital blunders. ... [Compares this with several Greek classic works]

If then these authors have not, for more than two thousand years past, lost one ten thousandth part of their original credibility, doubtless *the Scriptures have not either lost one ten thousandth part of theirs.*

*Printed copies of our Bible are of as much authority as any manuscripts extant, or any other not taken from the autographs of the prophets and apostles.* Scarce ever a transcriber took the tenth or twentieth part of care and pains, in comparing copies, or in correcting his work, which hath been taken on the principal editions of the Hebrew and Greek Testaments. — To promote their own gain, and in the case of private writs, securing civil property, which may be easily corrupted, *lawyers do not admit copies of copies as authentic. But that can by no means prove, that copies of the most public and incorruptible copies of writings, which relate to the most public interests, should not be sustained as authentic.* — *If such copies be not admitted proofs of a correspondent original, and the mistakes of one copy allowed to be corrected from others more exact, [then] every ancient writing in the world, and most of the modern ones, must pass for forgeries as few can produce, or even swear that they saw the originals [emphases mine].*<sup>77</sup>

A generation or so after Brown, John Dick (1764–1833) who earned his Doctor of Divinity from Princeton College in 1815, gave a series of lectures on Systematic Theology that were published posthumously by his son. Dick gave his readers a fairly commendable treatment of what is meant by the description of Scriptures as “Genuine” (ie, the author really wrote) and “Authentic” (ie, contents are fact, not fiction),<sup>78</sup> and argued for the “Inspiration of the Sacred Writers”:

As some of them were intended only to promote the interests of religion in their own age, they have left no record behind them, and their instructions are lost, or only a few fragments of them have been preserved. But others were directed by the Spirit to commit their revelations to writing, for the benefit of succeeding ages; and the books collected into one volume, and called ... the Bible, constitute the perpetual rule of faith and practice.<sup>79</sup>

Concerned with the textual-critical developments of his day, Dick devoted an entire section on Lecture XII “The State of the Sacred Text” in which he listed all the extant codices,<sup>80</sup> and discussed the “emendation of the received text.” Obviously, Dick did not think very much of Erasmus’ editions and furthermore cited Owen and Whitby as being too cautious about the new-modelling of the Textus Receptus due to more than 30,000 known variants at that time.<sup>81</sup> Dick averred,



The truth is that by a hundred and fifty thousand various readings, no doctrine or duty of our holy religion is affected; and the labour of Biblical critics have terminated in establishing, instead of weakening, the authority of the text. We are now fully satisfied, that we possess substantially the same text which was exhibited in the autographs of the evangelists and the apostles; and this is also the result of critical labours which have been bestowed upon the Old Testament.” [Dick proceeds to mention Trent’s decrees] ... After all, the Bible, according to her [ie, the Church of Rome] is an imperfect book, containing only a part of revelation, the remainder being laid up in the traditions of the church.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, if one considers the theology of Princeton as a whole, one could not with certainty lay blame squarely on the Hodges and/or on Warfield, since textual critical theories such as Dick’s had abounded since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and these would continue to profoundly influence the prevailing theological thought at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

American Presbyterian theologian and writer, Robert Jefferson Breckinridge (1800–1871) left his discussion of the Holy Scriptures till the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter of his book (printed in 1858) — *The Knowledge of God Objectively Considered*. Even then, Breckinridge does only hint at the doctrine of supernatural element in the preservation of the Scriptures, implied perhaps through acknowledging how “the sinful fallen condition makes it impossible ... but it is God’s exerting such an influence as shall produce the Bible we have in our hands.”<sup>83</sup>

The publication of A A Hodge’s *Outlines of Theology* in 1860 demonstrated the inroads made by textual criticism and made these accessible not just to the seminarian but to the lay preacher as well. Out of seven views of inspiration presented, the pastor of the Presbyterian church in Fredricksburg, Virginia admirably concluded: “The true doctrine is that their inspiration was plenary, and their writings in every part infallible truth.”<sup>84</sup> Hodge cited Dr T V Moore’s 1857 University Lecture and Gaussen on *Inspiration*. This was immediately followed by Hodge’s own definition of plenary inspiration. Hodge defined “plenary inspiration” as a “divine influence full and sufficient to secure its end. The end in this case secured is the perfect infallibility of the Scriptures in every part, as a record of fact and doctrine both in thought and in verbal expression; so that although they come to us through the instrumentality of the minds, hearts, imaginations, consciences and wills of men, they are nevertheless in the strictest sense the word of God.”<sup>85</sup> Hodge wrote, “Men think in words, and the more definitely they think, the more

are their thoughts immediately associated with an exactly appropriate verbal expression. Infallibility of thought cannot be secured or preserved independently of an infallible verbal rendering.”<sup>86</sup>

Yet, A A Hodge was careful never to explicitly mention any doctrine of divine preservation. In commenting upon “those smaller writings” of the NT, whose “testimony . . . is not as unanimous as for the rest,” Hodge only hinted at the doctrine by stating that “there remains the invincible presumption, that God would not permit his true people all over the world and of all ages to corrupt his word with the admixture of human composition.”<sup>87</sup> This somewhat unexpected statement from Hodge is found near the bottom of the page; nevertheless, an “invincible presumption” is still after all a presumption. This comment is placed in the context of canonicity and the recognition of the inspiration of those smaller NT works by the church. Arguably, this sorting and recognition process would reasonably have required the use of apographs, and not the by-then-nonexistent autographs. Yet, too, on this point, Hodge remained all the while ambiguous.

Moreover, quoting from Horne’s *Introduction* concerning the Hebrew OT having “two distinct rescensions or editions of the Hebrew Scriptures, which were collated in the eighth or ninth centuries,” A A Hodge noted, “and the text thus prepared is the Masoretic or Hebrew text in our Hebrew Bibles.”<sup>88</sup> Concerning the NT, Hodge listed

the oldest and most authoritative Greek manuscripts now extant: (1.) The Codex Alexandrinus of the fifth century, (called A.) now in the British Museum, (2.) The Codex Vaticanus of the fourth century, (called B.) now in the Vatican Library at Rome. . . . (4.) The Codex Bezae of the sixth century, (called D.) . . . Manuscripts succeeding these in age, up to the end of the fifteenth century, abound all over Europe. Upwards of six hundred have been diligently collated in preparations for recent editions of the Greek Testament. The results of the most thorough investigations are uniformly declared by the most competent scholars to establish beyond question the integrity of the sacred text.<sup>89</sup>

Clearly, Hodge (perhaps thrilled at the recent findings of Tischendorf) held in the highest esteem what these “most competent scholars” — many of whom held high positions in modernist and liberal institutions in Europe — would do for Christendom in establishing the text “beyond question,” yet, ironically, raising even bigger questions on the integrity and reliability of the Traditional Text.

It is instructive to read of Presbyterian Bible colleges which began rather well, but have since succumbed to modernism and liberal thought

— if there was a “Battle for the Bible” in those days, it was largely set against the backdrop of Liberalism’s anti-creedalism or anti-dogmatism among other issues. The Canadian Knox College Professor of Systematic Theology David Inglis illustrated a defence of dogmatic theology in an opening address to an all-men’s College in 1870:

Dogma is used as a term of reproach, as though it were equivalent of dogmatism in the justly offensive sense. ... Dogma is to be understood not as meaning merely a doctrinal notion; it signifies a positive truth positively asserted, in opposition to an opinion or speculation. In theology it signifies a revealed truth — a statement which truly expresses the mind of God in His Word. The claim to authority does not rest upon the use of dogmatic words — upon the positiveness of the statement, but upon the proof of the authority whence it is derived. A statement may in its form be dogmatic, while devoid of the authority out of which alone dogma can properly spring; but every doctrine having a divine authority must have a dogmatic form. We claim therefore for the truths which are declared and attested by the Word of God, and which are capable of definite statement, that they are positive and authoritative, not as matters of individual opinion, but as revealed truths bearing the stamp of Divine infallibility.<sup>90</sup>

...

The man who denies the authority of the Bible may indeed raise a thousand other questions, but the doctrines, as far as they represent the truths of the Scriptures, stand or fall with the Scriptures themselves. The difficulties of sincere doubters can thus be met only by bringing them back to the divine authority of the word of God — set that aside and faith is impossible, doubt is inevitable.<sup>91</sup>

Charles Hodge’s (1797–1898) *Systematic Theology* which was first published in 1873 similarly supported the notion of a positive form of Biblical dogmaticism, and argued in favour of rationalism that is “good.” Contending for the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration, Hodge wrote that inspiration extends to words and “applies to all the books of the sacred canon.”<sup>92</sup> He added that apparent discrepancies should not cause us to deny the Bible’s infallibility since the “doctrine of plenary inspiration [was] taught by ... Christ Himself.”<sup>93</sup> Yet, Hodge never mentioned the doctrine of special providential preservation.<sup>94</sup>

Professor Robert Lewis Dabney (1820–1898) of Union Theological Seminary, who first published his *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of*

*Systematic and Polemic Theology* in 1871, started with the existence of God, invoking the arguments of Francis Turretin against Hume among others; that Dabney actually devoted a chapter to deal with the “recent” Darwinian theory of evolution is commendable.<sup>95</sup> However, it is noteworthy that Dabney discussed the phenomenon of “Revealed Theology” only in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter, in which Dabney rather abruptly interjected with an assumption on divine inspiration and infallibility of Scriptures.<sup>96</sup> Throughout his book, Dabney appeared to be taking for granted what has been designated “as a postulate established by another department in the Seminary.”<sup>97</sup> Nowhere is the Bible’s preservation explicitly mentioned.

Shortly before 1888, another well-known Presbyterian theologian William Greenough Thayer Shedd (1820–1894) wrote extensively on inspiration and canonicity in the first volume of his *Dogmatic Theology*.<sup>98</sup> Again, there is no explicit mention of the doctrine of Biblical preservation in Shedd’s system of theology.

In 1891, Williams College Professor and graduate of Andover Theological Seminary John Bascom (1827–1911) would write a “modern” systematic theology entitled *The New Theology* vehemently criticising the “old” tenets of Protestantism enshrined in its historical creeds. In a diatribe aimed directly at the doctrine of inspiration, Bascom proclaimed:

The doctrine of inspiration reached its *rigid and exact statement in the scholastic period of Reformed theology*; the period which followed its first years of protest and strength. Protestant theologians, having broken with the church and with tradition, sought authority...in the Scriptures. *They pushed the doctrine to the full extent of verbal inspiration. This conclusion was the opaque element obstructive to vision*, and we are still waiting for a pure and pellucid medium between us and the works of God, between us and God. ... The uses of the doctrine of inspiration ... have shown two forms of unequal value, and often of conflicting force. *This doctrine aims at authority and finds for it a pivotal point in the Scriptures. It was the desire for authority*, and the supposed need for authority, *which carried the doctrine in expression from point to point, till a final defence was set up in the assertion of the absolute verbal completeness of the divine message* [italics added, emphases mine].<sup>99</sup>

Elsewhere, waxing almost lyrical on his perceived “bondage to the letter,” Bascom wrote: “The doctrine of inspiration has deepened dissent and division in Protestant churches. It has enforced the letter, as opposed to the spirit, and made the devotees blind and refractory from

the outset.”<sup>100</sup> Bascom candidly and conceitedly admitted his liberal theological position, rhetorically asking

why have we been so urgent in our attack on inspiration? ... The supernatural element, retained in inspiration, puts constant suspension and harmful limitation on naturalism, on reason, on the growth of mind under its own laws. The instant the spirit strives to move forward, ... it encounters this dogma, and is often turned back preemptorily by it. ... We object to the ordinary view of inspiration, not because it involves supernaturalism, but because it stands in obscure, perplexing and misleading relations with naturalism, the coherent method of God. We exclude this dogma ...<sup>101</sup>

Renowned Scottish Presbyterian theologian John MacPherson of Dundee (1836–1910) wrote a systematic theology simply entitled *Christian Dogmatics*, in which he mentioned that many dogmatists in their introductions or prolegomena dealing with fundamental doctrine discuss the idea of inspiration; however, he also expressed a certain degree of nonchalance (or perhaps a marked disinterest) at the ability of criticism to substantially influence Biblical doctrines: “In order to secure this place, Scripture must indeed be inspired, but even when the freest criticism has been applied to the documents, the doctrinal material remains practically unaffected.”<sup>102</sup>

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Harvard Seminary Professor William Adams Brown (1865–1938) published his modernistic systematic theology which effectively dismissed the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy as merely the “inerrancy theory.”<sup>103</sup> Brown asserted that this notion of inerrancy was built upon a theoretical argument of divine perfection, and was in turn based upon another theoretical assumption that human beings are unable to recognise divine truth in an imperfect setting; thus, Brown set into motion a practical argument that necessitates a perfect standard, but flawed in that it excluded the Scriptures.

Yet, Brown was not alone in his theologically liberal insistence against the inerrancy of the Scriptures; in 1908, Samuel Thomson Carter, another American Presbyterian, would publish the popular systematically-arranged essay, *Wanted—A Theology*, which, in its condemnations and petitions against the “further acceptance of Scholastic theology,” was against the old, orthodox Christianity and for the “New Theology.” The former, according to Carter, had been a parasite to the life of freedom in Christ. Carter also appealed for his readers to reject the Westminster Confession.<sup>104</sup>

The Scottish Presbyterian minister and theologian James Orr (1844–1913) in his popular 1909 systematic theology handbook — *Sidelights on Christian Doctrine* — despite his commendable treatment of dogma and doctrine also did not explicitly describe his views on inspiration or label preservation as a doctrine/dogma either.<sup>105</sup>

Similarly, post-Warfield, one finds most intriguing the reluctance of Reformed theologians to define inspiration more specifically and to discuss the doctrine of special providential preservation in relation to Scripture, such as one reads in the *Systematic Theology* of Louis Berkhof (1873–1957).<sup>106</sup>

Closer to the present time, one considers the works of John H Gerstner (1914–1996) whose *Theology in Dialogue* (published shortly after his death) addressed the pressing problem of inerrancy. In discussing the issue of possibly “lost canonical books,” Gerstner first surmised that the minority who have categorically denied the possibility of lost canonical books also “cannot believe that God would allow His church to be deprived of something as important as a special revelation of God contained in a book which the church never had.”<sup>107</sup> To this minority view, Gerstner next provided an “alternative” concept, insisting that “there must be an inspired original autographic literature.”<sup>108</sup> However, Gerstner finally denied any doctrine of special providential preservation, concluding: “God leaves us to a fallible transmission of the text also. ... He has not seen fit to keep the infallible originals absolutely. ... He obviously expects us to get along without them, to do the best we can in approximating the originals.”<sup>109</sup>

The work of Orthodox Presbyterian Church theologian Robert Lewis Reymond (1932–2013) who wrote of Scripture’s self-authenticating/evidencing character, its perspicuity and its finality, was particularly inimitable.<sup>110</sup> Defending inspiration quite extensively, and by syllogism that is based on the premise of divine perfection, Reymond contended for inerrancy as well.<sup>111</sup> Reymond however made no explicit mention of the doctrine of preservation; yet in his discussion of chapter one and article eight of the Westminster Confession, he somehow managed to gloss over the phrase “kept pure in all ages” by citing Augustine’s Epistle to Jerome. Clearly, Reymond made the distinction between the lost, inerrant autographs and the errant apographs; but, despite the fact that Reymond did examine the issue of Bible transmission, his conclusion of the discussion nevertheless seemed to

be skewed towards that of Warfield and his ilk.<sup>112</sup> In his closing areas, after discussing the Bible's finality, Reymond proceeded to refute the gainsayers' charge of Bibliolatry with two rather cogent arguments; (1) the indefectibility of the Bible, because God is perfect, and (2) that "no evangelical has ever worshipped the Bible" but only revered it. Therefore, Reymond nevertheless believed the Bible has no mistakes and he reckoned that to allege otherwise would indeed be blasphemous.<sup>113</sup>

### German and Swiss Reformed

Benedict Pictet (1655–1724) of Calvin's Geneva school in his systematic work *Theologia Christiana* of 1696 (translated "Christian Theology" in 1834 by Frederick Reyroux) made only a fair attempt to define his doctrine of Scripture unlike what his predecessors John Diodati and Francis Turretin had done. Pictet did mention of the perfection of the Scriptures.<sup>114</sup> Pictet went so far as to maintain that "Scripture is an unchangeable rule" using a sundial illustration, as opposed to unwritten tradition; furthermore, he addressed the issues of translations and apocryphal books.<sup>115</sup> However, Pictet did not mention the divine preservation of the Scriptures as a doctrine.

A generation or two after Pictet's passing would see the rise of Kantian philosophy which so influenced the German pastor-theologian Friedrich Daniel E Schleiermacher (1768–1834).<sup>116</sup> The insistence that a Christian consciousness presupposes and involves the consciousness of absolute dependence on God would from that time be a distinctive feature of Schleiermacher's theology; and the doctrine of providential preservation would be applied specifically to a conservation or maintenance of the created order.<sup>117</sup> Schleiermacher acknowledged the formal divisions or "classifications" of preservation previously made by theologians into (1) general (*generalis*), (2) special (*specialis*) and (3) most special (*specialissima*); and, between cooperation and preservation. He commented,

Some have divided the conception of preservation ... into the following: the *general*, which is related to the whole world as a unity; the *special*, which is concerned with species; and the *most special*, which is concerned with individuals (*generalis, specialis et specialissima*).

Continuing his discussion, he also mentioned the division between "preserving" and "co-operating," but argued for his original proposition of absolute dependence, since "a preservation which did not include the

placing of all the activities of any finite being in absolute dependence on God would be just as empty as creation without preservation.”

Interestingly, Schleiermacher made the observation between the two and how some theologians might have erred:

It should be added here that even theologians who have treated the subject quite correctly on the whole have allowed themselves to be led into describing co-operation as something more immediate than preservation, so that deeds, as distinct from the preservation of power, proceed from a divine activity. The result of this would be, if we took it seriously, to reduce the preservation of power to nothing.

This statement appears valid if one considers the miracle of inspiration as a kind of divine-human “co-operation” to some extent. Yet the tendency of certain theologians is to severely downplay “preservation of power” which this writer reckons can be applied to the inspired, written account, found in manuscripts containing the gospel—the very power of God unto salvation of individuals (Rom 1:16). So, in this sense, Schleiermacher can be credited with his general observation that in “absolute dependence on God, everything is equally direct and indirect.” God is in complete control, and nothing happens without His knowledge.

In fact, following his line of argument, one notes that Schleiermacher critiqued the idea of “co-operation” in miracles as inaccurate, because “something comes into existence, which according to its natural character would not have come into existence” and proposed instead that “God has prepared miracles in nature itself in some way incomprehensible to us.” However, Schleiermacher erred in his particular insistence on anti-supernaturalism when he concluded that “we should abandon the idea of the supernatural because no single instance of it can be known by us, and we are nowhere required to recognize it.”<sup>118</sup>

Today, Schleiermacher’s writings continue to exert a profound influence even on the theological liberalism that flourished between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This writer reckons that by extension of the first half of Schleiermacher’s “captivating” proposition, namely, how believers tend to “place all that affects or influences us in absolute dependence on God” when applied to a particular view of divine preservation, which, though rejected by many in conservative circles, may in a curious (and even contravening) sense partly account for some liberals not completely shunning a doctrine of divine preservation of Scripture.



In the late 1930s, Swiss Reformed theologian Heinrich Emil Brunner (1889–1966) published a booklet entitled *Our Faith*. Influenced heavily by the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth, Brunner used somewhat naturalistic analogy of describing the Scriptures as a “scratchy record,” urging believers to listen for “the Master’s voice” contained in them. Brunner asserted that the essence of the original has been preserved in this “scratchy record,” but that this is only discernible to believers in an almost mystical sense.<sup>119</sup> This extreme view of epistemology finds striking parallels in the Quakerian system of theology, written in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century by Robert Barclay.<sup>120</sup> In Barclay’s dedicatory epistle to Charles II, he asserted that Reformed theology and confessions emphasise the Spirit over the Scriptures, and consequently, Scriptures are only a secondary source of authority. Barclay then cleverly used the fact that there are transcription errors (or what may be called textual problems or alleged historical orthodox corruptions to hide supposed inconvenient truths) to argue that Scriptures are neither the final authority nor “the principal ground of truth,” nor “are they the primary rule of faith and manner.”<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, Barclay boldly averred that the canon is indeterminate and Scripture itself does not attest to it.<sup>122</sup>

### Dispensationalist

Perhaps the most well-known of classic dispensationalists and founder of Dallas Theological Seminary — Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952) — wrote his *Systematic Theology* in 1947, during a time when liberal theology in the form of Bultmannianism was being proliferated and people post-WWII seemed generally distrustful of the Scriptures.<sup>123</sup> Taking great pains to explicate the doctrine of inspiration, Chafer devoted an entire sub-section or a short chapter to the doctrine of the Preservation of the Scriptures.<sup>124</sup> Commenting on Matthew 5:18 concerning how not one jot or tittle of the divine deposition can pass until all is fulfilled, Chafer wrote, “The preservation of the Scriptures, like the divine care over the writing of them and over the formation of them into the canon, is neither accidental, incidental, nor fortuitous. It is the fulfillment of the divine promise.”<sup>125</sup> Thus, Chafer acknowledged the epangelical nature of the doctrine of providential preservation; the same doctrine is at least attested in the theology of the dispensational school to which Dallas Theological Seminary is affiliated.

## Neo-Evangelical

The following four evangelical writers are known for their stance on the issue of Biblical inerrancy. The first, Millard J Erickson has roots in the Baptist denomination. In Erickson's systematic work — *Christian Theology* — he presents several theories of inspiration (eg, intuition, illumination, dynamic, verbal and dictation). He then inserts an interesting and deliberately ambiguous comment which is not further elaborated on: “While inspiration in the strict sense probably does not apply to the preservation and transmission of this material, the providence which guides this process should not be overlooked.”<sup>126</sup>

Erickson also views inspiration in a rather distinctive way (as though putting the cart before the horse) by his puzzling choice of wording for the title of Chapter nine of his book, ie, “Preservation of the Revelation: Inspiration” and views the Bible as “an inspired preservation of that revelation.”<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless he does provide a sound commentary of 2 Peter 1:20–21 and highlights the authority and permanence of Scripture.<sup>128</sup> Overall, there seems to be a conscious attempt to “marry” the historical-critical concepts, eg, oral tradition, *Sitz im Leben* etc with a more traditional form of evangelicalism.<sup>129</sup> In the final analysis, what appears particularly unsettling in the issue of verbal and plenary preservation is that Erickson uses “preservation” in a totally different sense altogether than what is the literal and commonly-intended sense. Such an unconventional usage of preservation by Erickson almost totally nullifies any *actual* preservation and effectively reduces the entire special providential process to little more than conjecture.

The second title — *Integrative Theology* — is by well-known neo-evangelical writers Gordon R Lewis and Bruce A Demarest. The authors assert that the Apostles themselves were instrumental in guiding the ancient church in the preservation of Scripture and devote a fairly long discussion on the “supernatural inspiration of the Holy Spirit”<sup>130</sup> leading to the key question: “What difference does it make if the original was inerrant since we do not have inerrant copies?” The authors' somewhat forensic and non-committal reply to this question is that

its transmission to our day also has great importance. ... Thus the text of the originals can be established beyond reasonable doubt in the bulk of the material. ... The twenty-seven books of the New Testament, well-preserved through the centuries, are not a mere human witness to a noncognitive revelation, but convey the teachings ultimately from

God and communicated through verified apostolic spokesmen by the supernatural inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>131</sup>

Despite the rigorous, rational approach taken by the authors, they nevertheless assure the reader with the usual neo-evangelical wishful-thinking that “textual criticism has built confidence.”<sup>132</sup>

A third neo-evangelical systematic theology, Wayne Grudem’s *An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, features a remarkably extensive defense of the doctrine of Biblical preservation.<sup>133</sup> To avoid any possible misconceptions on the part of the reader, Grudem clarifies:

This is of course not to affirm the impossible notion that God providentially preserves every word in every copy of every text, no matter how careless the copyist, or that he must miraculously provide every believer with a Bible instantly. Nevertheless, this consideration of God’s faithful care of his children should certainly cause us to be thankful that in God’s providence there is no significantly attested textual variant that would change any point of Christian doctrine or ethics, so faithfully has the text been transmitted and preserved. However, we must say clearly that there are a number of differing words in the different ancient manuscripts of the Bible that are preserved today. These are called “textual variants.” The question of textual variants within the surviving manuscripts of the books that belong in the canon is discussed in chapter 5, pp. 96–97.<sup>134</sup>

It is evident that Grudem denies verbal preservation (not every word is preserved) but accepts conceptual preservation (biblical doctrines or ethics are preserved).

The final systematic theology in this brief review is Norman Geisler’s *Systematic Theology*. Among the various more recent systematic works surveyed, Geisler’s is significant in his citation of Turretin’s *Institutes* as the view of historic Protestantism.<sup>135</sup> Though Geisler asserts that only the originals are inerrant, he indeed dedicates an entire section to Francis Turretin, but seems to add his own conclusion to Turretin’s: “God would not inspire what He did not preserve ... so, the copies, while not inerrant, are providentially preserved.”<sup>136</sup> Moreover, Geisler also reveals a somewhat ambivalent attitude concerning the views of 17<sup>th</sup> century protestant orthodoxy when he cautions:

Scholastic orthodoxy of the seventeenth century virtually maintained that the authority is the Bible alone. In some cases this also has been the position of American fundamentalism of the twentieth century. Those who hold this position see an objective quality in the Bible that

automatically brings one into contact with God; a virtually sacramental view of the Bible can result.<sup>137</sup>

Hence, it may be said from this rather brief literature survey, that the doctrine of Biblical preservation which was upheld by the older theologians appears to have been neglected or changed by the newer ones who have embraced empiricism over Biblicism. There is thus a real need to understand the doctrine of Biblical preservation in a totally and thoroughly Biblical way especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 739.

<sup>2</sup> Not mentioned in this chapter are Roman Catholic systematic theologies, which do appear in Berkhof's recommended bibliography. Since they are Public Domain and have been made available at archive.org, the writer perused four Catholic theologies, all published sometime between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century: James Cardinal Gibbons' (1834–1921) *Catholic Faith of Our Fathers* (London: John Murphy and Co, 1889); Wilhelm Wilmers' (1817–1899) *Catholic Handbook of the Christian Religion for the Use of Advanced Students and the Educated Laity*, 3d ed (Chicago: Benziger Brothers, 1891); Sylvester Joseph Hunter's (1829–1896) *Catholic Outlines of Dogmatic Theology* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1895); Joseph Pohle (1852–1922) *Dogmatic Theology* (St Louis: B Herder, 1911).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Banks Strong, *A Manual of Theology* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Edward White Benson, *Living Theology* (London: Samson Low, 1893), 43, 126.

<sup>5</sup> Reginald John Campbell, *The New Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 258, defines the 'New Theology' as being "primarily a moral and spiritual movement."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 209.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 257.

<sup>8</sup> James Drummond, *Studies in Christian Doctrine* (London: Philip Green, 1908), 86–88.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 90. For instance, here Drummond explained the RSV's translation of the verse in 2 Timothy 3:16, arguing that "inspired" does not mean "infallible."

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Boynton Smith, *System of Christian Theology*, ed William S Karr (New York: A C Armstrong and Sons, 1892), 192.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 213 (see footnote).

<sup>15</sup> Clarence Augustine Beckwith, *Realities of Christian Theology: An Interpretation of Christian Experience* (New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 1906), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Gerald Bray, *God Is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 45.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

<sup>18</sup> John Gill, *A Collection of Sermons and Tracts: To Which Are Prefixed, Memoirs of the Life, Writing, and Character of the Author*, vol 3:8, “Dissertation Concerning the Antiquity of the Hebrew Language, Letters, Vowel-Points, and Accents” (London: George Keith, 1778), 435–8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 435.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 438.

<sup>21</sup> John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity* (Philadelphia: Delaplaine and Hellings, 1810), I:2.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> John Leadley Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Charleston: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1859), 35.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 39. The rest of this quote runs thus: “Even the infidel scoffer is made an unconscious witness. In its pages, his very scoffs are predicted, and his corrupt heart, from which, rather than from sober judgment, these scoffs proceed, is portrayed with an accuracy and skill which be speak the Author divine, the Searcher of hearts. The word which ‘is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart,’ must be ‘the word of God.’”

<sup>25</sup> Alvah Hovey, *Manual of Systematic Theology, and Christian Ethics* (Boston: Henry Young, 1877), 81, and George Burman Foster, *Christianity in Its Modern Expression* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 70–2. Foster’s points are useful in pointing to the “Importance of Evangelical Confessions for Faith-Knowledge and Dogmatics,” and he asserted that confessional writings are a religious witness, therefore not infallible as they are the productions of me, such that “they themselves present new creations from the newly gained understanding of the Scriptures.” Quite instructive are his comments on the method of Orthodox Ecclesiastical Dogmatics (71–2). Foster reminded the readers of Christ’s own opinion of Scripture, His high regard for the doctrine of preservation (77–8): the same doctrine which He during His earthly Ministry not simply assumed, but insisted on. Foster wrote, “Ecclesiastical Dogmatics spoke of *providentia universa*, *providentia generalis*, and *providentia specialissima*.”

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 83–6.

<sup>27</sup> William Newton Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1899), 37. Concerning “Inspiration,” Clarke wrote, “Primarily men are inspired, not writings. Inspiration in writings is secondary; there is no way to bring it into writings except through men” (40). Thus, Clark argued *against* the need for an immutable standard and thereby places undue emphasis on religious experience (46). Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1917), 191. “Those who have had first-hand experience of inspiration either in their own souls or in the life of others, have always combined reverence for the authority of the word of the Lord and a realization of the human frailty and liability to error in the prophet. ... Inspiration did not involve infallibility when men knew it by experience. Traditional theology has felt the need of inspired prophets and apostles ... to furnish the system of doctrine with a firm footing of inerrancy and infallibility. The doctrine of inspiration is not treated as part of the ... intellect, but as part of the prolegomena of theology. The social gospel, on the other hand, feels the need of present inspiration and of living prophetic spirits in order to lead human toward the Kingdom of God” (cf 193).

<sup>28</sup> E H Johnson, *An Outline of Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1895). Johnson dismissed the theories of Intuition/naturalistic (31),

Illumination/partial inspiration (32) in favour of Plenary Inspiration, but says it cannot be verbal, only dynamical—allowing room for the sacred writers to express Divine truth or ideas (33–4), but left room for probable error or discrepancies in the NT record. Johnson conceded: “To claim too much is to risk even more” (35). Augustus Hopkins Strong, *The Doctrine of God*, vol 1, in “Revision of ‘Systematic Theology’” (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society 1886), 116. As to its method (see sub-point c.), “That of preservation in written and accessible documents, handed down from those to whom the revelation is first communicated,” Strong quoted Henry P Smith concerning the Koran; “Alphabets, writing, books, are our chief dependence for the history of the past”. In 196–242, Strong furnished proofs for inspiration and answered objections.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Clyde MacIntosh, *Theology as an Empirical Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1919). MacIntosh dismissed the “virgin-birth story” as “a legend, ie a bit of unconscious social fiction about an historical personage” (112) and spoke contemptuously of the “untenability, from a critical point of view of the traditionalistic notion of revelation, inspiration, and authority ... are driving theology back to the more original, yet possibly more permanent religio-empirical approach ... to substitute for ... primitive thought the scientific principles and methods of modern investigation.”

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Paul Simmons, *A Systematic Study of Bible Doctrine; a logical arrangement and diligent treatment of the teachings of God’s holy word for the average preacher and the studious layman* (Ashland: Baptist Book and Bible House, 1936), 92.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–2.

<sup>32</sup> Claude Duval Cole, in vol 1, “The Doctrine of God” of *Definitions of Doctrine*, <http://libcf1.com/articles/cole-1.htm#5> (accessed March 14, 2014). See especially chap 5, “The Word of God (The Holy Scriptures).”

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatic*, ed John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 107.

<sup>35</sup> David J Engelsma, “Herman Bavinck: The Man and His Theology,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 46 (2012): 3–43. Engelsma says that “Bavinck’s weakening of the doctrine of Scripture have been disastrous in many Reformed churches, in which the dogmatics of Bavinck became influential.”

<sup>36</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 106.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 107–8.

<sup>39</sup> Gerrit H Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics: A Systematic Treatment of Reformed Doctrine* (Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing, 1980), 23–4.

<sup>40</sup> Engelsma, “Herman Bavinck,” 84, 86. Engelsma notes further: “This struggle with doubt concerning Scripture persisted throughout [Bavinck’s] ministry. To this struggle, Hepp refers when he speaks of a “duality in [Bavinck’s] spiritual existence.” In fact, doubt concerning Scripture increased in Bavinck’s old age. In the last phase of his ministry, as professor at the Free University in Amsterdam, Bavinck nearly succumbed to sheer scepticism.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Immanuel Nitzsch, *System of Christian Doctrine*, trans Robert Montgomery and John Hennen (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1849), 99. It is said that Nitzsch represented the Vermittelungstheologie of the school of Friedrich Schleiermacher. In section 41, Nitzsch gives a “dichotomy” of Scripture and the Word of God.

<sup>42</sup> Hans Lassen Martensen, *Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1866),

26, “the legal church ... cannot be satisfied with a canon of faith, which like the Holy Scriptures, contains what the church needs for the preservation of the true doctrine only in an undeveloped though completed form.” Speculative theology probably influenced by Schleiermacher and theosophy.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 33. As Martensen observed, the author Theirach incorrectly chose the second inference (Theirach, “Vorlesungen ueber Katholicismus u. Protestantismus,” as cited in Martensen).

<sup>44</sup> Isaak August Dorner, *Dorner’s System of Christian Doctrine*, tran Alfred Cave and J S Banks (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1880), 1:97. Dorner observed how Werenfels failed to convince the rationalists of the certainty of his Biblical presupposition that the Bible is a testimony of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

<sup>46</sup> Milton Valentine, *Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1906). In the Preface written (posthumously) by his son, M H Valentine, it is noted his (ie, the author’s) “plan of the Introduction included a chapter on the Authority of the Scriptures, involving the discussion on Inspiration, but its preparation was deferred to the last moment that he might have the benefit of the most recent literature of this burning question. But death intervened before the chapter could be written” (iv). Hence, one can only speculate how this intended chapter by the senior Valentine might have appeared.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 60–99. Valentine made use of patristic writings to furnish external proof for revelation and how “epistles of disputed authorship verify their authenticity by their internal essential unity with the undoubted apostolic writings. It is impossible to conceive of reporters or historians in better relation to the facts they narrate” (72), and cites Eusebius as an example of a reliable witness who “preserved for us ... [Papias’ now extant] account of the gospel of Mark and ... Matthew,” arguing that the chief force of their testimony is largely indirect. Additionally, Valentine used evidence from miracles, prophecy and internal evidences. His views have been influenced in no small way by the pervasiveness of historical criticism in his era.

<sup>48</sup> Heinrich Friedrich Ferdinand Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans Charles A Hay and Henry E Jacobs (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1889), 64.

<sup>49</sup> Dictionary of National Biography, sv “Watson, Richard (1781–1833).” Richard Watson can be considered one of the most important figures in 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodism, Watson’s Institutes represented the first attempt to systematize John Wesley’s theology, and by extension, Methodist doctrine.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes*, in Part I, “Evidences of Christianity,” ed Thomas O Summers (Nashville: E Stevenson and F A Owen, 1857), 80.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>53</sup> Amos Binney, *A Theological Compend* (Toronto: Wesleyan Methodist Conference Book Room, 1849), 37.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Amos Binney, *Binney’s Theological Compend Improved*, ed Daniel Steele (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1875), 56–8.

<sup>56</sup> Binney himself wrote in the preface of his improved *Compend*, “The author’s increased knowledge of theology during his long Christian ministry, and especially his studies in the New Testament during the fifteen years in which his sole employment has

been the preparation of a popular commentary, have qualified him to recast and enrich his Compend, and fortify its statements by more abundant references to the word of God. He has also endeavored to guard the reader against the new forms in which Christian truth is attacked in these modern times. He has not found any thing essentially new in theology. Hence the reader who looks for novelties will be disappointed. Christianity is not a progressive science but a system of objective truth, handed down from heaven, the perfect gift of its perfect Giver.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas N Ralston, *Elements of Divinity* (Louisville: E Stevenson, 1851).

<sup>58</sup> Thomas N Ralston and Thomas O Summers. *Elements of Divinity* (Nashville: A H Redford, 1851, 1878), 571–2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 573.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 575.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 581.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 583.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 598.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 600.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 603.

<sup>67</sup> William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1879), 1:171. Pope's style is apologetic, in which sets forth influential arguments for the "holiness doctrine of all Methodist systematic theology" and defended Methodist doctrine against its critics.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>72</sup> John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1873), 1:38, 42–5. Miley indeed wrote: "These doctrines are in the Scriptures; and the Scriptures bear the seal of a divine original," and continued to give a brief survey of all the writers and apologists who support, arguing against a Deistic rationalism and the destructiveness of Higher Criticism (44–5), yet Miley somehow avoided mentioning the issue of Scriptures' transmission altogether.

<sup>73</sup> Olin Alfred Curtis, *The Christian Faith: Personally Given in a System of Doctrine* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1910), 167–172.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 174–9.

<sup>75</sup> Raymond Howard Huse, *Theology of a Modern Methodist* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1920), 68.

<sup>76</sup> John Brown, *Systematic Theology: A Compendious View of Natural and Revealed Religion in Seven Books* (London: Wm Baynes, 1817), 59.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 62–3.

<sup>78</sup> John Dick, *Lectures on Theology* (New York: M W Doddon, 1850), 1:38.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 121.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. Here, it is interesting to note that there is no mention of Codex Sinaiticus.



<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 126–7.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 135–6.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Jefferson Breckinridge, *The Knowledge of God Objectively Considered* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1858), 418.

<sup>84</sup> A A Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (Broadway: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1860), 531.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>90</sup> David Inglis, *Systematic Theology, in Its Relation to Modern Thought: A Lecture delivered in Knox College on the 5th October 1870, at the opening of the College Session* (Toronto: Adam, Stevenson, 1870).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>92</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology Abridged*, ed Edward N Gross (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 46–54, 77–90.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 88, 92.

<sup>94</sup> The writer reckons that though a general view of preservation may have been considered implicit in Hodge's doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration, it is extremely hard to assign him the benefit of doubt for a special providential preservation.

<sup>95</sup> Robert L Dabney *Syllabus and Notes of the Course of Systematic and Polemic Theology*, 2d ed (St Louis: Presbyterian Publishing Company, 1878), 7, 17–9, 26–38, 87–90, 99–110. Dabney wrote, "This recent evolution theory verges every year nearer to the pagan atomic theory" (38).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 144. Dabney mentioned: "I need only add, that I hold Scriptures to be, in all its parts, of plenary inspiration." Furthermore, he wrote: "In approaching the Department of Revealed Theology, the first question is concerning the inspiration of the Scriptures. This having been settled, we may proceed to assume them inspired and infallible."

<sup>97</sup> In the Printing Committee's "Note to the Reader," one also finds agreement concerning "the order of subjects ... [being] chiefly that followed in the Confession of Faith. But the course begins with Natural Theology, which is then followed by a brief review of the doctrines of psychology and ethics, which are most involved in the study of theology. This being done, the lectures proceed to revealed theology, assuming, as a postulate established by another department in the Seminary, the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures."

<sup>98</sup> William G T Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971). Shedd mentioned inspiration on 1:61–110, 144. Under the broader issue of canonicity, Shedd briefly touched on the Old and New Testament Scriptures recognised by the church, but stopped at Catharge (397 AD) (cf 146.).

<sup>99</sup> John Bascom, *The New Theology* (New York: Putnam, 1891), 40.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 43, 45.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>102</sup> John MacPherson, *Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1898), 27–8.

<sup>103</sup> William Adams Brown, *Christian Theology in Outline* (New York: Charles

Scribner's Sons, 1906), 58. According to one Internet source, William Brown delivered a speech at Harvard in 1910 which he entitled "The Old Theology and the New." His critics charged that he and the Seminary both promulgated heretical beliefs. The situation came to a head in 1913 at the Presbyterian General Assembly in Atlanta, where Brown was accused of heresy. He was not allowed to respond; but on the next day, the Seminary president, Francis Brown, delivered an address that swayed enough of the Assembly to prevent formal charges. Francis Brown successfully defended the Seminary and its professor of Systematic Theology the following year at the Assembly in Rochester, and the matter was dropped.

<sup>104</sup> Samuel Thomson Carter, *Wanted—A Theology* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), 20–1.

<sup>105</sup> James Orr, *Sidelights on Christian Doctrine* (New York: A C Armstrong and Sons, 1909), 5–6. Orr often used terms like "Scripturally right" and "the Bible." He briefly alluded to the objections of higher criticism (15).

<sup>106</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1959), 34, 36, 54. On these pages, for instance, Berkhof seemed to make an almost *a priori* assumption that Scriptures are the only and most reliable means of knowing God, according to Reformed Theology.

<sup>107</sup> John H Gerstner, *Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1996), 141–7.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>110</sup> Robert L Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 87–93.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–49, 72–4.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 92. Reymond seemed to think that "the distinction is not a recent novelty" and calmly suggested that even Saint Augustine would have agreed with Warfield's views concerning the autographs and apographs.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 88–93.

<sup>114</sup> Benedict Pictet, *Christian Theology*, trans Frederick Reyroux (Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board, 1834), 49–54. Notwithstanding, Pictet devoted a brief section to Scriptures' inspiration (42–4) and authority (44–8), where the translator observed that Pictet continues to impugn the opinion of the Papists who maintain dual source authority; this approach seems consistent with his predecessors, even Calvin.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 54, 64–8. Contrasting Scriptures and tradition, Pictet wrote: "For this reason, some have not inaptly compared the Scriptures to a sun-dial; for as this, being itself fixed and immovable, points out the hour by its shadow, so the Scripture is an immovable rule: whereas they have compared tradition to the hand of a watch, which being always moving and turning round, points out the hour only by the motion and turning of its point."

<sup>116</sup> Friedrich D E Schleiermacher, *The Theology of Schleiermacher: A Condensed Presentation of His Chief Work, "The Christian Faith,"* ed George Cross (Illinois: University of Chicago, 1911). Schleiermacher, who has been dubbed "the father of modern theology," rejected most of orthodox Christianity in favour of the enlightenment view of the higher criticism of his time, and, in a sense, placed the subjective knowledge of the spirit before the objective knowledge of the written word. [http://www.theopedia.com/Friedrich\\_Schleiermacher](http://www.theopedia.com/Friedrich_Schleiermacher) says that "Modern systematic theologies have followed his [Schleiermacher's] model [in *The Christian Faith*] ever since."

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<sup>117</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, 2d ed (Great Britain: T & T Clark, 2003), 170. Under the heading “Doctrine of Preservation (Conservation)” Schleiermacher wrote: “The religious self-consciousness, by means of which we place all that affects or influences us in absolute dependence on God, coincides entirely with the view that all such things are conditioned and determined by the interdependence of Nature.”

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 175–7, 183.

<sup>119</sup> Heinrich Emil Brunner, *Our Faith* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), 10–1.

<sup>120</sup> Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity; being an explanation and vindication of the principles and doctrines of the people called Quakers* (Philadelphia: Friends’ Bookstore, 1848). Barclay made reference to Calvin’s “inward testimony of the Spirit,” the French Confession, and the Westminster Confession.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*, 76, 84–5.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid*, 77. It is interesting how Barclay compared and contrasted both the Bereans and Pharisees’ searching and high regard for Scriptures. It may be surmised that Barclay’s quotations (using the KJV) are scriptural yet he did somewhat bend the Scriptures for his own agenda, selectively using reformed quotations and anti-traditionalism to great effect, but in reality contradicting both the spirit and letter of every reformed author and work he had alluded to.

<sup>123</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1993).

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 61–88.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 124–5.

<sup>126</sup> Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 220.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 251. “The Bible as a revelation and an inspired preservation of that revelation is also regarded as having an intrinsic efficacy.”

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 201–3.

<sup>129</sup> For instance, the historical-critical concept of *Sitz im Leben* is mentioned no fewer than ten times in Erickson’s systematic theology (cf 92, 96, 97, 101, 104, 107, 112, 113, 887, 1112).

<sup>130</sup> Gordon R Lewis and Bruce A Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 1:150–1.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 153–4.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 164.

<sup>133</sup> Wayne Grudem, *An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 50, 63, 65.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

<sup>135</sup> Norman L Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Bloomington: Bethany House, 2002), 1:411.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 1:409–11.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 1:251.

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## THE EARNEST SERVICE OF AN UNPROFITABLE SERVANT

Tadahito Yamazaki

This morning we will learn from Luke 17:7–10, *“But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”*

In this passage, Jesus teaches us about the importance of the earnest service of a servant of God, and also the appropriate mental preparation to be a servant of God. This is a very important teaching because every Christian is a servant of God. Every Christian has a responsibility to serve earnestly and work hard for the Lord.

The word “servant” here in Greek is *doulos*. This can also be translated as “slave”. According to the Greek-English lexicon, *doulos* means “one who gives himself up wholly to another’s will”. And according to the book written by John MacArthur, slaves are “in the absolute control of an owner. Whether they were sold into slavery or born into it, slaves belonged entirely to those who owned them.” Slaves were to carry out the master’s wishes without question. Slaves were completely dependent on their masters for their basic necessities, including food and shelter. Slaves were under the absolute authority of their masters. A slave’s life was one of complete surrender, submission, and service to the master. Jesus invites us to serve Him in such a way—in complete surrender, submission, and service to Him.

Jesus teaches us that all works which we do are our duty, not our achievement. We should do our duty well. And if we do well, we are still unprofitable servants before the Lord. We have no greatness, no excellence, no ability, no power before Him. We are just saved by His

merciful grace, and serving Him for His glory. Therefore, we should serve Him earnestly and humbly and work hard for Him.

How should a servant serve the Lord? A servant of the Lord should serve in these three ways:

### **Earnestly**

A servant of the Lord should serve earnestly. In verse 7, we see the servant ploughing the field or feeding the cattle. He worked probably the whole day. Israel can be very dry and hot during the day time. Working the whole day under the sun is very hard work. After finishing his field works, he returns home, and though he is very tired he must cook the meal for his master and serve him until his master finishes his dinner. After that, he can eat his dinner. Every day is like this. It is actually hard work for him. This is the duty of a servant. It is natural for him to do it well. If he cannot do it well, he is not a good servant. He will be dismissed from his job.

Jesus said in verse 10, “So likewise ye”. This parable teaches us that as servants of the Lord, we are serving the Lord every day. Our study, duty, worship, prayer, and evangelism—all must be done as unto the Lord. Sometimes it is very hard for us, but it is just our duty. We are not great even if we work hard for the Lord. It is just our duty to do well. A servant of the Lord must have a sense of responsibility. We have a responsibility to serve the Lord earnestly and work hard for Him every day. We cannot forget this as servants. We are employed by Him to work hard for His glory.

How can a servant serve the Lord with such earnestness? If a servant intends to obey and work for the Lord earnestly, he will surely be attacked with many temptations and oppositions because Satan works hard to destroy him. We know that working hard for the Lord in this ungodly world is very hard work. We are preparing now for our ministry in the near future, and after graduation we will go into a ministry. Probably we will face various problems, hardships and trials. However, we must continue steadfastly to obey and work hard for the Lord even if it is so hard a situation. So, in order to serve the Lord with earnest devotion, we must trust in the Lord with all our heart. Proverbs 3:5–7 says, “*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.*”

Here, we can find some very important instructions which a servant of the Lord should acquire. Strictly speaking, a servant of the Lord should trust

in the Lord completely, and not trust his own power and ability, He must always be conscious of the Lord. If he does so, the Lord will lead him into the righteous way. These instructions are very significant. Without trusting in the Lord sincerely, man cannot continue to serve the Lord earnestly and humbly. A good servant trusts in the Lord completely, so that he can continue to do his best for the Lord even in times of hardships and trials in this world. If he trusts in the Lord completely, even if he encounters difficulties, he will have great joy working for His glory. In Acts 5, the Apostles rejoiced when they were persecuted for Jesus' sake. They could work usefully and were counted worthy by Him. This is the greatest honour for a servant of the Lord. With complete trust in the Lord, we can serve Him with earnestness, eagerness, strength, courage, and great joy.

### **Selflessly**

A servant of the Lord should serve selflessly. Verse 9 tells us that we should serve the Lord without thinking of ourselves. We should not be conceited and proud because we are just servants of the Lord. We should not be conceited to think that we are working for the Lord sufficiently. We have still many things to do. We should be diligent always. We must not be proud. We should just do our best for the Lord humbly.

Our works must all be for the glory of the Lord, not our own glory. We can do our best with our full strength because it is for the glory of the Lord. The Lord saved our souls. He is the Saviour who gave us eternal life. He is the Almighty God and the Creator of all things. For His glory, we can do our best for Him.

In this parable, Jesus teaches us also the hope and joy of a servant in order to encourage us. Though we are just unprofitable servants, we will not end up being unprofitable. We can be useful and profitable by God's grace if we trust in Him completely and work for Him with all our strength. In another parable in Matthew 25, Jesus mentioned the servant who had received five talents and did good work. The Lord praise his good work saying, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant"*. Here again Jesus encourages us to serve Him earnestly and selflessly without ceasing and to do good work for Him.

### **Dutifully**

A servant of the Lord should serve dutifully. Verse 10 tells us that we are just unprofitable servants before the Lord. It is our duty to serve Him. We have no greatness, no ability, no power before Him. We are but

## THE EARNEST SERVICE OF AN UNPROFITABLE SERVANT

sinners who have been saved by His merciful grace. We are like orphans who have been found on the streets and then supported by a kind master, and now serving him in his house. What we can do for our master in return for his kindness is to work hard for him. We must not forget our position. Do not forget that the Lord will surely reward His good servant for his labour, and also surely help him.

As mentioned above, the Lord called the servant who had received five talents and done good work, saying, *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant”*. This servant was diligent, and worked hard for the Lord, and he was recognised as a good servant. This is the most honorable praise for him. Any hard labour and painful experience which have come upon him will disappear. Similarly, the Lord will surely reward the labour of His good servant.

When we serve the Lord dutifully, He will also surely help His servants when we are in great trouble. The Bible says, *“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up”* (Ps 27:10). We can only trust in the Lord whom we serve until the end.

For an example, I would like to share about the experience of my pastor in Japan. He is an American, and his name is Rev Robert Klutz. He came from America as a missionary when he was 27. He is now 91. He has been evangelising in Japan for over 60 years. At first, he joined the missions board of Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), and he was supported financially by them. But he resigned from this missions board when they started to compromise with unbiblical Christians. He later married a Japanese lady, and was blessed with four daughters. However, he was very poor because he had no financial support. Finally he came to a point when he had no food for the day. Then he prayed to the Lord earnestly. And when he prayed to the Lord, a Japanese professor from a university came, and asked him to teach English to Japanese students at the university. At that time, English-speaking men were very few, and many Japanese students wanted to listen to a native English speaker. In this way, the Lord gave him a job to get enough income to support his family. From this case, we can see that when we are really troubled and confused, it is only the Lord who can surely help us, and we can trust in Him until the very end.

The Lord will surely reward His good servant for his labour for Him, and also surely help him when he is in great trouble. Therefore, a servant of the Lord can continue to serve dutifully and work hard for Him even in times of trials and hardship.

## **Personal Testimony**

I have been taught in FEBC the significance of trusting in the Lord in order to continue to serve and work for the Lord. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart. Lean not unto thine own understanding.” This verse impressed me most deeply and convicted me that it is the most instructive for my life. Actually, the studies in FEBC are very hard for me. Especially in my previous semester when I studied Greek and Hebrew at the same time. It was really hard. So tough for me. And I felt my studies to be painful, not joy but pain. Consequently, as I had feared, I failed Greek Reading. However, I realised later, that my studies are a preparation for the work of the Lord. Nevertheless, why do I feel it is so painful? I should do it with great joy, because I will be able to work for the Lord. I have been given the clear purpose of life to work for the Lord instead of a non-purposeful life, and I am studying now for it, so I should be delighted and do it with my best effort. Actually, I had forgotten to trust in the Lord.

The Bible teaches us in Romans 8:28, “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*”. If we trust in the Lord, we have nothing to be worried about, because the Lord makes all things work together for good to us who love Him. If someone studied hard, did his best, and failed, he need not regret it because he did his best for the Lord. The most important thing is to do our best for the Lord and to keep on trusting in Him. We need not worry when we fail, because the Lord makes all things work together for good. We should just put in more effort at the next opportunity. Learning to trust in the Lord is far more significant than acquiring other knowledge. This teaching on “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart” is a great encouragement for me.

## **Conclusion**

Today, we have learned that we Christians should serve the Lord earnestly, selflessly, and dutifully. We should work hard for the Lord because we are His servants. We must remember that we are but unprofitable servants. We should thus not be conceited and proud, but diligent and humble always, doing our best for the Lord. We should trust in the Lord with all heart as we serve Him earnestly and work hard for Him. Trusting in the Lord gives us earnestness, eagerness, strength, courage, and great joy. We should not forget that the Lord will surely reward our labour for Him, and also help us when we are in great trouble. We can thus continue to serve Him earnestly and courageously even if



any hardship comes upon us. Although we are actually just unprofitable servants, we will not end up being unprofitable. We can be profitable for Him by His grace.

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*Tadahito Yamazaki hails from Hokkaido, Japan. He is currently studying for his Master of Divinity at the Far Eastern Bible College. The above was his first sermon preached in the Homiletics class on 4 April 2018.*

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*College News continued from p76*

**Bachelor of Theology (BTh):** Charyhon Shanta Rosa Sinaga, Deddy Crisno Manalu, Maritus, Mega Tuti Manwarniat Zega, Murniwati Mendrofa, Van Bawi How, Van Thawng Hup. **Master of Religious Education (MRE):** Kiew Kai Xing Katharine, Leanne Joy Joseph, Nguyen Van Hieu, Xu Xiaoxian, Zhu Xinkai. **Master of Divinity (MDiv):** Chieng Yew Jinn, Choong Sin Chun, Fu Zheng, Joseph Robert Samuel Vijayaraj, Shobastian, Tan Pek Suan Shermaine. **Master of Theology (ThM):** Cheong Chin Meng, Zhu Jianwei.

**FEBC's Annual Retreat** was held at the Resort Lautan Biru (RLB) in Mersing, Malaysia, May 7–8, 2018. Two busloads of about 70 faculty and students enjoyed a time of worship, fellowship, fun and games at RLB—our home away from home.

**FEBC's 3rd Bible Lands Pilgrimage** (May 13–23, 2018). This trip was to Turkey and Greece. A total of 46 pilgrims from ten churches and three countries led by Dr and Mrs Jeffrey Khoo visited the Seven Churches of Revelation, the islands of Crete and Patmos, and the ancient city of Athens. Students earn two credits when they submit a research project after the trip.

**Clement Chew Yiming** (MDiv 2013, ThM 2015) was ordained a Minister of the Gospel on May 6, 2018 at the 43rd FEBC Graduation Service held at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. The ordination council consisted of the Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo, the Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew, and the Rev Tan Kian Sing. The Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy prayed the ordination prayer and the Rev Tan Kian Sing gave the charge. The Rev Clement Chew preaches and serves at Tabernacle Bible-Presbyterian Church, and teaches Elementary Hebrew at FEBC. His beloved wife Yujie (CertRK 2012, CertBS 2017), a pharmacist, is fully supportive of his ministry.

## College News

**FEBC reopened with a day of prayer** on Tuesday, January 2, 2018. About a hundred Board, Faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends came to pray with and for the College. Pr James Tan was the Lord's messenger that morning. Pr Tan is a BTh (2009) and MDiv (2016) graduate of FEBC and now serves as missionary teacher at the Bible College of East Africa (BCEA). FEBC alumni Dr Kim Kyung Soo and Dr Park Seung Kyu both missionaries and principals of BCEA Kenya and Tanzania respectively are calling for more Singaporeans to serve with them in BCEA. We pray that our local graduates would answer the call to be missionaries and serve the Lord overseas as the Lord leads.

**Six new full-time students** joined the College commencing in the January–April 2018 semester—**Korea:** (1) Kim Young Sug, (2) Kwak Won Young, (3) Yun Seong Kweon; **Philippines:** (4) Gyzza Berindex Dandoy; **Singapore:** (5) Yong Xuan Rui and (6) Felicia Koh. Won Young is a returning student after taking a break last semester. Xuan Rui and Felicia are studying for a semester to earn their CertRK/BS before they enter the university.

**Total enrolment this semester (January–April 2018) is 567:** 98 day students (fulltime: 47, part-time: 51), 293 students in the Basic Theology for Everyone (BTFE) night classes, and 178 distance learning students. **The students come from 15 countries:** Australia, Cambodia, China, England, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

**The lecturers/tutors and courses offered this semester are:** **Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo:** Systematic Theology II (Anthropology), Greek Exegesis II, Life of Christ II; **Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew:** Old Testament History II, Contemporary Theology IV, Hebrew Reading II; **Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy:** Homiletics, Ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, Job; **Rev Stephen Khoo:** Church Administration; **Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo:** Bible Geography III and Church Music I; **Rev Tan Kian Sing:** Colossians and Philemon; **Mrs Ivy Tow:** Greek Elementary II; **Mrs Jemima Khoo:** Teaching Children, Beginner Pianoforte; **Miss Carol Lee:** Theological Research and Writing; **Dr Jose Lagapa:** Biblical Missions; **Mr Clement Chew:** Hebrew Elementary II; **Mr Dennis Kabingue:** Greek Reading II; **Miss Joycelyn Chng:** Biblical Phonetics; **Mrs Anne Lim:** English Intensive II; **Mrs Irene Lim:** English Intermediate II; and **Eld Han Soon Juan:** English Advanced II.

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# O Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness

**FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE**  
**43<sup>rd</sup> Graduation Service**  
**Class of 2018**





**FEBC Annual Retreat @ Resort Lautan Biru  
Mersing, May 7-8, 2018**