



Bible-Presbyterianism

History & Theology

FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE

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BIBLE-PRESBYTERIANISM: HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.” (Jer 6:16).

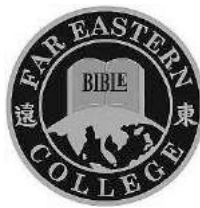
With the passing of the founding fathers of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore, namely, the Rev Dr Timothy Tow (d 2009), the Rev Quek Kiok Chiang (d 2015) and Dr SH Tow (d 2019), the next generation of Bible-Presbyterian leaders and members need to uphold the good old faith by imbibing the founding spirit and ethos of their pioneering forebears and appreciating the roots and fruits of their Bible-Presbyterian faith and practice.

Sadly, a new generation is emerging that seeks to undermine the beliefs and practices of our founding fathers especially those of Timothy Tow and SH Tow. These Bible-Presbyterians who were at the centre of the controversy that resulted in the split of the Bible-Presbyterian Church and the dissolution of the Bible-Presbyterian Synod in 1988 had just released a book called *Heritage & Legacy of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore* to tell “their side of the story”. It is really their attempt to rewrite history and redefine doctrines.

Can we keep quiet and say nothing? We are reminded of the words of Mordecai, *“For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esth 4:14).* We cannot be silent!

Thankfully, our founding pastors and leaders had bequeathed to us a trove of books and articles and other documents which reveal clearly their beliefs and convictions. It goes without saying that as true Bible-Presbyterians, there is a need to revisit and revive the history and theology of our good old Bible-Presbyterian faith—to address and defend Bible-Presbyterianism in the light and authority of the Holy Scriptures.

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.” (Heb 13:7-8). The Apostle Paul told young Timothy, *“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” (1 Tim 4:16).* We can do no less.



HISTORY OF BIBLE-PRESBYTERIANISM

Jeffrey Khoo

1a. The Bible-Presbyterian Church

1b. The four major church denominations in Singapore are the Anglican, Methodist, Brethren and Presbyterian—known as the “Big Four”.

2b. Out of the fourth arose the Bible-Presbyterian Church. In the history of Singapore Churches, the Bible-Presbyterian Church figures prominently.

1c. Singapore Church historian Bobby Sng wrote, “In the 1950s, four new groups made their appearance: the Lutherans, Baptists, CNEC and the Bible-Presbyterians. By 1964, these four had initiated a total of 222 other new congregations, two more than the Big Four. This growth was all the more remarkable as, unlike the Big Four, this new generation of churches did not have any previous network of churches to rely on. They had to start from virtually nothing. They succeeded in growing because their more vigorous evangelistic efforts enabled them to tap the vast potential among the younger generation. A casual visit to any one of these churches in the 50s would have impressed one with the high proportion of youths in their midst—sometimes as much as 95% of the congregation.” (*In His Good Time* [Singapore: Graduates’ Christian Fellowship, 1993], 241).

2c. Another reason for prominence was the battle for the faith against liberalism. Sng recounted, “The end of the War brought about a kaleidoscopic change in the church scene. It saw the emergence of a new generation of Christians who were not only theologically alive but who also refused to remain passive. Compelled by a burden to remain true to the Word of God, they chose to challenge the liberals.... By the early 50s, the battle for truth had exploded in Singapore with a ferocity that surprised many.” (*In His Good Time*, 244).

3c. It was the Bible-Presbyterian Church who took the lead in the battle for truth. Sng wrote, “Among the many people who responded to the gospel at John Sung’s meetings in 1935 were two young boys, both China-born and coming from godly family backgrounds. Few realized then that within 20 year [sic] these two young men would be blazing a trail in the church’s fight against liberal theology, affecting the lives of hundreds of Christians.” (*In His Good Time*, 244). The two young men were Timothy Tow and Quek Kiok Chiang.

3b. As can be seen above, the spiritual success of the Bible-Presbyterian Church was due the application of the double-edged Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God itself (Heb 4:12). And the two edges consists of (1) the Gospel and its evangelism (Matt

28:18-20) and (2) the Truth and its defence (Jude 3).

1c. Keith Hinton, former lecturer at Singapore Bible College, wrote, "... in 1950, Timothy Tow, influenced by the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC), broke from the Presbyterian Church to form the new and rapidly growing Bible Presbyterian denomination. By 1971 it had 13 congregations and 828 members, increasing by 1983 to 27 congregations and 4,105 active members." (*Growing Churches Singapore Style* [Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1985], 27).

2c. Hinton wrote, "In 1950, Rev Quek Kiok Chiang and Dr Timothy Tow formed the first Bible Presbyterian Church. Their strong drive, convictions on doctrine and separation, mission and evangelism, have enabled them, from their position of executive power, to build, direct and discipline a denomination that in 32 years has grown..." (*Growing Churches Singapore Style*, 128).

3c. The Bible-Presbyterian Churches in Singapore have increased in number since. In 2019, there are a total of 43 Bible-Presbyterian Churches in Singapore (35 English, 7 Chinese, 1 Tamil) with about 20,000 members (Wikipedia, sv "Bible-Presbyterian Churches (Singapore)").

4c. Dean Kelley of the United Methodist Church and former Director of Civil and Religious Liberty at the National Council of Churches (USA) observed that in America, "the fundamentalists and Pentecostals increased their numbers at about the same rate as the mainline churches' decrease.... These groups not only give evidence that religion is not obsolete and churches not defunct, but they contradict the contemporary notion of an acceptable religion. They are not 'reasonable,' they are not 'tolerant,' they are not ecumenical, they are not 'relevant.' Quite the contrary!" (*Why Conservative Churches are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion* [New York: Harper & Row, 1972], 25).

4b. The Bible-Presbyterian Church's history and theology is a most worthwhile study in view of the

1c. Past: We need to know who we are (identity) and what we are in God's providence (history) and in the light of God's Word (theology).

2c. Present: The undermining of Bible-Presbyterianism by a new organisation called "Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore" (BPCIS) and its new book *Heritage and Legacy of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore* (Singapore: Finishing Well Ministries, 2018) edited by Chua Choon Lan, Quek Swee Hua and David Wong. They attempt to revise the history and doctrine of the Bible-Presbyterian Church.

3c. Future: The need for this and future generation to know their spiritual forefathers and their biblical-theological foundations so that they will be able discern between what is and what is not Bible-Presbyterianism.

5b. The Good Old Bible-Presbyterianism: *“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.”* (Jer 6:16).

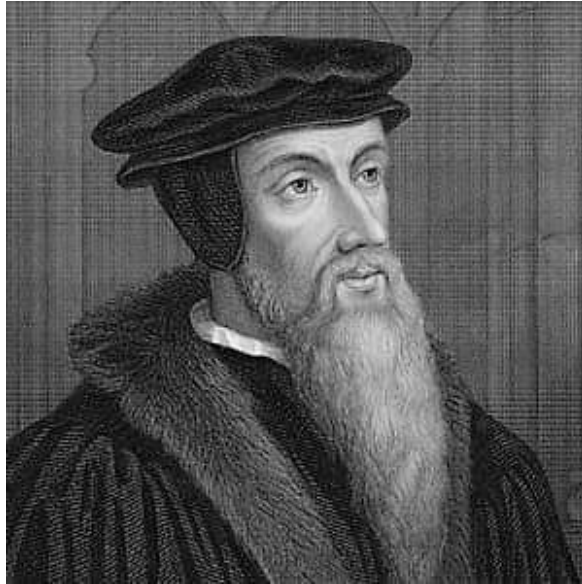
2a. Roots of the Bible-Presbyterian Church

1b. The Rev Dr Timothy Tow, founding father of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore, said that the Bible-Presbyterian Church has seven roots: (1) French (John Calvin), (2) English (English Presbyterian Mission), (3) Scottish (William C Burns), (4) German (Dr Rudolf Lechler), (5) Chinese (Dr John Sung), (6) American (Dr Carl McIntire), and (7) Singapore (*The Singapore B-P Church Story* [Singapore: Life Book Centre, 1995], 9-18).



2b. For our present study which seeks to connect theology with history, I will just focus on five of the seven roots: 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7. For each root we will consider these three things: (1) Origins, (2) Doctrines and (3) Practices. To a certain extent, they all intertwine.

1c. French (John Calvin)



1d. Origins

1e. 16th Century Protestant Reformation

1f. “The Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore is first of all a Protestant Church. That brings us back immediately to the 16th Century Reformation when our spiritual forefathers broke the shackles of Rome to return to the apostolic faith; to the faith of an open Bible, liberated from all erroneous and tyrannical traditions of a man-made system.” (*The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 9-10).

2f. The Reformation produced two main schools of theology: Lutheran and Reformed. “Insofar as the Bible-Presbyterian Church is concerned, we trace our roots to that branch of Protestantism known as the Reformed Faith on the European continent, and as Presbyterianism in the British Isles.” (Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 11).

2e. John Calvin

1f. The Reformed school is the Calvinistic school. “John Calvin (1509-1564), a French theologian and pastor, was the leader of the Reformed Faith,... The beauty and perfection of Reformed theology is seen in Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.” (Tow, *The Singapore B-P*

Church Story, 11).

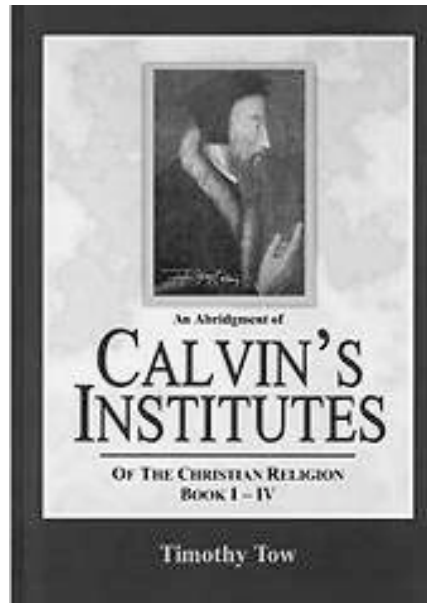
2d Doctrines

1e. Five Solas: (1) *Sola Gratia*, (2) *Sola Fide*, (3) *Solus Christus*, (4) *Sola Scriptura*, (5) *Soli Deo Gloria*.

2e. Five Points of Calvinism (TULIP): (1) Total Depravity, (2) Unconditional Election, (3) Limited Atonement, (4) Irresistible Grace, (5) Perseverance of the Saints.

3d. Practices

1e. *An Abridgment of Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion* by the Rev Dr Timothy Tow published by the Far Eastern Bible College Press in 1997.



2e. "The writer of this Abridgment was first introduced to Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* while a student of Faith Theological Seminary, USA. What was offered as an elective, he discovered to his delight to be a gem of the greatest price. This led him to pursue through the voluminous work on his own, and to re-study it in latter years. Through Calvin's inspirational teaching (his emblem is a heart offered to the Lord) of 'the true and substantial wisdom which principally consists of the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves,' this writer has found a new, radiant confidence for living in perilous end-

times like these. For, Calvin has taught, as no other theologian, that 'salvation is **of the Lord**' (Jonah 2:9).

"Reading Calvin's *Institutes*, however, is like going through a ten-course Chinese dinner. The feast he spreads is so sumptuous that it takes no little time to imbibe. In order to render the *Institutes* more assimilable to students of Far Eastern Bible College, the writer has made this Abridgment for their guidance, chapter by chapter." (*An Abridgment of Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vi).

3e. Calvin's *Institutes* is now taught in two parts at FEBC, and compulsory for all students. Four credits total.

2c. English (English Presbyterian Mission)

1d. Origins

1e. The English Presbyterian Mission is Reformed in faith, and sent missionaries to our ancestors in South China especially in Swatow and Amoy.

2e. The English Presbyterian Mission established Swatow Hospital where Tow Keng Kee (Timothy Tow's father) received his medical training and earned his licence to practise medicine in 1911.



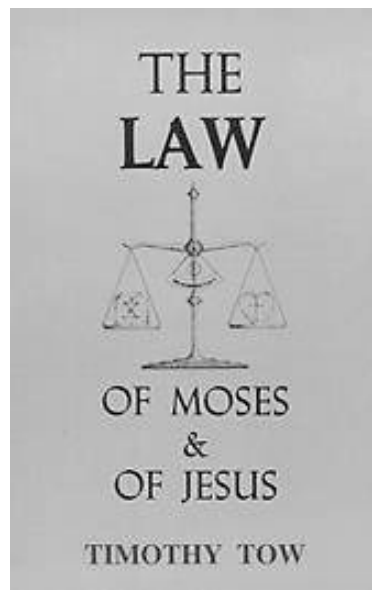
3e. When the Tow clan migrated to Malaya and later Singapore, Tow Khi Hien (Timothy Tow's grandfather) became an evangelist of the English Presbyterian Mission and later

became a pastor of an English Presbyterian Church at Upper Serangoon Road and even pastored Glory Presbyterian Church—the oldest Chinese Church in Singapore—for a season (Timothy Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow* [Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, 2001], 31, 57-59).

2d. Doctrines

1e. As English Presbyterians, we subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith with its Larger and Shorter Catechisms (1643-46) “which are the standards of the B-P Church as well as of many other Bible-believing Presbyterian Churches around the world. Nevertheless, it is the Bible, the infallible and inerrant Word of God, that is our supreme rule of faith and practice. Hence the name Bible-Presbyterian.” (Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 10).

2e. As Presbyterians and as affirmed in the Westminster Confession, we hold to Covenant Theology and not Dispensationalism (WCF Chapter 7). See Timothy Tow, *The Law of Moses and of Jesus* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1986) which was his STM thesis at Faith Theological Seminary.



3e. As a Confessional Church, we uphold the Verbal Plenary Inspiration (VPI) and Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) of the Holy Scriptures as affirmed in WCF Chapter 1.8, “The Old Testament in Hebrew ... and the New Testament in Greek ...

being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical, so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them."

4e. With the modern attack on the present perfection of the Scriptures by textual criticism and the modern versions, Bible-Presbyterian Churches which believe and defend Biblical infallibility and inerrancy with the Far Eastern Bible College affirm the present authenticity and absolute authority of the Scriptures thusly:

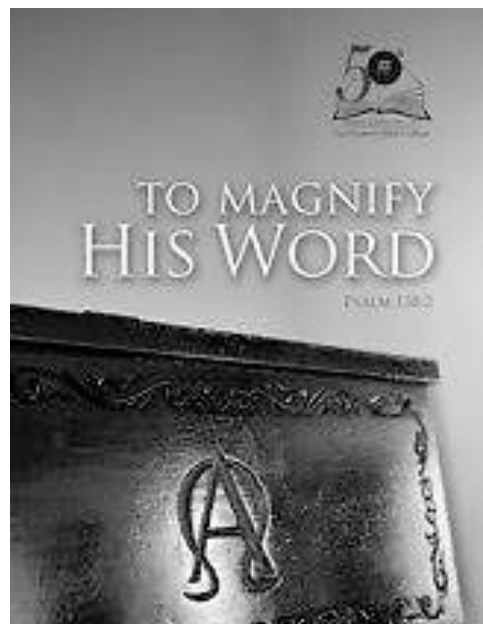
1f. "We believe in the divine, Verbal Plenary Inspiration (Autographs) and Verbal Plenary Preservation (Apographs) of the Scriptures in the original languages, their consequent inerrancy and infallibility, and as the perfect Word of God, the supreme and final authority in faith and life (2 Tim 3:16,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

2f. "We believe the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament underlying the Authorised (King James) Version to be the very Word of God, infallible and inerrant."

3f. "We uphold the Authorised (King James) Version to be the Word of God—the best, most faithful, most accurate, most beautiful translation of the Bible in the English language, and do employ it alone as our primary scriptural text in the public reading, preaching, and teaching of the English Bible."

4f. On account of the above statement of faith, Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, in an attempt to evict the College from 9A Gilstead Road, sued the Board of Directors of Far Eastern Bible College in the year 2008. Life Church claimed that FEBC is a new College with a new doctrine which they say is "heresy" and thus had no right to remain in the premises. In "Khoo Jeffrey and others v Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and others [2011] SGCA 18", the Court of Appeal in Singapore ruled judiciously that "the College in adopting the VPP doctrine, has not deviated from the fundamental

principles which guide and inform the work of the College right from its inception, and as expressed in the Westminster Confession...It is not inconsistent for a Christian who believes fully in the principles contained within the Westminster Confession (and the VPI doctrine) to also subscribe to the VPP doctrine." See *To Magnify His Word*, Far Eastern Bible College, Golden Jubilee Yearbook, 2012, 264-278. See also Wikipedia sv "*Khoo Jeffrey and others v Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and others*" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khoo_Jeffrey_and_others_v_Life_Bible-Presbyterian_Church_and_others).

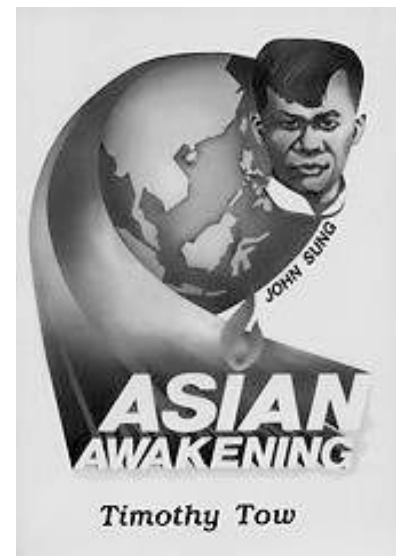
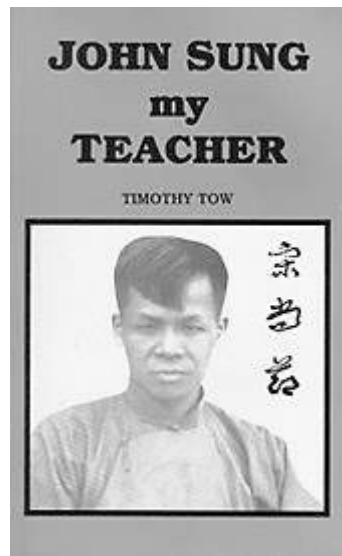


3d. Practices

1e. From the English Presbyterians was inherited the Presbyterian form of Church government. The Church is governed by a plurality of teaching and ruling elders.

2e. "The special characteristic of the English Presbyterians is their Non-conformist stance vis-à-vis the established Church, ie the Church of England with her bishops and Archbishop. Since our English forebears believed that the Church should be governed by elders or presbyters according to the Scriptures" (*The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 10-11).

3c. Chinese (Dr John Sung)



1d. Origins

1e. “In 1935 Singapore was visited (August-September) and revisited (October) with a Pentecost whereby 2,000 nominal Christians were soundly converted through the ministry of Dr John Sung, PhD, a mighty revivalist God had raised for China and Southeast Asia. Under his ministry the founding fathers of the B-P Church of Singapore were not only saved but also called to full-time service.” (Tow. *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 15).

2e. For a full account of Timothy Tow’s conversion (and of the others), read “The Singapore Pentecost” in Tow’s autobiography *Son of a Mother’s Vow* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, 2001), 63-84.

2d. Doctrines

1e. Premillennialism

1f. “From Dr John Sung our founding fathers were introduced to the doctrine of the Premillennial Return of Christ” (*The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 15).

2f. “A thorough student of the Bible, John Sung knew the Old Testament as well as the New. His sermon texts ranged through every book of the Bible. A Premillennialist, believing in the soon coming of Christ,

he would expound Daniel or Revelation in his follow-up 'spiritual nurture' meeting after every revival campaign. These Bible-study sessions, like the revival meetings, would last two hours each session, three times a day.

"Though the Bible was his only textbook, John Sung could have used a Scofield Reference Bible, as reflected in the dates of authorship and other dates in his Homilies on the whole Bible. If he had consulted the Scofield Bible, he did not show any trace of Dispensationalism in his teachings. He strongly emphasised the holiness of God by quoting the Ten Commandments, and denounced sins by their families under each Commandment. And since the wages of sin is death, he spoke often on the theme of Heaven and Hell" (Timothy Tow, *Asian Awakening* [Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, 1988], 38-39).

2e. Arminianism

1f. "In his theological position, John Sung was an Arminian. But he rejected the doctrine of 'sinless perfection', nor did he quarrel with Calvinism and Predestination." (Tow, *Asian Awakening*, 39).

3d. Practices

1e. Apologetics

1f. "It is evident from a study of John Sung's life that God had sent him to Union Seminary, to taste the bitterness of liberal theology that he might find the grace and truth of the living Saviour the sweeter. From a failure to obtain salvation in the sages and sutras of the Orient, it made him treasure all the more the Word of God. Through all his conflicts with a false Christianity on one hand and human religions on the other, John Sung's solution to the problems of life, now and beyond, was the Bible. More than ever a fundamentalist after conversion, believing the Bible to be the infallible and inerrant Word of God, he took a strong stand against higher critics. Once when he was confronted by missionaries who denied the truthfulness of Genesis and the efficacy of the Blood of Christ, he quoted Confucius by way of contrast.

Confucius (551-478 BC) said, 'If I hear the Truth in the morning, I am prepared to die in the evening.' Commented John Sung, 'Had Confucius lived in Christ's day, he would have become a Christian.' With his former encounters with Fosdick, it was an old game to cross swords with liberal missionaries in the fields." (Tow, *Asian Awakening*, 38).

2f. Timothy Tow: "A College that is called a Bible College is called to defend the Bible." That was why he referred to FEBC as a "spiritual SAFTI". SAFTI stands for Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute.

2e. Homiletics

1f. "Though he had visions and dreams during the days of spiritual conflict, he rarely referred to them in his sermons, except his conversion experience." (Tow, *Asian Awakening*, 38).

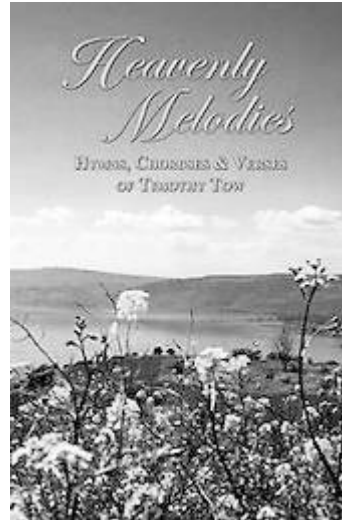
2f. "Dr Sung excelled in allegorical and biographical sermons.... Oftentimes he would act out his sermon on the pulpit platform. On other occasions, he would draw cartoons on the blackboard. Like the prophets of old, now told to carry a yoke, and now to smash an earthen vessel before their hearers, he used many visual aids of his own innovation. Apart from a French loaf and a miniature Chinese coffin..., I can recollect him wearing the rags of a Chinese gown to represent sin and a linen-white one for our righteousness in Christ. For the Holy Spirit he would use a little bell which he rang vigorously to show how a born again person is disturbed by sin under conviction." (Tow, *Asian Awakening*, 42).

3f. FEBC students are taught the four forms of effective speech: Statement, Restatement, Illustration and Testimony, not forgetting Application!

3e. Music

1f. "Another observation I have made of John Sung's homiletics is the employment of music. If Martin Luther has regarded music as being next to theology. John Sung made it at one with theology. For every message he

preached he would have an appropriate chorus to sing at intervals.” (Tow, *Asian Awakening*, 42). The hymns that Rev Timothy Tow in the steps of John Sung are published in *Heavenly Melodies* (Singapore: True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, 2017).



2f. BPCIS say that music is a non-essential. They say that decisions on type of music should be left to individual churches. They say contemporary songs of worship with which the younger generation readily identifies should be allowed. They also say that electric guitars and drums are not objectionable (Chua, *Heritage and Legacy*, 515). However, going with our Reformation fathers and the John Sung revivals, where music and songs must be solidly biblical and theologically grounded and should assist in doctrinal education, the traditional and conservative Bible-Presbyterians resist the modern, neo-evangelical and charismatic crowd in ditching the good old hymns for the sentimental and rock-and-pop choruses and songs of today.

4e. Baptism

1f. “As to the mode of baptism, he naturally sprinkled.... In Hong Kong, however, he went under the water in a Baptist Church to identify himself with the Baptists,... Now that he was immersed, the missionary of that Church asked him to baptize twenty-one women and twelve men, which he did. ...badgered by

controversialists on both sides of the Baptism question, I can see him with that impish smile, 'Well if you want it from me, More faith, less water; less faith, more water.'"

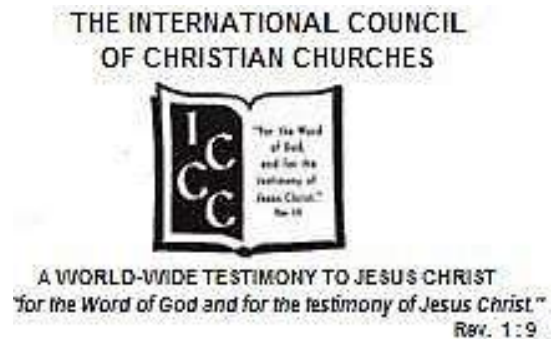
2f. Bible-Presbyterians do not require Baptists to be rebaptised if they want to transfer membership to our churches. However, they should understand and accept the biblical reasons for sprinkling and infant baptism, and be willing to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith and our other statements of faith.

5e. Evangelism

The spirit of evangelism was inherited from the John Sung Revival. Tow recounted, "John Sung was ever confident of a big catch of souls every time he preached. He preached for decision, which was helped by his moving appeal to receive Christ openly. After we were delivered, we were challenged to join the Preaching Bands, covenanting with God to go out at least once a week, most appropriately on the Lord's Day afternoon, to witness for Christ. The Preaching Bands truly became the hands and feet of the Church. Many souls were brought into the kingdom through a new wave of witnessing." (*Asian Awakening*, 33).



4c. American (Dr Carl McIntire)



1d. Origins

1e. “When Timothy Tow Siang Hui, founding pastor of the B-P Church was called to prepare himself for his life’s calling, he first learned under Dr Chia Yu Ming, doyen Presbyterian theologian of China in Nanking, and Dr A B Dodd, missionary to China... [Through them] he was introduced to Faith Theological Seminary, USA. Being an independent Seminary, nevertheless established by leaders of the Bible Presbyterian Church...in the old Princeton tradition, its more outstanding distinctive was its separatist position vis-à-vis the rising Ecumenical Movement under liberal and modernist leadership.

“Dr Carl McIntire, president of the Seminary Board and a founding father of the Bible Presbyterian Church, USA, was particularly articulate in speaking against Protestantism’s sliding back to Rome. So, he sounded a clarion call for a 20th Century Reformation, which became organized as the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) in Amsterdam in 1948. The same year the Ecumenical Movement was established in the same

City as the World Council of Churches. (Note that the WCC is not Christian!)...”.

“When the challenge to join the 20th Century Reformation was given by Dr McIntire to Faith Seminary students, the founding pastor of the B-P Church, Singapore, Timothy Tow, then a junior, felt God’s call to join the movement... Thus, in our Stand for the Faith, we can trace to Dr Carl McIntire, leader of the Bible Presbyterians and president of the ICCC, who must be acknowledged our American Root.” (Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 16-17).



2e. Biographies

1f. A biography of Dr Carl McIntire was penned by Gladys Titzck Rhoads and Nancy Titzck Anderson titled *McIntire: Defender of Faith and Freedom* (USA: Xulon Press, 2012). Rhoads in the book’s preface gave the reason for this biography, “Although esteemed around the world, even by many heads of state, Dr. Carl McIntire was one of the most criticized men in his own country. Americans are well known for their love of fair play, so we want to tell another side of the story. This biography is written with

the encouragement, cooperation and written contributions of many who knew Carl McIntire best—members of his congregation, family, and friends—in an attempt to set the record straight for posterity.” (Available at Amazon.com, US\$28.58, paperback).

2f. A biography critical of McIntire was written by Markku Ruotsila focusing on how McIntire impacted American politics especially his fight against Communism. The book is called *Fighting Fundamentalist: Carl McIntire and the Politicization of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

3f. See also *The McIntire Memorial* published in 2005 by the Executive/Standing Committee of the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) edited by John Dekker, Ovid Hepler, Edwin Ormeo, Frank Mood, and KC Quek. McIntire lived from 1906 to 2002 and led the ICCC from 1948 to 2002. Available at the Timothy Tow Memorial Library (FEBC).

2d. Doctrines

1e. Reformed Theology

1f. As stated in our French Root, Bible-Presbyterians trace our theology back to John Calvin of the 16th Century Protestant Reformation.

2f. However, the term “Reformed” is quite nebulous today. This is because those who claim to be Reformed are not really so. Church historian George Marsden wrote, “‘Reformed’ has numerous differing connotations. In the United States alone there are about a dozen Reformed denominations and perhaps another half-dozen with a Reformed heritage. Within each of the Reformed denominations varieties of meanings are given to being ‘Reformed.’ These may reflect European traditions, such as Scottish or Dutch, or continental neoorthodox, as well as a variety of American developments. Each such type includes differing subtypes. For instance, within the Reformed Church in America alone, ten distinct approaches to the Reformed faith have been identified.

Differences across denominational lines may be sharper. A strictly confessional member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (Covenanters) might be most unhappy with the preaching at Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral. A fundamentalist Bible Presbyterian would refuse fellowship with almost any member of the United Church of Christ. And within most of the larger Reformed denominations, conservatives and progressives are locked in intense struggles over the true meaning of the faith." (David F Wells, ed, *Reformed Theology in America: A History of Its Modern Development* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997], 1).

3f. Indeed, the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore suffers the same malaise. The name "Bible-Presbyterian" has all but lost its meaning and significance when certain parts of its history, doctrines and ethos have been revised and redefined by the more liberal or neo-evangelical parties within its denomination. For instance, a number of Bible-Presbyterian Churches (seven to be exact) have anomalously called themselves "Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore" (BPCIS). See Chua Choon Lan, gen ed, *Heritage and Legacy of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore* (Singapore: Finishing Well Ministries, 2018), 510-517. It is worth noting that the main leaders of this group of churches—Rev Dr Quek Swee Hwa and Rev Dr David Wong, played a significant role in the dissolution of the Bible-Presbyterian Synod in 1988 because of their compromising views on Bible versions, tongues-speaking, and biblical separation. Dr S H Tow, Senior Pastor of Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church, rightly observed, "What's a 'B-P'? The name of the game today is to play by rules of one's own making. Time-honoured names continue to be worn by those who play a different game." (Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 220; read the whole discussion in Appendix A).

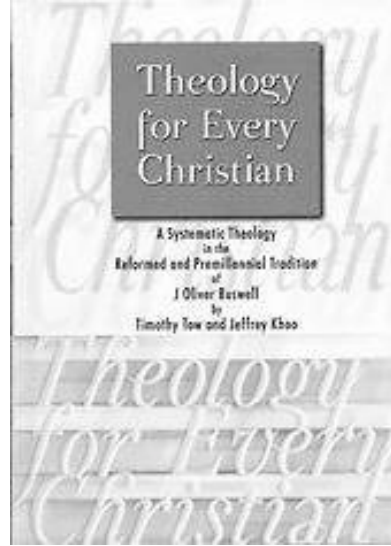
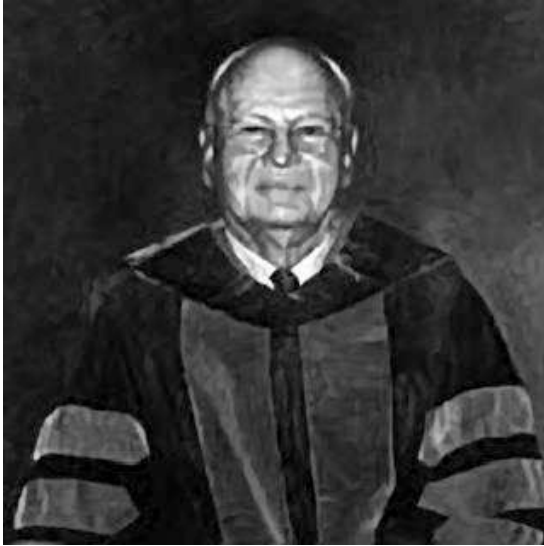
2e. Pro-Israel Premillennialism

1f. Premillennialism, ie Christ will return to judge this wicked world and then reign on earth for a thousand years (Rev 20:6) is an essential doctrine of the Bible-Presbyterian Faith. "Disputes about dispensationalism

revealed two distinct camps within the leadership of the OPC—one side Old School Presbyterian in outlook, the other fundamentalist. The Old School party, led by Machen, consisted of the majority of Westminster's faculty, many of whom came from non-American Reformed traditions such as Scottish Presbyterianism (John Murray), and Dutch Calvinism (Cornelius Van Til, Ned B. Stonehouse, and R. B. Kuiper). This group was characterized by a high regard for the Westminster Confession, Presbyterian polity, and Reformed piety (e.g., liberty in various matters such as beverage alcohol and tobacco,...). The fundamentalist party was led by Carl McIntire, J. Oliver Buswell, and Allan MacRae,...Though Buswell and MacRae disavowed the dispensationalist label, this group was premillennialist...They also...promoted a form of piety that featured abstinence from liquor, tobacco, movies, dancing, and cards." (D G Hart and John Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight* [Philadelphia: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1995], 46-47).

2f. J Oliver Buswell's Systematic Theology demonstrates the biblical grounds for premillennialism. See Jeffrey Khoo's "Dispensational Premillennialism in Reformed Theology" which was presented at the 52nd Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November 15-17, 2000 in Nashville Tennessee and subsequently published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 697-717, and republished in *Theology for Every Christian: A Systematic Theology in the Reformed and Premillennial Tradition of J Oliver Buswell* by Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2007). 470-505.

3f. It is important to note that the premillennialism of the Bible-Presbyterian Church sees a distinction between Israel and the Church. Bible-Presbyterianism affirms Covenant Theology and the Reformed tenets of divine sovereignty and covenant faithfulness for sure. As such, it sees consistency in God's covenant promises not only to His Church but also His chosen nation Israel (Rom 11:26) in contradistinction to amillennialism, postmillennialism and so-called historic premillennialism.



3d. Practices

1e. McIntire's 95 "Theses"

"In a book of quotations from Dr McIntire's ministry titled 'Freedom Is My Business' compiled on the occasion of his 50th anniversary in the Bible Presbyterian Church of Collingswood, New Jersey, October 1, 1933 to October 2, 1983, there are found the following statements on the Bible Presbyterian Church vis-à-vis the apostasy from which it separated." (Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 41-44):

1f. "When our church was formed in 1937, the word 'Bible' was placed in front of the name 'Presbyterian' because the great fundamentalist-modernist controversy had centred around the Bible."

2f. "Distinctions which give birth to the various branches of the visible church are valid and cannot be minimized, for they are based upon the solid conviction that there is such a thing as truth and that it is the duty of God's people to search it out."

3f. "The Bible Presbyterian Church is a militant church in the defense of the faith."

4f. "The Bible Presbyterian Church is a Bible preaching and evangelistic church."

5f. “The Bible Presbyterian Church is a confessional church. It accepts the historic Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.”

6f. “We are in the midst of a 20th century reformation which will do to a large sector of the Protestant church, with its departures from the confession of Peter, exactly what the 16th century Reformation did to the Roman Catholic church in its misrepresentation of the confession of Peter.”

7f. “The Neo-Evangelicals have deserted the battle to preserve a militant church.”

8f. “Believers and non-believers cannot have Christian unity.”

9f. “A false love is Satan’s tool to promote compromise and disobedience to Christ’s command.

10f. “The independent-agency structure which the Bible Presbyterian Church maintains has produced a decentralization and a genuine liberty which enables the faithful and non-political promotion of true doctrine.”

11f. “The [Neo]-evangelicals who work and hold fellowship with the modernist unbelievers are more abusive and do more harm to the cause of the Gospel and the purity of the church than the liberals themselves.”

12f. “The Church of Christ simply cannot be preserved without emphasis upon separation from the world and from apostasy.”

13f. “The churches need first reformation or separation, before evangelism.”

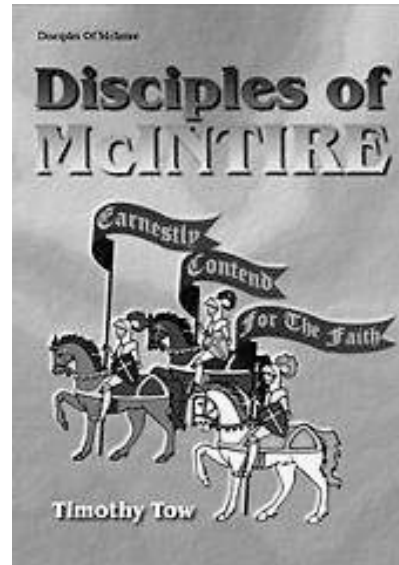
14f. “The marks of a true church are faithful preaching of the Word of God, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline. The means of grace for the blessing and the strengthening of the people of God are the Word of God, prayer, and the sacraments.”

2e. Against Billy Graham, Neo-Evangelicalism and Ecumenical Evangelism

1f. Dr McIntire said that Billy Graham had become "a cover for the apostates." (New York Times News Service, *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 2002). The Rev Timothy Tow likewise saw the danger in the compromises of Billy Graham and took a stand against him. He was sorely persecuted by his own for that.

2f. A Dissentious Spirit (1968-1969): "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 fraternize 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,... On and off the problem of Billy Graham cropped up which the Far Eastern Beacon serialized J.A. Johnson's book on Billy Graham—'the Jehoshaphat of Our Generation'. The historic position of Life Church and of the Bible-Presbyterian Church movement in this respect was libelled even by the Taiwanese assistant of the Chinese Service. The opposition in Life Church Session against the pastor increased from one or two dissenters to several...

"The spirit of dissension against the uncompromising, separatist stand of the Church manifested itself in the new building project. When plans for the three-storey Church-and-College extension incorporating a kindergarten were approved in February 1968, the same Session members, who were unhappy over the Billy Graham issue, opposed the launching of building operations. This opposition was of no avail, for God's good hand was upon His own work.... The three-storey [extension] Block was completed in exactly one year." (Timothy Tow, *Disciples of McIntire* [Singapore: FEBC Press, 2002], 60-62).



3f. “Birds of a feather flock together”. Now, the new Bible-Presbyterians mainly from the “Mountain” churches (esp Zion and Carmel) in their recent book *Heritage and Legacy* (146-148) have resumed criticising our founding father’s stand against Billy Graham. They favour Graham and oppose Tow. It reveals their neo-evangelical colours which brought about the schism in the past and the division in the present. See my critique of *Heritage and Legacy* in “Biblical Separation of Bible-Presbyterianism” with full documentation (forthcoming in *The Burning Bush*, July 2019).

4f. Documentation of Billy Graham’s compromise and eventual apostasy can be found in the following:

1g. J A Johnson, *Billy Graham—the Jehoshaphat of Our Generation?* (Bangalore: Berean Publications, nd).

2g. Ian R K Paisley, *Billy Graham and the Church of Rome* (Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 1972).

3g. Brad K Gsell, *The Legacy of Billy Graham* (Charlotte: Fundamental Presbyterian Publications, 1998).

4g. Wilson Ewin, *The Assimilation of Evangelist*

Billy Graham into the Roman Catholic Church (Canada: Quebec Baptist Missions, 1992).

5g. Ian Brown, *Billy Graham: Custodian of the Faith or Figure of Compromise?* (Londonderry: np, 1991).

6g. Robert E Kofahl, "Billy Graham Believes Catholic Doctrine of Salvation Without Bible, Gospel, or Name of Christ," transcript of the interview of Billy Graham by Robert Schuller (<http://www.biblebb.com/files/tonyqa/tc00-105.htm>).

5f. New B-P's Denial

1g. The new Bible-Presbyterians deny that they had compromised or are compromising the faith. They appeal to their "right of private conscience" (*Heritage and Legacy*, 445). We have never denied anyone their right to their personal conscience, but whether that conscience is governed by God's Spirit and God's Word is altogether another matter. The Bible warns against having a bad one—one that is seared or defiled (1 Tim 4:2, Tit 1:15).

2g. Dr McIntire "had to defend his Biblical viewpoint over and over again reminding people, 'What men believe determines what they do and where they stand.' He maintained, 'Separation is a Bible word, it is a Bible command, it is a Bible doctrine.'

"...Yet those who engage in compromise are the strongest in their denials that they are compromising. Like King Saul, they assert [that they have obeyed] 'the commandment of the Lord,' and when Samuel questions, 'What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?' the answer is, 'The people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God.' The testimony of the Lord remains the same

throughout the centuries, 'Hath the Lord as great a delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.'" (Rhoads and Anderson, *McIntire*, 229).

3g. How can these New Bible-Presbyterians claim to be "original" B-Ps when they speak so differently from and disparagingly of their Singaporean and American founding fathers?

3e. Total Abstinence

1f. One of the practical distinctives of the Bible-Presbyterian Church is total abstinence from tobacco and alcohol—strictly no smoking, no drinking.

2f. "Practical Separation is grounded in, flows from, and is impossible apart from, Ecclesiastical Separation (II Cor. 7:1). This means that we believe Christians should lead holy lives of moral purity, separated from worldly activities that stimulate the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (I John 2:15-17). Because certain things clearly defile the body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, it has historically been, and continues to be, our strong conviction that the drinking of beverage alcohol, and the use of tobacco in any of its forms is sin." ("What We Believe", <http://thebiblepresbyterianchurch.org/what-we-believe-a-summary>).

3f. However, the new Bible-Presbyterians will not "impose singular conformity through a top-down or high-handed way" the following: (1) gambling, (2) cinemas, (3) modern dance between sexes, (4) alcoholic beverages and tobacco, and (5) pubs and night clubs. They say that Christians should be discouraged from these worldly practices in a "graded fashion and tone [since] there will be divergent views among members." (*Heritage and Legacy*, 508). But what does God's Word say? Consider Romans 12:1-2, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the

mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

5c. Singapore (Rev Dr Timothy Tow)



1d. Origins

1e. The Bible-Presbyterian Church and movement in Singapore and Southeast Asia is due to the Lord calling and using its founding pastor and first theologian—the Rev Dr Timothy Tow (1920-2009). Upon his graduation from Faith Theological Seminary in May 1950, Life Church (*Say Mia Tng*) invited him to start an English service (October 20, 1950). The English church grew to become a denomination comprising 43 churches in Singapore today, and many more in ASEAN, even Australia, Canada, China, England, India, Korea, Kenya and

Tanzania.



2e. “When the challenge to join the 20th Century Reformation was given by Dr McIntire to Faith Seminary students, the founding pastor of the B-P Church, Singapore, Timothy Tow...felt God’s call to join the movement. Fired with a crusading zeal to defend the Faith, he wrote Elder Quek Kiok Chiang, then of the Teochew-speaking mother church (*Say Mia Tng*) at Prinsep Street to join the ICCC. Like David and Jonathan, the two leaders of this B-P Church in embryo began to impart the spirit of the 20th Century Reformation to the congregation that gathered after them....



“We have other founding members rising to bear the torch of the separatist stand and the 20th Century Reformation movement. One who took a firm stand with us from the beginning...is Rev Silas C T Hsu. A younger member who has arisen since the coming of Dr Billy Graham, foremost ecumenical

evangelist, to Singapore in 1978 is Dr Tow Siang Hwa. Seeing through the deadly leaven of neo-evangelical 'cooperative' evangelism and neo-evangelical 'scholarship,' Dr Tow has added his voice to the older founding fathers by publishing the B-P Banner, for many years the official organ of the B-P Church of Singapore. ...

"Though our founding fathers belong to the migrant generation, having come to make their home in Singapore in the 1920s and 30s, they are nevertheless citizens of a new Singapore, like sons of the soil, having been domiciled here almost all their life. They may be called a 'bridge' generation, with cultural roots plucked up from the Chinese mainland, but are now firmly transplanted here. They are loyal and patriotic citizens of the new Singapore (independent from British rule since 1965), but even more fervent in the service of God's Kingdom worldwide. These are our Singapore Roots." (Tow, *Singapore B-P Church Story*, 17-18).

3e. The life and work of the Rev Dr Timothy Tow is found in his autobiography *Son of a Mother's Vow* (Singapore: FEBC Bookroom, 2001). See also "*He Being Dead Yet Speaketh*": *Remembering the Life and Teachings of Pastor Timothy Tow on the Occasion of the 10th Anniversary Thanksgiving of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church (2003-2013)* in CD-ROM). Available from the Timothy Tow Memorial Library, Far Eastern Bible College, 9A Gilstead Road, Singapore 309063.



4e. The new Bible-Presbyterians (BPs) in their book *Heritage and Legacy* malign and defame the founding pastor of the Bible-Presbyterian Church when they said, "...the strong-willed personalities tend to enforce their rules on the rest. Hence, within the first decade, ministers and Session members were considered 'dissenters' for disagreeing with the founding pastor, even though they represented the majority view." (98-99). Their statement that they represented the majority view has no supporting documentation.

5e. Many who knew the Rev Dr Timothy Tow would aver that he was a most gentle and generous man of God. He had very strong and firm convictions for sure, for he was given totally to His Lord and His Word and will not compromise his faith no matter what, but He was selfless and sacrificial when ministering to God's people. His life motto was taken from Mark 8:36, "*For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*" (a verse given to him by Dr John Sung). He sought neither fame nor fortune—only the glory of God, earnestly contending for the faith (Jude 3). Evidently, the populists, moderates and compromisers were not pleased. "*For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*" (Gal 1:10).

6e. These new B-Ps in the newly formed BPCIS who disagree with the founder of the Bible-Presbyterian Church and his ethos should withdraw from the Church and start their own and call it by another name. That would have been the honourable thing to do. By badmouthing the founding pastor and trying to undo the good work he had done, they violate the 5th commandment.

2d. Doctrines

1e. The doctrines of the fundamental and conservative Bible-Presbyterian Churches follow mainly the Statement of Faith of the Far Eastern Bible College, especially its statement on the inspiration and preservation of the Holy Scriptures.

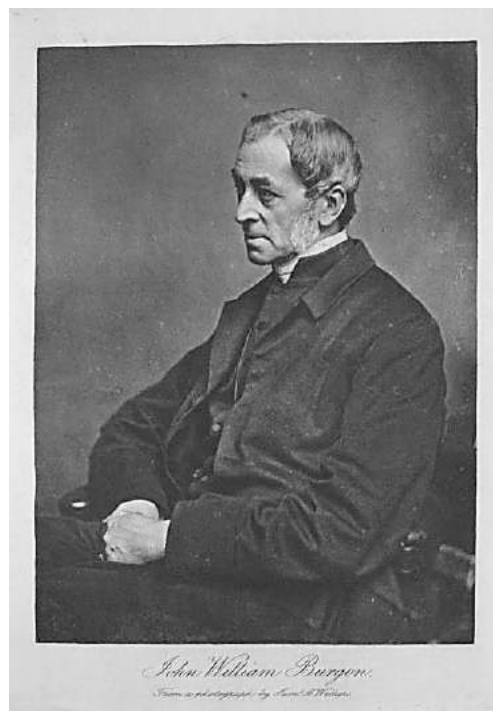
2e. The FEBC Statement of Faith as found in Article 4 of its Constitution reads as follows: The Statement of Faith of the College shall be in accordance with that system commonly called "the Reformed Faith" as expressed in the Confession of Faith as set forth by the historic Westminster Assembly together with the

Larger and Shorter Catechisms. In abbreviated form, the chief tenets of the doctrine of the College, apart from the Doctrinal Position Statement of the College, shall be as follows:

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

2f. We believe the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament underlying the Authorised (King James) Version to be the very Word of God, infallible and inerrant.

3f. We uphold the Authorised (King James) Version to be the Word of God—the best, most faithful, most accurate, most beautiful translation of the Bible in the English language, and do employ it alone as our primary scriptural text in the public reading, preaching, and teaching of the English Bible.



4f. The Board of Directors and Faculty shall affirm their allegiance to the Word of God by taking the Dean Burgon Oath at every annual convocation: "I swear in the Name of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit that I believe "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."



5f. We believe in one God existing in three co-equal and co-eternal Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Deut 6:4, 1 John 5:7).

6f. We believe that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, and is true God and true man in complete and direct fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14 (Matt 1:20-23, John 1:1, 14, Col 2:9).

7f. We believe God created the whole universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) by the Word of His mouth, and all very good, in the space of six literal or natural days (Gen 1:1, Exod 20:11, Ps 148:5, John 1:3, Col 1:16, Heb 11:3).

8f. We believe that man was created in the image of God, but sinned through the fall of Adam, thereby

incurring not only physical death but also spiritual death, which is separation from God and that all human beings are born with a sinful nature and become sinners in thought, word and deed (Gen 1:26-27, Rom 3:19-20, 5:12, 6:23).

9f. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died a propitiatory and expiatory death as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice, and that all who repent of their sins and believe in Him are justified before God on the grounds of His shed blood (Rom 5:8-11, 1 John 2:2, 1 Pet 1:18-19).

10f. We believe in the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His ascension into Heaven, and in His exaltation at the right hand of God, where He intercedes for us as our High Priest and Advocate (1 Cor 15:1-4, 15-19, Phil 2:9-11, Heb 3:1, 4:14-16).

11f. We believe in the personal, visible and premillennial return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to judge this world, restore His chosen nation Israel to greatness, and bring peace to the nations as King of kings and Lord of lords (Jer 3:17, Zech 14:9, Acts 1:6, Rom 11:26, Rev 20:1-7).

12f. We believe that salvation is by grace through faith alone, not by works, and that all who repent and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour are born again by the Holy Spirit and thereby become the children of God (Rom 5:1, 8:14-16, Eph 2:8-10, 1 Tim 2:5, Tit 3:5).

13f. We believe that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ and to convict and regenerate the sinner, and indwell, guide, instruct and empower the believer for godly living and service (John 16:7-14, Rom 8:1-2).

14f. We believe that Christ instituted the Sacrament of Baptism for believers and their children and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which sacraments shall be observed by His Church till He comes (Matt 28:19, 1 Cor 11:23-26).

15f. We believe in the eternal security, bodily resurrection and eternal blessedness of the saved, and in the bodily resurrection and eternal conscious punishment of the lost (John 10:27-29, 1 Cor 15:51-53, 1 Thess 4:13-18, Rev 20:11-15).

16f. We believe in the real, spiritual unity in Christ of all redeemed by His precious blood and the necessity of faithfully maintaining the purity of the Church in doctrine and life according to the Word of God, and the principle and practice of biblical separation from the apostasy of the day being spearheaded by the ecumenical movement, charismatic movement and other false movements that contradict the Holy Scriptures and the Historic Christian Faith (2 Cor 6:14-7:1, Jude 3, Rev 18:4).

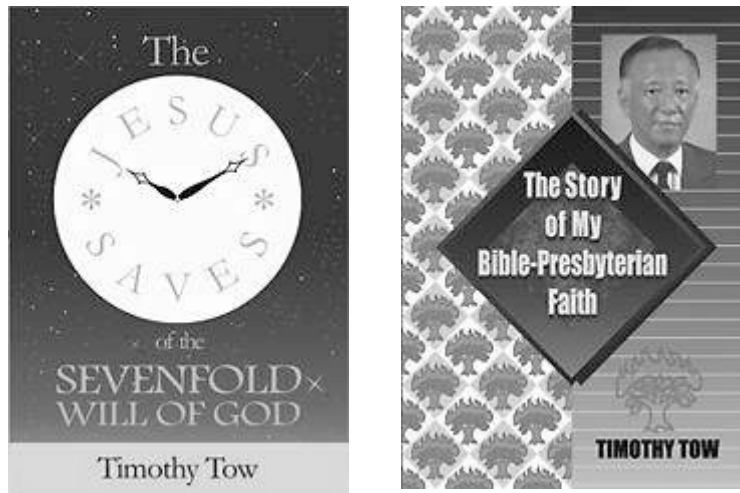
3e. Besides the above Statement of Faith, pastors and preachers of fundamental and conservative Bible-Presbyterian Churches take the following doctrinal positions of FEBC:

1f. I do dismiss the JEDP theory, and source/form/redaction criticism as products of modernistic scholarship, and do consider them to be illegitimate and destructive means of interpreting the Pentateuch, and the Synoptic Gospels. See Jeffrey Khoo, "Wrongly Dividing the Synoptic Gospels: A Critique of the Historical-Critical Methodology" in *The Gospels in Unison* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1996), 211-219.

2f. I do reject the neo-evangelical hermeneutic of Walter C Kaiser, namely, the Analogy of Antecedent Scripture, as fallacious. See Jeffrey Khoo, "The Hermeneutics of Walter C Kaiser Jr" in FEBC's 30th Anniversary Magazine (1962-1992), 15-16, "The Sign of the Virgin Birth" *The Burning Bush* 1 (1995): 5-33.

3f. I do reject Hyper-Calvinism in its denial of God's common grace, and of the free offer of the Gospel. See Timothy Tow, "Calvin's Clock of the Sevenfold Will of God," *The Burning Bush* 3 (1997): 84-88, "Lopsided Calvinism" in *The Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith* (Singapore: FEBC Press, 1999), 93-100; and Jeffrey Khoo,

“Hyper-Calvinism in the Light of Calvin,” *The Burning Bush* 3 (1997): 89-96.



4f. I do believe in the biblical doctrine and practice of personal and ecclesiastical separation from all forms of unbelief and apostasy, viz Romanism, Ecumenism, Modernism, Charismatism, and Neo-evangelicalism. See Jeffrey Khoo, *Biblical Separation: Doctrine of Church Purification and Preservation* (Singapore: FEBC Press, 1999).



5f. I do reject as false the tongues-speaking, demon-casting, faith healing, dreams and visions, words of wisdom/knowledge/faith, prophecies, slaying of the Spirit, holy laughing and dancing of the Pentecostal, Charismatic, or Vineyard Movement. See Jeffrey Khoo,

Charismatism Q&A (Singapore: FEBC Press, 1999); Timothy Tow, *Wang Ming Tao and Charismatism* (Singapore, Christian Life Publishers, 1989); and "The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error," *The Burning Bush 2* (1996): 15-29.

[Heritage & Legacy (398) says that there are two kinds of tongues—tongues that are human languages and tongues that are ecstatic utterances, and that there are two views on cessation—tongues have either ceased when NT canon was completed or at the 2nd Coming of Christ. Take your pick!]

6f. I do believe God created the universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), and do regard Genesis 1:1 as an independent clause stating the first creative act of God (cf John 1:3, Col 1:16, Heb 11:3). Read Quek Suan Yew, "Creation *Ex Nihilo* is Genesis 1:1," *The Burning Bush 3* (1997): 107-117. See also John C Whitcomb, *The Early Earth*, rev ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986).

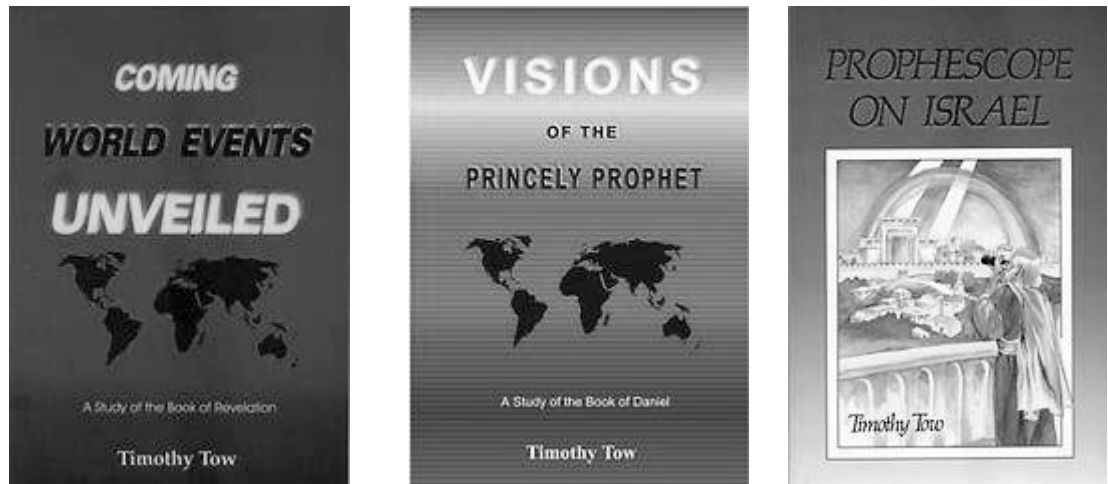
7f. I do believe God created all things perfectly and very good in six literal or natural, and not figurative or poetic, days. See Whitcomb's *Early Earth*. Arguments: (1) numerical adjective (Gen 1:5,8,13,19,23), (2) "evening and morning" (cf Dan 8:26), (3) 4th commandment (Exod 20:11), (4) "days" and "years" (Gen 1:14).

8f. I do believe the Genesis Flood was global or universal, and reject all other views which attempt to limit the geographical extent of the Flood. See John C Whitcomb and Henry M Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1961), and John C Whitcomb, *The World That Perished*, rev ed (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988). Arguments: (1) universal terminology (Gen 6:17), (2) mountains covered (Gen 7:19), (3) ark itself, (4) rainbow covenant (Gen 9:8-17), (5) Peter's commentary (2 Pet 3:6-7).

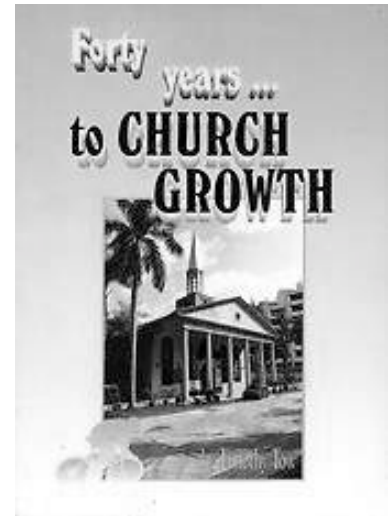
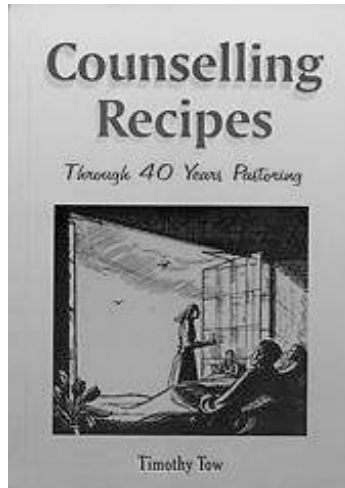
9f. I do believe Isaiah 7:14 is a strictly messianic prophecy historically fulfilled only by Jesus Christ who was conceived supernaturally in the womb of the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit as announced by the

angel (Matt 1:22–23, Luke 1:26–35). See Jeffrey Khoo, “The Sign of the Virgin Birth,” *The Burning Bush* 1 (1995): 5-33.

10f. I do subscribe to the premillennial view of eschatology that recognises a distinction between Israel and the Church. See Timothy Tow, *Prophescope on Israel* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1992), *Visions of the Princely Prophet: A Study of the Book of Daniel* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1995), *Coming World Events Unveiled: A Study of the Book of Revelation* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1995).



11f. I do reject the so-called “Biblical/Christian Counselling” of today (as taught by Gary Collins, Larry Crabb, Frank Minirth et al) that is influenced by Freudian or humanistic methods which essentially question the sufficiency of Scriptures, and the power of the Gospel. See Timothy Tow, *Counselling Recipes* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1994).



12f. I do reject the modern-day Church Growth movement (as promoted by George Barna, Bill Hybels, C Peter Wagner et al) which advocates worldly techniques or carnal methods to increase church membership. See Timothy Tow, *Forty Years to Church Growth* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1993).

4e. In *The Singapore B-P Church Story* (219), it was revealed that a “B-P minister” (unnamed) “shook the faith of the Church” in his teaching material called FOCUS I—THE BIBLE, published in 1974. In the Foreword, the B-P minister exhorted “Sunday School teachers, youth and adult leaders” to “Please go through these materials and try to make use of some of them in your classes and meetings. You play a vital part in our Focus Programme”. In his notes on “FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE”, he wrote on

1f. Chronology

“The period covered by the Bible **cannot be known**, since it is virtually endless. The Bible began with the condition of the universe **before** the creation (Gen. 1.2)...

“Nevertheless the period within which the 66 books were written can be known. Moses, who lived about [sic] BC 1450 (or **possibly BC 1230**), was the first writer...

“The dates of the earlier part of Genesis are difficult to determine, especially the age of the patriarchs. We can state the problem in this way: a. The O.T. is not alone in recording the longevity of ancient men. The Babylonians, Egyptians, Hindus, and others also have such traditions. B. Our conclusions are either that men really lived that long or that **there must be some other explanation for ‘years’ in Genesis. E.g. if years = months, then Noah’s 950 years were in effect 950 months and he was 80 years old when he died.**” (bold and underlining mine)

2f. Historical and Geographical References

“There are some matters which **cannot be ascertained because we have no way of determining the facts of the case.** Among some of these are: the precise location of Eden; where is Noah’s Ark today? **Was the Flood over the whole world or only a part of it?**” (bold and underlining mine)

5e. The author of that material (ie FOCUS) is now revealed to be Quek Swee Hwa. In *Heritage & Legacy* (427), Quek said that the questioning of what he wrote in FOCUS are “flimsy claims against me”. He says concerning

1f. Chronology

1g. Quek protests that he was merely quoting Halley’s *Pocket Bible Handbook* when he referred to years being months, and “I clarified that it is not my view.” There are a couple of problems: Problem #1 is that there is no mention that he was quoting and no source was given. Problem #2 is he did not state in his notes that it was not his view. A plain reading of his material shows that he was presenting an alternative view which he considered tenable.

2g. Quek also allowed for the late dating of the Exodus (13th century), a view propounded by Liberals and Neo-evangelicals because they do not accept the historical inerrancy and authority of the Bible.

2f. Historical and Geographical References

1g. Quek rightly observed that there are certain things for which we have no answer, but certainly not the Flood! In his notes, he clearly opened the Genesis Flood up for questioning. There is no question that the Bible is utterly clear with regard to the geographical extent of the Flood—it was global!

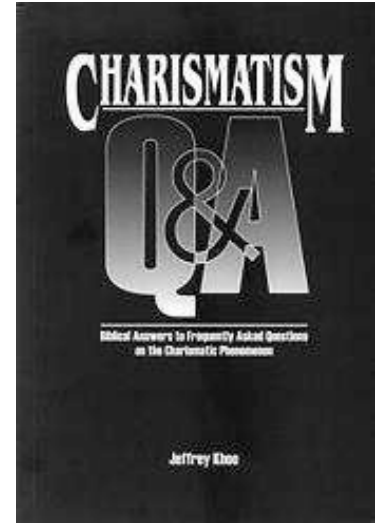
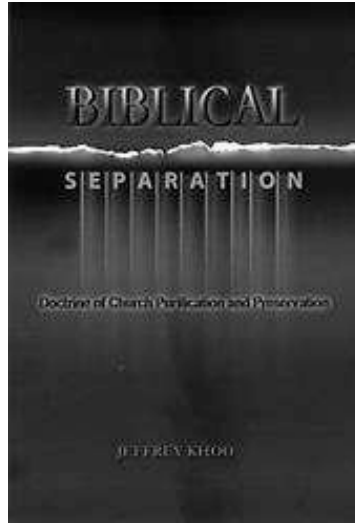
2g. Quek now says he is of the opinion that the flood was universal. That is good. But the question remains: What does he mean by “universal”? Is it global in the geographical sense or in the anthropological sense? There is a difference. It is still not clear what his position is.

6e. As far as True BPCs and FEBC are concerned, we teach the Bible strictly and authoritatively—the Bible means what it says and says what it means. With regard to biblical and theological scholarship, Fundamentalists teach with a Yes and Amen; Liberals teach with a No and Never; Neo-evangelicals teach with a Yes and No—This can, that also can, you can never be sure. Read Ernest D Pickering, *The Tragedy of Compromise: The Origin and Impact of New Evangelicalism* (Greenville: Bob Jones University, 1994).

3d. Practices

1e. Separation from Neo-Evangelicals and Charismatics

1f. Based on 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. See exposition by Jeffrey Khoo, *Biblical Separation* (Singapore: Bible Witness Literature, 2004), 56-57, and Charles Seet, “The Principle of Secondary Separation”, *The Burning Bush 2* (1996): 40-48.



2f. The BPCIS and new B-Ps deny Biblical Separation as defined by their founding fathers, and deny “Secondary Separation”. See *Heritage and Legacy*, 518-521. See Appendix: “Biblical Separation of Bible-Presbyterianism” as published in True Life Weekly, 4 November and 11 November 2018.

2e. Traditional Biblical Worship

1f. Based on John 4:24. We reject the Charismatic and contemporary worship style and music. See Jeffrey Khoo, *Charismatism Q&A* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1998), 79-84.

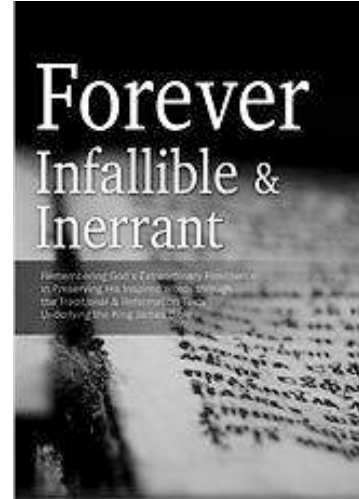
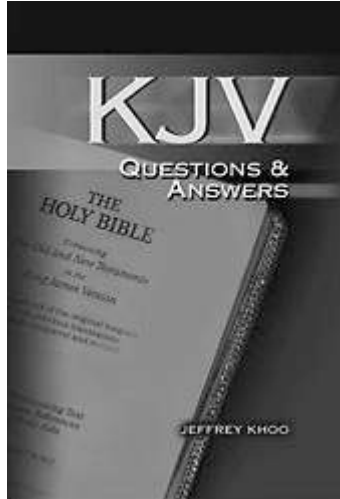
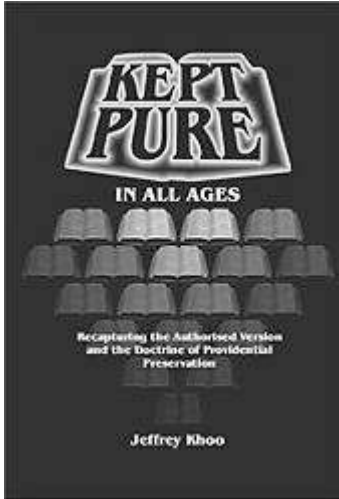
2f. The BPCIS and new BPs accommodate such worship. “[S]hould we ... allow contemporary songs of worship that the younger generation more readily identifies with? ... should we also allow other instruments since music is a powerful force that shapes the worship experience through contemporary songs?

“Our Presbytery has left such decisions to the discernment of individual churches.” They say it is “subjective” to insist on “piano-organ only, without electric guitars and especially drums” (*Heritage and Legacy*, 515).

3f. Beware of offering strange fire to God (Lev 10:10-2). See John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of*

Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship
(<https://www.gty.org/library/strangefire>).

3e. KJV Not Modern Versions



1f. Based on the doctrine of Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) in Psalm 12:6-7, Matthew 5:18. See *Forever Infallible and Inerrant: Remembering God's Extraordinary Providence in Preserving His Inspired Words through the Traditional and Reformation Texts Underlying the King James Bible* (James Bible) (<http://www.febc.edu.sg/v15/assets/pdfs/vpp/foreverinfallibleinerrant.pdf>), and the many books and articles published by FEBC.

2f. The BPCIS and new BPs affirm the verbal and plenary inspiration and authority of the Scriptures in the autographs (which they do not have and cannot produce). Nevertheless, they believe “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” (*Heritage and Legacy*, 511). They promote the NIV and ESV.

3f. By denying VPP and promoting the modern corrupt versions and their underlying critical texts, the BPCIS and new B-Ps have contradicted (1) the Reformed Faith, (2) the Westminster Confession (1.8), and (3) the Bible on which the BPC was founded and have used since

its founding. They should cease and desist from any claim that they are the “original” B-Ps.

4e. Burial Not Cremation

1f. Based on Romans 6:3-5 cf 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 42-44. The planting/sowing metaphor.

2f. For more reasons why we should bury instead of cremate, see Jeffrey Khoo, “Burial or Cremation?”, *The Burning Bush* 9 (2003): 44-49.

3f. The BPCIS and new B-Ps say they exercise “the right to be practical and has allowed member-churches to decide between burial or cremation. ...the reality on the ground today is that more and more members are opting for cremation over burial...” (*Heritage and Legacy*, 516).

4f. We must not decide on spiritual matters on the grounds of expediency (ie convenience) or utilitarianism (ie practicality). Our grounds for faith and practice must always be biblical—the Bible is our sole, supreme and final authority of faith and practice. The doctrines of baptism and resurrection point to burial. Furthermore, Jesus was buried; He set the Example and we follow Him. Burial serves to highlight the gospel, our faith and our testimony in life and in death.



“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report....by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.” (Heb 11:1, 2, 4).

Appendix

BIBLICAL SEPARATION OF BIBLE-PRESBYTERIANISM

A Review of Daniel Chua's Redefinition of Biblical Separation
in the Bible-Presbyterian Constitution

Jeffrey Khoo

Heritage & Legacy of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore published by Finishing Well Ministries in 2018 and edited by Dr Chua Choon Lan (General Editor) together with the Rev Dr Quek Swee Hwa, the Rev Dr David Wong, and the Rev Dr Daniel Chua is said to be a “bold attempt to explain and analyse the different voices, splits and controversies surrounding the BP Church in Singapore.” It claims to be “objective”. It is not. The writers come from a certain camp in the Bible-Presbyterian (BP) Church whose views differ from the founding fathers of the BP faith and movement, especially the Church's founding pastor and first theologian—the Rev Dr Timothy Tow (d 2009).

The book speaks about “Starting Again”. The editors want to form a new presbytery (a mini-synod) consisting of likeminded BP churches (only seven out of 43 have joined). To “start again”, they say they had to “think aloud” the doctrines and practices of the BP Church. Their thinking out loud, now voiced in a compendium, reveal why they are of a different BP faith and spirit, and why the BP Synod was dissolved in 1988. There is nothing new. There is only more. They reveal more of their mind and motivations now fleshed out in their book for all to examine and evaluate.

This critical paper will just deal with an article written by Daniel Chua entitled “Redux: What the Original Constitution Says About Biblical Separation”. Chua is “Pastor-at-Large” of Mt Carmel BP Church. Although Chua rightly acknowledges that it is “beyond doubt” that the BP Church was founded on biblical separation, it must be said that his article is really an attempt to redefine biblical separation and the original BP position on separation. How does he do it? Chua argues that the “Original Constitution” of the BP Church dating back to 1959 and 1971 says “nothing specific” about biblical separation. Chua's thinking is simplistic. Although there is no statement like Article 6 “Principle and Practice of Biblical Separation” as found in our present constitution, there are specific statements that speak of or allude to separation as defined by our confession, our history, our ethos. Note the following:

(1) Chapter III Article 4: Doctrine. “The doctrine of the Church shall be in accordance with that system commonly called ‘the Reformed Faith’ as expressed in the Confession of Faith as set forth by the historic Westminster Assembly together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.” From the outset, the BP Church has declared itself a Confessional Church by its subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is a Reformed Confession. It stems out of the separatist movement in the 16th century Protestant Reformation.

(2) Article 4k: “We believe in the real, spiritual unity in Christ of all redeemed by His precious blood and the necessity of maintaining the purity of the Church in doctrine and life according to the Word of God.” Unity is based on purity in doctrine as defined by God's Word. This is a positive statement for separation. Separation is surely a foundational doctrine and practice for “real, spiritual unity.” “*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a*

peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” (1 Pet 2:9). The light is the light of God’s truth (Ps 43:3). And concerning truth and unity, Jesus said, *“They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth ... That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us”* (John 17:16,17,21). Unity must never be had at the expense of truth. Rather it must always be founded on God’s forever infallible and inerrant Word which is truth itself.

(3) Principles of Government, Article 4a. *“God alone is the Lord of the conscience’ and ‘hath left it (the conscience) 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.”* Evidently, the statement to free a God-governing conscience from man-made doctrines and any doctrine that be against God’s Word is a call for separation. We are to expose and oppose anything that is contrary to the Holy Scriptures. The Apostle Paul commanded, *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”* (2 Tim 4:2-4). Our conscience is bound by God and His Word, and anything contrary to Him and His Word must be soundly refuted and rejected.

(3) Article 4c: *“Our blessed Saviour, for the edification of the visible Church, which is His body, appointed officers, not only to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments but also to exercise discipline for the preservation both of truth and duty: it is incumbent upon these officers and upon the whole Church, in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing in all cases the rules contained in the Word of God.”* The clause *“to exercise discipline for the preservation of both truth and duty”* and *“to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing in all cases the rules contained in the Word of God”* requires separation as a disciplinary measure against the disorderly and disobedient in the church according to the doctrinal and ethical standards of God’s Word. Romans 16:17 says, *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.”* 1 Corinthians 5:11, *“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.”*

(4) Article 4d: *“Truth leads to goodness, the great touchstone of truth is its tendency to promote holiness; according to our Saviour’s rule, ‘by their fruits ye shall know them’. No opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level and represents it as of no consequence what a man’s opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty; otherwise it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it.”* Truth is always good and promotes holiness. Thus any attempt to compromise or mix truth with error is deceptive and destructive. The very basis of separation is the holiness of God. Leviticus 20:26 says, *“And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.”*

(5) Article 4e: *“Under the conviction of the above principle, we think it necessary to make effectual provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith. We also believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good character and principles may*

differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.” This statement reiterates the importance of sound doctrine and realises the danger of isolationism or extremism. We believe that there are Bible-believing and Bible-defending Christians in churches other than the BP. We have had fellowship with good and godly men from other denominations who uphold the fundamentals of the Christian Faith and take a separatist stand against any unbelief and compromise.

In light of the above, Chua’s view that separation is “a call to separate from liberal Christianity and the ecumenical movement, from attempts to foster unity and relationship among Eastern Orthodox Church, Roman Catholics and Protestants of all shades and persuasions” is a caricature of the original BP position on separation. Nowhere does the original constitution state that we are to separate from Protestants “of all shades and persuasions”. He makes the original BPs look like isolationists and extremists when we are biblical and true to the doctrine and practice of separation. Further, the 1986 constitution of the BP Church calls for separation “from all unbelief and corruption ... to oppose all forms of modernism, cultism, Romanism and false religions. ... We are opposed to all efforts to obscure or wipe out the clear line of separation between these absolutes: truth and error, light and darkness.” This is surely in keeping with the doctrine and practice of the 1956 and 1971 constitutions which Chua cites as the “Original Constitution.” It is clear that the BP constitution does not advocate separation from all believers of whatever stripe or shade but from all who depart from “absolutes” ie the truths the Holy Scriptures.

Chua opines that they the “moderates” have gotten it right, and that those under Timothy Tow and Dr S H Tow (or “Tow brothers” as he calls them) have gone overboard. He says that the doctrine of separation has become “our Achilles’ heel when certain strong-minded personalities in the US, International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) and here in Singapore extend the separation stand to a wider and wider range of issues and causes.” Chua wants a weak separation. He thinks separation should stand still in time and make no headway as though there are no new heresies and falsehoods (or “fake news”) to contend with. Chua is either naïve or does not get what biblical separation is all about.

It goes without saying that Satan our adversary is a wily enemy. Just like the monkey god who can transform himself into 72 different forms, Satan changes shape and tune even into “an angel of light” to seduce and ensnare the unwary and undiscerning. *“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”* (2 Cor 11:13-15). That is why believers are enjoined not to be spiritual novices, to be *“tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive”*(Eph 4:14). When the old serpent rears its ugly head in new and different ways, the Church is duty bound to *“earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”* (Jude 3). A fresh call for separation is issued and new resolutions drafted to resist the devil and counter his newfangled heresies.

One telling sign of the book’s lack of objectivity and fairness is its biasness against and one-sided treatment of the Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) controversy. The editors devoted one whole chapter on it but published only Life BP Church’s statements against VPP without publishing the responses by Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC). It is all too obvious that Chua

and his fellow writers are unable to grasp the truth of VPP. They cannot see that Satan who in the past had attacked Verbal Plenary Inspiration (VPI) and lost that battle is today attacking the Bible from behind by attacking its preservation (VPP). They cannot see that the Bible is not only infallible and inerrant in the past when it was first given (in the autographs) but is equally infallible and inerrant today (in the apographs) (Ps 12:6-7, Matt 5:18, 24:35). They say they are “Reformed” but their view on the Bible proves otherwise. What is more is that the Rev Dr Bob Phee in his lead article in Chapter 11 not only undermines VPP by speaking out of context on certain matters, but also maligns its adherents by inaccurate reporting, parroting others without getting his facts straight.

Chua says separation “our *raison d’etre*” has become “our Achilles’ heel”. He says the problem lies with extending “the separation stand to a wider and wider range of issues and causes”. As discussed above, the wider range of issues and causes are not brought on by us but by the enemies of our Lord and attackers of His Word. Chua speaks like Eliab who chided David for standing against Goliath, but with David we reply, “*Is there not a cause?*” (1 Sam 17:29). He denies that the “moderates” in the BP camp are neo-evangelicals. But actions speak louder than words. Even Phee, their anti-VPP writer, wrote a paper titled “Neo-Evangelicalism in the Bible-Presbyterian Church” back in October 1988 detailing the alleged neo-evangelicalism of Quek Swee Hwa. It appears Phee has made a U-turn.

Chua cites Timothy Tow’s opposition to Billy Graham as a case of extreme separation. It is common knowledge that Graham was a progenitor and promoter of neo-evangelicalism. One needs only to look up Prof George Marsden’s book *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* to see this. Marsden wrote, “Graham and Fuller Seminary agreed that they had to jettison the counterproductive negativism of extreme fundamentalism and that they had to be open to sympathizers in ecumenical old-line denominations. ... Graham lent his endorsement to Fuller Seminary as a leading institution in the emerging new evangelical coalition.” Chua says that the Session of Life BP Church and the BP Presbytery in the late 1960s did not agree with Tow on the matter of Graham and that cracks already existed in the BP Church then. Indeed, no one questions that there were detractors who opposed Tow on the Graham issue, but some had repented. By and by, as Graham showed more and more his true neo-evangelical and ecumenical colours, Tow was vindicated.

Those who oppose the doctrine and practice of separation as defined by the founding father of the BP Church should leave and form their own denomination and call it by another name. That would have been the honourable thing to do. But some choose to remain within the BP fold till this day, paying lip-service to separation but are practically neo-evangelicals. Harold Ockenga who coined the term “neo-evangelicalism” said that while neo-evangelicalism reaffirms the theological view of fundamentalism, it repudiates its “separatism and its determination to engage itself in the theological dialogue of the day. It had a new emphasis upon the application of the gospel to the sociological, political and economic areas of life.” He went on to say, “Neo-evangelicals emphasized ... the recapture of denominational leadership, and the reexamination of theological problems such as the antiquity of man, the universality of the Flood, God’s method of creation, and others.” It is no surprise that co-editor Quek Swee Hwa questioned the literalness of the “years” of Genesis and believes the Genesis Flood to be local not global. It is also no surprise that co-editor David Wong had no qualms getting his DMin from Fuller Seminary (flagship seminary of neo-evangelicalism) and working with Haggai Institute (an

evangelical institution which cooperates with Liberals, Catholics, and Charismatics). When neo-evangelicals speak of separation and say they are for it when they are actually not, they invariably contradict the Bible and themselves. This is very telling of the book's neo-evangelical slant and its lack of objectivity and utter biasness. The neo-evangelical ethos of the editors show extreme prejudice against biblical and true separation as practised by Tow the founding pastor of the BP Church and other BPs who are true to the BP faith and practice.

Chua talks about "second-degree separation". Biblical separatists have never been fond of this term for they do not find such "degrees" of separation in the Bible. That is why it is seldom heard as Chua himself observed. It is not found in the 1956 and 1971 constitutions, neither is it found in the post-1986 constitution. Separation is separation and has the holiness of God as its premise. The holiness of God does not come in degrees, neither does separation.

What must however be emphasised is that biblical separation contains these two aspects: (1) Separation from unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14-7:1) and (2) separation from disorderly believers (2 Thess 3:6, 12-15). One is protective, the other chastitive.

The Rev Charles Seet, current pastor of Life BP Church, has an article on "Secondary Separation" which was published in *The Burning Bush* in January 1996. In it Seet preempted Chua and rightly said, "We agree that the obvious compromise and deceit of these missionaries deserve a strong response. But we wonder if it is really justified to react against them by blaming the term 'second degree separation' (which is virtually synonymous with the term 'secondary separation'). A better way to deal with those who revile secondary separation would be to prove that the Bible does teach a separation from those disobedient to the command of separation from unbelief. They may revile the term, but they cannot easily knock down the clear teaching itself." Separation from disorderly or disobedient believers which undermine the gospel witness and the health of the church is certainly biblical and warranted regardless of what Chua says.

Chua at the end seeks to justify his brand of separation by claiming that "the moderate churches could hardly be accused of deviating from our original position on biblical separation." The appellation "moderate" is a term often used by unbiblical adherents and practitioners to make themselves look appealing and "balanced". It is just a guise. For instance, the pastors and professors in the Southern Baptist Convention who deny the fundamentals of the faith, who are actually liberals and modernists, call themselves "moderates" Now we have so-called "moderates" in the BP Church who are seeking to redefine biblical separation to fit "their" BPism, and speaking badly of BPs who do not fit their modern "moderate" mould. Chua calls his BPism "our original position". It is far from original or biblical.

By the way, Chua on the premise of "our original position" calls for a new presbytery named "Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore" (BPCIS). It is a misnomer. The name misrepresents and misleads.

The above is primarily a critique of Chua's paper on separation (pp518-22), and some parts of the book. Much more can be said. A more comprehensive and critical analysis of the entire book (525pp) will come in due course.

Life BPC Constitution Article 6

Principle and Practice of Biblical Separation

- 6.1. The doctrine of separation from sin unto God is a fundamental principle of the Bible, one grievously ignored in the church today.
- 6.2. This doctrine arises out of the holiness of God. Both the purity and righteousness of God (Luke 1:75) are involved. "Be ye holy; for I am holy." (1 Pet 1:16, also 3:11; Exod 15:11; Isa 6:3; 2 Cor 7:1)
- 6.3. The Bible does speak of cooperation ("be of one mind," "that they may all be one," "labourers together," "keep the unity of the Spirit," "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," also 1 Cor 12:25). However, biblical cooperation is based upon TRUTH. It involves the united effort of God's people. This is not a cooperation borne of a spirit of undiscerning pluralism, or that of seeking "truth" in all religions.
- 6.4. We maintain that Scripture teaches a separation that is based on the holiness of God, producing purity in all of life, personal and ecclesiastical.
- 6.5. It is the duty of all true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ to make a clear testimony to their faith in Him, especially in these darkening days of apostasy in many professing churches, by which apostasy whole denominations in their official capacity, as well as individual churches, have been swept into a paganising stream of modernism under various names and in varying degrees.
- 6.6. There has been a notable growth of autocratic domination on the part especially of modernistic leaders by whom the rightful powers of true churches are often usurped and are now being usurped.
- 6.7. The commands of God to His people to be separate from all unbelief and corruption are clear and positive: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14; see also Matt 6:24; Rom 16:17; Gal 1; Eph 5:11; 2 Thess 3:6, 14; 2 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 3:10; 2 Pet 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7-11; Jude 3, 20-24; Rev 18:4). We reach out to those who are part of any human system which involves compromise with error, and who thus ought to "come out from among them" (2 Cor 6:17), separate themselves unto the "Father ... the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor 6:18), thus "cleansing themselves" and perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor 7:1).
- 6.8. In loyalty to the revealed Word, we, as an organised portion of the people of God, are obliged to oppose all forms of modernism, cultism, Romanism and false religions. Dialogue for the purpose of reaching a compromise between all true Bible believers and representatives of such beliefs is impious, unbiblical, treasonous and unfaithful to the holy God, as He has revealed Himself to us in His infallible, inerrant Word.
- 6.9. We are opposed to all efforts to obscure or wipe out the clear line of separation between these absolutes: truth and error, light and darkness. (See Isa 5:20; 2 Cor 6:14-18.) We refer to such efforts by New Evangelicals, Charismatic Christians, promoters of ecumenical cooperative evangelism and of the social gospel, and all churches and other movements and organisations that are aligned with or sympathetic to the Ecumenical Movement.

DOCTRINE OF BIBLICAL SEPARATION

Ko Linggang

1a. The Historical BP Position on Biblical Separation

1b. From its inception, the Bible Presbyterian 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 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.

2c. 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” (*Son of a Mother’s Vow*, 138). It was with this foundational principle of separation that Life BPC and the BP movement was founded.

3c. Even the pastor of Zion BP church acknowledges 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”. (*Heritage & Legacy*, 150).

4c. Likewise, for the BP in America, it is reported that “Rigorous separation, personal and ecclesiastical, was the posture of the Bible Presbyterian Church”. (McGoldrick, James. *Presbyterian and Reformed Churches: A Global History*, Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 329).

5c. Similarly, this fact is illustrated from a remark of BP minister Francis A. Schaeffer in a paper presented to the BP Synod of 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.” (cited in George P. Hutchinson, *The History Behind the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod*, New Jersey: Mack Publishing Company, 1974, 254).

6c. However the BPCIS have attempted to retell history from their perspective, and try to paint different a picture of the BP church, both in America and Singapore.

1d. According to them, they, as moderates, are not the ones who had deviated from the original position of separation. They claim that initially the BP church only took a position on 'primary' but not 'secondary separation'. Instead, it was a hardening of positions of a 'strong-headed but influential minority' that pushed for secondary separation, which was not actually the original position of the BP Church. (*Heritage & Legacy*, 518-522; see also Dr Khoo's response in the Appendix).

2d. 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 origin of the BP church in America was also a more moderate one, akin to the BPCIS's present position. (*Heritage & Legacy*, 101, 502-3).

3d. In fact, they even go so far as to assume to know how Machen would have reacted to the current situation among the BP churches in Singapore today, posing the question "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?" (*Heritage & Legacy*, 505).

7c. It will be shown that the historic positions of the BP church, both in America and Singapore have always stood for biblical separation – one that calls for separation not just from unbelief and apostasy, but also compromise and disobedient brethren.

2b. The biblical heritage of separation can be shown clearly in the events leading to the formation of the BP church in America in the 1930s amidst the Modernist/Fundamentalist debates.

1c. The Bible Presbyterian Church in America was born out of the Modernist/Fundamentalist controversies of the 1930s. The story of their formation is one of courageous contending for the faith amidst apostasy and compromise. Men like J Gresham 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 the denomination and seminary.

2c. 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.

3c. 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. Rather, they agreed to the fact 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. (See PCA Historical Center: The Text of the Auburn Affirmation, <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.)

4c. 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. (See Ned Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen*, [Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1977] 388-495.)

5c. 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 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." (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).

6c. Eventually the General Assembly took control of Princeton and reorganized the Seminary in 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". (Hart and Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 25–26).

7c. Therefore, what prompted Machen (and also McIntire's) withdrawal from Princeton Seminary after the General Assembly's reorganization was not so much the presence of liberals within it, but rather these so-called 'moderate evangelicals' or 'theologically tolerant' who were tolerant of liberals. It was the problem of 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.

8c. Furthermore, the forming of the BP Church itself was actually also a separation from believers because of 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 (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". (*The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 37).

1d. 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 it should be for the support not just of Presbyterian agencies, but also of any that were fundamental and believed in the Word of God).

2d. Writing in that time, J Oliver Buswell was concerned that these differences between what he perceived to be the faculty of Westminster Seminary and the view the PCA were irreconcilable and necessitated separation. "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.” (J Oliver Buswell, “Parting Regrets: Reflection on a Letter,” January 30, 1937, <https://continuing.wordpress.com/2012/05/31/parting-regrets-reflection-on-a-letter/>).

3d. 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 a number of other ministers separated to form their own denomination – the Bible Presbyterian Church.

4d. At their inaugural meeting in June 1937, a document known as the ‘Articles of Association’ was drawn up, which proclaimed the following:

1e. 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.

2e. 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 reaffirm our belief in the fundamental principles of Presbyterian Church polity.

3e. 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.

4e. 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. (Minutes of the Bible-Presbyterian Church Synod 1938, <http://www.bpc.org/synod/minutes/1938.html>).

5d. It is clear that the purpose and desire of the founding fathers of the BP Church 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 carried over to the BP Church in Singapore, when it was established nearly twenty years later.

3b. A similar story played out in the 1950s when Rev. Timothy Tow returned from his studies at Faith 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.

1c. When Rev. Timothy Tow studied at Faith Seminary under Dr. Carl McIntire in the late 1940s, that is when he first he heard the message of the 20th Century Reformation and took 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”. (Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow*, 125).

2c. 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.

3c. It was noted by Elder Han Soon Juan in Life BPC'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 Chiang (sic.) and Deacon Hsu Chiang Tai for a few years, but to no avail." (*50 Years Building His Kingdom*, 28).

4c. Just 5 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.

5c. 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". (*The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 73).

6c. Therefore January 1955 saw the birth of the Bible-Presbyterian Church Movement in Singapore, the first Biblically fundamental witness in Singapore. From 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 (Jude3).

7c. 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." (*In His Good Time*, 232).

8c. Within 10 years, the Lord prospered the work with 4 BP churches established and the Singapore Presbytery of the Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore and Malaya inaugurated. From this single church, would spawn a movement and witness that would result in numerous churches, missionary endeavours, organizations and also a Bible college that would all promote the historic fundamental faith throughout Singapore and also the many other parts of the world.

9c. 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 BPC. As the late Rev. Timothy Tow reported in his autobiography,

1d. "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 newsreports in the *Far Eastern Beacon*, November and December 1968. (*Son of a Mother's Vow*, 237).

2d. "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." (*Son of a Mother's Vow*, 239-40).

9c. This situation of having mixed opinions with regards to separation and compromise finally came to head in the late 1980s, where the 'dissentious spirit' in the denomination could no longer be contained. Whilst 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 situations as such:

1d. "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." (*The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 226).

10c. Among 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 regards 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:

11c. "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 the Holy Spirit, but are repudiated by Fundamental Churches that hold to the Reformed tradition. (*Wang Ming Tao & Charismatism* [Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1989], 9).

1d. 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.

12c. Through all these, 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." (*In His Good Time*, 312-313).

13c. As a result, each individual BP church became an independent organization, free to do as they please, seek its own alliances and establish 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.

7b. On 8 October 2011, 4 B-P Churches – Emmanuel, Herald, Zion Serangoon and Zion Bishan came together to form a new presbytery, calling themselves the Bible-

Presbyterian Church in Singapore (BPCIS). They were soon joined by a few others, Mt. Carmel, Mt Hermon and Shalom BPCs. In coming together to publish the book *Heritage and Legacy*, they have clearly identified and aligned themselves to the non-militant, non-separatist stance. They describe themselves as moderates, being tolerant of differences, acknowledging that even among themselves there is a 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” (*Heritage & Legacy*, 496). The next section will attempt to examine their arguments in the light of history and theology.

2a. The Current Debate on Biblical Separation

1b. In the book, *History and Legacy of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore*, 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 what they term ‘secondary separation’ or ‘extreme separation’ was a teaching and practice that was never part of the original BP stand, but rather came as a result of the more extreme hard-line camp of separatists. And so, they claim that “the moderate churches could hardly be accused of deviating from our original BP position on biblical separation... From the viewpoint of the moderates, they were not the one who shifted the goal post.” (*Heritage & Legacy*, 520-521).

1c. 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.” (*Heritage & Legacy*, 146).

2b. The BPCIS claims “to preserve the legacy of the BP Church wherever it honours God and edifies His people” (*Heritage & Legacy*, 498). 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 with regards to separation really is.

2b. Redefining Roots and Origins

1c. In recounting the actual start of the B-P Church in Singapore, the BPCIS is quite adamant in wanting to prove that it was never actually a split of a break away from the mother church, *Say Mia Tng*, though she remained part of the Presbyterian Synod, whereas the English Service under Rev. Tow became independent and took on the name Life BP Church.

2c. 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”. (*Heritage & Legacy*, 111).

3c. They 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 rather that relationships continued to be friendly, and they could peacefully co-exist in the same premises for nearly 8 years before Life BPC moved to the present premises at Gilstead Road.

4c. It seemed 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.” (*Heritage & Legacy*, 113).

5c. In the various testimonies shared by some of the pioneer members of the BP church in Chapter 4 – Voice of the Silent Generation, a number of them also make a point (some repeatedly) to reiterate the idea that it was not a split from *Say Mia Tng*.

1d. For example Eld Chia Hong Chek’s testimony was by way of an interview, and one of the questions posed to him was “What triggered the ‘break’ *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. (*Heritage & Legacy*, 172-174).

2d. Eld Joshua Lim also testifies “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” (*Heritage & Legacy*, 184).

3d. Eld Dr Ang Beng Chong’s testimony was more direct and factual,

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.” (*Heritage & Legacy*, 200).

3c. 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 practiced separation not only from liberalism, but also from believers that had compromised with ecumenical groups – what they term as secondary separation.

4c. However, the fact remains that in the founding of Life BPC, 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 BPC have to cut ties with the Synod? If mother church was in agreement to Life BPC, why did she then remain in this compromised synod? It is clear that Rev. Tow and Life BPC 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, yet 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.

2b. Question of Secondary Separation

1c. BPCIS sees different degrees of separation and asserts that the right biblical approach is only primary separation and not secondary or second-degree separation: “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

hardline 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." (*Heritage & Legacy*, 501-502).

2c. Of all the articles that touch on this topic of separation, it is probably the article by Daniel Chua (pp. 500-509) 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)". (*Heritage & Legacy*, 501)

1d. 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' 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 thoughts, biases or presuppositions 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 to be warned 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.

2d. 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.

3d. Furthermore, the words that the Apostle Paul used are strong words, giving commands that must be obeyed. The word for 'withdraw yourselves' (v. 6) 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' (v. 14) 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 (v. 5), and here in verse 9 and 11 he was giving the general principle on how they ought to deal with such members of the church who fall in to these sins. They were to not company with them, no longer have 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.

1e. 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 misdemeanour." (*Biblical Separation*, 114).

4d. Therefore the interpretation that Chua sets forth is not simply a matter of 'divergent Scripture exegesis', but is blatantly an erroneous

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

3c. Therefore, the notion of secondary separation is definitely 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 ways, we must at times separate from brethren who compromise or who teach wrong doctrines.

3b. Essentials vs. Non-essentials

1c. Alongside the cautions against secondary separation, 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 of conscience to.

1d. These would be the non-negotiable essential doctrines that they would require all their members to abide by:

1e. "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.

2e. The system of theology that is reflected in the Westminster Standards, comprising the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

1f. While they state this, it is curious to note that elsewhere in the book, Quek Swee Hwa seems to contradict this essential doctrinal requirement, 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" (*Heritage & Legacy*, 69).

2f. So are these matters essential or not? Should they 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!

3e. The doctrine (and practice) of infant baptism (not infant dedication) within the context of Covenant theology.

4e. The pursuit of truth and holiness, together with separation from all unbelief and sin." (*Heritage & Legacy*, 511-512).

2d. Under non-essentials, they would list 1 doctrine and a number of practices that they see should be granted greater latitude with regard to the differences they may have between them.

1e 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.

2e. 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.

3e. The choice of musical instruments – We encourage the use of instruments appropriate to the music being played.

4e. The use of hymns and spiritual songs – We urge our Bible-Presbyterian churches to continue using hymns within the rich 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

5e. 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”.

6e. The disposal of the dead – We accept that churches may practise burial or cremation.

1f. While this list words 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?” (*Heritage & Legacy*, 424).

2c. Looking through this list, there are a few issues that are problematic.

1d. 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!

2d. While they claim that the use of a Bible version is a non-essential and would allow the churches to use versions according to their choice, yet a non-VPP position is required as an essential. They are basically

saying that it must be a position of dogma to 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, but 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. Furthermore, this 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.

3d. Many of the points, especially with regard to the non-essentials are very 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 with regard to worship, in the instruments used, hymns and songs sung and the style of worship, but none of the points really 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.

4d. 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 seem to dangerously leave open the door for some of these charismatic practices to creep into the church. If that does happen, the Synod is powerless to discipline any church or minister that allows it, for it is a non-essential matter.

4b. Rights of Private Judgment

1c. In many instances where the Westminster Standards are 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:

1d. "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:

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." (*Heritage & Legacy*, 81).

2d. Likewise, they refer to a similar clause in the Form of Government of the BP Church: "Our former BP Synod failed because the previous outspoken leadership 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."

"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" (*Heritage & Legacy*, 46).

2c. 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.

3c. However, it must be noted that such liberty of conscience only apply to matters that are not regulated by the Word of God. If it is concerning 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 – such as 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 we should leave up to one's own conscience or freedom of liberty. They are to be carefully regulated by what the Word of God teaches.

3a. The Biblical Doctrine of Separation

1b. 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 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". (*Biblical Separation*, 13).

2b. 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.” (*Biblical Separation*, 69).

3b. As God’s church, we are members of His body, and are called to obey God’s call to holiness. In fact, the very word for church in the New Testament, *‘ekklēsia’*, carries with it the idea of separation, for it is a combination of 2 words in the Greek meaning ‘called out’. As a visible local church, our role is to be one who is called out of this world, to be separated from all the sins and ungodliness of this world. In terms of our doctrines and practices, we are also to strive towards purity and to weed out any error that we might have. Whilst we can never achieve 100% purity, it must be the continual quest that we strive towards, and must never allow ourselves to be unequally yoked with all who would do otherwise.

4b. Generally, when discussing the doctrine of Biblical Separation, there are two main aspects to it – Personal and Ecclesiastical Separation.

1c. Personal Separation from Sin

The first and most direct application of the teaching is Biblical Separation would be with regard to personal separation of every Christian from all forms of sin and ungodliness. As saints, our duty is the purposeful removal of ourselves from all worldly philosophies and sinful activities. Thus whilst we are in the world, we 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).

2c. 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 as well. The leaders of each local church, especially, 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 Cor 6:14-7:1, and Amos 3:3.

3c. Ecclesiastical Separation from Disobedience and Compromise

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

However, be careful to note that while the purpose of this separation does continue to primarily be 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 we do know of Christian brethren caught in such situations, in compromised churches, or associating themselves in groups that preach another gospel, we should be like the angels sent to rescue Lot, dragging him out of a doomed city (Jude 1:23 ref. Amos 4:11).

1d. Two Biblical examples from the Old Testament could be helpful to illustrate this point on separation from disobedience and compromise:

1e. 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 angry, and knew that something had to be done. In Exodus 32:25, "Then 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. (v. 27). Here were the faithful of Israel taking action against their very own people – their brethren who were also fellow worshippers of God. 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.

2e. 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 major 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 Chr 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 for it 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 we see that the Lord was displeased with Jehoshaphat's compromise, and warned that His wrath was upon him because of his failure to separate.

4a. **Conclusion**

1b. 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?

2b. 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.

3b. 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.

3b. We would do well to take heed to the warnings of Jude who warned in his day: in Jude 1:3-4 "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."

4b. Now more than ever we need to earnestly contend for the faith, to continue to uphold true Biblical separatism, for in so doing preserve the purity of His church and His truth – the faith once delivered unto the saints.

5b. 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."

DOCTRINE OF PREMILLENNIALISM

Joshua Yong

1a. Introduction

- 1b. The Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore is Reformed in its system of theology, but one of its unique theological distinctives is the embracing of a pro-Israel premillennial view in eschatology.

2b. Definitions

1c. Covenant Theology

- 1d. A system of theology which represents the whole of Scripture as being covered by two covenants, 1) the covenant of works and 2) the covenant of grace.

2c. Dispensationalism

- 1d. A system of theology which sees dispensations as periods of time where God deals with man according to His own will, often in the form of a test where man's obedience is tested. Each test has its own unique set of conditions, promise and penalty.

3c. Dispensational Premillennialism

- 1d. The term "millennium" means 1,000 years (Rev 20:1-7).

- 2d. "Premillennialism is the view which teaches that Christ will return before the millennium. Christ must return to judge His enemies, restore Israel, and rule over the whole world from Jerusalem for a thousand years." (Tow and Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian*, 431).

- 3d. In contrast to historic premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism is a pro-Israel millennial position. It recognises God's future plan for Israel as a distinct nation.

- 4d. All dispensationalists are premillennialists, but not all premillennialists are dispensationalists.

4c. Historic premillennialism

- 1d. Historic premillennialists believe that Christ will return before the millennium to reign on earth for 1,000 years. Some historic

premillennialists believe that the thousand years signifies a long period of time. Historic premillennialists do not see a distinction between the Church and Israel, but they see the Church as the replacement of Israel. Historic premillennialists usually hold to a post-tribulational view of the rapture.

5c. Amillennialism

1d. Amillennialism literally means “no millennium.” This view teaches that there is no future 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth. They understand the 1,000 years of Revelation symbolically as referring to the spiritual reign of Christ. They believe that when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, Satan was spiritually bound in the “bottomless pit.” Amillennialists usually hold to a post-tribulational view of the rapture.

6c. Postmillennialism

1d. Postmillennialists believe that Christ will come after the millennium. They understand the 1,000 years figuratively as representing a time which will follow this present age. It will be a time of great spiritual blessing and peace on earth, after which the Lord Jesus Christ will return.

2d. This view is held predominantly by modernists who do not believe in the total depravity of man. This is also held by Christian reconstructionists who believe that they must reform society to be more Christian in order that Christ might return.

5c. Rapture

1d. The “rapture” refers to the “catching up” of the Church to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air. This will take place in close succession after the resurrection of believers who are asleep in Christ.

2d. The rapture is taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52.

3d. There are five views of the rapture:

1e. Pretribulational rapture: the church will be caught up before the seven years Great Tribulation.

2e. Mid-tribulational rapture: the church will be caught up in the middle of the Great Tribulation, after the first three and a half

years.

3e. Pre-Wrath rapture: the church must enter the second half of the tribulation, but it will be caught up before the end of the Great Tribulation.

4e. Post-tribulational rapture: the church will have to go through the Great Tribulation and will only be caught up at the end of it.

5e. Partial rapture: the church will be caught up at different times during the Great Tribulation according to their spiritual maturity.

4d. The only tenable views of the rapture are the Pretribulational, Mid-tribulational, and Pre-Wrath rapture views.

3b. The Issue at Hand

1c. In 2011, four B-P Churches formed a new Presbytery named “Bible Presbyterian Church in Singapore” (BPCIS). Subsequently, three other B-P Churches joined the Presbytery.

2c. In 2018, they published a book, *Heritage and Legacy of the Bible Presbyterian Church in Singapore* (Singapore: Finishing Well Ministries, 2018) in an attempt to retell history and redefine Bible-Presbyterianism.

3c. Daniel Chua, explaining why he felt it was the right time to launch this new Presbytery, wrote: “A key reason why it is feasible this time is because we are determined to work on a ‘moderate’ position. We agree there are some core distinctives that define us as ‘Bible-Presbyterian’, and those are non-negotiable. But there are other matters that are secondary and peripheral, yet have caused divisions in the past” (*Heritage and Legacy*, 498). What did Chua mean by a “moderate” position? What are the doctrines which are considered “core distinctives” and those that are “secondary and peripheral”?

1d. Chua wrote, “the non-essentials are matters that should not detract us from our understanding of Bible-Presbyterianism, such as premillennialism (versus amillennialism), Bible versions, types of musical instruments, adoption of hymns and spiritual songs, style of worship, disposal of the deceased, and association with non-BPCs and parachurch organisations.” (*Heritage and Legacy*, 496).

2d. Chua criticised the BP movement in the USA for parting over

“non-cardinal or secondary issues such as views on amillennialism or premillennialism, personal liberty or total abstinence over alcohol, tobacco, dancing, card playing, and movies, and primary or second-degree separation...” (*Heritage and Legacy*, 502).

3d. The “white paper” of BPCIS specifically identified the doctrine of Premillennialism as “**NON-ESSENTIAL** (emphasis theirs) to our understanding of Bible-Presbyterianism.” They explained: “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.” (*Heritage and Legacy*, 512).

1e. Some preliminary comments: With regard to 1d and 2d, these doctrines and practices are known as the distinctives of the B-P Church for very good reasons. These distinctives are what make a Bible-Presbyterian a Bible-Presbyterian. Without these distinctives a person may identify himself as a Presbyterian, an Evangelical, a Protestant, or a Christian, but not as a Bible-Presbyterian. The distinctives of a Church are necessary to give a denomination its identity. It will allow its congregation to serve and worship together in unity.

2e. With regard to 3d, Chua has employed double-talk. On the one hand, BPCIS expressed that they will only teach premillennialism in their churches; yet on the other hand, they do not require their worshippers to adhere to this teaching as the only possible position. What is the point of teaching a doctrine that one is not convicted of, at least not enough to require one’s member to adhere to?

2a. History of Premillennialism in the B-P Church

1b. From the very beginning, premillennialism has always been an important theological distinctive of the B-P Church in Singapore.

2b. Rev Timothy Tow recalled learning this doctrine when he was a child.

1c. “Historically speaking, I had received the Premillennial doctrine from Dora Yu, China’s first woman evangelist who converted Watchman Nee in the nineteen twenties. I received this even as a little child from my parents, singing such hymns as ‘When Jesus comes to reward His Servants’ from Dora Yu

Revival Hymnal." (Timothy Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow* [Singapore: FEBC Bookroom, 2001], 422).

2c. "What I would like to stress about Dora Yu is her bringing into our family the Doctrine of the Premillennial Return of Christ. This she perpetuated by a new Revival Hymnal she had compiled. One of the hymns on the Second Coming whose tune I learned by heart at that young age, was 'When Jesus Comes to Reward His Servants'. Another hymn was 'The Gospel Bells Are Ringing'. Mother often sang these hymns to us, and told us about Christ's soon coming and the need of our readiness to meet Him." (Timothy Tow, *Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith* [Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, 1999], 12-13).

3b. Rev Timothy Tow then received this doctrine through the ministries of Dr John Sung and Dr Chia Yu Ming.

1c. "The next person I received the Premillennial teaching is John Sung, through his exposition of Daniel and Revelation at the Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church." (Timothy Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow*, 422).

2c. "When Dr. John Sung brought Pentecostal Revival to Singapore in 1935, he was most articulate in preaching the soon Return of Christ. He spoke on Israel's Restoration and the part she would play in the Golden Millennium. This he emphasised by teaching Revelation and Daniel in his "spiritual nurture" sessions. A poster depicting Nebuchadnezzar's statue in Daniel for a backdrop to his teaching at the Telok Ayer Methodist Church where the revival meetings were held, substantiates what I say." (Tow, *Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith*, 13).

3c. "In 1935 Singapore was visited (August-September) and revisited (October) with a Pentecost whereby 2,000 nominal Christians were soundly converted through the ministry of Dr John Sung... From Dr John Sung our founding fathers were introduced to the doctrine of the Premillennial Return of Christ" (Timothy Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story* [Singapore: Life Book Centre, 1995], 15).

4c. "A thorough student of the Bible, John Sung knew the Old Testament as well as the New. His sermon texts ranged through every book of the Bible. A Premillennialist, believing in the soon coming of Christ, he would expound Daniel or Revelation in his follow-up 'spiritual nurture' meeting after every revival campaign. These Bible-study sessions, like the revival meetings, would last two hours each session, three times a day." (Timothy Tow, *Asian Awakening* [Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, 1988], 38).

4c. "After this, it was from Dr. Chia Yu Ming when I studied under him in

Nanking, China, 1946-47." (Timothy Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow*, 422).

4b. Rev Timothy Tow later studied in Faith Theological Seminary where he learned the doctrine of premillennialism under Dr James Oliver Buswell and Dr Allan MacRae.

1c. "Last of all, I learned it from Faith Seminary under Dr. Allan MacRae and Dr. J.O. Buswell. And I have been imparting this doctrine since I became your pastor and since I became principal, Far Eastern Bible College, 1962." (Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow*, 422).

2c. "One of the outstanding courses taught in Faith Seminary was Israel's part in the Second Coming of Christ and her preeminence during our Lord's reign on earth for a thousand years. I learned this doctrine under Dr. Allan A. MacRae, Dr. J.O. Buswell and Dr. R.L. Harris. Dr. Harris said to the class, 'I believe we are nearest to the truth.'" (Tow, *Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith*, 15).

3c. "One decade after the establishment of the Bible Presbyterian Church, USA, and Faith Theological Seminary... the founding pastor of the B-P Church, Singapore, entered Faith Seminary as a student... Being Reformed and premillennial he imbibed the teaching of Faith Seminary, under Dr Allan A MacRae and Dr J O Buswell, which was also Reformed and premillennial, with delight." (Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 51).

1d. In 1937, Dr Carl McIntire broke away from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and founded the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) in America because he could not agree with OPC's amillennial position, amongst other issues.

1e. "Because of the amillennial position of the old denomination being adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, McIntire and his friends, like Dr. MacRae and Dr. Buswell, seceded to form the Bible Presbyterian Church which is avowedly Premillennial." (Tow, *Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith*, 16).

2e. "Now, the leadership in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Westminster Seminary being amillennial and holding the position of Christian liberty in matters of smoking and drinking, it found opposition from those who were premillennial and held to the separated life. The two issues resulted in a group withdrawing from the infant Orthodox Presbyterian Church to form the Bible Presbyterian Church, and from Westminster to establish Faith Seminary, taking with them

the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions.” (Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 34).

2d. When the BP synod in America was founded, a document entitled, “Articles of Association of the Bible Presbyterian Fellowship” was drawn up. One of the articles included a statement on their decision to amend the Westminster Confession of Faith to include their premillennial position.

1e. “... 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 USA in May, 1936. We propose to amend these standards in any particular in which the premillennial teaching of the Scriptures may be held to be obscured...” (*The Singapore B-P Church Story*, 36).

3d. In the book, *Heritage and Legacy*, Daniel Chua claimed that McIntire had “urged tolerance of other eschatological views.” He based this claim on one of McIntire’s statements concerning this issue: “It is of historic significance that the Synod took action clearly setting forth the teaching of the Bible concerning the Lord’s return. This is an important doctrine, but it is of a different nature from the issue of the apostasy of our day and the denial of the blood of Christ and the resurrection of Christ on the part of men in the visible church. In this connection the Synod was careful to recognize the liberty of men to have different views concerning the Lord’s return.” (*Heritage and Legacy*, 514). Chua propounded that that was the precedent set by the BP Church in America for us today.

1e. What Chua failed to mention was that the article he cited went on to describe how the BPC took a stronger stand on the doctrine of premillennialism after its split in 1956.

2e. “After that division the BPC position on the premillennial return of Christ seemed to harden and to become specifically pretribulational. The board of Faith Theological Seminary issued a statement in 1959 stating that it ‘interpreted the statement that the Seminary was premillennial to mean that the pre-tribulation rapture was in the premillennial view of the return of Christ,’ and that the ministers of the Synod are ‘man for man believers in the pre-tribulation, premillennial return of Christ.’” (John A Battle, *Eschatology in the Bible Presbyterian Church* [WRS Journal: August

2004], 10).

3e. Carl McIntire's non-tolerant view was witnessed in this example: "The New Jersey – Philadelphia Presbytery was holding up the ordination of three men, two of them graduating from Faith Seminary, because their eschatology was not premillennial and pretribulational. The presbytery referred these men to the Faith Seminary faculty to have their views corrected." (Battle, *Eschatology in the Bible Presbyterian Church*, 11).

4e. "When the Bible Presbyterian Synod met in October 1982, Dr. McIntire and others wanted a resolution passed supporting the pretribulational position of the church. This position had never before been specified in official church documents. The resolution was introduced and passed on the last day of Synod. It stated that the 'imminent return of Christ in His Second Coming has been the Blessed Hope of the Bible Presbyterians from the beginning,' and further, 'The church will not go through the Tribulation.' The resolution did note the First Synod's declaration for eschatological liberty, but interpreted it **that no one will be disciplined for other views; it did not specify this liberty for new men coming into the church** (emphasis mine). This liberty 'in no way moderates the witness of the church to the imminent, pre-millennial return of Christ, taught in the Holy Scriptures.'" (Battle, *Eschatology in the Bible Presbyterian Church*, 11).

5e. Chua's claims that McIntire took a tolerant view concerning premillennialism are therefore unfounded and misleading.

6e. Unlike the BPC in America, the B-P Church in Singapore does not specify its position concerning the timing of the rapture. But the doctrine of premillennialism remains an important distinctive of the Church. As a matter of fact, Rev Timothy Tow did not see the need to quibble over the timing of the rapture: "To the Reader, here is a more vital question to answer. When Jesus the Messiah descends from heaven to earth that soon coming Day, where will you be? Some argue Christians will be caught up to meet Him in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, others say no, it is a Mid-Tribulation or Pre-Wrath or even Post-Tribulation Rapture. But if you have no assurance of salvation it is like a traveler studying three or four airline flight schedules from Singapore to New York, but he has not bought his ticket. Whichever plane is

leaving now, this very hour, how can you join the flight? O to be stranded when others in your family are gone above!" (*Prophescope on Israel*, 122).

5b. Soon after his graduation from Faith Seminary in 1950, Rev Timothy Tow went on to found the B-P Church (1955) and the Far Eastern Bible College (1962). The premillennial position of the B-P Church is clearly expressed in the statement of Faith of the Far Eastern Bible College:

1c. "We believe in the personal, visible and premillennial return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to judge this world, restore His chosen nation Israel to greatness, and bring peace to the nations as King of kings and Lord of lords (Jer 3:17, Zech 14:9, Acts 1:6, Rom 11:26, Rev 20:1-7)". (Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian: A Systematic Theology in the Reformed and Premillennial Tradition of J Oliver Buswell* [Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2007], 656).

2c. All faculty members of the Far Eastern Bible College are also required to sign a positional statement which reflects the College's stand on various doctrines. Amongst other doctrines upheld is the doctrine of the premillennial return of the Lord Jesus Christ: "I do subscribe to the premillennial view of eschatology that recognises a distinction between Israel and the Church." (*Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith*, 119).

3a. The Doctrine of Premillennialism

1b. The Position of the B-P Church

1c. Covenant Theology

1d. The B-P Church in Singapore subscribes to the Reformed system of theology.

2d. The Far Eastern Bible College's Statement of Faith article 4.1 states: "The Statement of Faith of the College shall be in accordance with that system commonly called "the Reformed Faith" as expressed in the Confession of Faith as set forth by the historic Westminster Assembly together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms." (Tow and Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian*, 656).

3d. The Far Eastern Bible College's positional statement in like manner affirms: "I do subscribe to the system of theology called "Reformed" as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and its Larger and Shorter Catechisms (1643-8)." (*Story of My Bible-Presbyterian*

Faith, 117).

4d. The Reformed system of theology is essentially a covenant system of theology. Reformed theology is synonymous with covenant theology.

5d. Covenant theology may be defined as the system of theology which “represents the whole of Scripture as being covered by two covenants: 1) the covenant of works; and 2) the covenant of grace.” (*Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, sv “Covenant Theology”).

6d. In the covenant of works, God promised eternal life to Adam and his posterity on the condition of his perfect obedience. Adam disobeyed God and by his disobedience, sin entered into the world and death passed upon all man. After the fall of man, God instituted the covenant of grace, where God, by His free grace, promises eternal life, on the grounds of the perfect obedience and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, to all who believe in Christ (Romans 5:12-21).

7d. Covenant theology stands in contrast to dispensationalism.

1e. Dispensationalists use the term “dispensation” to refer to “a distinctive way in which God manages or arranges the relationship of human beings to Himself.” (Craig A Blaising and Darrell L Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993], 11).

2e. C I Scofield in the Scofield Reference Bible describes the “dispensations” in the Bible as referring to periods of time which are “marked off in Scripture by some change in God’s method of dealing with mankind, or a portion of mankind, in respect of the two questions of sin and of man’s responsibility.” (C I Scofield, *The First Scofield Study Bible* [Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1986], 1572).

3e. Dispensationalists understand the different “dispensations” as referring to different periods of time or administrations where God relates Himself to man through various arrangements.

4e. There are mainly three types of dispensationalism.

1f. Classical: Represented by John Nelson Darby, the theologian of the Brethren Movement; C I Scofield, who

produced the "Scofield Reference Bible". This Bible was filled with theological annotations and introduced a new recognisable system of Bible interpretation known as "dispensationalism"; and Lewis Sperry Chafer who founded the Evangelical Theological College which later came to be known as Dallas Theological Seminary.

2f. Revised: In 1966, Charles Ryrie published his work "Dispensationalism Today". Ryrie identified three *sine qua non* of dispensationalism in his work: 1) The distinction between Israel and the Church, 2) which is based on a literal or plain interpretation of the Bible and 3) the basic purpose of God in His dealing with man in this world is the glory of God.

3f. Progressive: This form of dispensationalism was in development for at least fifteen years before it was introduced in the Evangelical Theological Society in 1991 under the name of "progressive dispensationalism". Progressive dispensationalism is represented by Robert Saucy, Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock.

5e. Dispensational theology is a system of discontinuity, whereas Covenant theology is a system of continuity. Covenant theology holds that the unifying theme of the covenants is the redemptive plan of God for the salvation of man. The B-P Church rejects the theological system of the dispensationalists.

2c. Israel and the Church

1d. The word "church" is understood in two distinct ways:

1e. The invisible Church: "The catholic or universal church which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all." (Westminster Confession of Faith, 25:1).

2e. The visible Church: "The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law) consists of all those, throughout the world, that profess the true religion, and of their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation."

(WCF, 25:2).

2d. The universal Church comprises all believers from the time of Adam to the time of Christ's second coming.

3d. In the Old Testament, the visible church was manifested in the nation of Israel. Israel was the visible, national witness of God.

1e. Buswell referred to Israel as "the church of Israel." He wrote that the nation of Israel in the OT "was not merely a political entity, but the nation as a nation was a 'separated' group, a 'chosen' people, a 'called out' congregation. Stephen refers to the 'church in the wilderness' (Acts 7:38)." (J Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* [Singapore: Christian Life Publisher, 1994], 1.420).

2e. "It is quite correct to refer to the visible people of God, as organized in national Israel, as the Jewish church." (Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2.489).

4d. In the New Testament, the visible church is manifested in the NT Church which comprises both Jews and Gentiles throughout the world.

5d. God does not have two different plans of salvation for Israel and for the NT Church. Believers in the OT and the NT are both saved by the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas OT saints looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, NT believers look back to the Lord Jesus Christ who had already come.

6d. There is a distinction between the Church and Israel. The New NT Church did not replace Israel. God did not cast Israel away, but has a future plan for Israel.

1e. In response to "Premillennialists who say Israel is no more Israel but fulfilled by the Church..." and that "all the blessings to Israel are now transferred to the Church," Rev Timothy Tow wrote: "The key to the question whether the blessings promised to Israel are fulfilled in the Church or in Israel herself is found in the whole chapter of Romans 11. ... This chapter on the restoration of Israel at the Second Coming of Christ is so clear that it needs no further explanation. Christ, the Virgin born Son of God, will return to our wartorn earth and establish a peaceful reign of a thousand years sitting on the throne of His father David." (Tow, *Story of My Bible-Presbyterian*

Faith, 16-18).

2e. Buswell made a distinction between the “church of Israel” and the “church as organized from the day of Pentecost onward,” explaining that “the church today is not a nation in any literal sense of the word, but it was a nation prior to the time of Christ.” (Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 1.420).

7d. In summary, where soteriology is concerned, we believe that God has only one plan of salvation for both OT and NT believers – redemption through the perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ. But where ecclesiology and eschatology are concerned, we believe that God has different and unique plans for both Israel and the Church. Nevertheless, these plans are not disunited, but they fall under the same covenant framework.

3c. Literal Hermeneutics

1d. Reformed theologians have traditionally adopted a literal method of interpreting the Scriptures. This literal method is also known as the grammatical-historical, literal method of hermeneutics.

2d. In contrast to that is the allegorical method of interpretation, which Reformed hermeneutics rejects. John Calvin expressed his rejection of the allegorical method, condemning it as the “contrivance of Satan to obscure the sense of Scripture.” (Henry A Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981], 66).

3d. Reformed hermeneutics adopts the principle of the “analogy of faith” in interpreting Scriptures. This principle is based on the belief that all of Scripture is in harmony and unity and will not contradict itself.

1e. The Westminster Confession of Faith wrote: “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.” (WCF 1:9).

2e. Buswell explained the same principle: “It will be discovered that the Bible interprets itself. Not only does each successive book in the time in which it was written presuppose the Biblical books which went before, but the earlier books in

many passages were clearly intended to point forward to Scriptures which were to come later.” (Buswell, *Systematic Theology* 1:25).

4d. Although reformed theologians have generally adopted a literal method of interpreting the Bible, there are those who tend to spiritualise away Old Testament prophecies, especially when they concern Israel.

1e. In response, Buswell wrote, “There are those who argue that we need a special kind of hermeneutics for prophecy, just as, they say that we need a special kind of hermeneutics for poetry... I would vigorously deny that we need any special hermeneutics for prophecy or for figurative language, other than what is included in the grammatico-historical method.” (Buswell, *Systematic Theology* 2:427).

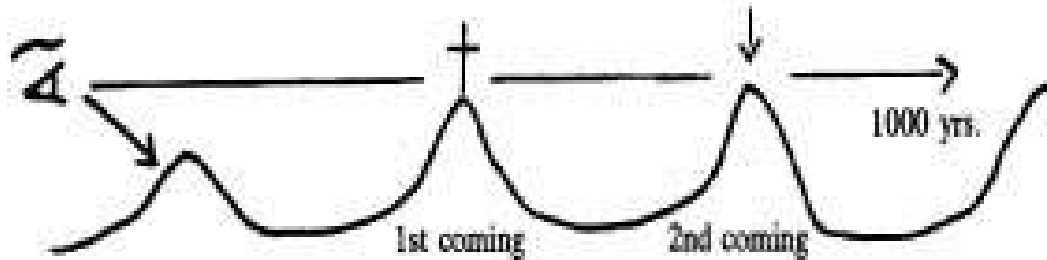
2e. Their method of hermeneutics is not the reason why Covenant theologians have failed to recognise a distinction between Israel and the NT Church, leading them to conclude that Israel and the Church are one and the same. Rather, it is because of how they apply their hermeneutics. Where eschatology is concerned, certain covenant theologians seem to have given precedence to their presupposed eschatological stance – where they fail to see God’s covenant plan for Israel – to drive their hermeneutics. While one’s theological system should guide one’s hermeneutics, one should also seek to be consistent in applying one’s exegesis to the Scriptures.

5d. Reformed hermeneutics rejects an “already/not-yet” or “double fulfilment” view of interpreting prophecies.

1e. While dispensationalists have traditionally also adopted a literal form of hermeneutics, some of them have more recently adopted a form of “complementary hermeneutics.” Progressive dispensationalists such as Blaising and Bock explained that there must be a “both-and” perspective in studying certain passages of Scripture. This is also called the “already-not yet” view or “inaugurated eschatology.” This view acknowledges the possibility of a prophecy in the Old Testament having already an initial or partial fulfilment with the view of a future fulfilment. (Darrell L Bock, “Hermeneutics of Progressive Dispensationalism” in *Contemporary Dispensationalism* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993], 91).

2e. Instead of a double sense or double fulfillment hermeneutics, we hold to what Buswell has termed a “double lens” and “cosmic perspective” view of prophecy. This is where “a single prophetic text or passage in its distinctive or respective parts or verses can depict both immediate and distant scenarios.” (Tow and Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian*, 480).

3e. Rev Timothy Tow termed this concept the “prophescope.” He explained: “Like a man looking out of his window into the distance, the seer and the prophet, insofar as prophetic history is concerned, can see a panorama of four mountain ranges...” (Timothy Tow, *The Gospel Prophets* [Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, nd], 11).



4c. The Millennium

1d. The premillennial position of the B-P Church and the Far Eastern Bible College is the dispensational premillennial or pro-Israel premillennial position. This position not only recognises the literal one thousand year rule of Christ on earth, it also sees a distinction between Israel and the Church in God’s eschatological programme. This is not to be confused with dispensationalism. The B-P Church does not adopt the dispensational system of theology.

2d. This differentiates us from the historic premillennial position. While historic premillennialists accept the literal reign of Christ in a literal kingdom on earth, they do not see God’s plan for future Israel as a nation during the millennium. They hold that Israel will be assimilated into the Church during the millennium. They do not interpret Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel literally.

3d. Rev Timothy Tow described some of the characteristics of the millennium.

1e. “How does the thousand years come in? The thousand years is mentioned six times in Revelation 20. In verse 6 is the

statement, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Rev 5:10 states further, "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." These statements include both Jews and Gentiles who are born again, but the Jews will be at the head."

2e. "That Israel who has been dispersed to the four corners of the earth for 2,000 years will be regathered and restored with the services of Gentile nations in the Millennium is the teaching of the whole of Isaiah Chapter 60."

3e. "During the Millennium there will be no more war on the earth. Jerusalem will be the capital of the world, and there will be no more the United Nations with headquarters in New York."

4e. "In order that Israel might play the major role in God's plan of salvation in the end times, leading to Christ's second coming and millennial rule on earth (Rev 5:10), God will gather the dispersed people of Israel as a restored nation a second time (after Babylon the first time)."

4d. Regarding the rapture, the B-P Church does not have an official position. However, the Post-tribulational rapture view is untenable as it does not see a distinction between Israel and the Church. The views which are tenable are the Pretribulational, Mid-tribulational, and Pre-Wrath rapture views.

2b. The Compatibility of Pro-Israel Premillennialism with Covenant Theology

1c. The Faithfulness of God

1d. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is an important tenet in Covenant theology. Equally important is the doctrine of the faithfulness of God.

2d. Terms in the Bible such as "promises," "fulfilment," "commitment," "testament," "relationship" and "covenant" are based on the doctrine of God's faithfulness.

3d. The oft repeated theme: "I will be thy God," expresses the faithfulness of God.

4d. In his work, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Jonathan Edwards, having traced the work of redemption from the time of Noah to the end times, commented:

1e. "From what has been said, we may see the stability of God's mercy and **faithfulness** (emphasis mine) to his people; how he never forsakes his inheritance, and remembers his covenant to them through all generations. Now we may see what reason there was for the words of the text, 'The moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but my righteousness shall endure for ever and ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.' And now we may see abundant reason for that name of God which he reveals to Moses, Exod. 3:14, 'And God said unto Moses, I am that I am:' i.e. I am the same that I was when I entered into covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and ever shall be the same: I shall keep covenant for ever: I am self-sufficient, all sufficient and immutable." (Jonathan Edwards, *The Work of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols [Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976] 2: 618).

5d. Covenant theology, which is a system which presupposes the faithfulness of God, must also recognise God's faithfulness to Israel. It is based on this doctrine of the faithfulness of God that we hold to a pro-Israel premillennial position.

2c. Israel as a Distinct Nation

1d. Genesis 12:1-3 records the covenant which God had established with Abraham. Three aspects of this covenant are seen in this passage: 1) There are promises concerning Abraham, 2) promises concerning Israel and 3) promises concerning all nations.

2d. In Genesis 13:16, God promised that Abraham's seed would be as the dust of the earth. The "seed" is an important aspect in the Abrahamic covenant.

3d. The Bible refers to the "seed" of Abraham in several different ways: 1) The Bible refers to the Lord Jesus Christ as the prophesied "seed" of Abraham (Galatians 3:16); 2) The "seed" is used in reference to the spiritual seed of Abraham (Galatians 3:6, 9); and 3) The Bible uses "seed" in reference to the natural descendants of Abraham. The natural descendants can be divided into two groups. One group includes all of Abraham's descendants, namely, Isaac, Jacob, Ishmael, and Esau. The

other group would only include the descendants of Isaac through Jacob. God promised that He would make a nation out of Abraham (Genesis 13:16; 15:5; 17:2). This nation would come through Isaac (Genesis 17:19), Jacob (Genesis 28:13-14) and the twelve tribes of Israel. God's covenant relationship with Israel therefore involves Israel as a distinct people.

2d. This covenant was formally inaugurated in Genesis 15 through a covenant cutting ceremony. The sign of circumcision was attached to the covenant in Genesis 17 and God reaffirmed His covenant with an oath in Genesis 22.

3c. Israel's Future in the Land

1d. God has not only called Israel to be a chosen nation and a peculiar people to be distinct from the rest of the nations, God has also promised Israel a land.

2d. Several characteristics regarding this promise can be observed.

1e. First, the land is given as an everlasting possession. Genesis 17:7-8 reaffirms this. The covenant God made with Abraham is an everlasting covenant. The land is mentioned in the covenant, not as a sign, but as a promise.

2e. Second, the land is also promised as Israel's possession. The promise was given not only to Abraham, but was also later reiterated to Jacob. God gave the land to Israel based on His everlasting covenant, not on the condition of Israel's obedience.

1f. In Genesis 28:13, the LORD spoke to Jacob and said *"the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it and thy seed."*

2f. This promise is reiterated in Psalms 105:8-11 – *"He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations. Which covenant he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a law, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant: Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance:"*

3e. Third, the land that was promised was a specific and exact land. The boundaries of the land were clearly delineated to Abraham by way of geographical landmarks.

1f. God told Abraham in Genesis 13:14, 15 to "... [l]ift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever."

2f. Following that instruction, God told Abraham to walk through the land in the length and breadth of it, and that would be the land God would give to him (Gen 13:17).

3f. The land is also described as "all the land of Canaan" (Gen 17:8).

4f. The clearest description of the land is further given in Genesis 15:18-21 – "In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

3d. Israel has yet to possess the promised land in its entirety, according to the boundaries which God had set. Is one supposed then to think that God will not keep His covenant promise to Israel regarding her land? On the contrary, this unfulfilled promise points to a future national restoration of the nation of Israel to the land given to her by God.

4a Evaluation and Application

1b. Importance and Implications of Premillennialism

1c. Since the birth of the B-P Church in Singapore, the doctrine of Premillennialism has always been a core distinctive. The new B-Ps have attempted to undermine the importance of this doctrine by labelling it as a "non-essential" and dismissing it as "secondary" and "peripheral."

2c. How can it be a non-essential doctrine when it has serious implications on other doctrines? In light of the above study, we can see the impact and implications of adhering to a premillennial position.

1d. It will impact how we interpret prophecies in the Bible. If one

does not hold to a premillennial position, then one has to spiritualise or explain away the prophecies and promises concerning the future restoration of Israel, which will be inconsistent with reformed hermeneutics.

1e. Prophecies make up about 25 percent of the Bible. One's hermeneutics in relation to prophecy will have a big impact on his understanding of God's Word. "According to 'The Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy' by J. Barton Payne, there are 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 prophecies in the New Testament for a total of 1,817. These prophecies are contained in 8,352 of the Bible's verses. Since there are 31,124 verses in the Bible, the 8,352 verses that contain prophecy constitute 26.8 percent of the Bible's volume." (Jack Kelly, *How Much of the Bible is Prophecy?* [<https://gracethrufaith.com/ask-a-bible-teacher/much-bible-prophecy/>] accessed April 2019).

2d. It will impact how one understands the relationship between Israel and the Church.

3d. A premillennial position affirms God's faithfulness to His people. There are prophecies concerning Israel still unfulfilled. The doctrine of the faithfulness of God is an important tenet of covenant theology. If one does not hold to a pro-Israel premillennial position, one will have difficulty explaining how God will fulfill His covenant promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob concerning the nation of Israel.

4d. It has implications upon practical Christian living. Premillennialists understand Biblical prophecy as warning that the world will become more and more wicked culminating in the rule of the Antichrist. Christians must therefore recognise the signs of the times. The comfort and assurance is that God is in sovereign control over all things.

2b. Relationship of Premillennialism with Biblical Separation

1c. The new B-Ps have either confused the matter of upholding the doctrine of premillennialism as a distinctive with the practice of Biblical Separation, or they were trying to use a form of "straw man" argument in order to undermine this doctrine.

2c. There is a difference between holding a doctrine as a distinctive and exercising Biblical separation over a distinctive. One should not conflate the two. The B-P Church has never required the need to exercise Biblical separation

over the doctrine of the millennium. But it is a different matter to say that this doctrine is non-essential as a B-P distinctive. There is no need to separate over the doctrine of Premillennialism, but the doctrine has to be upheld as an essential distinctive for the sake of unity. The distinctives of the Church are necessary for unity in worship and service.

1d. In practice, what this means is that we can fellowship and cooperate with Christians from other fundamental and sound churches or denominations who may not hold on to premillennialism. We may even allow the person to take the pulpit, if the person is a minister of the Gospel, as long as the person agrees to respect our distinctives and not teach anything that may cause confusion or breed disharmony.

2d. Within the church however, it is a different situation. Because membership in the church requires one to submit to and agree with the statement of faith of the church, and if premillennialism is a doctrinal distinctive of the church, then a person who is unable to hold to it will not be allowed to be a member, and consequently not be allowed to serve.

3c. The claim that upholding the doctrine of premillennialism may “detract us from our understanding of Bible-Presbyterianism” is grossly misleading. Upholding a Biblical doctrine will never detract one from understanding our B-P faith. The upholding of the distinctives of the B-P Church has never been the cause of division. It is the lack of clarity, the departure from these Biblical distinctives and the introduction of doctrines that are not in accordance with the B-P Church and the Word of God that have brought about divisions in the past.

INSPIRATION AND PRESERVATION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

Samuel Joseph

1a. Introduction

1b. The doctrine of scripture is fundamental to the Christian faith. The Bible-Presbyterian (B-P) Church, holding to the statement of doctrine expressed in the historic Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), has all along been founded on the belief that the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are “given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life” (WCF 1. II.).

2b. The doctrine of Verbal Plenary Inspiration (VPI) encapsulates this biblical truth: that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God,” inspired as a whole and in its parts (words, and even parts of words), so that it is infallible, inerrant, and “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

3b. It is important to note, in the first place, the *matter* of inspiration. The doctrine of VPI holds to the biblical teaching that inspiration has to do with words: not ideas, or general teachings, but words themselves. In the second place, note the *mechanism* of inspiration. The doctrine of VPI holds to the biblical teaching that God’s inspired Word was written down by men, “holy men of God” who spoke and wrote “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21, cf. 2 Sam. 23:2). God, in other words, used fallible men – *imperfect* instruments – to produce something *perfect*: His inspired, inerrant, infallible word.

4b. None of the above is really controversial in B-P circles. The issue that has arisen, however, concerns the *transmission* and *present state* of the inspired Word of God. Do we still have those same inspired words (and parts of words) today? Could God have used fallible men – imperfect instruments – to *preserve*, and not only to *produce*, His perfect word? The doctrine under attack now is the doctrine of Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP).

5b. The issue is not trivial. The modern Bible versions (based on “critical” Greek and Hebrew texts) that are now being promoted in some B-P churches, are significantly different from the Bible that has all along been used in (English-speaking) B-P circles. Whole verses are present in the latter which are absent in the former; whole passages in the former are either absent, or called into question. These differences cannot be brushed aside.

6b. The issue has grown heated. Even a cursory attempt to trace the course of the “VPP controversy”¹ is enough to reveal the sadly acrimonious nature of the dispute. It is not our purpose to delve into the detailed history of the controversy; nor to pick apart and categorise the various perspectives and opinions that have been offered; nor to sift truth from bias in the various accounts of events that took place. Rather, since the centre of contention has been the doctrine of VPP itself, it is this doctrine that will be of central concern to us here. The fires of controversy have drawn our attention and raised our alarm: ignoring the smoke and the flickering shadows, we focus instead on the heart of the matter. What exactly is the doctrine of VPP? Why should we hold to it? Is it biblical? How does it stand up against the alternative positions? These are some of the questions we will seek to answer in the following sections.

2a. VPP Explained

1b. The doctrine of VPP has concisely been stated as follows:

“VPP means the whole of Scripture with all its words even to the jot and tittle is perfectly preserved by God without any loss of the original words, prophecies, promises, commandments, doctrines, and truths, not only in the words of salvation, but also the words of history, geography and science. Every book, every chapter, every verse, every word, every syllable, every letter is infallibly preserved by the Lord Himself to the last iota. What and where are the preserved words of God today? They are the inspired OT Hebrew words and NT Greek words the prophets, the apostles, the church fathers, the reformers used which are today found in the long and continuously abiding and preserved words underlying the Reformation Bibles best represented by the time-tested and time-honoured KJV.”²

2b. Is there a biblical basis for such a doctrine? To confirm this, we need biblical answers to these simple questions:

- 1) Has God promised to preserve His word?
- 2) Has God told us to what degree He would preserve His word?
- 3) Has God told us where to find His preserved Word today?

¹ A “Chronology of Events” is printed in two parts in the *Burning Bush*: Vol. 18 no. 2 (July 2012) and Vol. 21 no. 2 (July 2015).

² Taken from http://www.febc.edu.sg/v15/article/verbal_plenary_preservation.

3b. The Promise of Preservation

1c. There are a number of biblical texts where God promises to preserve His word.³ The following passages are only a selection.

2c. Psalm 12:6-7

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.

1d. In the opening verses of the psalm, David laments the lack of “godly” and “faithful” men in his generation. It seems that those who stand firmly on the truth are no longer to be found; instead, falsehood and hypocrisy abound. From this deplorable situation David turns to the LORD, who has set Himself against “all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things,” and promised to set the poor and needy in safety from their oppression. But in a context of lies and falsehood; surrounded by dishonesty and hypocrisy – can such a promise be relied upon?

2d. David’s consolation is this: God’s words are not like man’s words. Man’s words are dross, unreliable; but “the words of the LORD are pure words.” They are pure from all error, from all falsehood, from all malice. They are “purified seven times” – perfectly pure, like silver of the purest quality: precious, treasured, dependable. And most importantly, they will continue to be pure, because the LORD will “keep” (or guard) them, and “preserve” them, for ever. Again a contrast is drawn between man’s words (which God will “cut off,” verse 3), and God’s words (which He will “keep” and “preserve”). God’s words are pure and preserved; man’s words are neither.

3c. Matthew 24:35

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

1d. The context of Matthew 24 concerns a long prophetic discourse of the Lord Jesus, delivered while He sat on the mount of Olives (verse 3). The discourse concerns the destruction of the temple, and other future

³ For a comprehensive review of many more such texts, see George Skariah, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Perfect Preservation of the Holy Scriptures,” ThD diss., Far Eastern Bible College, 2005.

events which will precede His second coming. The truth of the prophecy, and the inevitability of its fulfilment, are underscored and emphasized⁴ by the Lord in verse 35: though heaven and earth are temporal, His words are imperishable.

2d. By “my words,” Jesus was not simply referring to that particular discourse. Rather, He was arguing from the nature of God’s Word itself: God’s words are imperishable, they endure forever, they will never pass away – therefore this particular discourse will stand unchanged and unchanging, until all is fulfilled and heaven and earth themselves pass away (cf. verse 29).

4c. Conclusion

1d. These and other biblical passages make it unequivocal that God has promised to preserve His word. This is the uniform teaching of scripture, and a necessary corollary of the scriptural teaching on inspiration.

2d. Would the God who commanded men to live by every word of His, neglect to ensure that every word would remain? Would the God who settled His Word forever in heaven, scatter it irretrievably with mistakes on earth? What would be the point of God’s assuring, and our affirming, that “holy men of God” wrote precisely to the jot and tittle exactly what God wanted them to write – if that assurance were to be lost, and that affirmation to fail, for every subsequent generation?

4b. The Extent of Preservation.

1c. The next question to be answered is, has God told us to what extent He would preserve His word?

2c. Or, to put it another way: in what condition should we expect to find the preserved Word of God? Should we expect to find only the major doctrines preserved? Should we expect to find the gist of God’s Word preserved? Should we expect to find the general teaching of God’s Word preserved? Or should we expect to find the words themselves perfectly preserved? Here again we have scripture to guide us.

3c. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

⁴ The negation is very strong in the Greek original: the statement has the force of, “my words will never pass away.”

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

1d. Paul has been warning Timothy against false teachers and “evil men” who will “wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (verse 13). By contrast, Timothy is not to swerve from the truth, but to “continue” in what he has “learned” and “been assured of” (verse 14) – to continue in what he has learned from his childhood; to continue in the “holy scriptures” by which he has been made “wise unto salvation” (verse 15). This same scripture, which young Timothy had been taught on the knees of his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice, is then described in verses 16-17.

2d. The context is important. When Paul says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God,” Paul is not referring to some idealized concept of the “holy scriptures,” but to the very words⁵ that Timothy had heard as a child from his godly mother and grandmother. These words, which were available to Timothy many centuries after they were originally written down, are nevertheless described here by the Holy Spirit as being the inspired words of God.

3d. In other words, Timothy still had the inspired words of God, even though he lived centuries after those inspired words were first written, in a time when the autographs containing those inspired words were long gone – he had those same words, because God had preserved them. And because God had preserved His word, the scripture which was available to Timothy was still profitable.

4c. Matthew 5:18

For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

1d. In the “sermon on the mount” Jesus makes this remarkable assertion concerning the enduring authority and fidelity of God’s word. In this sermon He repeatedly corrects the established teaching of the Pharisees, using the formula “Ye have heard... But I say...” (for example, in Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, and so on). To silence the charge of

⁵ Significantly, the Greek word for “scriptures” used here is a rarer word, which has particular reference to the *letters* and *words* of scripture. See Skariah, “Biblical Doctrine of Perfect Preservation,” 68-70.

antinomianism, Jesus prefaces His teaching with the statement that He has “not come to destroy” the law, “but to fulfil” (Matt. 5:17).

2d. Verse 18 then explains why this *must* be so: the nature and character of God’s word, its authority and infallibility, is such that it *must* be fulfilled – and its necessary fulfilment is linked to the endurance and preservation of the text, the words themselves: more than the words, the letters and even the parts of the letters.⁶

3d. Every part of the *text* would remain in existence, even up to the time that heaven and earth were to pass away; and therefore every part of the *teaching* of God’s Word would remain in force. Even the very least commandment of God would remain, both in its text and in its teaching, so that all will be held accountable for their obedience (verse 19).

4d. The point is this: the teaching depends on the text – there can be no teaching (at least, no teaching certain enough for men to be held accountable by it) without an accurate text. Jesus is clearly saying here that the “law” and the “prophets” (verse 17) had been preserved to the very jot and tittle all through the centuries until His day, and that all of God’s Word (the Old Testament that existed at that time, and by extension the New Testament that was to be written) would continue to be preserved, to the jot and tittle, until heaven and earth pass away.

5c. Conclusion

1d. God has indeed told us, not only that He would preserve His word, but also to what extent He would preserve it. He has promised to preserve, not just the doctrines; not just the gist; not just the teaching; but the very words themselves, down to the jot and tittle.

2d. And this makes perfect sense: if the words themselves were not preserved, what confidence could we have in the teachings or the doctrines? Words are like containers allowing ideas to be transmitted from one mind to another – if there is no confidence in the words themselves, how can there be confidence in the meaning those words are

⁶ The word “jot” refers to the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and the word “tittle” refers to the little “hook” (literally, “horn”) that serves to distinguish pairs of similar letters – much as in English the letter “t” is distinguished from the letter “l” (and the letter “c” from the letter “e”) by a little cross-bar. It is worth noting here that the terms “jot” and “tittle” apply specifically to Hebrew – the original language of the Old Testament. God’s word is preserved in the same languages in which He first inspired them.

supposed to contain and convey?

5b. The Identity of the Preserved Text

1c. If God has promised to preserve His word, and has in fact preserved it down to every jot and tittle, according to His promise – then the crucial question is: has He told us where to find His Word today? There would be little point in saying that the preserved words of God are “somewhere out there,” if we did not know where and had no way to find out!

2c. In dealing with the issue of canonicity, we find that there is no specific Bible verse that lists for us precisely which books are canonical and which are not. However, there are biblical principles which lead us to identify the canonical books: these are the books which have been received as scripture by God’s people through the ages, and the books which bear witness (by their content and quality) to their own God-breathed character.

3c. Similarly, when we come to identify the preserved text of each of those canonical books, we find that there is no specific Bible verse telling us precisely which edition of the Hebrew or Greek texts of a particular canonical book represents the preserved Word of God. Instead, we have the promises and principles of scripture which allow us to identify the preserved text. These principles have been codified into seven “biblical axioms,”⁷ summarized below.

4c. Epangelical Axiom

1d. Why should we be looking for the preserved text of scripture at all? The epangelical (from a Greek word meaning “promise”) axiom basically affirms the biblical promise of God to preserve His Word (which has already been discussed above).

5c. Linguistic Axiom

1d. In what language should we look for the preserved Word of God? The linguistic axiom affirms that God has preserved His Word in the same languages that He originally gave it – Hebrew and Aramaic for the Old Testament, and Greek for the New Testament. It is these inspired and preserved Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words that form the foundational authority for all of Christian faith and practice.

6c. Temporal Axiom

⁷ Jeffrey Khoo, “Seven Biblical Axioms in Ascertaining the Authentic and Authoritative Texts of the Holy Scriptures,” *The Burning Bush* 17, no. 2 (July 2011): 74-95.

1d. Will the preserved Word of God be found to have been available to God's people, or locked away in some secluded and inaccessible place? The temporal axiom affirms that God's desire is for His Word to be known and used by His people. There will be a temporal continuity, in other words, to the preserved Word of God.

2d. The biblical picture is emphatically not that of a God who inspired particular words and then abandoned them to the vagaries of time, chance, and human frailty; rather, scripture itself indicates the nature of God's "singular care and providence," working through human hands to specially preserve His Word – a preservation not operative in a vacuum, but a preservation *through* God's people, *for* God's people.

3d. This is the situation that we find, for example, in the Old Testament. That there was a *command* for God's Word to be preserved intact for present and future generations, for their continuing obedience, is evident from such passages as Deut. 4:2 and Deut. 12:32. That there was a *community* or group specially tasked with this preservation, is evident from Deut. 17:18-19 and Deut. 31:9-13. The priests and Levites are described here as the custodians of the written Word of God. Copies – accurate, authoritative copies – were to be made of this written law, so that the kings could govern the people according to God's law, and so that the very words of God might repeatedly be read to the present and subsequent generations.

4d. This same care is evident throughout the history of Israel. We find Hezekiah's men copying out the proverbs of Solomon (Prov. 25:1). We find Agur warning against tampering with God's words (Prov. 30:5-6). We find Asaph the psalmist speaking of the "testimony" and "law" of God as something that He commands to be preserved and passed down faithfully and accurately from generation to generation (Psa. 78:5-7). We find Daniel, exiled in Babylon, still having, treasuring, and reading a copy of God's Word (Dan. 9:2 cf. Jer. 25:11-12). After the exile, we find Ezra, a "ready scribe in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6), who had "prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10), bringing the "book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel" (Neh. 8:1) before the people and teaching them out of these preserved words (Neh. 8:5-8).

5d. Certainly there were times when the people did not have the law of God. For example, in the time of king Josiah we are told that the book of the law was "found" by Hilkiah the priest, and read to the king; and

the king responded as one who had not known what was written in the law. How can we reconcile this fact? If God's Word was supposed to be preserved by His people, for His people, always accessible to His people, how come this book of God's law appears to have been lost before Josiah's time? The answer evidently is that it was not lost; it was not hidden; it was not inaccessible – it was neglected. The book was in the temple of God, not in a remote monastic hideout! They did not have the book of the law, because the temple had been neglected; the moment they began to restore the temple, the book was found.

6d. The bottom line is simply this: God wants His people to have His word; He has preserved it for that purpose. Thus if we are to identify the preserved Word today, there must be a line of temporal continuity: it must have been in the hands of God's people, used and approved by them through the ages – times of darkness, neglect, and apostasy notwithstanding.

7c. Ecclesiastical Axiom

1d. What should we expect to be the relationship between the church of God and the preserved Word of God, down through the ages? The ecclesiastical axiom affirms that the church, by the working of the Holy Spirit (according to Christ's promise in John 16:13), will receive by faith, hold to, and defend (cf. Jude 3) the preserved Word of God.

2d. Thus we find the church warned against pseudonymous letters purporting to be from the apostle Paul, but teaching falsehood (2 Thess. 2:2). We find the church receiving as inspired scripture the canonical epistles of Paul – against the “wresting” or twisting of those very scriptures by the hand of heretics and false teachers (2 Pet. 3:15-16). We find the church tasked also to spread the inspired Word of God, for example Paul's epistle to the Colossians (Col. 4:16).

3d. On this biblical basis we expect to find the church of God down through the centuries from New Testament times to the present day, to be the receivers, users, and propagators of the preserved Word of God.

8c. Evangelistic Axiom

1d. What should we expect to be the relationship between the preserved Word of God and the extant manuscripts available today? The evangelistic axiom affirms that by virtue of the church's obedience to the Great Commission, the preserved Word of God will generally be found in the majority of manuscripts, rather than in the minority (however

ancient or venerable the minority may be touted to be).

2d. The church was commanded to take the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth: an endeavour necessarily entailing the spread of God's Word to the very same limits. It was thus the duty of the church – a duty vouchsafed to her by none other than her Lord – to multiply and spread accurate copies of scripture across the globe. Surely an adequate testimony to the faithful discharge of this duty is borne by the substantial agreement of the majority of manuscripts extant today.

9c. Doxological Axiom

1d. What should be our own attitude as we endeavour to identify the preserved Word of God? The doxological axiom affirms that the approach and methodology that is adopted, and the conclusions that are reached, must be to the glory of God – the God who Himself, it must be remembered, has magnified His word above all His name (Psa. 138:2).

2d. Modern textual criticism, however, is a fundamentally rationalistic approach that puts the critic in a position to question and change the text based on subjective, non-theological criteria. This will be considered in a little more detail in a later section; it will suffice for now to point out that the logical basis for modern textual criticism is the assumption that the Bible (in its transmission through the years, at least) is just like any other ancient book.⁸

10c. Historical Axiom

1d. What should guide our thinking as we look at history to identify the preserved Word of God? The historical axiom affirms that just as God was active in *giving* His word, so He has been active in history in *protecting* His Word from being lost.

2d. We see this active, providential hand of God in biblical history itself. We see *direct restoration*: when Moses' anger was kindled at the sight of Israel's idolatry at the foot of Sinai, he broke the tables of stone on which God had written His law – but God restored that writing (Deut. 10:1-5). Then again, when God gave His Word through the prophet Jeremiah, and the scroll was read before the wicked king

⁸ Except for the vastly greater number of manuscripts available for the New Testament than for any other comparable piece of ancient literature. God, however, is not generally (certainly not directly) credited with either producing or curating this impressive collection.

Jehoiakim, the king cut up and burned the scroll (Jer. 36:23) – but God restored every word which had been on the burned scroll, and added more words of judgment (Jer. 36:32).

3d. We see *providential preservation*: in the time of Josiah, during the national reformation and revival that took place under his reign, while the temple was being repaired, the “book of the law of the LORD given by Moses” was found (2 Chron. 34:14).

4d. Informed by this understanding, we see in the history of the church God’s hand at work, particularly in the period of the Reformation, that great revival of the church. At a time when the great *truths* of scripture were being restored to God’s people, He was working also to ensure the restoration of the *text* of scripture. The men of the Reformation were guided by God in their textual labours; their efforts, culminating in the venerable King James Version (and most importantly, its underlying Hebrew and Greek text) have been passed down to us through the providential (not coincidental!) invention of the printing press.

11c. Conclusion

1d. The application of these “axioms” or principles leads us unmistakably to the Hebrew Masoretic text of the Old Testament, and the Greek Textus Receptus of the New Testament. The epangelical axiom leads us to begin the search; the linguistic axiom directs our attention to the original languages; the temporal, ecclesiastical, and evangelistic axiom narrows our focus to that text which is temporally continuous, ecclesiastically approved, and evangelistically multiplied.

2d. The doxological axiom leads us to conclude that modern rationalistic textual criticism is not the appropriate *method* to use in identifying the preserved text; the historical axiom, that this is not the appropriate *time* for us to be criticising the text handed down to us from the Reformation. Our duty now is to receive the text handed down to us, and not continually to apply textual criticism to it, coming up with new versions, editions, and so on.

3a. VPP Evaluated

1b. In order to complete our brief study of the VPP issue, it will be useful for us to evaluate VPP against some of the other approaches and views that have been put forward, as well as to evaluate some of the criticisms that have been levelled against VPP.

2b. Criticism of VPP

1c. Such criticism generally falls into two categories: a criticism of the *results* of VPP (usually along the lines that it causes schism and confusion and must therefore be guarded against); and a criticism of the *novelty* of VPP (usually along the lines that it is a new doctrine and therefore must be rejected).

2c. Criticism of Results

1d. The recent book, *Heritage & Legacy of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore*,⁹ features a chapter devoted to “The Verbal Plenary Preservation Controversy.” In it several statements are made concerning VPP and its alleged “results” – rather belligerent statements painting the doctrine as heretical, infectious, and damaging. For example, consider the following:

“The gangrene-like characteristic of the VPP heresy has been amply demonstrated both locally and abroad. Since the infection began to develop in Singapore more than five years ago,¹⁰ it has ravaged churches at an amazing rate. It has affected no fewer than six churches to date... The bad news is that Bible-believing churches that use the KJV appear to be most vulnerable to this infection.”

2d. The lurid sensationalism is obvious; the acrid sentiment abundantly evident – the truth of the statement somewhat less so. Quoting from the Lord Jesus, “Ye shall know them by their fruits,” the purveyors of this particular piece of propaganda go on to list three “fruits” of VPP: division, deception, distortion. These are three diabolical “d”s, indeed – but are these really the “fruits” of VPP? Are they really diagnostic evidence of doctrinal infection?

3d. Consider the first of these, “division.” In the first place, the scalpel cuts both ways: in order for division to occur, there must not only be some who hold to the doctrine, there must also be others who reject it.

⁹ The chapter in question is the eleventh chapter. The abbreviated title *Heritage & Legacy* will henceforth be used.

¹⁰ This particular statement was made in 2008. It is taken from an article written by the “Pastor and Elders of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church,” and included in an abridged form in the book, *Heritage & Legacy*.

More importantly, however: is division necessarily a bad thing?

4d. When Moses stood in the gate of the camp against the perversion and shame of the people, and said, "Who is on the LORD's side" (Exod. 32:26) – was he not making a division within the camp?

5d. Even if it were to be affirmed that the presence of division necessarily entails that one side is right and the other wrong – how are we to determine which is which? The surgeon operating on a tumour must make a *division* (for the sake of the patient, he can hardly afford not to!) – but before that he must make a *decision*: what is cancerous and what is normal tissue? Analogously, the pertinent issue here is the decision – whether the doctrine of VPP is biblical, or not – and not the division that inevitably results when some strongly believe the doctrine is biblical, and others equally strongly do not.

6d. The waters grow even murkier as we approach the muddy depths of "deception" and "distortion." One is simply at a loss to fathom how these can be said to be "fruits" of VPP. Do these writers seriously mean to suggest that believing the preserved Word of God exists and can be identified today, necessarily leads the believer to become a "deceiver" and "distorter"? But if that is not the case, then how can "deception" or "distortion" be called a "fruit" of the doctrine?

7d. In attempting to focus attention on these supposed "fruits" of VPP, the writers of the quoted article have sadly and entirely missed the point. In dealing with this issue the question to be answered is not "What happens to churches when there is a controversy regarding VPP?" nor is it "What do people who stand for the doctrine allegedly do in their defence of it?" – the question is simply this, "Is the doctrine biblical, or not?"

3c. Criticism of Novelty

1d. In a somewhat more cogent argument, the writers of the same article quoted above criticize VPP as being "a new teaching" or "a new doctrine," and moreover "a subjective opinion that has no biblical authority... purely human conjecture." Concerning the latter of these criticisms (really more like caricatures), it is to be hoped that the explanation of VPP above is a sufficient reply – and when the latter is silenced, the former meekly follows: for if a doctrine is truly biblical,

how can it be new?¹¹

3b. “Alternative” to VPP

1c. The book *Heritage & Legacy* contains a section reproducing the “Statement of Faith on the Preservation of God’s Word” of the Board of Elders of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. The statement is dated 8 November 2005. Since this is implicitly presented to us as the correct position (or at least a legitimate alternative) regarding the preservation of God’s word, it behoves us to examine it more closely.

2c. Confusion immediately arises due to apparent contradictions between the 2005 statement, and another statement by the “Pastor and Elders of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church,” dated January 2008, which is reproduced (in an abridged form) in *Heritage & Legacy*, just a few pages removed from the 2005 statement.¹² The following tabulation will serve to bring out these contradictions:

¹¹ For further assurance regarding the antiquity of the doctrine even in its ecclesiastical articulation, see Samuel Eio Tze Liang, “Towards a Historical Understanding of the Doctrine of Biblical Preservation” (MRE Thesis, Far Eastern Bible College, 2014). This has also been reprinted in the Burning Bush in four parts, from July 2017 to January 2019.

¹² Both of these statements are still available online: <http://www.lifebpc.com/about-us/our-stand> (accessed 21 March 2019).

2008 Statement (pgs. 470-472)	2005 Statement (pgs. 479-481)
<p>“The teaching [of VPP] can be summarised as follows: the process of preservation of the Scriptures culminated in the Hebrew and Greek texts underlying the King James Version.”</p>	<p>“We uphold the use of the KJV Bible, which is the best English translation of the Scriptures made by godly translators from the best Greek and Hebrew texts, which are the closest to the original texts.”</p>
<p>“[The teaching of VPP] would surely provide us with the most solid ground to continue using it [the KJV] and to discourage the use of any other version of the Bible. But as noble as the intention may be for this new teaching, we must realise that it is untenable.”</p>	<p>“We uphold the use of the KJV Bible, which is the best English translation of the Scriptures made by godly translators from the best Greek and Hebrew texts, which are the closest to the original texts.”</p>
<p>“Nowhere in the entire Bible is there a verse which says that God will restore the 100% purity of the Greek and Hebrew texts of His Word to make them exactly like the original autographs. Nowhere in the Bible can you find even a single verse that says or implies that God will do this restoration work through the translators of the KJV... This is all purely human conjecture.”</p>	<p>“We do believe that the Hebrew and Greek texts that were used for the King James Version of the English Bible (KJV) were providentially preserved by God and are therefore closest to the original autographs of the Bible.”</p>

Table 1: Discrepancies between the statement by “Pastor and Elders of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church” (2008; given the title “Mark Them Which Cause Divisions” in *Heritage & Legacy*) and the statement by “Board of Elders, Life Bible-Presbyterian Church” (2005; given the title “Our Statement On The Preservation Of God’s Word” in *Heritage & Legacy*).

3c. Apart from these inconsistencies, it ought to be pointed out that the position expressed by the 2005 statement is frankly tenuous and inadequate. The authors “hold to the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible in the original texts (autographs) which are perfect in every way.”¹³ They hold also to “an inerrant

¹³ Except of course for their regrettable lack of existence. This raises another line of questioning: can something that does not exist be called “perfect”? But this is perhaps too philosophical to be useful at this point.

and infallible Bible and the full preservation of God's holy Word."¹⁴ An extended quotation from G. I. Williamson (author of an exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith) follows, to the effect that the early copies of this "perfect" original "each erred in a slight degree, but they did not err in the same points," so that the original text "would not be lost or inaccessible because by the majority testimony of several copies, error would always be witnessed against. The true text would be perfectly preserved within the body of witnesses." The conclusion of the authors concerning the Hebrew and Greek texts underlying the KJV is, "We do not ascribe perfection to them... or say that they are the¹⁵ preserved texts to the exclusion of other manuscripts within the family of Received Texts. But we believe that they were providentially preserved by God and therefore closest to the original autographs."

4c. One senses at once a lamentable timidity about this position. On the one hand the assertion is made – with salutary force of certainty – that the true original text is *perfectly* preserved in the body of witnesses; that whatever errors exist, they are *always* witnessed against. Yet at the same time there is an inexplicable complacency about retrieving this original text!

5c. If we have somehow (by some arcane process!) determined that these are the texts *closest* to the original – can that satisfy us? Can we be content to lie with the lame man *outside* the Beautiful gate, without endeavouring to enter? Especially if we are willing to say that the *actual* original text is indubitably there, somewhere in the mass of manuscripts, and can certainly be found – that error is *always* witnessed against, and so can infallibly be recognized and excised!

4b. Fallacy of Modern Textual Criticism

1c. There is, it must be said, another very popular narrative that runs along somewhat different lines. From this perspective God has indeed preserved His word, somewhere in the mass of manuscripts available to us today; and it is our privilege to find His word, by the application of modern rationalistic textual

¹⁴ In the original statement the words "inerrant," "infallible," and "full" are in capital letters, for emphasis.

¹⁵ Again, in the original statement this word "the" was in capital letters, for emphasis. These emphases have been left out here for aesthetic reasons; the meaning is clear without unnecessary capitalisation.

criticism. Yet this line of thinking leads not to the texts underlying the King James Bible, but to the modern critical texts as being “closest” to the original autographs. Given the popularity of this viewpoint, it must briefly be considered here.

2c. Fundamental Assumption

1d. The fundamental assumption of such an approach seems to be that it treats (often implicitly rather than explicitly) the Bible like any other ancient book in its transmission – the only difference being the vastly greater quantity of biblical manuscripts.

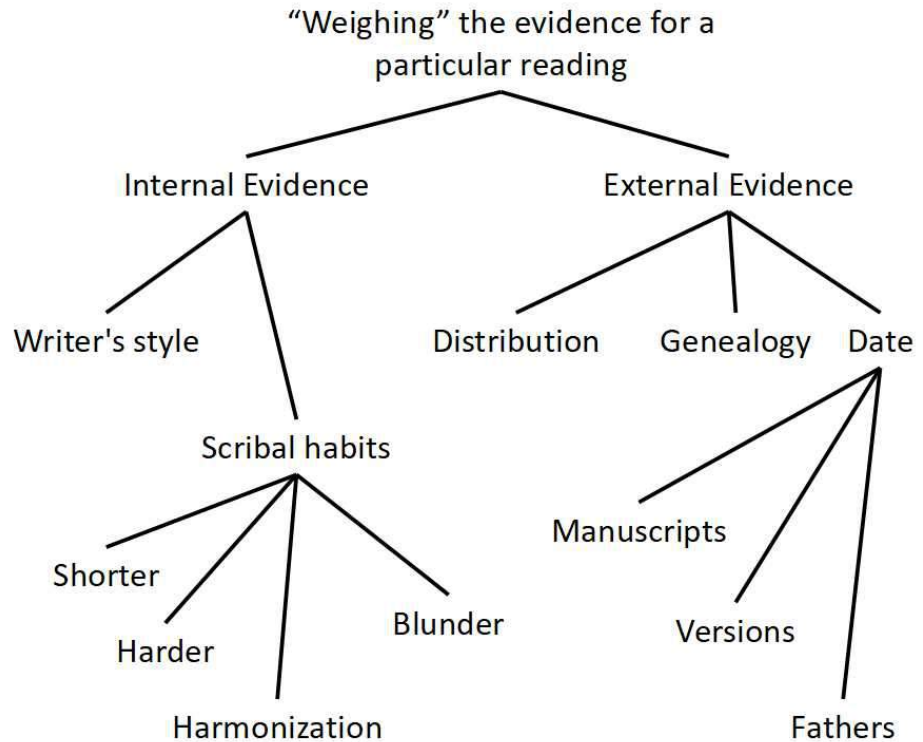
2d. This is a crucial point. The Bible (it is assumed) was preserved just like any other book from antiquity, by the production and distribution of hand-written copies. No spiritual forces were involved, either preservative or corruptive – the Bible may be a spiritual book, but its transmission through the centuries was a purely non-spiritual affair. There was no attack (certainly no concerted attack) by the devil to corrupt the Word of God; and the hand of God was not operative in any meaningful sense to preserve His word.

3c. Rationalistic Methods

1d. Such a naturalistic assumption naturally informs the methods that are developed to recover, from the available manuscripts, the original text.¹⁶ The following chart presents some of the more important “rules” used by textual critics for their reconstruction efforts.¹⁷

¹⁶ Of course, it must be said that at the time of the Reformation, when the printed Hebrew and Greek texts were being developed, there were some textual decisions that had to be made – it is simply a fact that there are differences in the available manuscripts. The real issue comes when we consider the *method (along with its assumptions) underlying such textual decisions, and whether or not God was at work in guiding these decisions in the particular case of the Reformation texts, and whether or not God is still at work guiding the textual decisions of modern critical scholars.*

¹⁷ These rules (this is not an exhaustive list) can easily be found in most modern textbooks on textual criticism, as well as numerous articles available online.



2d. The evidence is divided broadly into “internal” and “external” evidence. Which of these is more important depends on the particular views of a given textual critic, and the particular nature of the available evidence in a particular case.

3d. With regards to the internal evidence, the operative principle is this: the original reading is the one that best explains the rise of the other readings. This determination is reached by considering what is known of the habits of early scribes – they tend to add rather than omit (for fear of leaving out any of the sacred text), meaning that the shorter reading is to be preferred; they tend to clarify rather than obscure, meaning that the more difficult reading is to be preferred; they tend to harmonize parallel passages, meaning that readings bearing the marks of harmonization are to be rejected; they tend to make blunders such as omitting (or repeating) words because their eyes skipped ahead (or back) to another word with an identical or similar ending, meaning that readings containing such obvious errors are to be rejected.

4d. With regards to the external evidence, there are principally three factors to consider: the date of the reading (not necessarily the date of the manuscript, if the reading can be traced back further); the geographical distribution of the reading (a reading that is widely distributed is more likely to be original, and less likely to be the multiplication of a single

corrupt copy); and the genealogy of the manuscript in which the reading is found (manuscripts are grouped into “types” or “families” depending on various criteria).

5d. Now every one of these “rules” may be individually questioned. The idea of a particular “style” for a particular writer may be questioned – Matthew wrote only one gospel: does that really give us sufficient information to determine his “style”? And in any case, is it not entirely possible for a writer to vary his style even within the same literary composition? The understanding of “scribal habits” may be questioned – how can we be sure which of a set of readings a particular ancient scribe would find “harder” or “easier”? The whole concept of “genealogy” may be questioned – what are the rules (and how robust are they) that determine a manuscript’s genealogy? And in any case, what does that genealogy actually tell us about the readings found in a particular manuscript?

6d. The argument seems to be, however, that while the rules (both their definition and application to a particular case) may be individually questioned or debated, and while no particular category of evidence is decisive in and of itself, the totality of evidence can somehow be “weighed” in such a manner as to allow a final decision to be made. On the face of it, this appears quite frankly preposterous. How can a conglomeration – however adroitly composed – of questionable probabilities conspire to generate anything other than more probability?

7d. The textual critics have indeed come up with an attractive system, one tailored to fit snugly the shoulders of scholarship; a Savile Row suit in the wardrobe of academia – but however intellectually alluring, however mentally stimulating, however favoured by the elite, such a method can never rise above the realm of probability. There will be differences; there will be disagreements; there will be debates – but there will not be certainty. Thus we find that a number of textual critics themselves despair of ever truly recovering the original text of the New Testament.¹⁸

8d. There is, moreover, an even deeper problem: a problem of presuppositions. It is simply a fallacy to think that such an endeavour as this may be embarked upon without any presuppositions – one may as well imagine setting out on a transatlantic voyage without a ship or

¹⁸ A list of quotations to this effect can be found at: <https://www.wayoflife.org/database/ungodlyfruit.html>.

vessel of any kind. The question is which ship (which set of presuppositions), and the answer to this question has a significant impact on the destination that is eventually reached. The rise of modern textual criticism has involved the replacement of theological presuppositions with naturalistic ones: the modern textual critic thinks of the *text* of scripture quite apart from the *teaching* of scripture – in other words, the *teaching* of scripture has no say in what the textual critic thinks the *text* of scripture actually says.

4a. Conclusion

1b. This then is the doctrine of VPP. It is hoped that the questions raised in the Introduction, above, have been answered. It remains for us to look forward: with a word of caution concerning certain errors we ought to avoid, and certain attitudes we ought to adopt.

2b. Errors to Avoid

1c. A major error to be avoided is the error of “Ruckmanism.”¹⁹ Peter Ruckman and his ilk assert that the KJV is somehow “advanced revelation” – in other words, that the English of the KJV is somehow superior to the underlying Hebrew and Greek text. The error here is rather plain: the inspired Word of God is the Hebrew and Greek; the English is only a translation. What is pernicious, however, is the persistent tendency of some to characterize all who defend VPP, and all who uphold the use of the KJV, as followers of Ruckman.

2c. There is thus a need for clarity and precision here. Those who hold to VPP do not by many means mean to suggest that the English of the KJV is as inspired, or more inspired than the underlying Hebrew and Greek; nor do we mean to imply that the *translators* of the KJV were “moved by the Holy Spirit” in the *same* way as the “holy men of God” who wrote the *inspired* Word of God.

3c. What we do believe is that the translators of the KJV were guided by God in their textual decisions, and helped by God in their translation, so that what they produced was a faithful, accurate translation of the perfect, inspired and preserved Word of God. The translators of the KJV were fallible men. But – and this is a crucial point – saying that a particular word or verse can be translated *differently*, or can be *clarified* for a particular context or to make a particular point, is *not* the same as saying that the translation is a “mistake”! We do not believe there are any such “mistakes” in the English of the KJV, because it is a faithful and accurate translation; more than that, we believe that the

¹⁹ More on Ruckman can be found here: <https://www.wayoflife.org/database/ruckman.html>.

Hebrew and Greek texts underlying the KJV are the very inspired and preserved words of God.

3b. Attitudes to Adopt

1c. We need, fundamentally and always, an attitude of humility. Our desire is not to show ourselves better than others; any form of self-righteous boasting is to be repudiated. Indeed, we ought rather to esteem others better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3). It must be remembered that the position we hold is not a matter of superior intelligence, or even superior devotion – it is a matter of faithful, humble, prayerful searching of the scriptures to know the truth.

2c. There may be questions that we cannot answer. There may be questions that really cannot be answered in the present age. There are times when it is entirely legitimate to say, “I don’t know how to reconcile that.” It is important to remember, however, that in every matter we are guided not by what is more intellectually attractive, nor even by what seems more intellectually defensible, but by what scripture says.

3c. At the same time, the stand we take must be uncompromising, because this is an important issue. It has become fashionable to treat the text of scripture with a sort of desultory disdain: “use any version,” is the cry from some quarters; “use them all, it matters not!”²⁰ But it does matter. It does matter whether entire verses – entire passages! – belong in the Bible, or not. It does matter whether we have the very words of God preserved for us, or not. It does matter whether we can be fully certain of every jot and tittle of God’s Word as it stands today, or not.

4c. We stand at the crossroads of a new era. As we have been hearing, there are some who wish to reinterpret the past and reshape the future. What will Bible-Presbyterians stand for in the years to come? On this, and indeed on every other issue, let it be said by posterity – and most importantly by our Lord, on that last day – that we stood unwavering on the Word of the living God.

²⁰ Towards the end of *Heritage & Legacy*, the view is propounded that a “reboot” of the B-P Church in Singapore should involve leaving it “to the discretion of churches and individuals to adopt a reliable translation” (page 514). The assumption underlying this indifference? “[The issue] at stake... is the choice of Bible versions, and not a denial of the inerrancy of the Bible itself.” But this rather lofty ideal is destroyed by the simple fact that certain Bible versions either entirely leave out, or seriously question, significant portions of the Bible.

ESSENTIAL PRACTICES

Clement Chew

1a. Introduction

1b. God's Word is the very foundation of our Christian faith. It is the sole and supreme authority of our faith and practice. This is the reason why Satan is so ferocious in his attacks on the Bible. Psalm 11:3 declares, "*If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?*" Once a congregation's view of the Bible is lowered, the spirit of compromise will soon infect the church. Ungodly Bible study techniques and hermeneutics will flourish. False doctrines will be taught and propagated. This will in turn lead to wrong practices which displease the Lord and deal damage to the name of Christ. Finally, if the downgrade is not addressed, it will lead to apostasy.

1c. In the previous lectures, we have examined the downgrade of Christianity in new Bible-Presbyterianism. The attacks on historic Bible-Presbyterianism can be seen in the following areas:

1d. Inspiration and Preservation of the Bible

1e. The latest contention involves the doctrine of the Verbal Plenary Preservation of the Bible. This denial that God has preserved every jot and tittle of His inspired Words attacks the very foundation of our Christian faith. The highest view of the Bible is no longer adhered to.

2d. Doctrine of Premillennialism

1e. There is an acceptance of other views of eschatology in contrast with Pro-Israel Premillennialism. This affects the interpretation of the Bible, especially in the area of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

3d. Biblical Separation

1e. With a lowered view of the Scriptures, a spirit of compromise now enters the church. There is now a refusal to separate from unruly brethren. A permissive attitude towards false doctrine and practice pervades the church. "*Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*" (1 Cor. 5:6b).

2c. It is thus little surprise to see a call for broader latitude to practice among the new B-Ps (see especially *Heritage & Legacy*, 512-517). The historical positions

of Bible-Presbyterianism on essential practices are now questioned. These include:

1d. Burial or Cremation.

1e. Should we always bury the dead, or should we allow cremation?

2d. Alcoholic Drinks: Total Abstinence or Moderation?

1e. Should we allow social drinking so long as the person does not get drunk, or should we be teetotalers?

3d. Contemporary Christian Worship

1e. Should we permit Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) that seemingly appeals to the younger generation, or should we stick to songs with carefully composed structure, lyrics and harmony?

2e. What instruments should we permit in the worship service?

2a. **Does Practice Matter? – Double-talk in the BPCIS**

1b. Central to the issue is a disconnect in what is declared in a church's or presbytery's positional statement with what is practiced and proclaimed on the ground. The declared position may appear orthodox, but much leeway is given in reality for churches to differ from it.

1c. One example can be seen in the BPCIS White Paper with regard to church worship (*Heritage & Legacy*, 512). The White Paper states the following

1d. 2.3.b The choice of instruments – We encourage the use of instruments appropriate to the music being played.

2d. 2.3.c The use of hymns and spiritual songs – We urge our Bible-Presbyterian churches to continue using hymns within the rich 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.

3d. 2.3.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”.

2c. However, on page 513 of *History & Legacy*, Chua proceeds to ask the following questions of the readers concerning style of worship and style of songs.

1d. “Should the churches in our Presbytery only use hymns on account of its richer lyrics?” Chua then insists that the urging of the Presbytery for churches to use hymns “is not the same as insisting on the use of hymns alone”.

1e. *Critique:* Chua’s statement leaves the churches liable to accept other contemporary songs, including Contemporary Christian Music (CCM).

2d. “Or should we allow contemporary songs of worship that the younger generation more readily identifies with?”

1e. *Critique:* Did not the White Paper state that worship should focus on glorifying God, and not man? Why then is there a need to choose music to appeal to the tastes of the younger generation? Is the focus on God or man? If the focus is on God, then the chief concern should be whether the music is acceptable to God rather than to man.

3d. “Should we stick only to pianos, organs and wind instruments that better suit the carefully composed structure, harmony, and metrical patterns of hymns? Or should we also allow other instruments since music is a powerful force that shapes the worship experience through contemporary songs?”

1e. *Critique:* With these questions, Chua weaponizes 2.3.b to allow instruments in support of Contemporary Christian Music into the church worship service.

3c. Chua then claims that the BPCIS Presbytery leaves decisions on worship issues to “the discernment of individual churches”. There should be no attempt “to enforce a singular conformity to a certain style of worship (e.g., conservative worship with hymns only, accompanied by piano-organ only, without electric guitars and especially drums)” for such issues are “subjective” (*Heritage & Legacy*, 515).

4c. From Chua’s comments, we see that there is little insistence for member churches to abide to the positional statements in the BPCIS White Paper. What

purpose then does the White Paper serve if member churches are not prepared to adhere to it? Is it not double-talk?

2b. Jesus taught in Matthew 12:34 that *“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”* What we say and do reveal our hearts. Similarly, how a church conducts herself practically in her services and ministries reveals what she actually believes. When this differs from what is stated in her constitution and statement of faith, it is but religious hypocrisy and double-talk. A constitution or statement of faith must never be used as a cover-up for compromise in the camp.

3b. In the book of Malachi, the Lord charges the children of Israel for not honouring him (Mal. 1:6). The people’s reply was *“Wherein have we despised thy name?”* The name of Jehovah was still on their lips as they worshipped. They were still offering their sacrifices as commanded by God. However, the issue was in the sacrifices they offered. They were offering that which was polluted and blemished before the Lord (Mal. 1:7-14). As a result, the Lord was displeased with them. Religious hypocrisy is always an affront to God. Nothing shall be hidden from him.

3a. **Burial or Cremation**

1b. The Historic Position of the B-P Church

1c. The historic position can be found in the 1987 publication of the *Far Eastern Beacon*. The statement is as follows:

1d. *In keeping with the Word of God, we of the Bible Presbyterian Church of Singapore:*

(1) Exhort and encourage all our members to plan for funerals by burial and not by cremation.

(2) Disseminate such Scriptural teaching to our children and fellow-Christians so that they, too, will come to the same Scriptural understanding and persuasion.

(3) Remind BP pastors and leaders to avoid officiating or giving undue support to cremation. Cremation should only be decided on as an exception and after consultation with the Board of Elders.

2c. Timothy Tow

1d. Timothy Tow held to a position that the dead must be buried and not cremated. On Jan 8, 2006, he preached a message entitled *“Why We Do Not Cremate”* to explain his position on the issue. The sermon is

published in the weekly of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church dated 22 January 2006, Vol. III No. 17.

2b. The Position of the BPCIS

1c. White Paper of the BPCIS

1d. The disposal of the dead – We accept that churches may practise *burial or cremation* [*italics mine*].

2c. Statement by Daniel Chua

1d. “BPCIS therefore exercises the right to be practical and has allowed member-churches to decide between burial or cremation. ...the reality on the ground today is that more and more members are opting for cremation over burial...” (*History & Legacy*, 516)

3b. The Biblical Position

1c. The Doctrine of the Body (1 Cor. 6:19)

1d. Burial upholds the doctrine of the body. The Bible tells us that the body of the Christian is not unimportant. It is the temple of the living God. Therefore, we are not free to dispose of the body of the dead in any fashion that we desire.

2c. The Doctrine of Baptism in Christ (Rom. 6:3-5)

1d. When a man is born again, he is baptised in Christ with the Holy Spirit. Romans 6:3-5 teaches us that this baptism involves being identified with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection. Verse 4 says, “*Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death*”. When we cremate, we lose this testimony of a Christian’s baptism (an identification) with Christ in his burial.

2d. Verse 4 continues, saying, “*that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*” When we cremate, we also lose the testimony of our resurrection to come in Christ Jesus.

3c. The Doctrine of the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:35-50)

1d. The act of burial is a wonderful testimony of the future bodily resurrection of Christians in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:35-50, Paul likens burial to the imagery of a seed being planted in the ground. After some

time, the seed will spring forth from the ground as a plant. Similarly, at the appointed season, God will raise the bodies of believers from the earth. Just as Christ rose up bodily from the dead, so Christians will also be resurrected bodily from the grave. What appears as “dead” to the eyes of the world is but “sleep” for the believers. Burial therefore looks forward to the resurrection of Christ.

2d. There are some “burial-only” opponents who teach that Christians who are cremated will not be saved, or receive the glorified body. Such accusers confuse the issue altogether. All true believers, regardless of whether they are buried or cremated, will certainly be resurrected bodily. These include the valiant saints in the period of the Reformation who were burned at the stake for their faith. The issue affects not the resurrection itself but the witness of the resurrection.

4c. Burial of the Old Testament Saints

1d. The Burial of Sarah (Gen. 23)

1e. In Genesis 23, the Bible records the extent to which Abraham went to purchase a piece of land from the sons of Heth to bury Sarah. Abraham initially wanted to purchase only the cave of Machpelah (Genesis 23:9), but Ephron insisted that Abraham should purchase the whole land (field and cave included) for the burial (Genesis 23:11). Abraham could have easily solved the problem by adopting the practice of cremation just like the surrounding cities and nations. But Abraham willingly fulfilled the legal obligations of buying both the field and the cave so that Sarah could be buried. The burial not only expresses Abraham’s and Sarah’s faith in the land promises of God’s covenant to Abraham, but also their faith that they will one day be resurrected and be found in the heavenly land above (c.f. Heb. 11:16).

2d. The Burials of the Patriarchs

1e. Abraham was buried (Gen. 25:8-10)

2e. Isaac was buried (Gen. 35:29)

3e. Jacob was buried (Gen. 49:33; 50: 1-13)

3e. Joseph was buried (Gen. 50:26; Exo. 13:19; Josh. 24:32).

1f. In the case of Joseph, it would have been far more economical for the children of Israel to cremate Joseph and carry his ashes to be buried in the Promised Land. However, they did not do so. This shows how burial ought to be pursued even if there may be more economical and practical solutions for disposing the dead. The testimony of the resurrection far outweighs these factors.

3d. Other Old Testament Examples of Burial

1e. The Burial of Moses (Deut. 34:5-6)

1f. In Deuteronomy 34:5-6, God was said to have personally buried the body of Moses. *“So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.”*

2e. The Burial of Samuel (1 Sam. 25:1)

3e. The Burial of David (1 Ki. 2:10)

5c. New Testament Examples of Burial

1d. The Burial of Jesus (Matt. 27:57-60; John 19:38-41)

1e. Joseph of Arimathea specially sought for the body of Jesus to be buried in his tomb.

2d. The Burial of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:10-12)

3d. The Burial of Stephen (Acts 8:2)

6c. Cremation is a Sign of Condemnation and Judgement.

1d. The Judgement of Achan (Josh. 7)

1e. Joshua 7 records how Achan was punished for taking the accursed thing from Jericho. Achan and his family were stoned

with stones and burnt with fire. (Joshua 7:25).

2d. The Judgement of Saul (1 Sam. 31:12)

1e. The bones of Saul were burned as an expression of judgement for Saul's sins including the visit to the witch of Endor (c.f. 1 Sam. 28; compare also with Deut. 21:3).

3d. The Indictment against Moab (Amos 2:1)

1e. God revealed His determination to punish Moab because he burnt the bones of the king of Edom into lime.

4d. The Judgement of Jezebel (2 Ki. 9:10, 34-37)

1e. God's judgement of the wicked queen Jezebel consists of her body being eaten by the dogs. The body was thoroughly consumed by these scavenger dogs that only the skull, feet and palms of the hands were left.

7c. Cremation Is Associated with Heathenism

1d. John Davis in his book, *What About Cremation?*, noted that cremation was wide-spread since the early days of mankind, and was often associated with pagan rituals and mystical beliefs of afterlife.

2d. The Bible commands the children of Israel not to pass their children through the fire like the heathen nations. "*Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods.*" (Deut. 12:31) In addition, Deuteronomy 21:23 commands the children of Israel to maintain a separated witness – "*His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.*" (Deut. 21:23)

3d. "Cremation . . . with all that fire and burning would only evoke thoughts of punishment and judgement. Would not the message on the Christian's blessed hope of a future resurrection be contradicted by rolling a casket into the furnace? The fire gives a picture of hell, not heaven. Clearly, cremation illustrates the eternal destiny of unbelievers, and not of believers. The hideous sight of a body stoking up the furnace will only bring more sorrow and grief to the bereaved, not hope and comfort." (Tow and Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian*, 449).

4b. Conclusion

1c. Burial is the scriptural method of disposing the dead. Unless there are unusual circumstances such as wars or plagues where burning is mandatory, otherwise the dead should always be buried. The testimony of burial is that of hope, comfort and peace. This testimony is lost when cremation is practised. Let all Christians bury and not cremate.

4a. **Alcoholic Drinks: Total Abstinence or Moderation?**

1b. The Historic Position of the B-P Church

1c. The Historic Position of the Bible Presbyterian Church in America

1d. The Bible Presbyterian Church in America arose from a split within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (then Presbyterian Church of America). In their biography of McIntire, Rhoads and Andersen noted two camps within the OPC. "One group was strongly influenced by the teachings of Dutch theologians, Cornelius Van Til and R.B. Kuiper. This group of men was also openly smoking and drinking their beer and wine. The second group were offended by the smoking and drinking... When Rev. McIntire and others went to Westminster to meet together and plan the start of the PC of A (now OPC), as they approached the building, they saw that the windows were lined with beer bottles and some seminary men were sitting on the front steps openly smoking. They were told that Dr. Kuiper had planned it. So Carl spoke to him: 'You can't shove this in our faces, you will divide us.'" (*McIntire: Defender of Faith and Freedom*, 69).

2d. In her treatise, *A Brief History of the Bible Presbyterian Church and Its Agencies*, Margaret G. Harden noted three reasons for the formation of the BPC in coming out of the OPC: Premillennialism (in contrast with Amillennialism), Total abstinence from alcoholic drinks (in contrast with drinking in moderation), Support of all missionaries so long as they are fundamentalists (in contrast with support only for Presbyterian missions).

3d. The BP Synod was formed in 1938 with the following resolution, "We deem it wise to pursue the course of total abstinence." The Synod also noted that the resolution "was in keeping with the pronouncements of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. from 1811 to the turn of the century." Ministers were asked to warn of intemperance "to purge the church of a sin so enormous in its mischiefs and so disgraceful to the Christian name." (*A Brief History*, 63-4).

2c. Rev. Timothy Tow

1d. Rev. Timothy Tow also held to a position of total abstinence. In his commentary *The Gospel Prophets: An Applied Commentary on Isaiah and Micah*, he writes, "It is a grave error to quote the making of wine at Cana by our Lord for an excuse for drinking. The wine at Cana contained a very low percentage of alcohol. Besides, according to Hebrew custom, it was drunk with two parts of water. The drinks that cause a man to be drunk today, like whisky or brandy, have such high alcoholic content that it can be almost be used to run a car! But says Buswell, 'Our stomachs are not combustion engines.'" He then adds as a prayer in the devotional commentary, "Lord, keep me from any alcoholic drinks. Help me to be a teetotaler. Amen."

2b. The Position of the BPCIS

1c. The BPCIS adopts a graded fashion and tone to the following due to "divergent views" among members: (1) Games commonly used for gambling; (2) Patronage of commercial theatres; (3) Modern dance between sexes, (4) *Alcoholic beverages and tobacco* [emphasis mine], (4) Modern saloon and liquor traffic (*History & Legacy*, 508). By "graded fashion and tone", they mean that they will not "impose singular conformity" in any way. In other words, every member and church is free to hold on to their own position regarding these issues.

3b. The Biblical Position

1c. Biblical Terms for Wine

1d. Hebrew Words for Wine

1e. *Yayin* (יין) – This is a general term for wine in the Bible which appears 141 times in the Old Testament. It can be used to describe (1) grapes or anything from the vine (Num. 6:4), (2) freshly pressed unfermented grape juice from the vine (Isa. 16:10) or (3) intoxicating drink (Prov. 20:1).

2e. *Tirosh* (תירוש) – Often translated as "wine" or "new wine". This term occurs 38 times in the Bible. This word is used to refer to the fresh produce of wine from the field. It is often used in conjunction with other words of produce like grain and oil (Num. 18:12).

- 3e. *Shekar* (שכר) – Often times rendered as “strong drink”. This term occurs 42 times in the Bible. It is frequently used to describe wine that is made from other kinds of fruit rather than grapes. For example: barley or grain.
- 4e. *Mimsak* (ממסך) – Often times rendered as “mixed wine”. This term refers to cocktails or wine that is mixed with spices.

2d. Greek Words for Wine

- 1e. *Oinos* (οἶνος) – This word is the general term for wine and can be regarded as a close equivalent to the Hebrew word *yayin*.
- 2e. *Sikera* (σικερα) – Refers to sweet intoxicating drink made from something other than grapes (Friberg). It is similar to the Hebrew word *shekar*.
- 3e. *Gleukos* (γλευκος) – This word refers to sweet wine that has just begun the process of fermentation (Louw-Nida).

2c. Was Jesus a Wine Bibber?

1d. Jesus’ miracle of turning water into wine in Cana (John 2:1-11) is often used to support drinking in moderation. Proponents of moderation point to the term “well drunk” (*methuō*) in verse 10 and say that it refers to intoxication. They refer to Acts 2:15 where the same verb is used by the Apostle Peter to claim that the Apostles were not drunken. Thus, they claim that Jesus made wine that was intoxicating.

- 1e. Firstly, the term used for wine in this passage is *oinos*. As seen earlier, this term is a general term for wine and can refer to both fermented and unfermented wine.
- 2e. Whenever we interpret a passage, we must always consider it in the light of biblical theology. God has clearly forbidden drunkenness and drink that is intoxicating in other portions of the Scripture (Prov. 20:1; Isa. 13). To therefore say that Jesus, will make wine that is intoxicating will make God to be one who is inconsistent and acting contrary to His Word. God forbid!
- 3e. Moreover, it is often noted that the common wine in biblical times is not like the wine drunk today. The alcoholic content was much lower. “The wine of Sharon was mixed with

two parts of water, being lighter than others. With the other wines, the proportion was one part wine and three parts water.” (Timothy Tow, *The Gospel of Life*, 13). This would make the wine about 2 to 3 percent in alcoholic content, which is far lower than much of the alcoholic drinks we see today. The wine which Jesus made was the Wine of Life and not the Whisky of Death (Timothy Tow).

3c. Warning Against Wine Drinking from Proverbs 23:29-35

1d. Proverbs 23:29-35. *“Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.³¹ Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things. Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.”*

1e. **Flee from drinking.** Some argue that the commandment is meant only for the drunkards as verse 30 addresses those who “tarry long at wine”. However, an examination of the context reveals that Solomon addresses the command to every individual reader of the Proverbs, whom he terms affectionately as “my son” (v.26), and not just the drunkards. Moreover, while verse 30 addresses the drunkards in the plural (i.e. “they”), the command to “look not” (*al tēre*) in verse 31 is given in the singular (i.e. “thou”). This shows that the command not to look at alcoholic drink is meant for every Christian. The urgent exhortation is thus not one of moderation, but one of total abstinence. Do not even set your eyes upon it, what more to drink!

The thrust of the message is this – the best way to avoid the dangers of alcohol is to guard one’s eyes, for alcoholic drink is highly seductive. It first attacks through the eye gate with its attractive colours. The second line “*when it giveth its colour in the cup*” can be rendered literally as “when it gives in the cup its eye”. It is as though the alcoholic drink is an active seducer who will not stop looking at you with her eye. Once you are snared visually, you will proceed to taste it. When it goes down the throat, “*it moveth itself aright*”, appealing to the taste buds, leaving

you hooked by the aesthetic experience it gives. Before you know it, the deadly consequences kick in, stinging like a poisonous snake (v.32), one of which includes a slavish addiction to the seductive spirit in the cup.

2e. **Dangers of Drinking.**

1f. *Addiction (v.30)*. The term for “wine” (*yayin*) is a generic description of both unfermented (i.e. non-alcoholic grape juice) as well as fermented wine (i.e. alcoholic wine). Over here, the term refers to alcoholic drink because it is paired in parallel with “mixed wine” (*mimsāk*). The second term refers not only to alcoholic drink, but those which have been mixed with spices or other kinds of spirits, thereby increasing the taste and potency of the cocktail.

Verse 30 is most vivid in describing the addiction of the alcoholic. He will not just tarry at the drink, but to tarry **long**. He will also make an active and voluntary entrance (literally “to go in”) for the alcoholic drink. He will not stop at just the most generic forms of alcoholic wines, but begin to expand his menu of spirits, thus becoming an addict connoisseur.

2f. *Contention (v.29)*. Verse 30 begins with the interjection “woe” (*wōy*). It is an impassioned cry of grief and despair (*BDB*) due to the sorrow caused by the alcoholic wine. This sorrow is caused by the “contention” that arise from drinking alcohol. The terms “contentions” and “babblings” are purposely presented in the plural, telling us that it is something that soon becomes habitual to the alcoholic. These “contentions” are not the godly contention of the faithful Christian who seeks to earnestly contend for the faith (c.f. Jude 3). Rather they arise from the “babblings” of the alcoholic. These “babblings” arise from a tormented mind which rehearses agitation within itself and soon results in an outward pouring of misery on both himself and others. It is little wonder that we often hear of family members who are abused by loved ones who are addicted to alcohol.

3f. *Riotous Conduct (v.33)*. An intoxicated man will

soon see things that may not be present in reality (see v.34-35). Moreover, alcoholic drink is often associated with seductive women. Are not many advertisements of wine filled with pictures of sensual women? An alcoholic may soon find his life descended into sexual promiscuity. This results in broken marriages. Many young women are also raped after they have been rendered weak and unconscious by alcohol. Ladies beware!

In addition, a person may soon speak “perverse things”. These “perverse things” (*tapucah*) refers to things that has been turned upside down from reality and truth. They are things which are contrary to the Word of God. Note that these utterances begin in the heart. Because perverseness is found in the inner man, it will soon manifest itself in the speech and actions. Some of the most senseless and wicked things are said under the influence of alcohol.

4f. *Twisted Perception of Reality (v.34-35)*. Verse 34 is a most poetic description of the drunkard who has lost all sense of control. Not only has he lost all sense of reality, but his drunkenness has caused him to be knocked out just like someone floating in a boat or vessel in the midst of a violent ocean. The picture of many men and women lying unconscious in the streets after a drunken party, some in a state of undress, most certainly fits what we read in verse 34.

This twisted sense of reality continues in verse 35. A drunkard can often be struck down by others, yet he thinks that he is invincible. Or perhaps he may not even know that he is struck. He simply does not feel the pain. However, after the alcoholic awakes from his drunken stupor, he is soon actively seeking (*bāqash*) for his next drink. It first starts with a look at the seductive wine. Now, he is fully ensnared!

4c. Two Debated Passages

1d. Ephesians 5:18. *“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;”*

1e. This passage is often used to argue that it is fine to drink in moderation so long as it is not in “excess”.

2e. The term “excess” is translated from the Greek term *asotia*. This term refers to a lifestyle that is wasteful, profligate, riotous and full of debauchery. It is used to describe the prodigal son in Luke 15:13 who wasted his life away.

3e. This passage is thus a warning of what can happen when one is drunk with wine. It can lead one to be riotous in his conduct, engaging in much sin and debauchery. Instead of filling oneself with the wine spirit, a Christian should instead be filled with the Holy Spirit. It should not be used to justify drinking in moderation.

2d. 1 Timothy 5:23. *“Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.”*

1e. Context is the key in this passage. Timothy has been suffering from stomach discomfort. This was possibly exacerbated by the water which he had drunk. In those days, water was treated by disinfecting it with some wine. Timothy had kept himself from wine, wary that as a pastor, he ought not to be given to wine (1 Tim. 3:8). Thus, the Apostle Paul saw fit to ask Timothy to treat the water with wine for the sake of his health. The alcoholic content in this water would have been extremely diluted. Thus, this passage should not be used to support drinking in moderation.

3c. Conclusion

The Scriptures warn expressedly against alcoholic drink. The teaching is not one of moderation, but one of total abstinence. This has been the historical and Biblical position of the Bible-Presbyterian Church. A Christian should therefore steer clear from the trending culture of social drinking. Guard your eye gate. Do not dwell on wine. Do not drink.

5a. Contemporary Christian Worship

1b. The Historic Position of the B-P Church

1c. The BPC adopts the regulative principle of worship.

1d. *The regulative principle involves two vital doctrines of the Christian faith. The first is the doctrine of God’s nature. 1 Corinthians 14:33 and 40 tells us that the God we worship is a God of decency and order, and not confusion. God is not pleased with any form of worship that is*

chaotic, wild, and uncontrolled. Spiritual maturity is an important element. The more spiritually minded we are, the more sensitive we will be to the holiness of God. It is not so much a matter of rules and regulations, but of spirituality. If our hearts and minds are biblically tuned to God and His Word, we do not need anyone to give us a list of "do's and don'ts," we will automatically know what God wants us to be and what He wants us to do. We will naturally desire what God desires. 1 Corinthians 2:15-16 says, "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ." (Theology for Every Christian, 366).

2c. The historic position of the BPC is to reject all forms of Charismatic and contemporary worship style and music.

2b. The Position of BPCIS

1c. The BPCIS leaves decisions on worship issues to "the discernment of individual churches". There should be no attempt "to enforce a singular conformity to a certain style of worship (e.g., conservative worship with hymns only, accompanied by piano-organ only, without electric guitars and especially drums)" for such issues are "subjective". Thus, the BPCIS is open to members adopting a more contemporary style of worship.

3b. The Biblical Position

1c. What is Biblical Worship?

1d. Worship can be defined as rendering unto God all the glory and praise that is due unto Him with an appropriate spiritual response to Biblical truth. True worship must be done in spirit and in truth. To worship in spirit means that worship is spiritual in nature and must be from the inner man. This can only be possible if the worshipper is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and submits to its control and influence. On the other hand, worshipping in truth requires all worship to be in accordance with God's Word. The Christian is expected to come before the Lord in holiness (1 Chronicles 16:1-2). Right worship must be consistent with the character of God.

2d. The Elements of Biblical Worship

1e. Biblical worship must focus on the right person (Ps. 135:1-6). Our object of worship must be solely the triune God.

- 2e. Biblical worship must accomplish the right purpose (Ps. 96:7-8). It must abound to the glory of God.
- 3e. Biblical worship must be done in the right pattern (John 4:24). Since God is the object of worship, all worship must be done according to God's principles and stipulations. These principles and stipulations are found in God's Word. The Word must thus be central in our worship of God.
- 3d. Worship becomes unacceptable in the eyes of God when we worship someone else other than Him (i.e. false gods; Psalm 115; Exo. 34:14; Isa. 42:8); worship God in the wrong form (Exo. 32:4-6 where the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf as *Elohim*); worship God in a self-styled fashion (Lev. 10:1-3; Isa. 29:13); worship God with a wrong attitude (1 Sam. 15:1-23; Mal. 1; Isa. 1:11-15).
- 2c. Doctrine of Biblical Separation.
- 1d. The Lord must be worshipped in the beauty of holiness (Ps. 29:2; 96:9). Therefore, true worship must also involve the doctrine of separation (Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:14-17). The music that we use must not be associated with any sinful and ungodly themes. Though the church is in the world, the worship of the church must not be of the world.
- 3c. Evaluating Songs Used in Worship.
- 1d. The Purpose of Singing.
- 1e. Colossians 3:16-17. *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.¹⁷ And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."* This teaches us that singing can also function to teach and admonish the brethren.
- 1f. *Teaching function.* The term "teaching" is the Greek διδάσκω (*didaskō*) that is related to the noun διδαχή (*didachē*) which means "teaching" or "doctrine" (Louw-Nida). Therefore, the term διδάσκω has the idea of indoctrination. One of the functions of hymns is thus to teach doctrine to those who are singing or hearing the song. At the

end of the song, the hearers should learn or be reminded the truth of God's Word.

- 2f. *Admonishing function.* Comes from *νουθετέω*, which means "to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct, admonish, warn, instruct".
- 2e. Good biblical singing is a means of grace to ensure that the word of Christ dwell in us richly! The word "*dwell*" (*ἐνοικέω, enoikeō*) has the idea of someone "making a home" in or among a particular people. In this case, it is the Word of Christ that is to take personal residence in the lives of God's people. Furthermore, the verb "*dwell*" is written as a command in the present tense. This means that it is not an option for the Christian to reject the Word of Christ. It must dwell "richly" (*πλουσίως*) and take strong control of our lives. As Spurgeon once remarked, the Christian's blood is to be "Bibline".
- 3e. Moreover, the Bible tells us that the Word of Christ is to dwell in believers "*in all wisdom*". Singing must always be done with heavenly wisdom that comes from God's Word, and not by the whims and fancies of man's imagination.
- 4e. The Christian must sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. We sing because of the experience of God's amazing grace in our lives. It is singing that comes from our inner man because of the inward reality of salvation, and thus singing with joyful expression. In addition, this singing is done "in the name of the Lord". God's name encapsulates His nature, character and attributes. Thus, no part of our songs of worship should detract from the nature, character and attributes of the triune God.
- 2d. Textual Considerations
 - 1e. Does it promote the glory of God? (Isa. 42:8).
 - 2e. Does it teach good doctrine? Is the theology in accordance with the Word of God? (See 1 Corinthians 14).
 - 3e. Who wrote the words? Any associations with unbiblical

movements?

3d. Musical Considerations

1e. Is the message of the music appropriate to the lyrics of the song? Does it assist in promoting the truth of God's Word?

2e. How is the music presented? Is it presented in a controlled fashion? Or is it presented in a sensual manner?

3e. How does the singer express his vocals? Does he sing in a worldly fashion? Does he attract attention to himself?

4c. What is Contemporary Christian Music (CCM)?

1d. CCM is not about the writing of new songs. It is a movement that involves worldly and highly syncopated styles of music that arose around the 1960s, and using these contemporary music styles to. It is sometimes also known as Contemporary Worship Music (CWM).²¹ Some equate CCM to Christian rock. In reality, CCM embraces a wide variety of musical styles. Examples include various forms of rock (such as soft rock, hard rock, country rock, blues rock, acid rock and punk rock), rap, bee bop, blues and jazz, country and techno-drive (for example heavy metal, retro, industrial etc.) According to John Frame, a leading proponent of CWM, "... the tunes and musical arrangements tend to reflect a popular style somewhat like the 'soft rock' of the early 1970s. It is this style which serves to define CWM in the minds of many, but it would be an exaggeration to say that CWM totally lacks stylistic variety." Dan Lucarini, a former musician involved in CCM, states that CCM "includes other forms of **heavily syncopated music** with rock influences such as jazz, rap, blues, hip-hop, punk ska or modern country & western." (*Why I Left The Contemporary Music Movement*, 17).

2d. The Roots of the CCM Movement

²¹ The expression "Contemporary Worship Music" is coined especially by certain theologians such as John Frame. He claims that the term "CCM" was too broad since it "refers to everything from Christian heavy metal to Maranatha praise choruses, including much which nobody, not even the CCM artists would recommend for use in worship." However, a survey of his book would reveal that his use of CWM does not differ very much from the way others would define CCM. See John M. Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1997), 9.

1e. The First Root: The Roman Catholic Church

1f. The first root of CCM can be traced back to the Northern American Roman Catholic Church.²² In the 1960s, the RCC became concerned that they were losing millions of youths to the popular culture. In a move to attract these youths, Vatican II decided to introduce “guitar” masses. These masses quickly caught on with the youths, and some of these songs were introduced to Catholic youth campfire meetings, which are very similar to the youth camps in Bible-Presbyterian Churches. These songs were sung in a country style that is very similar to tunes such as “Kum Bayah” and “Michael Row the Boat Ashore”. One of the popular tunes is “We are One in the Spirit”, which is a song infused with ecumenical theology sung to a minor key.

2e. The Second Root: The Jesus Movement

2f. The second root of CCM was born from the “Jesus Movement” in the 1960s. This movement aimed to reach out to the youth of California who had been affected by the lifestyle of drugs, free sex and radical politics. This group of people is often termed “hippies”. In order to reach out to these “hippies”, the music used was designed to appeal to the youth of those times. The only difference lies in the lyrics which were changed so that they contained so-called “Christian” theology. This Jesus Movement soon caught on for these hippies regarded Jesus as a rebel against the Roman and Jewish establishment of His time, just as the youths desired to rebel against the establishment and norms of those times. It is little wonder that one of the most popular CCM rap artists of the 21st Century, Lecrae, launched his career by a work entitled *Rebel*.

3e. The Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement

3f. The third root of CCM lies in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement. As the movement grew, it was

²² Adopted from a webpage entitled *School of the Rock* by Paul D. Race. The website can be accessed at http://www.schooloftherock.com/html/a_brief_history_of_contemporar.html.

also determined to create music that was unique to the movement. They did not want to be associated with the limited traditional styles of old, but wanted something that was more vibrant for which worshippers can easily identify to be “Charismatic”.

5c. Some Genres of Music in CCM.

- 1d. Rock and Roll. This term was originally a slang word for sex. This style was later popularised as a means to antagonise the older generation. “The great strength of rock ‘n’ roll lies in its beat ... it is a music which is basically *sexual, un-Puritan* ... and a threat to established patterns and values” (Irwin Silber, *Marxist, Sing Out*, May 1965).
- 2d. Rock Music. Music that was originally composed as part of the counterculture movement.
- 3d. Jazz. Features high improvisation. Originally created to refer to liveliness and sexual excitement.
- 4d. Pop Music. Originally the music of the hippies, it has now come to mean the music that is generally embraced by the world with a mix of styles.

4b. Conclusion

CCM is not Biblical. If the songs do not fail in their doctrinal content, they will certainly fail the criteria for musical soundness. Moreover, CCM has associations with the Charismatic and Ecumenical movement. Therefore, the music and songs promoted by the CCM movement ought to be rejected.

Appendix A

The Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore

Statement on Cremation

(Far Eastern Beacon, July 1987)

The Situation

- (1) There is an increasing number of cremations in Singapore even amongst Christians.
- (2) It is quite evident that our Government favours cremation by improving the facilities of the existing crematoria and columbaria, and by increasing the cost of burial while keeping down the cost of cremation.
- (3) Some non-BP pastors have spoken and written in favour of cremation and have officiated at cremations while some non-BP churches have even built columbaria.
- (4) Those who favour cremation claim it is more hygienic, cleaner and cheaper.
- (5) They see cremation as a convenient form of disposal of the dead.
- (6) Cremation does away with burial plots that need to be upkeep and falls in line with our Government's stress on strategic land use.

Scriptural Considerations

The Scriptures plainly teach:

- (1) Christians are to love their own bodies (Eph 5:28), even at death, the corpse is not to be lightly disposed of, having been associated with the soul of a departed loved one. God's judgment upon Adam was that at death, Adam should return to the ground: "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen 3:19).
- (2) The patriarchs and their spouses were buried, viz. Abraham (Gen 25:9), Sarah (Gen 23:19), Isaac (Gen 35:29), Rebekah (Gen 49:31), Jacob (Gen 50:5-7,13), Leah (Gen 49:31), Rachel (Gen 35:19-20) and Joseph (Josh 24:33).
- (3) Our Lord Jesus was laid in a tomb and buried (Matt 27:60; 1 Cor 15:4).
- (4) Burial of the believer at death is compared to being "sown in corruption" (1 Cor 15:42,44). This exemplifies faith and hope of the resurrection.

Why We Should Not Cremate

(1) In the Scriptures, in some cases non-burial is a mark of God's judgment and curse, eg the disposal by burning of Achan and his family (Josh 7:24-25), of harlots (Gen 38:24; Lev 21:9) and the disposal of Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:10,34), of King Jehoiakim (Jer 22:19).

(2) Christians are reminded to glorify the Lord by life or by death and that "whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:8).

(3) To see the disposal of a loved one's corpse by cremation is usually painful to the bereaved and violates the sacred memory of the dead.

Exceptions

We recognise that there could be unusual circumstances, e.g. in times of war, or plague, where disposal of the dead by burning may be mandatory.

Conclusion

In keeping with the Word of God, we of the Bible Presbyterian Church of Singapore:

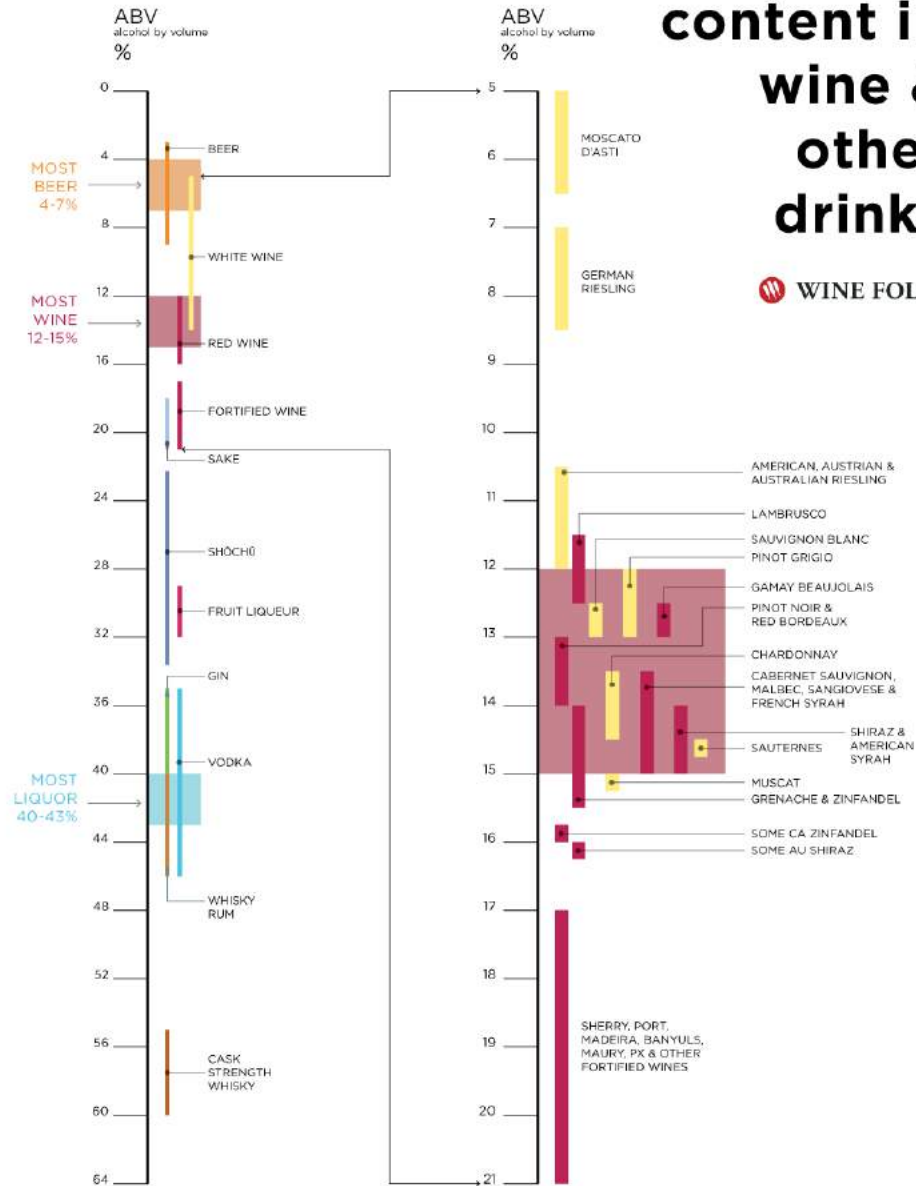
(1) Exhort and encourage all our members to plan for funerals by burial and not by cremation.

(2) Disseminate such Scriptural teaching to our children and fellow-Christians so that they, too, will come to the same Scriptural understanding and persuasion.

(3) Remind BP pastors and leaders to avoid officiating or giving undue support to cremation. Cremation should only be decided on as an exception and after consultation with the Board of Elders.

Appendix B

Alcohol content in wine & other drinks



Extracted from: <https://winefolly-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/alcohol-content-in-wine.png>