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Jeffrey Khoo

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THE BURNING BUSH

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SINGING THE PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

Jeffrey Khoo

I greet you all in the blessed name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I am privileged to share with you this message on the preservation of Scripture, especially the singing of it.

In 2 Timothy 4:2 we are told to preach the Word; in Ephesians 5:19 we are told to sing the Word. As such, we should not only preach Bible preservation, we should also sing it. Allow me please to introduce to you four hymns that teach the doctrine of Bible preservation.

The King James Bible versus the Hundred Versions

The first was written by the late Rev Dr Timothy Tow (1920–2009), founder of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore. Rev Tow was an ardent defender of the KJV. To counter the growing trend within the church to replace the KJV with modern versions and to encourage his church members to stick to the good old version, he wrote the hymn “The King James Bible versus the Hundred Versions” sung to the tune of Uxbridge:

*The Bible is the Word of God,
Inerrant and infallible,
Preserved for us from age to age.
It stands God's Rock unmovable.*

*God has preserved it in the Text
Received by His Church everywhere.
Through good and faithful men of God,
The King James Bible without peer.*

*Three hundred years it reigned supreme,
Until Westcott and Hort crept in,
And sowed the tares amongst the wheat,
And for a time they seemed to win.*

*An influx of hundred versions
By Westcott and Hort's text corrupt,
Shall never stand up to the test.
That makes King James Bible the best.*

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*The Bible is the Word of God,
Inerrant and infallible,
Preserved for us from age to age.
It stands God's Rock unmovable.*

The music and the score can be downloaded freely from <http://hymnpod.com/2020/05/29/the-king-james-bible-vs-the-hundred-versions/>.

Help, Lord, for Men of Virtue Fail (Psalm 12)

The second hymn is based on Psalm 12. Psalm 12:6–7 is an important proof text for the doctrine of Bible preservation, “*The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.*”

Theologian and hymn writer Isaac Watts (1674–1748) believed those verses to mean the divine preservation of the Holy Scriptures. This can be seen in his hymn on Psalm 12. As much as God will preserve His people that none would be lost, so will He also preserve His words. Here is the hymn and note especially the last stanza:

*Help, Lord, for men of virtue fail,
Religion loses ground!
The sons of violence prevail,
And treacheries abound.
Their oaths and promises they break,
Yet act the flatterer's part;
With fair, deceitful lips they speak,
And with a double heart.
If we reprove some hateful lie,
How is their fury stirred,
“Are not our lips our own?” they cry,
“And who shall be our Lord?”
Scoffers appear on ev'ry side,
Where a vile race of men
Is rais'd to seats of pow'r and pride,
And bears the sword in vain.
Lord, when iniquities abound,
And blasphemy grows bold;
When faith is hardly to be found,
And love is waxing cold:*

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*Is not thy chariot hast'ning on?
Hast thou not given this sign?
May we not trust and live upon
A promise so divine?*

*“Yes,” saith the Lord, “now will I rise,
“And make oppressors flee;
“I shall appear to their surprise,
“And set my servants free.”*

***Thy word, like silver sev'n times try'd,
Through ages shall endure;
The men that in thy truth confide,
Shall find the promise sure.***

You can also download this hymn from <http://hymnpod.com/2020/05/29/help-lord-for-men-of-virtue-fail/>.

Three Witnesses There Are Above

The third hymn is on the Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7). The doctrine of the Trinity is a most fundamental doctrine of the Christian Faith. The clearest proof text for the doctrine must surely be 1 John 5:7: *“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”*

The Westminster Confession of Faith II.3 states, “In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.” The Westminster divines cited 1 John 5:7 as a supporting text. Evidently, they regarded the Johannine Comma to be an authentic and authoritative text of Scripture.

The Rev William Barton (1597–1678), vicar of Leicester Cathedral, composed a hymn based on the Johannine Comma.

*Three witnesses there are above,
And all these three are one:
The Father, Son and Sacred Dove,
One Deity alone.*

*The Living Father sent the Son,
Who by the Father lives:
And unto them that ask of Him
The Holy Ghost He gives.*

The hymn can be sung to the tune of “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”. Again, you can download it from <http://hymnpod.com/2020/05/29/three-witnesses-there-are-above/>.

God’s Perfect Gift

The fourth and final hymn I wish to introduce is the one I had written in the midst of the battle for the verbal and plenary preservation (VPP) of the Holy Scriptures fought in Singapore a decade or so ago.

It was and still is the contention of the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) that without a 100% perfect Bible today, our gospel and our truth foundations would be undermined, if not destroyed. “*If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?*” (Ps 11:3). The Bible must be 100% perfect without any mistake for it to be our sole, supreme, and final authority of faith and practice. For this reason, we cannot but “*earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*” (Jude 3).

The Board and Faculty of FEBC take the Dean Burgon Oath at every annual convocation. Dean Burgon’s excellent statement on the absolute infallibility and total inerrancy of Scripture should be taken to heart by all sincere Bible believers: “the Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word of God, not some part of it more, some part of it less, but all alike the utterance of Him that sitteth upon the throne, faultless, unerring, supreme.”

In the heat of the battle, this poem was written:

The One and Only
Perfect God
Living and True
In His
Perfect Book
Inspired and Preserved
Without Error
Tells of a
Perfect Saviour
Fully God and Fully Man
In the Person of
JESUS CHRIST
Who Died for Our Sins
Was Buried and

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Rose Again the Third Day
To Give to All Who Trust in Him
Perfect Salvation
Of Body and Soul
Both Now and Ever

Church musician Christopher Tan took the words and arranged it to be sung to Isaac Watts' "When I Can Read My Title Clear".

*The One and Only Perfect God is Living and is True,
God gave His Son, Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for me and you.
Who died for me and you, Who died for me and you,
God gave His Son, Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for me and you.
Jesus, our Perfect Saviour's fully God and fully man,
He died, was buried, rose again, To save the sons of men.
To save the sons of men, To save the sons of men,
He died, was buried, rose again, To save the sons of men.
The Bible is God's Perfect Book, inspired and kept pure.
Forever ev'ry word kept pure, Of this we can be sure!
Of this we can be sure! Of this we can be sure!
Forever ev'ry word kept pure, Of this we can be sure!
O Trust Him for Salvation free of body and of soul,
He'll save you to the uttermost, O Trust in Him my soul!
O Trust in Him my soul! O Trust in Him my soul!
He'll save you to the uttermost, O Trust in Him my soul!*

The music can be heard here: <http://hymnpod.com/2020/05/29/gods-perfect-gift/>.

May God's people sing the preservation of Scripture for it assures us that the God who has preserved His words perfectly will also preserve our faith in Him without fail to the very end. "*Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.... Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth.*" (Isa 12:2, 5).

The Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo is Pastor of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and Principal of Far Eastern Bible College. He is a member of the Advisory Council of the Dean Burgon Society. The above message was delivered at the 42nd Annual Dean Burgon Society Meeting, July 29, 2020.

THE DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE OF BIBLICAL SEPARATION IN THE BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (SINGAPORE): A RESPONSE TO BPCIS

Ling-Kang Ko

INTRODUCTION

From its inception, the Bible-Presbyterian (BP) Church has always sought to be a militant, fundamentalist witness for the Lord Jesus Christ and the truth of His Word. This was true for both the Bible Presbyterians under Dr Carl McIntire in the United States, as well as the Bible-Presbyterian Church that started under Rev Dr Timothy Tow in Singapore. The practice of Biblical Separation has always been one of the defining characteristics of the BPs. This is evident in the story of their inception and all throughout its history.

Rev Timothy Tow shared in his biography that one of the vital lessons that he learned from seminary and applied to the founding of the new church was ‘separation from doctrinal and ecclesiastical apostasy’.¹ It was with this foundational principle of separation that Life BP Church and the BP movement was founded.

Likewise, for the BPs in America, it is reported that ‘Rigorous separation, personal and ecclesiastical, was the posture of the Bible Presbyterian Church’.² This fact is reflected in the remarks of BP minister Francis A Schaeffer in a paper presented to the BP Synod in 1942:

Let no one of us forget that our Separatist position is not an arbitrary thing; it is doctrinal. If one should ask for a single word that would show our stand against the evils of this day, the word would be Separatist; and it should be for we are Separatists. On the basis of our System of Doctrine we militantly state that this is a day when the issues must not be confused.³

Even Dev Menon, pastor of Zion Bishan BP Church acknowledged that ‘it is quite clear from history that the BP Church will be remembered as a church born and bred on its stand on the doctrine of separation’.⁴

However, in their recent publication, *Heritage & Legacy of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore* (henceforth *Heritage & Legacy*), the authors who claim to represent the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore (BPCIS) have attempted to retell history from their perspective, and paint a different picture of the BP church, both in America and Singapore.

According to them, they, describing themselves as ‘moderates’, are not the ones who had deviated from the original position of separation. They claim the BP church initially only took a position on ‘primary’ but not ‘secondary separation’. Instead, it was a ‘strong-headed but influential minority’ that hardened their position and pushed for secondary separation – a practice which they claim was not actually the original position of the BP Church.⁵

They also cite McIntire, and try to use his words against him to show that he was initially more cautious in urging against ‘extreme separation’, and had actually ‘took a very moderate approach in the earlier years’, but then he would ‘eventually change his position’. They seem to suggest that the original position of the BP church in America on separation was also a moderate one, akin to the BPCIS’s present position.⁶

In fact, they even go so far as to assume to know how J Gresham Machen, the leader of the fundamentalist group that left the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA) in the 1930s, would have reacted to the current situation among the BP churches in Singapore:

The question that the hardline separatist BP camp in Singapore must answer is this: Do they honestly believe that the moderate BP leaders and churches from which they eventually separated have denied the ‘five fundamentals’ of the historic Christian faith? By the same token, would Machen himself have urged separation or dissociation if he were alive today?⁷

This series of rhetorical questions posed seem to imply that Machen would be on their side if he were alive today. How can they be so certain?

It will be shown through this paper that the historic position of the BP church, both in America and Singapore has always been for biblical separation – one that calls for separation not just from unbelief and apostasy, but also from compromise and disobedient brethren. It will also interact with some of the claims made by the BPCIS in *Heritage & Legacy* concerning both the doctrine and practice of biblical separation, and demonstrate that the right biblical

position on separation is that which is adopted by those whom they brand as ‘hard-line’ and ‘extreme’, and not the ‘moderate’ position, which they adopt.

A Movement Founded on Separation

The Bible Presbyterian Church in America

The biblical heritage of separation can be shown clearly in the events leading to the formation of the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) in America in the 1930s amidst the Modernist Fundamentalist debates. The Bible Presbyterian Church in America was born out of the Modernist versus Fundamentalist controversies of the 1930s. The story of their origin is one of courageous contending for the faith amidst apostasy and compromise. Men like J Greshem Machen and Carl McIntire stood firm not just against the apostates that denied the fundamentals of the faith, but also against the moderates who sought to be inclusive of all views within both the denomination and seminary.

A close examination of the actual conflict would show that the problems within the denomination was not that it was full of apostasy and liberal teachings, but rather that there were moderates in the leadership who were not willing to take firm action against the liberals, but were trying to mediate a neutral position that could be inclusive of a wide spectrum of views. For example, the Auburn Affirmation was a paper published in 1924 that argued that it was wrong for the General Assembly of the PCUSA to require all ministerial candidates to adhere and agree to the five fundamentals. Many of those who eventually signed this document were not liberals who denied these fundamentals of the faith. Nevertheless, they agreed that the denomination should allow for a latitude of views, and that ministers should have the liberty to believe what they wanted to, and not be bound by these requirements.⁸

Likewise, the battle for Princeton Theological Seminary was not actually between the liberals and the conservatives, but rather of moderates who wanted to be accommodating to the views of the liberals. This battle played out within both the board of directors and trustees, as well as within the faculty itself.⁹ Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) historian D G Hart’s assessment of the conflict was that

On the one side were strict Calvinists, a group that included Machen and the majority of professors (seven of eleven) and the majority of the board of directors (nineteen of twenty-eight), the body responsible for faculty

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and curriculum. On the other side were moderate evangelicals who were led by Erdman and Stevenson and included a majority of the board of trustees (seventeen of twenty-two), the officers responsible for finances.¹⁰

Eventually the General Assembly took control of Princeton and reorganised the Seminary by dissolving the previous boards and installing a single board of control over the school. Hart and Muether explain:

The seminary was reorganized in such a way that conservatives who had been a majority on the board of directors were now a minority. What is more, signers of the Auburn Affirmation were appointed to serve on Princeton's board. In effect, the seminary had been forced to conform to the theologically tolerant – if not indifferent – character of the Presbyterian Church. Princeton Seminary, an institution that had stoutly served the Reformed faith since 1812... had been lost to the cause of Presbyterian Orthodoxy.¹¹

Therefore, what prompted Machen (and also McIntire's) withdrawal from Princeton Seminary after the General Assembly's reorganisation was not only the presence of liberals within it, but also these so-called 'moderate evangelicals' or 'theologically tolerant' who pushed for the accommodation of various positions, even those that were clearly unbiblical. It was the problem of these evangelicals who refused to separate from liberals that led to the downfall of Princeton and PCUSA, and it was from those people that Machen would separate from.

Furthermore, the subsequent formation of the BP Church in 1937 itself was also a separation from believers due to doctrinal differences, out of a desire to be a more effective witness for the Lord. The founding ministers of the BP church felt that if they remained with the newly formed Presbyterian Church of America (PCA later renamed OPC),

there was no possibility that that body would ever become a widespread or effective witness to the great spiritual succession of American Presbyterianism... So, for the sake not only of the principles at stake, but also with a view to the need for the establishment of a great nationwide witness to the Word of God, there were many who believed that the then 'Presbyterian Church of America' as it had existed up until that time represented a 'false start'.¹²

There were disagreements over a few issues, namely that of eschatology (arguing for Premillennialism and not Amillennialism), Christian living (requiring total abstinence from alcohol and tobacco), and of support of foreign missions (that they should be able to support

not just Presbyterian agencies, but also of any that were fundamentalists and faithful to the Word of God).

Writing in that time, J Oliver Buswell was concerned that these differences between what he perceived to be the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary and the majority of the pastors in the PCA (as they were then known as) were irreconcilable and necessitated separation.¹³

The faculty as a whole are very emphatic in their opposition to the teaching of total abstinence. I think we agreed on definitions at that point. The faculty think it wrong to teach that ministers in this present day and age ought not to drink liquor... I feel that the philosophy of time held by the Westminster faculty, and Dr. Van Til in particular, is at the basis of much of the attack upon the Premillennial position which goes on in the Westminster classrooms. The Westminster faculty do not see this point and we did not have time to argue it. I hope to take up the matter later on. What I fear is that the Presbyterian Church of America, necessarily going the way of the separated life, the strongly evangelical and historical type of apologetics and evangelism, and quite largely colored by pre-millennial teaching, may have to part company with Westminster Seminary. I wish that parting of the ways might be prevented. I do not believe God will bless a drinking, worldly ministry.¹⁴

These matters were debated at length within this new denomination, but no agreement could be reached. As a result, Carl McIntire, J Oliver Buswell and several other ministers separated to form their own denomination – the BPC. At their inaugural meeting in June 1937, a document known as the ‘Articles of Association’ was drawn up, which proclaimed the following:

For the sake of fellowship in the principles for which we stand, and as a testimony to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and because of the official apostasy of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A, and because of the departure of the Presbyterian Church of America from the historic position of American Presbyterianism, we, a group of ministers and ruling elders, do associate ourselves together in the Bible Presbyterian Synod.

We believe in the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We reaffirm our faith in the system of doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms in the form in which they stood in the constitution of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in May, 1936. We propose to amend these standards in any particular in which the pre-millennial teaching of the Scriptures may be held to be obscured. We

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reaffirm our belief in the fundamental principles of Presbyterian Church polity.

We heartily reaffirm our faith in and support of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Mission, and join in the vigorous testimony of that Board against modernism and unbelief of all kinds.

We are persuaded that the great battle in the world today is the faith of our fathers against modernism, compromise, indifferentism, and worldliness. With all our hearts we throw our strength into the great task of winning lost souls to Jesus Christ by the Gospel of the Grace of God.¹⁵

It is clear that the purpose and desire of the founding fathers of the BPC in America was for a separated witness that would be involved with the fight to earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. They were militant fundamentalists, battling ‘against modernism, compromise, indifferentism, and worldliness’, and unashamedly so. This was the heritage that was passed on to the BP Church in Singapore, when it was established nearly 20 years later.

The Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore

A similar story played out in Singapore during the 1950s when Rev Timothy Tow returned from his studies at Faith Theological Seminary and started the English Service of Life Church at Prinsep Street. The story of the BP Church in Singapore is also one of earnestly contending for the faith amidst apostasy and compromise.

When Rev Timothy Tow studied at Faith Seminary under Dr Carl McIntire in the late 1940s, he heard the message of the 20th Century Reformation and understood the need to take a stand for Biblical Separation. He recounts,

One wintry morning in mid-January... there came in a tall and distinguished looking man, viz, Dr Carl McIntire. He was the pastor of Collingswood Bible Presbyterian Church and President of the Board of Directors of Faith Seminary. He spoke to us at length at our Chapel Hour. As he presented his case for a Twentieth Century Reformation and a return to our fathers’ faith, and called young men like us to join the cause, I felt my heart strangely warmed, to use Wesley’s words. I felt my heart knit to his heart, like Jonathan’s to David’s (1 Sam 18:1). I became that day his disciple. I have been loyal to the Separatist Cause of the International Council of Christian Churches, which he founded, all through the years.¹⁶

Upon his return to Singapore, on 20 Oct 1950, the Life Church English Service was inaugurated. Rev Timothy Tow was installed as the pastor and preached the first Lord's Day message, which was an exposition of the church motto 'Holding Forth the Word of Life' taken from Philippians 2:16. Initially, the church began with an affiliation to the mother church, Life Church, Prinsep Street, though with certain conditions.

It was noted by Elder Han Soon Juan in Life BP Church's 50th Anniversary Commemorative Magazine:

In the drafting of the constitution, it was declared that while the English Service would remain filial to mother church, it was opposed to the Ecumenical Movement and to any affiliation with the World Council of Churches (WCC) through the Malayan Christian Council (MCC). The Chinese Presbyterian Synod was identified with the MCC, whose hierarchies were modernists rejecting the infallibility of Holy Scriptures, the virgin birth of Christ, His bodily resurrection and personal second coming.... However, as an offshoot of mother Church, we were de facto linked to the Synod. In the name of mother Church, the testimony of separation from the MCC was raised by our commissioners, namely, Rev Timothy Tow, Elder Quek Kiok Chiang and Deacon Hsu Chiang Tai for a few years, but to no avail.¹⁷

Just five years after her inauguration, Life Church English Service separated from her mother church and also the MCC to form Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. Despite making continual protests and putting pressure upon the mother church to withdraw from the MCC, it was all to no avail. Matters finally came to a head in 1955 where the only option left was to separate. Rev Tow recounts the circumstances surrounding this withdrawal:

The last battle for the Faith was fought in Muar at the Trinity Presbyterian Church when commissioners from all parts of Singapore and Malaya gathered for the double function of dedication of the new church. This was in January 1955... Of course the battle was lost against the usual phalanx of modernist missionaries and subservient national pastors. In the same month, according to the Life Church Weekly Chronicle, the 'The Interim Committee decides to make our Church fully constituted and to sever connections with the Synod on accounts of modernism'. In order to distinguish ourselves from the Synod churches we prefixed the word Bible to make ours the Life Bible-Presbyterian Church.¹⁸

January 1955 saw the birth of the BP Church movement in Singapore, the first biblically fundamental witness in Singapore. From

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the very onset, a defining trait of the BP Church was their strong and firm allegiance to the Word of God. Having been born out of an adherence to the biblical command to separate, the BP Church has always been a militant church, earnestly contending for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

From then on, the BP Church in Singapore became a firm defender of the faith and a strong separated witness for the Lord. Bobby Sng describes the developments after the split from the MCC:

The BP Church developed at a rapid pace but largely in isolation from other churches. Its strong call to all Protestant Christians to separate themselves from churches that had liberal leadership struck a responsive chord in some but antagonized the leaders of the larger churches. Its consistent emphases on solid biblical teaching and evangelistic efforts led to its expansion throughout Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia.¹⁹

Within 10 years, the Lord prospered the work with four BP churches established and the Singapore Presbytery of the Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore and Malaya was formed. Out of this humble beginning would spawn a movement that has resulted in numerous churches, missionary endeavours and organisations being established. It saw the founding of the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) that would promote the historic fundamental faith throughout Singapore and to many other parts of the world.

However, not everyone in this new Church had the same vision of separation. From the late 1960s, there had already been rumblings of a neo-evangelical mindset evidenced even in some of the leaders of Life BP Church. As the late Rev Timothy Tow reported in his autobiography,

Hitherto, the witness of separation from modernistic unbelief and ecumenical apostasy had received full support of the Church. However, when ‘evangelical’ leaders like Dr Billy Graham began to fraternise with the apostate ecclesiastical powers for the sake of ‘cooperative evangelism’ and the pastor pointed out the unscripturalness of such a relationship (2 Cor 6:14–18), one or two Session members who differed with the pastor introduced a dissentious spirit in the Church, the first time in eighteen years... The opposition in Life Church Session against the pastor increased from one or two dissenters to several when the pastor published two news reports in the Far Eastern Beacon, November and December 1968.²⁰

The climax of dissension was reached when the Assistant Pastor was invited to preach at a Methodist Church in July 1969, for which

campaign he appended his name to a letter cyclostyled on paper bearing the letterhead of the said Methodist Church. This gave the impression that he was in close fellowship with a Church in the Ecumenical Movement. Controversy over this matter flared up at Presbytery. There the question of whether a Bible-Presbyterian minister, when invited to preach by a Church in the modernist Ecumenical fold, had a duty to warn against the dangers of Ecumenism, was discussed. The opinion of the Presbyters was about equally divided, resulting in a contention so sharp that they left in bitterness of spirit.²¹

This situation of having mixed opinions with regard to separation and compromise finally came to head in the late 1980s, where the 'dissentious spirit' in the denomination could no longer be contained. While the BP Church continued to grow and numerous churches were planted, it seemed that not every church was headed in the same direction, with the same unity of spirit. Dr Tow Siang Hwa, writing in the Annual Record of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church (1994) described the situation as such:

A true B-P is opposed to all efforts to obscure or wipe out the clear line of separation between B-Ps and New Evangelicals, Charismatics, promoters of ecumenical cooperative evangelism, promoters of the liberal-modernist social gospel, and all links with the Ecumenical movement.

As the B-P Movement grew, and younger men went overseas and imbibed liberal and New Evangelical theology, a deviant spirit began to creep into the B-P Church. While wearing the B-P name these were playing the New Evangelical game.²²

The issues that were being contended were centred mainly on strong differences in interpreting the doctrine of biblical separation, fundamentalism and neo-evangelicalism. Another main issue was with regard to charismatism, and specifically the place of tongue-speaking. Rev Tow highlighted this issue in the preface to his book on *Wang Ming Tao and Charismatism* which he penned in response to the problems that were brewing in the church:

The tide of Charismatism is coming in so strong today that it has splashed into the Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore. At its Annual Pastors and Leaders Conference on Cameron Highlands September 1987, certain younger leaders maintained that while the tongues of Pentecost (Acts 2) had ceased, those mentioned of the Corinthian Church (1 Cor 12 and 14) have not. Today they continue in the Church as 'meaningful ecstatic utterances'. Now, these tongues are required by Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostal Churches of their members as evidence of baptism by

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the Holy Spirit, but are repudiated by Fundamental Churches that hold to the Reformed tradition.²³

In all these happenings, it was clear that the neo-evangelical mindset had sunk its roots deep, and it seemed that a dissolution of the synod would be the only solution. As Bobby Sng wrote,

However, with growth, internal differences also arose. Its relentless call for believers to separate themselves from what it considered to be non-fundamental churches and new-evangelicals, brought a mixed response. Not all agreed on the rigid, narrow definition of ‘separation’. In a statement issued on October 30, 1988 describing its voluntary dissolution, the B-P Church declared:

The decision was arrived at after much prayerful consideration and discussion over certain protracted issues. These issues centred mainly on strong differences in interpreting the Doctrine of Biblical Separation, Fundamentalism, and Neo-Evangelicalism. Concerted attempts were made during the past two years at reconciliation through personal discussions and formal meetings. Even a moratorium failed to resolve these differences and break the impasse. Dissolution is accepted as the last resort.²⁴

As a result, each individual BP church became an independent organisation, free to do as they please, seeking its own alliances and establishing their own doctrinal convictions. It has been 31 years since the split in the synod, and it is evident that many of the BP churches today are BP in name only, but have so far removed themselves from the original mission and purpose of the BP Church. They are no longer true fundamentalists who would contend for the faith.

On 8 October 2011, four B-P churches – Emmanuel, Herald, Zion Serangoon and Zion Bishan – came together to form a new presbytery, calling themselves the BPCIS. They were soon joined by a few others, Mt Carmel, Mt Hermon and Shalom BP Churches. In coming together to publish the book, *Heritage & Legacy*, they have clearly identified and aligned themselves to a non-militant, non-separatist stance. They describe themselves as moderates, being open to differences, acknowledging that even among themselves there are diversity of views. Yet despite all that they continue to insist that they are ‘committed to the pursuit of truth and holiness, and separation from sin and error’.²⁵ The next section will attempt to examine their arguments in the light of history and theology.

A Movement Split on Separation

In the book, *History & Legacy*, one recurring theme is the issue of Separation – blaming it as the cause of the splits and dissensions amongst the churches and attempting to redefine what true biblical separation really is. It also seeks to give a version of BP history, whereby they claim that ‘secondary separation’ was a teaching and practice that was never part of the original BP stand. Instead, they contend that this teaching arose only within the more extreme hard-line camp of separatists. Therefore they assert that the moderate churches cannot be accused of deviating from the original BP position on biblical separation. From the viewpoint of the moderates, they are not the ones who shifted the goal post.²⁶

Incidentally, the book, in certain parts contradicts itself, for some of the authors, such as Dev Menon, writing the article entitled, ‘An Overview of the BP Church in Singapore: A History of Separation’, actually does acknowledge that even in the earlier years of the 1950s, ‘the majority of evangelical Christians agreed not to have direct working relationships with liberals. Only the BP Church insisted on having secondary separation’.²⁷

Nonetheless the BPCIS claims ‘to preserve the legacy of the BP Church wherever it honours God and edifies His people’.²⁸ This section will seek to examine the claims of the BPCIS to see if they are historically and biblically accurate, and to establish what the true BP heritage and legacy with regard to separation really is.

Redefining Roots and Origins

In recounting the actual start of the BP Church in Singapore, the BPCIS are quite adamant in wanting to prove that there was never actually a split or a break away from the mother church, *Say Mia Tng*. This is despite the fact that she remained part of the Presbyterian Synod, whereas the English Service under Rev Tow became independent and took on the name Life BP Church, in the process establishing a new denomination. They claimed that

Tow never accused the Chinese Presbyterian Churches of being liberal or ecumenical in any of his writings or preaching. The truth is that the BPs did not branch out from the mother church over doctrinal differences, or over its ecclesiastical purity.²⁹

However, if it was not over doctrinal difference or ecclesiastical associations, then what was it? As cited previously, Tow’s own account

of events, as a primary witness and key person involved in the whole event, clearly testified otherwise. He described the proceedings of the final synod meeting prior to the split as the ‘last battle for the Faith’. The reason for their decision to ‘sever connections with the Synod’ was because of the ‘usual phalanx of modernist missionaries and subservient national pastors’, and ‘on account of modernism’.³⁰ If mother church was truly doctrinally aligned with the new BP church, why did she not leave the modernist synod as well?

The BPCIS make a concerted effort in trying to show that even after Life BP Church separated from the mother church, it was not an acrimonious split, but that relationships continued to be friendly, and they could peacefully co-exist in the same premises for nearly eight years before Life BP Church moved to the present premises at Gilstead Road. It seems to be a quibble over semantics, as they pose the question:

So, did Life BP Church break away from the Presbyterian denomination in 1955, or did it go ‘independent’ with the blessings of its parent church *Say Mia Tng*? The BPs are sometimes not clear on this point. No doubt, they need to know that in 1960, the Prinsep Street Church was still recommended as the worship centre of choice for Teochew-speaking relatives and friends.³¹

In the various testimonies shared by some of the pioneer members of the BP church in Chapter Four – Voice of the Silent Generation, several also make a point (some repeatedly) to reiterate the idea that it was not a split from *Say Mia Tng*. For example Elder Chia Hong Chek’s testimony was by way of an interview, and one of the questions posed to him was ‘What triggered the ‘break’ with *Say Mia Tng*? Were there any *Say Mia Tng* pastors or elders who were considered liberal?’ and ‘What happened to the friends and the church at *Say Mia Tng*? Were families split as a result?’ They seem to be leading questions designed to incite a response that would testify of no split and seemingly no problem with the mother church.³² Pursuing a similar argument, Elder Joshua Lim wrote in his testimony:

... contrary to what some think, there was no break with *Say Mia Tng* over liberal theology of unbelief. The pastors and elders of *Say Mia Tng* belonged to the traditional Presbyterian faith and were conservative, sound and evangelical in theology. The subject of liberalism was not an issue in those days... On 15 November 2017, my wife and I attended the worship service after some 60 years and found the message edifying.³³

Elder Dr Ang Beng Chong's testimony is more factual and truthful, where he wrote:

Theological liberalism was spreading worldwide, and reached Singapore too. The WCC influenced many of the mainline denominations to join them in an organisational link that is more of a political move than a true unity of Christian churches. So under the leadership of Rev Tow, *Say Mia Tng's* English Service separated from the Malayan Christian Council (which was indirectly associated with WCC) and formed its own organisation, Life Church to align itself with the ICCC. In January 1955, the name Bible-Presbyterian (BP) was added to distinguish us from the mainline Presbyterian Synod of Singapore.³⁴

This point is important for them to establish, as they are trying to prove that from the beginning, the BP heritage was not one that would separate from other believers that are orthodox but not separatist. If they admit that Rev Tow and Life Church did indeed separate from *Say Mia Tng*, then it would be an acknowledgment of the fact that from the very beginning, the BP Church practised separation not only from liberalism, but also from believers that had compromised with ecumenical groups – what they term as secondary separation.

However, the fact remains that in the founding of Life BP Church, ties were cut with the Synod, and by extension, with *Say Mia Tng* as well. If it was just a simple matter of planting a daughter church, and going independent with the mother church's blessing, why did Life BP Church have to cut ties with the Synod? If mother church was in agreement with Life BP Church, why did she then remain in this ecumenical Synod? It is clear that Rev Tow and Life BP Church had serious disagreements with the actions of the Synod and saw it as a grave compromise. Therefore, in disagreeing with the Synod and separating from it, they were in actual fact also separating from *Say Mia Tng* as well. While they may continue to maintain a friendly relationship, and regard her as the mother church, it must be underscored that there was no longer any formal ecclesiastical relationship. There was a separation – a clear break that delineated the position that the BPs had – opposition to compromise with ecumenism.

Question of Secondary Separation

BPCIS sees different degrees of separation and asserts that the right biblical approach is only primary separation and not secondary or second-degree separation:

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When it comes to biblical separation, the BP churches in Singapore suffered ‘much anguish’ in the past because of disagreements over interpretations and applications of the same passages. One group adopts a hard-line policy that includes second-degree separation (insisting on separating from fellow evangelicals and even BP church leaders who maintain ties with institutions dubbed as new-evangelicals etc.). The other segment prefers a more moderate approach that affirms primary separation (i.e., separation from apostates or groups that clearly deny the fundamental doctrines of our faith) but not second-degree separation (i.e., they will not break fellowship with evangelical leaders or organisations simply on account of their links with certain groups), unless there is clear evidence the leaders themselves have become liberals or apostates.³⁵

Of all the articles that touch on this topic of separation, it is probably the article by Daniel Chua that attempts to give any biblical justification for such a position. He argues that one can interpret 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15 as

not a call to totally break fellowship with a fellow believer, but to refrain from joining him in his ways in order that he may be ashamed and hence wake up from his idle and disruptive ways. Regardless of how one interprets ‘keep away’ (v. 6) and ‘not associate’ (v. 14c), it cannot mean to ‘totally cut themselves off from a brother’ because of the parting reminder to ‘not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother’ (v. 15). In the final analysis he is, after all, still a ‘brother’ (adelphos).³⁶

His exegesis is problematic at a number of levels. For one, he completely ignores the meaning of the two words in verse 6 and 14 used to call for separation from the disobedient brother, translated as ‘withdraw yourselves’ and ‘have no company with’ in the KJV. He claims that they cannot mean to ‘totally cut themselves off’, simply because of verse 15, that they are to be regarded as brothers and not enemies. In so doing, he is applying eisegesis (interpreting a text in a manner that reads one’s own assumptions or biases into the text) by having a preconceived notion of how one ought to relate to a brother in Christ. Because he is against the notion of separation from other Christians, he believes that the Bible cannot be calling a complete disassociation with another believer simply because verse 15 says we are to regard him as a brother and not an enemy. However, he fails to realise that sometimes out of love, the best thing that we can do for a disobedient brother is to separate from him in order that he may be ashamed and repent from his ways.

The verse clearly calls for a separation from the person, and not just to ‘refrain from joining him in his ways’. Again, that is simply not a thought found in the text. One wonders how refraining from joining an errant brother in his sin would be enough to shame him and wake him up from his idle ways. If Paul is simply calling for the rest in the church to make sure that they would continue to work and not be idle like those disorderly brethren, then it would not warrant such strong language and drastic measures in his commands.

Furthermore, the words that the Apostle Paul used are strong words, giving commands that must be obeyed. The word for ‘withdraw yourselves’ (v6) is from the Greek *stellesthai*, coupled together with the preposition *apo*. Used together, it has the clear meaning of avoiding, depart from, ‘to abstain from familiar intercourse with’. The word for ‘have no company with’ (v14) is *sunanamignumi*, with the negative particle, which calls for one to avoid and have no dealings with this person. This same word was used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:9 and 11, in the instructions he gave them in applying church discipline to the fornicator in the church. For the man that was persistent in that sin, Paul told them to excommunicate him (v5). In 1 Corinthians 5, especially in verses 9 and 11, he was giving the general principle on how they ought to deal with such members of the church who fall into these sins. They were not to have company with them, no longer fellowship with them, not even to eat together with them. The idea of separation is clearly taught here, for to continue to be in fellowship with them is to condone their sin.

Pertaining to the passage in 1 Corinthians 5:9, John Whitcomb sees it as a very clear biblical injunction on the need to separate from errant believers:

Notice this amazing statement of biblical separation. We do not separate from immoral people who are not Christians. We are to associate with publicans and sinners who are the potential recipients of the Holy Spirit’s convicting, converting work, through our witness. But the one group we are to separate from are Christians who are immoral, or who are doctrinal heretics. These are the people we must excommunicate, or separate from. We are not even to eat with them. Why not? Because if a worldling or a young, untaught Christian watches you having fellowship (which is what I understand ‘eating with’ to mean) they could interpret the outward form of fellowship to be an endorsement of the heresy or moral misdemeanor.³⁷

Therefore, the interpretation that Chua sets forth is blatantly an

erroneous one. The clear biblical injunction is to separate not just from unbelievers but also errant and disobedient brethren who are not walking according to the truth of God's Word.

The notion of secondary separation is certainly taught in Scripture and must be obeyed. In order to preserve a clear witness for the truth of God's Word and to warn errant brethren of the grave dangers of their disobedient ways, faithful Christians must at times separate from brethren who compromise or who teach wrong doctrines.

Essentials versus Non-Essentials

Alongside the cautions against secondary separation, the BPCIS have listed out what they regard to be essentials that they would require their members to comply with, and some non-essentials that they would grant freedom for members to practise if they wish. These are excerpts that have been quoted of the non-negotiable essential doctrines that they would require all their members to abide by:

Our Doctrines

- a. Among other doctrines, particularly those mentioned in our Statement of Faith in our respective Church Constitutions, we uphold the following as **Essential** to Bible-Presbyterianism: (emphasis in original)
 1. Scriptures: we affirm the divine plenary and verbal inspiration and authority of the canonical Scriptures, together with its infallibility and inerrancy in the autographs (in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). These Scriptures form the sole basis for our beliefs and life in Christ. We believe that the Scriptures have been preserved for us to read and understand sufficiently and we do not take the position of Verbal Plenary Preservation of the Scriptures in any of the Textus Receptus editions or in the King James Version, which is a version many of our Bible-Presbyterian churches continue to use and treasure.
 2. The system of theology that is reflected in the Westminster Standards, comprising the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.
 3. The doctrine (and practice) of infant baptism (not infant dedication) within the context of Covenant theology.
 4. The pursuit of truth and holiness, together with separation from all unbelief and sin.³⁸

Though they state the above as essential and non-negotiable, it is curious to note that earlier in the book, Quek Swee Hwa seems to advocate a more casual attitude towards these doctrinal requirements, for he states:

Our theological positions cover a broad spectrum. Whether it is Covenant theology (also known as Reformed theology) or dispensational theology we espouse, we must remember that the differences between these two positions do not deal with fundamental issues that should divide us from one another.

Similarly, Arminian and Covenant/Reformed theology may have differences with each other. But again, this is not tantamount to severing our relationships with one another. It is the joy of the Devil to see Christians detach themselves from one another because of these inconsequential differences.³⁹

So there seems to be no consensus as to whether these matters are essential or not, or whether they should be a cause to separate over. Indeed these are no small issues, for to be dispensational or Arminian would go directly against the teachings of the Westminster Standards and the Reformed Faith!

Under non-essentials, they would list one doctrine and several practices that should be granted greater latitude with regard to the differences they may have between them:

- b. We also regard the following as **NON-ESSENTIAL** to our understanding of Bible-Presbyterianism: while we largely follow and teach the position of the Premillennial Return of Jesus, we do not require this as the only possible position. Godly Christians and scholars have held to the positions of Amillennialism and Postmillennialism: these two are viable options. But we stick to our historical position as Premillennial and will only teach this view in our churches. (Emphasis in original)

2.3 Our practices

- a. The use of Bible versions in worship services – Our churches are free to use Bible versions of their choice according to guidelines given by the Presbytery.
- b. The choice of musical instruments – We encourage the use of instruments appropriate to the music being played.
- c. The use of hymns and spiritual songs – We urge our Bible-Presbyterian churches to continue using hymns within the rich

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hymnody of the Christian Church, paying careful attention to the biblical soundness of the lyrics of all hymns and songs used in the Church and for personal worship.

- d. The style of worship – The way we worship should focus on glorifying God, not man. We do not accept practices associated with ‘charismatic’ churches, e.g. ‘tongue-speaking’, ‘being slain by the Spirit’, and giving a ‘word of knowledge’.
- e. The disposal of the dead – We accept that churches may practise burial or cremation.

While this list speak of the differences quite carefully and formally (albeit vaguely), not every writer is as careful. For example, David Wong demonstrates quite a cavalier attitude towards these differences:

We recognise that there are primary issues and secondary issues, major issues and minor issues.... For example, the inerrancy of Scriptures is a primary issue, the use of a particular Bible version is a secondary issue. The Person and power of the Holy Spirit is a major issue; whether or not that power is manifested in tongue-speaking is a minor issue.... So what if I use the NIV and you the KJV? So what if I don't speak in tongues and you do?⁴⁰

Looking through this list, there are a few issues that are problematic: There does not seem to be any set criteria given as to how one determines what constitutes an essential and what is non-essential. There is no biblical basis as to how one can decide if an issue is essential enough to require one to be dogmatic about, or if it is a non-essential that does not need to be mandated. Many of the items, such as Bible versions, method of worship, charismatic practices are indeed essential and important issues. The differences between those who are for and against these matters are significant, and not something that can be easily dismissed.

Despite their claim that the use of a Bible version is a non-essential and would allow the churches to use versions according to their choice, they still insist their anti-VPP position is dogma, and everyone must reject the doctrine of VPP. What that means is that they would be willing to cooperate and be united with anyone regardless of the translation that they use, or what textual-critical methods they employ. However, they would be unwilling to work with someone who has a high view of God's Word and believes that God has preserved His Word perfectly in the Hebrew and Greek words underlying the KJV. So a church that believes that they may only have 99% of God's Word available to them

is welcome to fellowship with them, but a church that believes that they have 100% of God's Word perfectly preserved today, is rejected, because they have breached one of their essential doctrines. Furthermore, such a position against the doctrine of VPP contradicts their subsequent point on abiding by the Westminster Standards, for the present perfection of Scripture is a doctrine clearly affirmed in the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF).⁴¹

Many of the points, especially regarding the non-essentials, are too vague and general. Perhaps it was done deliberately, so that the matters are left open for each church to decide. For example, there are three points given about worship, in the instruments used, hymns and songs sung and the style of worship, but none of the points really or actually say which is the preferred method of worshipping God. It is deliberately vague so that all styles of worship, whether traditional, contemporary or somewhere in between, are acceptable.

Although they do say that they do not accept charismatic practices, yet charismatic practices are listed as non-essential. They claim on the one hand to be non-charismatic, yet at the same time leave the door open for charismatic practices to creep into the church. If that does happen, the Synod is powerless to discipline any in the church who allows it, for it is after all a non-essential matter.

Rights of Private Judgment

In many instances where the WCF is brought up, it is often not to promote or affirm their position on Reformed Theology, but to highlight the portion of the WCF that speaks of Christian Liberty and how the church should not bind the conscience of man in any doctrine that is not explicitly taught in Scripture. They then use it as the basis for why it is acceptable for them to have diversity of teachings and practices within one denomination. They argue:

When we understand the Presbyterian distinctives properly, we will realise the broad lines of our beliefs and practices are in place. As we form the Presbytery (the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore, BPCIS), we are embarking on what may be the start of crafting a wide range of church practices, inter-church relationship and other matters. We have already indicated what is basic to and regulative of our Westminster Form of Government. As the Confession of Faith's Chapter 22 ('Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience') declares in Section 2:

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God alone is Lord of the conscience and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship...

We have reached an important point in our journey together. As our BPCIS churches grow and have a rich variety of ministries, and with more daughter churches started, some diversity is inevitable within our network structure. We are in agreement on the fundamental doctrines and cardinal essentials of the faith, and have hammered out many of the non-essential issues. It is best for us not to wait until all the nitty-gritty details of our union are discussed.

Likewise, they refer to a similar clause in the Form of Government of the BP Church, arguing that our former BP Synod failed because it did not heed the first chapter ('Preliminary Principles') of the Form of Government of the BP Church. The opening statement states specifically:

There are several great principles which are basic to and regulative of our church government: that 'God alone is the Lord of the conscience'; and 'hath left it free from the doctrine and commandments of men, which are in any thing contrary to His Word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship': Therefore we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: we do not wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and at the same time, be equal and common to all others.⁴³

They then continue to assert: 'There are nine great principles which, if obeyed, would have rendered dissolution of the synod unnecessary. Among these principles are:

- The inalienable right of private judgment in matters outside of biblical injunctions and the need to avoid being too intrusive;
- The recognition that there are truths and forms which good Christians may differ and the need to exercise forbearance; and
- The Presbytery/Synod should not make laws to bind the conscience.⁴⁴

They cite these, in order that they can justify their coming together despite the many differences they have. By their own admission there are still some 'nitty gritty' that have not been sorted out yet. Yet they want to rush into their union, confident that if they shift these differences to the category of 'private judgment', they can then coexist peacefully. They want to downplay the importance of the doctrine of Biblical Separation, and in its place argue for liberty and private judgment. They argue that

many of the issues that the BP churches previously contended with are but the ‘narrow-minded agenda’ of certain individuals who tried to impose their conscience on others.

However, it must be noted that such liberty of conscience only applies to matters that are not regulated by the Word of God. If it concerns teachings that are found in Scripture, then Scripture must be obeyed. Some of what they claim to be inconsequential differences, are actually serious disobediences that are contrary to God’s Word. These include rejecting the notion that tongues have ceased completely, or the rejection of the practice of separation from disobedient brethren, or the acceptance of any style of worship. These are not matters that should be left up to one’s own conscience or freedom of liberty. They ought to be carefully regulated by what the Word of God teaches.

The Biblical View of Separation

In order to have the right understanding of separation, it is necessary to return to the Bible and examine what the Scripture says concerning separation. It is certainly a doctrine that is taught in both the Old and New Testaments, and is one that all Christians should take seriously. As Dr Jeffrey Khoo rightly stated, ‘The doctrine of separation is not just a denominational distinctive, but an ecclesiastical principle that must be adopted by every Bible-believing Christian and church. Separation in the light of Scripture is not an option but a command’.⁴⁵

Separation is a doctrine that is intrinsically rooted in the doctrine of God. In the answer to the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q4, ‘What is God’, God is succinctly described as ‘a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.’ The very nature of God speaks of Him as a unique, all powerful being, who is perfect in His holiness and goodness. The very idea of holiness is that of one who is undefiled, and not tainted by any impurity or blemish. That is who God is, and that is what He expects of His people. ‘The essential element of holiness is that of separation. Separation is intrinsic to the doctrine of holiness. We separate from all forms of unbelief and apostasy because it is God’s nature to separate from such’.⁴⁶

All of God’s church are members of His body, and are to obey God’s call to holiness. In fact, the very word for ‘church’ in the New Testament, *ekklesia*, carries with it the idea of separation, for it is a combination of two words in the Greek meaning ‘called out’. The role of the visible local

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church is to be called out of this world, separated from all the sins and ungodliness of this world. In terms of its doctrines and practices, every church is to strive towards purity and to weed out any error that it might have. While it is unlikely that 100% purity can ever be achieved, it must be the continual quest of every church. As such, it is imperative that no faithful church should ever allow itself to be unequally yoked with any who would introduce error and impurity to corrupt it.

Generally, when discussing the doctrine of Biblical Separation, there are two main aspects to it – Personal and Ecclesiastical Separation.

Personal Separation from Sin

The first and most direct application of Biblical Separation would be with regard to personal separation of every Christian from all forms of sin and ungodliness. The duty of every saint is the purposeful removal of himself from all worldly philosophies and sinful activities. While he is in the world, he should ‘abstain from all appearance of evil’ (1 Thess 5:22), and not be of the world (John 17:15–16). This is a principle based on the holiness of God, as Peter clearly instructs: ‘As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.’ (1 Pet 1:14–16).

Ecclesiastical Separation from Apostasy and Unbelief

As a body of believers, the local church also has a responsibility to practice the principles of Biblical Separation. The leaders of each local church have been tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the purity of their doctrines; that their practices are in line with the Word of God, and that they do not have any ecclesiastical relationships with parties that preach a false gospel or promote heresy. This teaching is clearly found in passages such as 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 and Amos 3:3.

Ecclesiastical Separation from Disobedience and Compromise

Furthermore, the Bible tells us that it is not enough to separate from those who are unregenerate; there may be certain instances where it is necessary for us to separate from disobedient brethren and those who engage in compromise (ie, those who do not practice separation from apostasy and unbelief). This principle would be taught in passages such as 1 Thessalonians 3:6 and Romans 16:17–18.

However, one must be careful to note that while the purpose of such separation is primarily for the protection of the flock, that the people of God be not led astray, it is also for the sake of the errant believer, that he may be restored, as Paul commands in 2 Thessalonians 3:15. Thus if one knows of Christian brethren caught in such situations, in compromised churches, or associating themselves in groups that preach another gospel, he should be like the angels sent to rescue Lot, dragging him out of a doomed city (Jude 23, Amos 4:11).

Two biblical examples from the Old Testament could be helpful to illustrate this point on separation from disobedience and compromise. In Exodus 32, when the children of Israel sinned at the foot of Mount Sinai by building a golden calf and worshipping it as Jehovah, Moses was very wroth, and knew that something had to be done. In Exodus 32:25, ‘Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the LORD’S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.’ Moses then instructed the Levites to go forth, armed with swords, and slay any brother, companion or neighbour who were yet caught in their sin (v27). Here were the faithful of Israel taking action against their very own people – their own brethren. It was necessary because God’s holiness demanded it, and they had to have the courage and conviction to stand on the side of the Lord and against their disobedient brethren.

The other incident is in the life of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 17–20. Although Jehoshaphat is remembered as a good king of Judah, he had one glaring error in his life, and that was his propensity to compromise. 2 Chronicles 18 records how he joined affinity with Ahab, and sat together with him and planned to go to battle together. Although he clearly knew of Ahab’s wickedness and idolatry, and how he hated God’s prophets (2 Chron 18:7), yet he would still say, ‘I am as thou art, and my people as thy people’. This was a grave error on Jehoshaphat’s part, and the Lord had to send a prophet to rebuke him in 2 Chronicles 19:2, ‘And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD’. Clearly, the Lord was displeased with Jehoshaphat’s compromise, and warned that His wrath was upon him because of his failure to separate.

CONCLUSION

There are clearly two contrasting views and positions with regard to the doctrine and practice of Biblical Separation. There is on one hand the BPCIS which argue that they are the ones who carry on the true legacy of the BP Church, and that their view of separation is the right one. On the other hand, there is us, whom they decry as being hard-line, extreme, isolationistic separatist. Which or who is right?

Having examined the various points of contention through both a historical and theological lens, it is clear that a stricter, more careful practice of separation is the biblical one. Our desire is to be obedient to God's Word, and to fulfil His will for the Church. God's desire is not for unity at the expense of truth, but that His truth will prevail amidst the apostasy and compromise that He warned would happen in the last days.

To be weak on separation is to weaken our witness for the Lord. To compromise on truth and on God's Word for pragmatic reasons, in order to have peace and unity, is not what God has commanded us to do.

We would do well to take heed to the warnings of Jude who warned in his day: 'Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.' (Jude 3-4). Now, more than ever, we need to earnestly contend for the faith, to continue to uphold true biblical separatism, for in so doing we preserve the purity of His church and His truth – the faith once delivered unto the saints.

It may have been true that the practice of separation has led to divisions, contentions and anguish in the past. But that should not deter us from endeavouring to do all we can to be obedient to the Lord in all things. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself warned us in Matthew 10:34-38, 'Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy

of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.’

Notes

¹ Timothy Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow* (Singapore: FEBC Bookroom, 2001), 138.

² James Edward McGoldrick, Richard Clark Reed, and Thomas Hugh Spence, *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches: A Global History* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 329.

³ George P Hutchinson, *The History Behind the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod* (New Jersey: Mack Publishing Company, 1974), 254.

⁴ Chua Choon Lan et al, eds, *Heritage & Legacy of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore* (Singapore: Finishing Well Ministries, 2018), 150.

⁵ Ibid, 512–522. See also Dr Khoo's response to these claims in Jeffrey Khoo, “Biblical Separation of Bible-Presbyterianism,” *The Burning Bush* 25 (July 2019): 66–76.

⁶ Chua, *Heritage & Legacy*, 101.

⁷ Ibid., 505.

⁸ See “PCA Historical Center: The Text of the Auburn Affirmation,” accessed April 21, 2017, <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/auburn/auburntext.html#2> and David O Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity* (Greenville: Unusual Publications, 1986) 146–7, 157–158.

⁹ Ned B. Stonehouse, *J Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir*, 3rd ed (Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1977), 388–495.

¹⁰ D G Hart, *Defending the Faith: J Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (New Jersey: P & R Publishing Company, 1994), 125.

¹¹ D G Hart and John R Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: Committee on Christian Education and the Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1995), 25–26.

¹² Timothy Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story* (Singapore: Life Book Centre, 1995), 37.

¹³ However history would later show that the majority of the PCA would side with the views of the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, and it would be a small group of pastors that would separate from the PCA to form the Bible Presbyterian church because of differences over these aforementioned issues.

¹⁴ J Oliver Buswell, “Parting Regrets : Reflection on a Letter,” January 30, 1937, accessed April 21, 2017, <https://continuing.wordpress.com/2012/05/31/parting-regrets-reflection-on-a-letter/>.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Bible-Presbyterian Church Synod 1938, <http://www.bpc.org/synod/minutes/1938.html>.

¹⁶ Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow*, 125.

¹⁷ Timothy Tow, ed, *50 Years Building His Kingdom: Golden Jubilee Magazine (1950–2000)* (Singapore: Life Bible Presbyterian Church, 2000), 28.

¹⁸ Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 73.

¹⁹ Bobby E K Sng, *In His Good Time: The Story of the Church in Singapore 1819–2002*, 3rd Edition. (Singapore: Singapore Bible Society, 2003), 232.

²⁰ Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow*, 237.

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²¹Ibid, 239–240.

²²Cited in Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 226.

²³Timothy Tow, *Wang Ming Tao & Charismaticism* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1989), 9. See also *Heritage & Legacy* 425–446 for a discussion with Quek Swee Hwa and David Wong over what they regard as false allegations over these issues, and why they believe that they have been unfairly blamed for the split. While it may seem to be a matter of Rev Tow’s word against theirs, it is clear from their answers that they still do hold to the stand that tongues have not ceased, and that there should be a greater tolerance to the latitude of views – including those that lean towards liberalism and a rejection of separation.

²⁴Sng, *In His Good Time*, 312–313.

²⁵Chua, *Heritage & Legacy*, 496.

²⁶Ibid, 520–521.

²⁷Ibid, 146.

²⁸Ibid, 498.

²⁹Ibid, 111.

³⁰Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 73.

³¹Chua, *Heritage & Legacy*, 113.

³²Ibid, 172–174.

³³Ibid, 184.

³⁴Ibid, 200.

³⁵Ibid, 501–502.

³⁶Ibid, 501.

³⁷John C Whitcomb, “When Love Divorces Doctrine and Unity Leaves Truth,” in *Biblical Separation*, by Jeffrey Khoo (Singapore: Reformation Banner Publications, 1999), 114.

³⁸Chua, *Heritage & Legacy*, 511–512.

³⁹Ibid, 69.

⁴⁰Ibid, 424.

⁴¹Garnet Howard Milne, *Has the Bible Been Kept Pure? The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Providential Preservation of Scripture* (Independently published, 2017).

⁴²Chua, *Heritage & Legacy*, 81.

⁴³Ibid, 46.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Jeffrey Khoo, *Biblical Separation: Doctrine of Church Purification and Preservation* (Singapore: Reformation Banner Publications, 1999), 13.

⁴⁶Ibid, 69.

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CANON REVISITED: A REVIEW ARTICLE

Joseph Robert Samuel Vijeyaraj

Canon Revisited, by Michael J Kruger (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012) aims to address the problem of canon; that is, the problem of how Christians can be certain of their New Testament canon: precisely 27 books, no more, no less. Kruger's book is appropriately subtitled "Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books," and from this subtitle emerge both the *scope* of the book (it deals only with the New Testament canon, not the Old Testament) and its *slant* – Kruger is convinced that the problem of canon is capable of solution; and that the "origins and authority of the New Testament books" can indeed be established.

He begins by showing the need for such an establishment. The question of canon comes very close to the heart of Christianity, for it relates directly to the issue of biblical authority, itself the bedrock of all other Christian doctrines. Kruger puts the matter succinctly: "there can be no New Testament theology if there is no such thing as a New Testament in the first place." Yet, for all its foundational importance, the question of canon has been at once a fountainhead of evangelical confusion; and a focal point of critical attack; and a fertile soil for all sorts of pseudo-historical speculations.

As for how his envisioned establishment is to take place, Kruger states in the book's preface that his concern lies not so much in determining "whether the Christian belief in the canon is true," but rather "whether the Christian belief in the canon is intellectually justified." As Kruger himself later elaborates, his aim is not to demonstrate to a sceptic that the canonical books are truly of divine origin, but to show that "the Christian religion [itself] provides sufficient grounds for thinking that Christians can know which books belong in the canon and which do not."

This careful but somewhat convoluted explanation functions as an apology of sorts for Kruger's overall approach: he argues from a

Christian perspective, and is “unashamedly theological,” even in his attempts at historical reconstruction – refreshingly, and rightly, Kruger recognises that the problem of canon can only be resolved within a theological framework, for the definition of canon is in the first place a theological question. He thus begins by dealing, in as many chapters, with the three main canonical models (or canonical theologies); the last of these (the “self-authenticating” model) is then elaborated and defended, in five chapters.

Canonical Models

Kruger eschews the usual approach to the problem, arguing that to date, the debate over canon has been largely misdirected. The question on which the debate really turns, he asserts, has to do not with the *date* when the canon was formed, nor the *historical process* by which this formation took place, but with the *canonical model* – the question is, “on what grounds does one consider a book to be canonical?” Kruger uses this as his organising principle, spending two chapters classifying the prevalent theories, before presenting his own case.

Canon as Community-Determined

The first set of theories reviewed by Kruger have in common the view that a book is authenticated as “canonical,” not by virtue of any property inherent in the book, but as a consequence of its reception and usage by a particular community. Beneath this broad umbrella, however, a diversity of canonical systems are found huddled together.

Historical-Critical

First, there is the *historical-critical* model. This is a framework that emphasises *human agency*: the New Testament canon is the product of purely human decisions, prompted by nothing more mysterious than the human need to defend one’s own beliefs, or express one’s own identity, or exert one’s own dominance. Since by this conception the canon of present-day Christianity is a “historical accident,” it is not authoritative; and proponents of this canonical model are keen to disabuse the church of the notion that some books are intrinsically “canonical,” while others are not – hence the modern trend favouring equal treatment of “apocryphal” books, *à la* Bart Ehrman (and others).

In evaluating this model, Kruger makes the important point that this historical-critical approach, far from *constructing* a canonical model,

actually “*deconstructs* the canon entirely,” leaving the church with “an empty shell of books” devoid of divine authority. Moreover, he asks the searching question: how would one go about proving that the formation of the canon was a purely human act? It is not enough to point to evidence of debate and discussion among early Christians, for that only establishes *some* human involvement in the formation and reception of the canon – not the *sole* human involvement required by the model. In this manner Kruger exposes the central conceit of the historical-critical model for the naked assumption that it is.

Roman Catholic

Next comes the *Roman Catholic* model, which emphasises *ecclesiastical authority*. The Catholic claim is that the Church itself, via its Magisterium, is able infallibly to determine or establish the canonicity of a particular book. By this conception, the canonical writings are indeed authoritative; yet for the common Christian this canonical authority is made practically subservient to the authority of the Church.

Kruger goes perhaps a little too far in his attempt to find some positive aspects of this model. He acknowledges that the “church’s historical reception” of the canonical books “plays an important role” in the Christian conviction that these books are indeed “from God” – but a supposedly-infallible declaration on the basis of extra-biblical authority is a far cry from the humble reception of divinely-inspired truth, which is the appropriate response of the true church to God’s book.

Otherwise, Kruger does an excellent job in his critique. He begins by comprehending briefly the range of formulations within Catholic teaching regarding the church-canon relationship: recognising that while some Catholic writers go so far as to say that the canon is “derivative” from the church and “an act of the church,” others confine the church merely to an epistemological role; that is, the church is the “sole and fundamental means” by which any Christian can know, infallibly, “which books belong in the canon.”

Once again, Kruger exposes the flawed assumption hidden in both these approaches. Even the more restrained Roman Catholic model of canon implicitly assumes that any written revelation requires an external source of validation, which “unwittingly downgrades” the authority intrinsic to scripture by virtue of divine authorship. To argue further that the canon derives from the church, is to ignore both scripture and history:

for the doctrinal substance of the New Testament certainly preceded the church, and indeed caused the formation of the church; while the New Testament itself affirms that the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20), and that the apostolic writings were received as scripture apart from any official ecclesiastical proclamation (cf 1 Thess 2:13). Finally, the question of how the Roman Catholic Church can establish its own infallible authority, when scripture is disallowed from doing the same, unmasks the incoherence of the Catholic system.

Canonical-Criticism

Third is the *canonical-criticism* model, a more recent development which emphasises *editorial activity*. Canonical criticism overturns the normal critical impulse to recover the “original” form of the New Testament, arguing that the canon was deliberately shaped to transcend its original narrow context, and only in its final form can it have any true relevance for the church today. By this conception it is function that determines canonicity – the canonical books are those which came to function in the ecclesiastical community as scripture.

Kruger identifies a serious problem with this approach: namely, that it effectively expands the realm of inspiration to include the communal activity of the church. In other words, the New Testament canon consists not merely of the apostolic writings, but also of the various editorial revisions and redactions progressively imposed upon them by the “early factions of Christianity” (Kruger calls this a “sociological view of inspiration”). Needless to say, such a notion is patently unbiblical. The canonical-criticism model in fact merges both the Roman Catholic error of elevating church over canon, and the existential error (see below) of grounding the authority of scripture in the subjective response of its readers.

Existential / Neo-orthodox

The fourth and last community-determined model reviewed by Kruger is the *existential* (or *neo-orthodox*) model, which emphasises *individual engagement*; that is, authoritative scripture exists only when “an individual experiences God’s word and responds to it in faith.” By this conception, the canon comprises those books in which the church experiences an “encounter” with God. Experience determines canonicity, rather than the reverse – implying that the edges of the canon are

actually “fluid,” and that Christians today may “experience” God, in principle, anywhere.

In his evaluation, Kruger astutely points out that the existential model separates the authority of God from the authority of scripture: the latter exists only as and when God chooses to use scripture, whereupon those chosen texts “impose” themselves on the Christian community. But this *deprives* the canon both of a fixed boundary and of any intrinsic authority; *demotes* the canon by making it “contingent on the work of the Spirit” in the community; and *destroys* the very concept of canon itself, since God can speak through anything, even texts that are historically inaccurate and self-contradictory.

Canon as Historically-Determined

This set of models aim to identify canonical books by historical investigation, arguing that if apostolic origin can be demonstrated, or “authentic Jesus tradition” identified, then canonicity can be affirmed.

Canon-within-the-Canon

The first of the historically-determined models is the *canon-within-the-canon* model, which emphasises *historical authenticity*. By this conception, the present canon represents the result of a convoluted and flawed process; and the way forward requires a separation of true canonical wheat from accretions of spurious chaff. Often the criteria employed for this winnowing borrow from the higher-critical quest for the “historical” Jesus – who, in practice, tends rather suspiciously to conform to the critic’s own views of “what Jesus *should* be like.” Sometimes, however, the approach taken is more apparently orthodox: those books are canonical which “preach Christ,” or which “engender faith in Christ.”

The problem with this model, as Kruger observes, is that it holds scripture to whatever arbitrary (extra-biblical) standard of “truth” or “authenticity” is adopted by a particular critic. There is no objectivity to be found here. The tools of higher criticism have led to a mess of contradictory conclusions; and even the standard of “whatever preaches Christ” runs into the paradox of using scripture to determine what preaches Christ, and using what preaches Christ to determine scripture.

Criteria-of-Canonicity

Second (and last) is the *criteria-of-canonicity* model, which is a somewhat amorphous conglomeration of the previously-reviewed approaches. The essence of the idea here is that the present New Testament canon of twenty-seven books can be authenticated by applying the same methods used in the study of any other ancient text – various “criteria of canonicity” are adopted, and historical investigations conducted to affirm that the New Testament books can be demonstrated to meet those criteria.

This model has been popular among a number of prominent evangelicals past and present, but Kruger does not hesitate to raise grave concerns plaguing this approach. Most significantly, the *criteria-of-canonicity* model adopts the myth of “neutral historical research,” apparently assuming that such an “objective investigation” would be methodologically acceptable to the unbeliever, and its conclusions therefore convincing to him. Refreshingly, Kruger turns to scripture itself to show that no scholar can be “neutral” with respect to God (cf Prov 1:7), and rightly states that “the pursuit of neutrality is not a biblical virtue.” In fact, the pursuit of neutrality in this case amounts to a subversion of biblical authority, since it places “autonomous human assessment of historical evidence” over God’s word. More fundamentally, the very notion of “criteria of canonicity” runs into the paradox of explaining the origin and defending the validity of these “criteria” without appeal to scripture (since they are meant to identify and authenticate scripture).

Canon as Self-Authenticating

Both groups of models considered above, Kruger contends, face serious difficulties. The community-determined models, while embracing a legitimate aspect of canon (community reception), have dismissed any notion of intrinsic authority, and ignored the historical origins of canon in the apostolic age – in effect, they have made the New Testament “so much... the church’s book that it is unable to be God’s book.” On the other hand, the historically-determined models focus so thoroughly on historical investigation that scripture is stripped of its own “dignity and authority.”

Moreover, despite their diversity, all the models previously mentioned share a common feature – really, a common failure: they seek to “ground the authority of the canon in something outside the canon itself.” But the only proper canonical model is one that recognises the

canon as self-authenticating, and thus grounds the authority of the canon not in its communal *reception*, nor in its historical *origins*, but in its own *content*.

Concept

Kruger deftly defends his concept of self-authentication from the charge of circularity, simply pointing out that “epistemic circularity” is unavoidable when dealing with foundational or ultimate authority – any authority established by appeal to other authorities cannot be an ultimate authority. At the same time, he draws a helpful distinction between *self-authentication* and *self-attestation* – his idea of a “self-authenticating” canon is “not just a canon that claims to have authority, nor is it simply a canon that bears internal evidence of authority, but one that guides and determines how that authority is to be established.”

In other words, just as we may apply scripture to any question of contemporary experience, we may (we must!) apply scripture to the question of establishing the canon. Doing so, Kruger asserts, yields three components of a self-authenticating canon.

Components

The first component is the *providential exposure* of the church to canonical books. The canon must consist of books with which the church as a corporate community has always been familiar; this follows from biblical statements of God’s intent to give His word to His church (cf Rom 15:4). Effectively, this means that for a book to be identified as canonical, it must have been providentially preserved by God through the ages. Any book or epistle that has been lost – even if originally written by an apostle – cannot be considered canonical.

At this point Kruger strays into problematic territory. He rightly acknowledges that there are scriptural indications of apostolic writings that have been lost (cf 1 Cor 5:9), and is understandably concerned to establish a nomenclative framework for dealing with them. However, his solution – that these writings are inspired scripture, but not canonical – raises concerns, chiefly with regard to the strong link established in scripture between inspiration and preservation. For instance, 2 Timothy 3:16–17 makes it clear that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable” for His corporate church. Again, the Lord Jesus affirmed that man must live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4). If then man is to profit from, and live by, all

of God's inspired words, it follows that all those inspired words must be preserved: and therefore the category of "inspired-but-not-preserved" (or, "inspired-but-not-canonical") must be discarded. Still, since this point marks something of a digression, Kruger's main argument is not affected.

Given that canonical books must be available to the church, the next component of Kruger's self-authenticating canon comprises the *attributes of canonicity* by which the church may distinguish between all the books available to it. Kruger defines three such attributes. Firstly, any book that is God's handiwork will (just as the natural world, cf Ps 19:1) possess certain *divine qualities*, such as beauty, harmony, wisdom, and so on. These are not universally recognised only because fallen man is blinded by sin; but this blindness is overcome in some by the inner working of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, because of this infallible work of the Spirit, canonical books will enjoy a predominant *corporate reception* by the flock of God, who hear and know the Shepherd's voice. Thirdly, in acknowledgement of the fact that God appointed special messengers to declare His redemptive revelation and interpret His redemptive action, canonical books must have *apostolic origins* – not necessarily directly written by apostles, but "writings that bear the authoritative message of the apostles and derive from the foundational apostolic era." This guards the canon against spurious additions, and seals it as complete from the close of that apostolic era.

Implications

Kruger draws two implications from his articulation of the self-authenticating model of canon. In the first place, the model is comprehensive and self-reinforcing, because the three attributes of canonicity are so inter-related as really to compose one organic whole (the apostolic origins of a canonical book, for example, imply its divine qualities and corporate reception by the church; at the same time, divine qualities and corporate reception form part of the basis on which a book may be identified as apostolic). Hence this model supplies the deficiencies of the others thus far considered: for each of those tended to focus on just one attribute as the defining feature of canonicity.

In the second place, the self-authenticating model offers a synthesis to tame the tangle of conflicting canonical conceptions. By recognising the multifaceted nature of canon, it provides a balanced vessel capable of navigating the various stages of canonical development (from inspiration to communal recognition to ecclesiastical consensus).

DEFENDING THE SELF-AUTHENTICATING MODEL

The Divine Qualities of the Canon

Using the Westminster Confession of Faith as his guide, Kruger notes three “categories” in which the divine qualities of scripture are displayed. The “beauty and excellency” of scripture is one category: just as men who encounter God “are vividly aware of his beauty, majesty, and perfection and need no further ‘evidence’ that he is God” (cf Isa 6:1–7), so also the scriptures bear witness to their own divine beauty (cf Ps 19:7–9; 119:103). Another category is the “power and efficacy” of scripture, as it effectually brings conviction of sin, reveals the way of salvation, imparts wisdom for life, and so on: this is a salutary reminder that the canon is to be not just a rule of *doctrine*, but a rule of *life*. The bulk of Kruger’s attention, however, is focused on the third category, the “unity and harmony” of scripture. Three aspects of this unity are identified: doctrinal unity; redemptive-historical unity; and structural unity.

Doctrinal Unity

The orthodoxy of a book (ie, its accordance with the doctrinal unity of the canonical books) was important to the early church as they encountered New Testament books for the first time. The relevance of this criterion has been challenged by the popular view that early Christianity was a maelstrom of opposing doctrinal systems; a chaos on which order was imposed only in the fourth century, via an after-the-fact “orthodoxy” that played no part in canon formation. Kruger refutes this idea by pointing out that while there was early diversity of doctrine, there was also an existing standard by which “orthodoxy” could be distinguished from “heresy” – a standard comprising the Old Testament canon, certain “core” New Testament books which were irrefutably of apostolic origin, and the orally-transmitted apostolic tradition.

The concept of orthodoxy takes on “additional dimensions” when considered from a modern perspective. While many scholars have argued for theological diversity or contradiction within the completed New Testament canon, their supposed discrepancies tend to “evaporate” on closer examination. Indeed, Kruger unashamedly avers that “assessing the theological harmony of the New Testament involves more than simply following the standard academic steps.” He asks the pointed question, “Should Christians abandon their commitment to the canon’s authority because biblical critics, who view scriptural interpretation

as merely a human enterprise, claim to have discovered theological incongruities?” The answer is a resounding “no.”

Redemptive-Historical Unity

Kruger distinguishes between doctrinal unity and redemptive-historical unity: “The issue for early Christians was not only whether the New Testament books agreed with the Old Testament books on any given doctrine... but whether the New Testament books actually *completed the story* begun by the Old Testament.” Because the overarching theme of this story is God’s redemption of fallen humanity through Jesus Christ, a distinctive quality of canonical books is their “*Christocentric nature*.”

Structural Unity

Given that the Old and New Testaments are bound together by their central theme, Christ, it follows that the New Testament canon ought to exhibit structural compatibility with the books of the Old Testament. This structural unity is expressed in the “covenantal structure” of the New Testament (as a “new covenant,” cf 2 Cor 3:6), which mirrors that of the Old Testament – the gospels parallel to the Exodus account, Acts to Joshua, the epistles to the prophets. The same unity is also expressed in the “canonical structure” of the whole, as the New Testament contains “macrostructural features” linking it to the Old; the former thus evidencing itself the completion of the latter.

Kruger is somewhat speculative in his articulation of this structural unity, however. At times the examples he adduces leave something to be desired, if they are meant to represent biblical data rather than superimposed human opinion. For instance, he points to the supposed fourfold division of the New Testament in the early church, which together with the threefold division of the Old Testament yields seven sections in total: a biblically significant number which he says “speak[s] to the overall unity of the biblical canon.” But his fourfold division for the New Testament is supported not by biblical but by manuscript evidence; and the manuscripts he cites (codices such as Sinaiticus and Vaticanus), while they might agree in their division of the New Testament, differ in their ordering of the Old Testament books. Kruger does deal with this briefly in a later footnote, but his treatment is less than satisfactory.

The Apostolic Origins of the Canon

The idea has been prevalent among scholars that “canonicity” is not something inherent to the New Testament books, but a later imposition motivated by the “theological and political machinations of later Christian groups.” Against this Kruger aims to show that there was an existing *structural* framework and theological *rationale*, which would together predispose the church to expect a canonical deposit; and that there were *agents* (the apostles) whose authority the church recognised, and whose teaching they were already prepared to receive as canonical.

Structural Framework

The structure of the Old Testament is bound together by the concept of “covenant,” which Kruger defines as “an arrangement or contract between two parties that includes the terms of their relationship, covenant obligations (stipulations), and blessings and curses.” This covenantal picture of God’s redemptive plan, beginning from Genesis 3:15, was familiar to the early church.

Kruger makes his point here by drawing a link between the concepts of “covenant” and “canon” – just as contemporary extra-biblical covenants included a written copy of the covenant documents distributed to each party, so the canon of scripture is an inevitable documentation of God’s covenant relationship with His people. The early church, already primed to expect a “new covenant” (Jer 31:31), would naturally be expecting a new canon as well (cf 2 Cor 3:6).

Kruger’s point is well-taken; although he over-reaches, perhaps, in attempting to ground his argument in current historical insight concerning ancient Hittite treaties: rather than imply that God copied, from ancient pagans, the fundamental structure of all His dealings with mankind, it would seem preferable instead to trace such extra-biblical treaties to a deep covenantal understanding ingrained in mankind from the days of Adam and Noah.

Theological Rationale

In addition to informing the covenantal expectations of early Christians, the Old Testament also provided a crucial link between God’s redemptive and revelatory acts. The pattern there established was one of redemption followed by revelation to proclaim and explain that redemption; thus, for example, Israel’s deliverance from Egypt was followed by the giving of the law at Sinai (Exod 20:2).

Early Christians, steeped in the prophetic anticipation of a glorious final redemption (cf Isa 40:1–11; Ezek 36:25–28), and believing in Jesus as its fulfilment, would be led to expect “a new revelational deposit to accompany that redemption.” Such an expectation is further enhanced by explicit Old Testament prophecies concerning a coming phase of divine revelatory activity: for example, Deuteronomy 18:18 and Isaiah 61:1–2, both applied to the prophetic ministry of Christ (cf Acts 3:22–23; Luke 4:18–21).

Apostolic Agents

The apostolic office was established against this structural and theological backdrop, “to be the guardian, preserver, and transmitter of the message of redemption.” It was Christ Himself who chose and ordained the apostles (Mark 3:14–15), and sent them as His messengers to declare His redemption (John 20:21, cf Acts 10:41–42). This apostolic message, bearing Christ’s authority, was initially transmitted orally (cf 2 Thess 2:15; Luke 1:1–2); not as something to be shaped and altered, but as something to be kept and defended (cf Jude 3).

This “foundational apostolic tradition” was very soon written down, either by the apostles themselves or by their associates: thus the New Testament canon was formed. Moreover, Kruger points out that “there seems to be a degree of self-awareness among the New Testament authors that they are producing authoritative documents that would function as a rule for the church.” He cites and explains such passages as Mark 1:1, John 21:24, and 1 Corinthians 14:37–38.

Finally, Kruger deals with the critical claim that much of the New Testament is not in fact apostolic, but pseudonymous. He argues that such claims have been extensively challenged; they are based on assumptions already contrary to the Christian world-view; and they are generally based on subjective interpretations of an author’s “style, vocabulary, and the like.” Furthermore, Kruger does well to make the biblically-sound (but no doubt critically unpopular) case that based on the other attributes of canonicity, and with the Holy Spirit’s help, “a Christian can know a book is canonical even if he knows nothing about its apostolicity.”

The Corporate Reception of the Canon

The self-authenticating model includes the corporate, Spirit-guided reception of a book as an attribute of canonicity. Kruger notes, however, that the church did not immediately arrive at a final consensus

regarding the present-day New Testament: its canonical understanding “has a complex and sometimes erratic history spanning many centuries.” Kruger’s aim in this section is to show that, firstly, the self-authenticating model is able to accommodate the “tumultuous history of the canon,” and secondly, early Christians did not disagree nearly so much as critics have asserted.

Expectation of Canonical Diversity

Kruger points out that much of the disregard for a self-authenticating canon is built on the argument that the early existence of conflicting canonical views means none of those views can be considered normative. This argument involves an assumption that books given by God should be received automatically and universally – but the assumption is patently false, given that *spiritual falsehood* endangered the early church (cf 2 Pet 2:2; 1 John 2:19); *spiritual forces* opposed the early church (cf Eph 6:10–20; 1 Pet 5:8–10); *spiritual failure* blinded some in the early church (cf Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19); and *spiritual frauds* infiltrated the early church (cf Matt 7:21–23; Phil 1:15–16).

Moreover, Kruger insightfully observes that early Christians lacked the advantage of “the historical witness of generations of saints” pointing to the canonical books. Instead, they were confronted with books written “by a variety of different authors, in a variety of different time periods, and in a variety of different geographical locations.” Under such conditions, a certain amount of discussion and disagreement, far from contradicting the self-authenticating model, is entirely comprehended by it.

Actual Extent of Canonical Diversity

Critical claims to the contrary, much of the New Testament was, very early on, received as scripture by the church – there was from the beginning a “canonical core,” even though “the boundaries of the canon were still a little fuzzy.” Much of the evidence for this “canonical core” comes from the New Testament itself. For example, the apostle Peter (in 2 Pet 3:16) speaks of the epistles of Paul as on par with “the other scriptures” (ie, the Old Testament); moreover, Peter speaks of “all [Paul’s] epistles,” evidently assuming that his readers would be familiar with such a collection. Kruger also points to numerous indications in the writings of early church leaders supporting an early-emerging New Testament canon.

An interesting further argument is based on the evidence of the New Testament manuscripts themselves. The relative *quantity* of extant manuscripts provides an insight into early patterns of use: copies of canonical books from the second and third centuries “outnumber apocryphal [books] almost four to one,” suggesting that the distinction was well-recognised by early Christians. The early *collection* of texts into one manuscript tell a similar story: there is early evidence of canonical gospels grouped together, but never with apocryphal gospels; there is also evidence for the grouping (conceptual and actual) of the Pauline epistles. The *format* of early Christian material affords another line of evidence: Christians, in contrast to the rest of the Greco-Roman world, overwhelmingly preferred the codex (book) form rather than the roll, and this especially for canonical rather than extra-biblical texts. Finally, the presence of liturgical *features* in early Christian manuscripts suggests that particular texts were favoured for public reading in the context of worship.

Having established the existence of a “core” of canonical books which were accepted early on, Kruger’s final chapter deals with the finer points concerning the boundaries of the canon. The *cavil* that since patristic writers quoted from apocryphal gospels, the fourfold gospel canon cannot have been established early, is dismissed by the simple observation that patristic writers were well able “to distinguish between scriptural books and merely useful books.” The *claim* that many of the New Testament books were disputed at length, and that there was therefore no common understanding of canonicity, is contradicted by a comprehensive review of the patristic evidence both for canonical and non-canonical books, which paints a quite different picture. The *contention* that the canon was only “closed” – defined and restricted – by the fourth-century church, is met by historical evidence that “Christians sought to limit and restrict the canon in various ways prior to that time.”

Conclusion

In an age increasingly enamoured of post-modern scepticism – where, as Kruger puts it, “religious claims do not need to be refuted [because] they are disallowed in the first place” – it is most needful that the concept of “canon” be “revisited.” Kruger has met that need admirably well, and the primary appeal of his book is his treatment of the issue from a theological perspective. While not shunning the

facts of history, Kruger grounds his approach to canon in the canon itself, unashamedly using scripture as evidence in its own defence; and acknowledging as he does so that his solution is in fact not novel, but “very old.” Christians will find his procedure refreshing, and his conclusions fortifying.

The book does, however, suffer from some general weaknesses (in addition to the particular points mentioned above). While it is not a purely academic treatise – Kruger seems desirous, and rightly so, that his work should be accessible to the lay Christian – there is a fair degree of complexity to Kruger’s discussion. The path he follows is somewhat winding, straying sometimes into philosophical territory (eg, the distinction between *de facto* and *de jure* objections, the concept of “warrant,” and so on), while featuring copious footnoted references to and interactions with various scholarly volumes. Many will relish these footnotes as a rare delicacy. Many more will find them arcane. Those who follow judiciously will indeed be led to fair meadows bright with sunshine: but some, it is to be feared, may lose their way in the intervening shadows.

Furthermore, a major disappointment comes with Kruger’s apparent failure to admit the link between the issue of canon and the issue of text. He notes correctly that it is one thing to question the meaning or factual accuracy of a passage, and “quite another to question whether that passage belongs in the Bible in the first place.” From this he rightly avers that “the question of canon... is at the very [centre] of how biblical authority is established.” Yet he seems quickly to lose sight of the link he himself has just acknowledged, between *passages* of scripture and the *canon* of scripture: so that in a later footnote, he appears unwilling to recognise the authenticity of the last twelve verses of Mark; unwilling, at least, to allow that the issue *can* be determined, one way or the other.

He contends in the same footnote that it is “a caricature to argue that a self-attesting canon means that even the smallest portions of scripture, down to even a single word, can be immediately identified by Christians as divine” – but this caricature is irrelevant to the point at hand. If there are “divine qualities” that distinguish inspired scripture from any human production, does Kruger mean to imply that there is not enough divine quality in twelve verses for a Spirit-filled Christian (let alone the Spirit-filled corporate church) to identify? How long must a “passage” be, before one is allowed to expect that its excision or addition

would be recognised by the corporate church as an error – before the question of its inclusion becomes, in Kruger’s own words, a question “of how biblical authority is established”?

In the end, Kruger would leave the church in a precarious position: having *books* of scripture which securely authenticate themselves, yet left to her own devices to determine which *version* of each book is actually original; guided by the Spirit of truth to identify those *volumes* in which the divine music echoes, but abandoned by that same Spirit when she stoops to inspect the individual *notes*; following a Shepherd who promises that His sheep will infallibly hear His voice, who nevertheless cannot promise that they will be able to discern every *word*.

With these caveats in place, however, the present writer finds no difficulty, and indeed great pleasure, in recommending *Canon Revisited* to all readers, Christian or otherwise – everyone for whom the issue of canon, and the question of biblical authority, sparks a modicum of interest.

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BIBLIOTHERAPY: THE PLACE OF THEOLOGY IN FIGHTING CANCER

Joycelyn Chng

Cancer is a disease that is dreaded by most people, and being stricken with it is not typically something that one would expect nor be prepared for. Notwithstanding this, strike it does, not only upon non-Christians, but also upon the believers of Christ. So, in God's sovereign will and time, I was personally hit by breast cancer in 2018, about one and a half years after I had graduated from the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) and started serving the Lord full-time.

While being a child of God does not exempt one from falling ill with cancer, it makes a whole world of difference to how one reacts and responds to it. Indeed, the fight against cancer must count as the most intense trial I have experienced in my life thus far. Yet at the same time, this period of trial was a most spiritually uplifting time for me. In fact, it was like going through practical training as it were, where I was able to put into practice and apply the doctrines and theology that I had learned in FEBC, as well as learn experientially, in a most personal way, deeper things about God and His Word.

I therefore count it a privilege to have been put through the fiery trial of cancer. Unworthy as I am, God had carried me through and it is solely by the grace and mercy of the Lord that I am able to share how the knowledge of God and His Word had helped me through the trying period.

Dealing with the Diagnosis

“He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD.” (Ps 112:7)

At the beginning of 2018, I had noticed a lump but I did not do anything about it till February, when I started to experience some discomfort and was urged by my own sister to consult a sister in church, who is a medical doctor. This was the Lord's mercy upon me, as I learned later that breast cancer tumours do not typically cause pain or discomfort.

When I was advised to see the doctor without delay, I knew immediately that it was something serious. Faced with the prospect of being diagnosed with cancer, the Lord was gracious to grant me an inexplicable calm in my heart and the assurance to know that He is in control. That same night, I attended the vigil service of a sister-in-Christ who had gone home to the Lord after battling cancer exemplarily for a number of years. It was very sobering for me and I remember thinking that this battle was now mine to fight. I knew that the timing was directed by our all-wise God in order to prepare me for the battle ahead. How humbling it is to know that my God cares for me right down to the minutest detail!

I went to the polyclinic the next day and was greeted with the same sense of urgency after a brief examination by the doctor. At this point, I could have broken down if I did not know the one living and true God. However, I thank God that I do know who God is—the omnipotent Creator and Sustainer who is sovereign over all things—and have the confidence through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that He is my loving, heavenly Father (see Rom 8:16), in absolute control of my life. I was thus enabled by God’s grace to keep my focus on Him, trusting Him fully, which in turn, led me to see how He was helping me even in the situation that I was in. As it is written in Isaiah 26:3, 4, *“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength”*. So it was that when I was given a fast-track referral by the polyclinic to see the doctor in the hospital on the same day, a clear sign of the malignancy of my case, my heart was not weighed down by the thought of cancer but was rather filled with happy gratitude to the Lord for making a way for me to be attended to quickly. Indeed, *“Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God”* (Ps 146:5).

The doctor who attended to me at the hospital informed me that it was likely cancer and scheduled another appointment for a biopsy to be done. It was the Chinese New Year season then. Instead of going for visitations, I stayed at home to rest, read God’s Word and pray. I needed to spend time with the Lord and to examine myself, asking as the Psalmist did in Psalm 139:23, 24, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”* God gave me much comfort and assurance through His Word: *“If we say that we have no*

sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:8–10); *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”* (John 15:1, 2). I was most grateful to God for His love in showing me the areas of my life that still need to be worked on, that I may be truly conformed to the image of Christ and be more fruitful for Him. The Lord also impressed upon my heart that I must be ready to leave this earth anytime He calls.

By God’s gracious provision, I was recommended a good Christian doctor by another sister in church, and was able to get the biopsy done earlier than the date that was originally given. A number of other incidents also served as precious tokens from the Lord to show me that He was with me and providing for my every need as I went through this trial. When the biopsy result came, it was no surprise—I had cancer, stage 2B. However, with so much to thank God for in my affliction, how could I murmur or complain? I learned that when the whole being is filled with praise and thanksgiving to God, there will be no reason to murmur against Him or doubt Him. Even the oft-heard question amongst non-Christians in similar situations, “Why me?”, will be something that is most foreign to an afflicted child of God. We rather echo the words of Job in Job 13:15, *“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him”*.

Sovereignty of God

And that was what I did—simply trusting God. No matter what the circumstances, God’s Word was my source of comfort, strength and instruction. I give all praise to God for without a doubt, it was God who caused me to remember the knowledge that I had imbibed during my theological studies as well as through the years of studying His Word. He also gave me His wisdom and grace to apply the knowledge to my situation. Several doctrines enabled me to have absolute peace in my heart, and allowed me to submit fully and unquestioningly, without hesitation, to God’s will and plan for me. One in particular is the Sovereignty of God. The thought that God is in control of even the tiniest cell in my body, and that no cell could turn cancerous if He did not allow it, brought great relief and comfort to me (see Neh 9:6; Ps 139:14–16;

Jer 5:22; Matt 10:29–31). The fact that God reigns sovereignly over all things, enabled me to put my trust fully in Him. I was comforted that God knows all things; He knows the end from the beginning (see Isa 46:10). God already knew how this trial would end; my duty was simply to wait upon Him with expectancy and joyful hope. And as God has seen fit for me to go through this trial, I take as from a Father's hand, comforted that I am His child. Job 23:10 spoke especially to me, "*But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*"

Goodness of God

Another doctrine that kept me unwavering in my trust in God is the Goodness of God. Psalm 119:68 was one verse that the Lord brought to my mind repeatedly. It says, "*Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.*" Psalm 72:18 was another verse: "*Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things.*" I firmly believed that my good God must have His good purposes to be fulfilled through this trial. His goodness is unchangeable. It is not measured by the circumstances that I am in, nor my physical state. Goodness is God's very attribute, and it characterises everything that He does. This wonderful truth protected my mind from faithless thoughts. "*I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.*" (Ps 27:13). In fact, it is often in and through trials that we become even more sensitive to recognise the goodness of the Lord in our lives.

The doctrine of prayer also guided my response to the diagnosis. I was convicted that I needed to share with my pastor and the church about my condition so that they could uphold me in prayer (Jas 5:13–16). God's Word declares that "*the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*" (Jas 5:16). The fellowship of the saints is a great privilege and means of grace given to us by God, for our mutual encouragement and edification as we go through life's joys and pains. I thank God for my family and all the brethren who laboured in prayer for me and gave me much encouragement and support. My prayer request was not specifically for healing, for I knew that God can and would heal if it was His will for me, and if He still has something for me to do for Him on this earth. However, if God does not heal, then this sickness would be a means for me to leave this earth and go to my heavenly home. It was the process of getting to the end of this trial—however it would end—that I knew I needed God's grace to be upon me for I am weak and have absolutely

no strength of my own. But praise be to God for I can “*be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim 2:1)! Therefore, my prayer was for God to have mercy on me and grant me His grace and strength to go through the treatment, and when the going got tough, for Christ to hold me fast. I earnestly desired that ultimately, God be glorified. “*Be thou exalted, LORD, in thine own strength: so will we sing and praise thy power.*” (Ps 21:13). God gave me the wonderful assurance—one that had been impressed deeply upon my heart during my studies in FEBC—that He would surely answer a prayer that is uttered according to His will and consistent with the character of Christ (see John 14:13, 14).

Other Bible verses that brought me great encouragement and instruction included Philippians 1:21, “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” and Romans 14:8, “*For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.*”

Undergoing the Treatment

“... *for the joy of the LORD is your strength.*” (Neh 8:10b)

God led clearly concerning the course of treatment through the two Christian doctors—a surgeon and an oncologist—whom He had graciously appointed for me. I was to have surgery first, after which an assessment would be made to confirm if there was a need for chemotherapy. Radiotherapy would follow at the end.

The surgery to remove the tumour was scheduled on 16 March 2018. While God’s common grace is availed to all men (Matt 5:45), it was an absolute blessing for me to know that God’s special care was upon my surgeon as she is also His child (see Luke 12:24), and whom I had no doubt, committed the surgery to Him in prayer too. I thank God particularly for His Word, which gave me much strength and confidence as I prepared to undergo the operation. The following passages were especially precious: “*The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.... The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.*” (Ps 34:17–19, 22); “*But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he*

shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him.” (Ps 37:39, 40); “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” (Phil 4:6–9).

Indeed, the God of peace was with me as I lay waiting to enter the operating theatre. After I was wheeled into the theatre, His peace continued to keep my heart and mind from all fear and anxiety as the surgeon and other medical personnel prepped me for the operation. I fell unconscious shortly after the anaesthetist injected me, and it was five hours later that I was awoken by a nurse informing me that the surgery was over. Immense joy and gratitude to the Lord flooded my soul, and I said in my heart, “Praise and thank God! The first part of the treatment is done!”

God granted me a smooth and speedy recovery from the surgery. Besides the physical blessing, I am also very grateful to the Lord for the fruitful time that He gave me in the hospital. The Lord opened a door for me to share the gospel with a housekeeping staff who saw me reading my Bible in the hospital room. It was the Lord’s Day and though I was not able to attend the worship service in church, God, by His appointment, made it possible for me to speak a word for Him to this lady who had not heard about Jesus prior to our meeting. The fellowship with God through prayer and the reading of His Word also directed my thoughts to the reality and blessings of my “Home over there”.

My cancer journey was just at the beginning stage, but I had already experienced God’s meticulous provision, both physical and spiritual, as well as His overseeing of the minutest detail, many times over. This loving superintendence over every aspect of my life led me to spontaneously refer to God as my wisest and kindest micro-Manager! I could not imagine going through life, much less this cancer trial, without God directing my every step. It is thus that when I was informed that the full assessment of the excised tumour showed that the cancer was of a

higher grade than initially thought, I was not discouraged but continued to praise God with absolute trust that He knows best. Psalm 72:18, which says, *“Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things”*, was still reflective of my sentiment, and Isaiah 25:1, 4 echoed my heartfelt thanksgiving to God, *“O LORD, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.... For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.”*

The next phase of treatment—chemotherapy—was potentially the most challenging one. With the cancer determined to be of an intermediate instead of a low grade, I was quite prepared for the need to undergo chemotherapy. In the days leading up to my appointment with the oncologist to discuss if it was indeed necessary, God’s Word once again brought me much comfort. His promise in Psalm 91:14, 15 was especially reassuring: *“Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.”* The example of Christ also encouraged and strengthened me tremendously: *“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered”* (Heb 5:8). I prayed and asked the Lord to spare me from chemotherapy, but I submitted to His will saying, *“nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”* As I prayed, God reminded me of the Apostle Paul’s testimony in 2 Cor 12:7–10, *“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”*

Immediately, tears streamed down my face. I knew it was God’s will for me to go through chemotherapy. I cried to Him, *“Let it be so, Lord, let it be so. Whatever would glorify you the most, let it be so. I commit*

myself fully into your hands.” With that, perfect peace came and all my fears were laid to rest. 2 Corinthians 4:15–18 says, “*For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*” Indeed, “What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 1). It is safe to say that not one student can graduate from FEBC without having memorised this. The memorisation would have been a wasted exercise, one that is confined only to the mind, if I had desired anything less.

As expected, I was prescribed chemotherapy, administered over the course of five months. This was followed by one month of radiotherapy. By God’s mercy and grace, this period of treatment turned out to be a most blessed one, and I experienced how the grace of God was indeed sufficient for me. God’s presence with His very own, even in the midst of the harshest storm, is the great assurance of every believer. It is enough for us to know from the Bible that God is with us in our time of suffering (see Isa 43:1, 2); yet God condescends to show us through big and small ways, the depth of His love for us. Each day did not go by without God’s loving reminder of His goodness, faithfulness and abiding presence to cheer, comfort and guide. We do have a living and true God who is very real in our lives, and a perfectly inspired and preserved Word to tell us about Him. Through various ways, God gave me the precious opportunity to witness the veracity of His Word, and see Him working all things “*for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*” (Rom 8:28).

God Keeps His Promises

There were many promises of God recorded in the Bible that I clung onto as I went through the treatment. The Lord’s promise of sufficient grace in 2 Corinthians 12:9 was particularly strengthening. Other passages included: “*Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee;*

yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.... For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.” (Isa 41:10, 13); “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor 10:13); “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ;” (1 Pet 1:6, 7); “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matt 10:29–31).

Truly, God does not lie, and He is faithful to His Word. God knows how much each of us can bear and we can be sure that He has fixed the bounds of our trials and will not try us beyond our limit. True to His Word, God knows how much I can bear. He carried me through the sixteen doses of chemotherapy as well as twenty sessions of radiotherapy, and helped me to cope well with the side effects. In the last month of chemotherapy, the numbness in my fingers and toes—a permanent side effect—intensified to the point where I seriously considered if I should stop chemotherapy since I had completed the minimum number of doses, with two more prescribed doses remaining. To some, it might have been an obvious choice to stop. However, I was afraid of making any decision according to the flesh, which would be most displeasing to the Lord. I examined myself before my heavenly Father and poured out my struggles to Him: (1) If I decided to continue and complete the full prescribed course of chemotherapy, was it because of my pride that I did not want to be seen as giving up? (2) If I decided to stop, was it because of fear and worry that caused me not to trust in Him?

God heard my cry and assured me through His Word that His children will not seek Him in vain. Jeremiah 32:27 also encouraged me greatly: “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?” Therefore, while I still had not made any decision before the scheduled day for my penultimate dose, I had absolute peace that somehow, God would make it all plain in His perfect time and way. I asked the Lord to lead and direct me clearly through my oncologist

whom He had been using to this end up till then. And God never fails. He gave me the answer clearly and right on time: While in the previous few visits, my oncologist would initiate the possibility of stopping chemotherapy at the mention of numbness, she did not once suggest it at this visit, even though I had told her that the numbness had worsened significantly. It was as if God had sealed her mouth and stopped her from saying it. Hence, I knew without a doubt that it was His will for me to complete the whole course of chemotherapy. O, the excitement of witnessing God answering my prayer and keeping His promise that His children shall not seek Him in vain! I proceeded with chemotherapy that day having exceeding peace and joy in my heart, for I knew that He had willed it so.

Furthermore, God showed me that He was indeed caring and providing for me from His appointment of not only a God-fearing surgeon, but also a Christian medical oncologist, a Christian radiation oncologist and a Christian physiotherapist, who were all very forthcoming in encouraging me in the Lord. Some of them even prayed for me during my consultations with them. When my oncologist heard of my desire to attend the one-week church camp in June 2018, she took the effort to make changes to the chemotherapy schedule without disrupting the treatment plan, so that I could go for a time of spiritual feeding. The Lord's hand was unmistakably behind it all, and He truly led me all the way.

God Fulfils His Purposes

Several things that had come about due to this trial greatly encouraged and assured me of what I already knew—all things come to pass according to God's counsel and purpose (see Isa 46:9–11). I trusted that God has His good purposes to be fulfilled through this sickness and that He would reveal them to me by and by, in His own good time. In fact, I did not have any particular expectations concerning this for it was enough for me to know that God knows. I was already very thankful to God for I recognised that this trial was good for me that my faith might be tested and exercised, my life purified and dross removed, to the praise and glory of God. But God dealt most graciously with me. He showed me that beyond these, He was working out a higher purpose through this affliction.

The Lord led me to get acquainted with a fellow patient during one of my chemotherapy sessions. From our brief conversation, I found out that she was a Buddhist who was open to other religions. God placed

in me a desire to share the gospel with her someday. We exchanged phone numbers and started to communicate via text messages. Our paths crossed twice more in the following two weeks, and we were able to talk more as we sat side by side for chemotherapy. Through these conversations, God gave me the opportunity to share with her the peace, joy and trust I have in the Lord Jesus Christ, and my thankfulness to God in spite of the cancer. On that third meeting, I passed her two gospel tracts before I left. Little did I know that it was the last time our chemotherapy sessions would coincide. But God certainly knew and He, according to His sovereign plan, caused me to hand her the tracts at the time perfectly appointed by Him. Praise the Almighty God!

We continued to keep in contact through text messages. About three weeks after she had received the tracts, she shared her desire to want to know this God of mine for she could see that it was because of Him and His teachings that I was able to have such joy and strength amidst the difficulty. My heart was greatly gladdened when I read her message. I sincerely felt that perhaps one of God's purposes for afflicting me with cancer was to reach out to this one soul and that it was worth it all if I could just be used by God to point this soul to Christ! Subsequently, I was able to go to her house to give her a Bible as well as some Christian books and reading materials. By the mercies of God and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, she eventually came to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."* (2 Cor 4:7). All glory be to God!

Through the wonderful way in which God saved her, I saw that there is truly nothing accidental in the things that happen in our lives. God, the Creator of the heaven and the earth, is fully in control, and He will do absolutely what He has purposed in ways that are most mysterious and unfathomable to the finite human mind. I would never have met this lady—a businesswoman living the high life in society—if not for cancer. Indeed, as Isaiah 55:8, 9 says, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

Another unexpected result that came out of this trying period was the writing of songs that could only have been by God's grace. The Rev Timothy Tow had noted in his book *My Homiletic Swimming Pool* (1998),

the therapeutic effect that music has on the soul as observed in the case of the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 3:14, 15). I found this to be very true. Other than His precious Word, the Lord had also used many Christian hymns to encourage and comfort me during this trial. As I sang to myself hymns such as *All the Way My Saviour Leads Me*, *Jesus, I Am Resting*, *When I Can Read My Title Clear* and the children's song *Along the Road* (Mrs Tow had reminded me of this song that was taught many years ago in the children's choir), it was as if the words were the very outflowing of my thoughts and feelings.

On 8 May 2018, about a month after I began chemotherapy, I was reading the Bible and turned to Habakkuk 3:17–19. Somehow, the Lord led me to paraphrase the words of these verses to the tune of *O God, Our Help in Ages Past*, and a new hymn entitled *Yet I Will Rejoice* was born, praise the Lord! The Lord gave me another song that same day; this time with an original tune as I read and meditated on Psalm 57:1, 2. More hymns were penned and composed by God's grace and enabling, in the days and months that followed while I underwent chemotherapy and radiotherapy. I can truly echo the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 42:8, "*Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.*"

A number of the hymns were written in response to specific incidents that had happened. One such hymn is *Praise in Affliction*, which I had penned after a bout of infection that required me to be hospitalised. I wanted to remind myself to continue to praise God even when the situation seemed unfavourable and tough. The Lord gave me the words for *My Father's Plan Is Best* to counter the erroneous view—one that stems from a wrong understanding of Matthew 7:9–11—often held by the Charismatics that our loving heavenly Father, being the Giver of good gifts, would not afflict us with cancer. Good gifts are to be seen and understood from God's perspective, and not evaluated using the world's faulty reasoning. The hymn *Even So*, was written the day after God revealed His will for me to continue with the final two doses of chemotherapy. It reflected a "come what may" resolve to go on trusting the Lord even if the numbness in my fingers and toes would worsen.

I am encouraged by 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4, which says, "*Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort*

wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” I do not doubt that God in His infinite wisdom, has ordained this trial to come upon me for His good purposes to be fulfilled in my life. It is thus my prayer that the Lord would be pleased to use these hymns to bring comfort and encouragement to some who may be in beds of affliction, or in the midst of severe testing.

Conclusion

“I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.” (Ps 40:1–3)

By the grace and mercy of God, it has been more than two years since the completion of the main phase of treatment. The Lord has seen fit to preserve my life (see Ps 31:15), which can only mean that my work on earth is not done. Time would fail me to tell of all the spiritual lessons that I have learned, and all the wonderful things that God has done for me. But this one thing is sure: When God puts us through a trial, He will surely provide for us the grace to go through it victoriously—if Christ be magnified, whether it be by life or by death (see Phil 1:20–21; cf Heb 11:35). *“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”* (Rom 8:37). This same confidence was thus expressed by Daniel’s three friends, *“If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”* (Dan 3:17, 18).

Nevertheless, this confidence in life or death (see Rom 8:37–39), can only be had by those who *“are in Christ Jesus”* (Rom 8:1). I am therefore most thankful to God that I have been saved by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, who *“loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Gal 2:20). What blessed assurance to know that Jesus is my personal Saviour, interceding for me before my heavenly Father’s throne (see Heb 4:14–16)! Because of what Christ has done for me, I am able to know God personally. He enables me to *“walk by faith, not by sight”* (2 Cor 5:7), viewing all things through the lens of Holy Scripture, and interpreting all happenings from a heavenly perspective. Herein lies our duty: We must know our God well, so that our faith in Him will not falter

when the time of testing comes. And come it will, for it is written in Acts 14:22, “... *that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*” Thanks be to God then, that He has given us His perfect Word whereby we may know Him and wherein we can find all that we need to help us through our trials on this earth. We must therefore grow in our knowledge of God’s Word so that our faith in Him may also grow thereby.

Joycelyn Chng is a tutor in Church Music at Far Eastern Bible College where she earned her MDiv. She serves as full-time staff of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and ministers to the women inmates at Changi Prison.

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45th Graduation Service

FEBC’s 45th Graduation Service was held on Saturday, 14 November 2020, at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. The service was without its usual “pomp and circumstance” due to Covid-19 restrictions. Attendance was by invitation only. The Rev Dr Park Seung Kyu, the Principal of the Bible College of East Africa (BCEA) in Tanzania, was the graduation speaker. He spoke on the topic “Theological Education in a Disintegrating World” (2 Tim 4:1–5).

Twenty-five graduated with their hard-earned certificates: Certificate of Religious Knowledge (CertRK): Choy Hui Xian Eunice, Chui Ziyang Marcus, Jeffrey Setiawan, Low Boon Siang, Lucy Palusia; Certificate of Biblical Studies (CertBS): Chew Yoon Chong Winston, Tan Chung Huat Josiah; Diploma in Theology (DipTh): Jeong Young Joo, Kang Song Han, Jenerose Brava Sagayoc, Yong Choon Leong, Loreto Mulhay Yubat; Bachelor of Theology (BTh): Chew Kai Sheng David, Khoo May Lynn, Tadahito Yamazaki; Master of Religious Education (MRE): Abigail Sarah George, Mega Tuti Mawarniat Zega; Master of Divinity (MDiv): Choi Jeong Geun, Cornelius Koshy, Rachel Leong Ann Lee, Li Qicheng Kelvin, Maritus, Murniwati Mendrofa; Ra Chae Won; Doctor of Religious Education (DRE): Nelson Noel Ng’uono Were.

College News

Covid-19 Crisis

FEBC presses on in its ministry of biblical and theological education despite the lockdowns and restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. When the nation-wide “Circuit Breaker” took place on 8 April 2020, we were nearing the end of the semester and so the classes for the remaining two weeks before the exams were conducted online. The graduation service and annual retreat in Mersing had to be postponed.

During the mid-year vacation, most of the foreign students chose to remain in Singapore and did not return to their home country. The few who left found it most difficult to return given the travel restrictions imposed by Singapore and other countries. Hence, those who chose to stay chose the better part. During their stay, they were well taken care of—free room and board, three meals a day, seven days a week all provided for by the college. We thank some friends who sponsored dinner packets for the students especially on weekends. The students in turn were cooperative and kept the campus clean. Students also took turns to cook, and those who did not know how to cook had to learn. All students now know how to cook. This is all part of their missionary training. Thank God for the peace and safety we enjoyed on campus despite the lockdown.

Daily Vacation Bible College

DVBC is usually held during the week before Graduation Sunday. Dr Park Seung Kyu, Principal of the Bible College of East Africa (Tanzania) was to teach “The History of Fundamentalism.” The lockdown mantra—“Stay Home, Stay Safe”— meant that the course had to be offered online, together with three other courses—“The Sevenfold Will of God,” “Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology” and “Zechariah” by FEBC Principal Jeffrey Khoo. The courses were conducted from 11 May to 5 July 2020 free of charge. 818 students from 136 churches and 12 countries signed up for the courses, a good number for credit working towards the Certificate of Religious Knowledge (CertRK, 20 credits) or Certificate of Biblical Studies (CertBS, 40 credits).

Another DVBC was held from 16 November to 13 December 2020 at the end-of-year vacation. Four courses were offered: (1) Harmony of the Gospels by Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo, (2) Thinking and Study Skills by Carol Lee, (3) Biblical Phonetics by Joycelyn Chng, and (4) Writing and

Speaking Clearly by Judith D'Silva. Only "Harmony of the Gospels" was offered online for all, while the other three were conducted at the FEBC Hall strictly for full-time students.

Total Enrolment

Total enrolment in the July–November 2020 semester was 673: 33 fulltime and 640 part-time students (day classes: 249, night classes: 174, distance learning: 217). The day and night classes are livestreamed. **Students enrolled from 14 countries:** Australia, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. There were no new students last semester. The immigration authorities did not respond to our application for student passes. Some students who went back home during the college vacation found it difficult to come back for classes.

Faculty and Courses



The lecturers/tutors and courses offered this semester are: Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo: Life of Christ I; Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew: Hebrew Reading I, Homiletics, OT History II, Hermeneutics (night class, live stream); Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy: Theology of Prayer, Systematic Theology III (night class, live stream); Rev Stephen Khoo: Nehemiah; Rev Tan Kian Sing: 1 Thessalonians (live stream); Mrs Jemima Khoo: Teaching Methods, Beginner Pianoforte; Miss Carol Lee: Youth Christian Education, Women in the Bible (live stream); Rev Dr Jose Lagapa: Acts of the Apostles (live stream); Rev Clement Chew: Hebrew Elementary I; Mr Samuel Joseph: Greek Reading I; Mr Joshua Yong: Contemporary Theology I (live stream); Rev Dr Park Seung Kyu:

Intertestamental History (live stream); Mr Zhu Jianwei: Systematic Theology I (Chinese, night class, live stream); Mrs Irene Lim: English Intermediate II; and Eld Han Soon Juan: English Advanced II.

The College Matron Mrs Ivy Tow, now 82 years of age, has decided to stop teaching Greek. Khoo May Lynn, who has just graduated with her BTh, is now full-time Staff Assistant.

Wedding Bells

We congratulate Shobastian (MDiv 2018) and Murniwati (MDiv 2020) who were joined in holy matrimony on 8 August 2020, Joshua Yong (ThM 2016) and Ho Xiaowei (MDiv 2011) on August 22, Cornelius Koshy (MDiv 2020) and Abigail Sarah George (MRE 2020) on December 11.



Proverbs 18:22 says, *“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.”*

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Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness

FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE
45th Graduation Service
Class of 2020
Graduates & Students



O Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness

FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE

45th Graduation Service

Class of 2020

Faculty and Graduates

