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THE BURNING BUSH

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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 and edited by Surgeon 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.”¹ 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).²

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, reveals 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.³ Well, 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 on 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 from 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 clauses “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” require 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.”²⁴ 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 of 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 and regressive 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. His is not separation redux but separation reduced.

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 charity 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. The “moderates” have departed from the original BP position. Since the dissolution of the Synod in 1988, they have advanced in their non-separatist position by cooperating with those who have compromised the faith, they are open to charismatic tongues, they have replaced the good old KJV with modern corrupt versions, they have introduced Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) into their worship services etc.⁵ Even Phee, their anti-VPP writer, wrote and distributed a paper titled “Neo-Evangelicalism in the Bible-Presbyterian Church” back in October 1988 detailing the alleged neo-evangelicalism of Quek Swee Hwa.⁶ 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 *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* to see this.⁷ 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.”⁸ 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.⁹

Indeed, Billy Graham was a neo-evangelical through and through, and the spirit of neo-evangelicalism will ultimately end up in liberalism and universalism. Fuller Seminary for example is not the evangelical seminary it used to be. It is now a quasi-liberal seminary that entertains all kinds of theology—a mix of orthodox and heretical. It is no surprise that students who enter Fuller believing in the total inerrancy of Scripture leave the Seminary doubting and even denying inerrancy, affirming only a “limited inerrancy”—an inerrancy restricted only to spiritual matters but not to historical, geographic or scientific matters. On

“Black Saturday” just 15 years after its founding, Fuller Seminary led by Dan Fuller (son of founder Charles Fuller) declared without equivocation that the Bible contained “incidental errors; but these did not hinder God’s revelational purpose.”¹⁰

This is really no different from what we are hearing from anti-VPPists who say that the Bible as we have it today is only 99.9% perfect—it contains some insignificant mistakes, but these mistakes do not affect doctrine and are unimportant. Marsden wrote, “Predictably, the biggest change at Fuller has been the decreasing adherence to the strict inerrancy of Scripture”. Between 1965 and 1967, just a few years after “Black Saturday”, 43% of students who enrolled at Fuller said they believed in total inerrancy, but by the time they completed their studies, only 22% of them did.¹¹ If there is no repentance on the part of anti-VPPists, I dare say the so-called “Biblical” Graduate School or “Reformed” Bible College of these anti-VPP BPs will eventually end up like Fuller with even lesser people believing in the Bible.

There is also no question that Billy Graham was party to this weakening of the fundamental doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Iain Murray rightly said, “The Bible never makes success the criterion of truth. ... the developing BGEA [Billy Graham Evangelistic Association] ministry has been accompanied by a disastrous weakening of evangelical belief.”¹² Graham eventually denied the exclusiveness of the gospel when he said, “I used to believe that pagans in far countries were lost if they did not have the gospel of Christ preached to them. I no longer believe that.”¹³ In a Robert Schuller interview, Graham said it again, “I think that everybody that loves or knows Christ, whether they are conscious of it or not, they are members of the body of Christ.... [God] is calling people out of the world for his name, whether they come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world or the non-believing world, they are members of the Body of Christ because they have been called by God. They may not know the name of Jesus but they know in their hearts that they need something they do not have, and they turn to the only light they have, and I think that they are saved and they are going to be with us in heaven.” But what does the Bible say, “*For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 2:5). “*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Jesus Himself said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the*

Father, but by me.” (John 14:6). It goes without saying that Graham’s neo-evangelicalism, ecumenism and non-separatism has resulted in a disastrous denial of the historic Christian Faith.

It is disturbing that editors Chua, Quek and Wong, and the contributing writers of this book can call themselves “BP”, talk about “heritage and legacy”, and yet go out of their way to write supportively of the neo-evangelical and ecumenical agenda of Graham. Instead of aligning themselves with the founding father of BPism—the Rev Dr Timothy Tow—who took a separatist stand against Graham, they choose to malign him in their book. As the saying goes, “Birds of a feather flock together.” They are BPs of a different stripe and type, and not original at all.

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.”¹⁴ 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.”¹⁵

It is thus no surprise that the editors of this book want to recapture the denominational leadership by forming a new presbytery. It is no surprise that co-editor Quek Swee Hwa was open to the possibility of the Genesis “years” being “months” and not literally “years”, and questioned the universality of the Genesis Flood.¹⁶ It is 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 shows extreme prejudice against biblical

and true separation as practised by Timothy 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 comprises 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.¹⁷

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.”¹⁸ Separation from disorderly or disobedient believers who 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”.¹⁹ 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.

Notes

¹ Chua Choon Lan, gen ed, *Heritage and Legacy of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore* (Singapore: Finishing Well Ministries, 2018), vii.

² Timothy Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story* (Singapore: Life Book Centre, 1995).

³ “Constitution of the Life Bible-Presbyterian Church (in English)” in *The Bible-Presbyterian Annual*, ed Quek Kiok Chiang et al (Singapore: Publication Department of the Bible-Presbyterian Church of Malaya, 1959), 14–18. “Constitution of the Bible-Presbyterian Church” in *The Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore and Malaysia 1950–1971*, ed Tan Wai Choon et al (Singapore: Acme Printers, 1971), 163–172.

⁴ “Constitution of the Life Bible-Presbyterian Church” in *Fifty Years Building His Kingdom: Golden Jubilee Magazine 1950–2000*, ed Timothy Tow et al (Singapore: Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, 2000), 51–63. “Constitution” in *In the Steps of Our Saviour: True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church Sabbatical Jubilee*, ed JT Joseph et al (Singapore: True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, 2010), 160–176.

⁵ See Timothy Tow, “A Dissentious Spirit That Led to the Dissolution of Synod, October 30, 1988” in *The Singapore B-P Church Story* (Singapore: Life Book Centre, 1995), 215–230.

⁶ “Neo-Evangelicalism in the Bible-Presbyterian Church” by Bob Phee et al (np, 2008).

⁷ George M Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). 153–171.

⁸ *Ibid*, 167.

⁹ See JA Johnson, *Billy Graham: The Jehoshaphat of Our Generation?* (Bangalore: Berean Publications, nd); Ian Paisley, *Billy Graham and the Church of Rome* (Greenville: Bob Jones University Press, 1970); Ian Brown, *Billy Graham, Custodian of the Faith or Figure of Compromise?* (Londonderry: np, 1991); Wilson Ewin, *The Assimilation of Evangelist Billy Graham into the Roman Catholic Church* (Canada: Quebec Baptist Missions, 1992); Brad Gsell, *The Legacy of Billy Graham: The Accomodation of Truth to Error in the Evangelical Church*, rev ed (North Carolina: Fundamental Presbyterian Publications, 1998).

¹⁰ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 212. See also Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 106–121

¹¹ Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 302,

¹² Iain H Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 72.

¹³ *Ibid*, 73.

¹⁴ Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, Foreword.

¹⁵ *Ibid*.

BIBLICAL SEPARATION OF BIBLE-PRESBYTERIANISM

¹⁶ “Neo-Evangelicalism in the Bible-Presbyterian Church”, 5–6, especially source document in Appendix VI. In Chapter 10 of *Heritage and Legacy*, Quek says these are “flimsy claims against me”. In a letter to his Board of Elders in 1995, he says the “years” as “months” was a quotation of Halley’s Pocket Bible Handbook and not his view. That it was not his view was not stated in his FOCUS teaching notes. The reading of those notes gave the impression that it was a viable view. If it was an erroneous view, Quek offered no caveat. As regards the Genesis Flood, he says he believes in a “universal flood” without explaining what he means by “universal”. Does he see it as universal geographically or anthropologically, or both? There is a difference. Regardless of what he now claims to be his position, his teaching notes categorically stated that the facts of the Flood, whether it is local or global, cannot be ascertained. Know for sure that such an agnostic assertion is exegetically untenable. See John C Whitcomb and Henry M Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961).

¹⁷ Jeffrey Khoo, *Biblical Separation: Doctrine of Church Purification and Preservation* (Singapore: Bible Witness Literature & Reformation Banner, 1999, 2004).

¹⁸ Charles Seet, “The Principle of Secondary Separation”, *The Burning Bush* 2 (1996): 47.

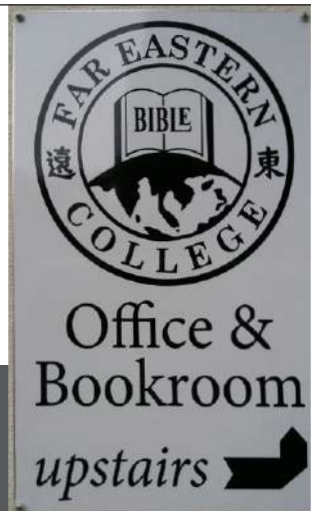
¹⁹ See Gregory A Wallis, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1859–2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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THE PRESERVATION OF GOD’S INSPIRED WORDS IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

Samuel Joseph

The doctrine of scripture is fundamental to the Christian faith. The Bible-Presbyterian (BP) 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).

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). Controversy has arisen, however, regarding the present state of the inspired word of God. Do we still have those same inspired words (and parts of words) today? The doctrine under attack now is the doctrine of Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP).

The issue is not trivial. The modern Bible versions (based on “critical” Greek and Hebrew texts) that are now being promoted in some BP churches, are significantly different from the Bible that has all along been used in (English-speaking) BP 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. This difference cannot be brushed aside.

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.

VPP Explained

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

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?

The Promise of Preservation

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

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.”

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?

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.

Matthew 24:35

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

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 events which will precede His Second Coming. The truth of the prophecy, and the inevitability of its fulfilment, are underscored and emphasised⁴ by the Lord in verse 35: though heaven and earth are temporal, His words are imperishable.

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).

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.

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?

The Extent of Preservation

The next question to be answered is, has God told us to what extent He would preserve His Word?

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.

2 Timothy 3:16–17

“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, throughly furnished unto all good works.”

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.

The context is important. When Paul says “all scripture is given by inspiration of God,” Paul is not referring to some idealised 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.

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.

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.”

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

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

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).

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.

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.

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 supposed to contain and convey?

The Identity of the Preserved Text

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!

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.

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, codified into seven “biblical axioms” by Dr Jeffrey Khoo, are summarised below.⁷

Epangelical Axiom

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).

Linguistic Axiom

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.

Temporal Axiom

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.

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.

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 Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32. That there was a *community* or group specially tasked with this preservation, is evident from Deuteronomy 17:18–19 and 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.

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 (Ps 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).

THE PRESERVATION OF GOD'S INSPIRED WORDS

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.

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.

Ecclesiastical Axiom

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.

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).

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.

Evangelistic Axiom

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).

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.

Doxological Axiom

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 (Ps 138:2).

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

Historical Axiom

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.

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 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).

THE PRESERVATION OF GOD'S INSPIRED WORDS

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).

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.

Application

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.

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.

Response to Criticism of VPP

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.

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).

Criticism of Results

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.

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?

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

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?

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.

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?

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?”

Criticism of Novelty

In a somewhat more cogent argument, the writers of the same article quoted above criticise 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

“Alternative” to VPP

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.

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:

2008 Statement (470–472)	2005 Statement (479–481)
“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.”	“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.”
“[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.”	“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.”
“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.”	“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.”
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 <i>Heritage & Legacy</i>) 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 <i>Heritage & Legacy</i>).	

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 and infallible Bible and the full preservation of God’s holy Word.”¹⁴ An extended quotation from GI 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.”

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!

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 recognised and excised!

Fallacy of Modern Textual Criticism

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 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.

Fundamental Assumption

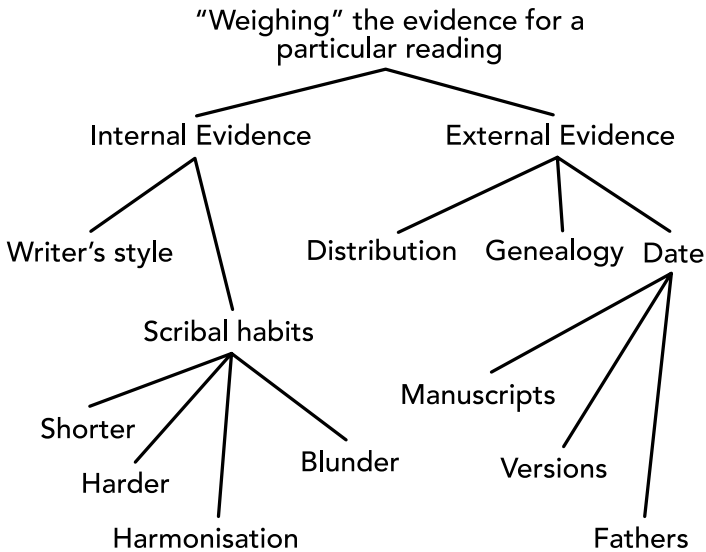
The fundamental assumption of such an approach seems to be that it treats (often implicitly rather than explicitly) the Bible like any other

ancient book in its transmission—the only difference being the vastly greater quantity of biblical manuscripts.

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.

Rationalistic Methods

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



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.

With regard 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 harmonise parallel passages, meaning that readings bearing the marks of harmonisation 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.

With regard 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).

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?

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?

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

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 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.

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.

Errors to Avoid

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 characterise all who defend VPP, and all who uphold the use of the KJV, as followers of Ruckman.

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.

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” as long as it remains accurate and true to the original text. 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 Hebrew and Greek texts underlying the KJV are the very inspired and preserved words of God.

Attitudes to Adopt

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.

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.

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.

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.

Notes

¹See “The Battle for the Bible between Far Eastern Bible College and Life Bible-Presbyterian Church: Chronology of Events” in *The Burning Bush* 18 (2012): 86–108, and “The Battle for the Bible between Far Eastern Bible College and Life Bible-Presbyterian Church: Chronology of Events II” in *The Burning Bush* 21 (2015): 92–99.

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

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 dissertation, Far Eastern Bible College, 2005.

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

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.

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.

⁷ Jeffrey Khoo, “Seven Biblical Axioms in Ascertaining the Authentic and Authoritative Texts of the Holy Scriptures,” *The Burning Bush* 17 (2011): 74–95.

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.

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*, ed Chua Choon Lan et al (Singapore: Finishing Well Ministries, 2018).

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).

THE PRESERVATION OF GOD'S INSPIRED WORDS

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.

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.

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.

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

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

²⁰ Towards the end of *Heritage & Legacy*, the view is propounded that a “reboot” of the BP 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.



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AFRICA BIBLE COMMENTARY: A REVIEW **ARTICLE**

Nelson N'guono Were

Introduction

The *Africa Bible Commentary* (ABC)¹ was officially launched on 19 June 2006 in Cape Town, South Africa. The General Editor Dr Tokunboh Adeyemo was the General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa. The contributing writers come from different Protestant denominations.

The ABC is hailed as a one-of-a-kind work. Rick Warren considers it “a monumental work of Biblical scholarship”. John Stott says it is “a publishing landmark”. Douglas Carew said it presented “a good and readable blend of excellent scholarship, heartwarming spirituality and relevant application”. Aboagye Mensah in his foreword commended it as a “unique and relevant” work done by African theologians who are “committed to the life of the church”, who are matured by their “practical experience in teaching the Bible”.

The work is indeed voluminous consisting of about 1,600 pages from cover to cover including the glossary and preliminaries. The book has “section by section interpretive commentary and application” on the Bible text. It also has “more than 70 special articles dealing with topics of key importance to ministry in Africa today ... that have global implications.” Scripture quotations in the ABC are taken from the New International Version of the English Bible.

Does the ABC live up to the ideals painted by those who had commended it at the back cover and in the forewords? This review though not exhaustive will be comprehensive. It will review ABC's two major sections: its topical articles and its interpretive commentary.

Approach to Review

In dealing with the commentary section, this review will sample a section from texts that are controversial to different schools of thought in Kenya today, especially the Liberal and the Charismatic. The passages will be examined from (1) a Protestant perspective that is derived from the 16th Century Reformation and its five pillars, (2) a Fundamentalist perspective that comes from the 20th Century Reformation movement which challenged the liberal and rationalistic approach to the Scriptures; and from (3) a Reformed and Premillennial perspective of eschatology. The intention is to review and reveal the theological persuasion of the book.

Since the purpose of the ABC is to help Christians in Africa apply biblical principles in addressing issues that are contemporary to them and provide “African insights into the Word of God” as stated by John Stott in his foreword, this reviewer will examine the worldview with which the different topics are addressed and how they relate to the Bible in order to ascertain whether or not the material “will help others towards Christian maturity” as asserted by Aboagye Mensah.

The ABC’s Introduction gives (1) an overview of its history and its contents. The work is said to have been conceived in 1994 due to “deficient knowledge of the Bible and faulty application of its teaching” being the “primary weakness of the church in Africa”. It gives (2) suggestions and guidelines on how to use the book especially to those new to Bible commentaries. Finally, it gives (3) information on the editors and contributors.

Many of the ABC editors and writers are seminary professors and have used some portions of the ABC as part of their class lectures.” (ix). From the list of 70 contributors in pages xii to xviii, the following can be drawn: (1) they come from 25 countries—15 of them from Kenya and 18 from other African countries who have at some point taken theological courses from Kenyan institutions like Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) and St Paul’s United Theological College (Limuru). (2) There are 13 who show no formal theological training (at least no information is given) though one has a Certificate in Biblical Studies. Out of the 13, three of them are pastors (including one woman pastor); (3) 23 of the contributors have been or are still in active ministry; (4) 40 of them have taught or are currently teaching in theological institutions in the more than ten denominations represented. It is notable that the authors are drawn from Protestant denominations

and are members of the Association of Evangelicals of Africa. There is no representation from the Roman Catholic Church.

The publisher WordAlive is a publishing house in Nairobi, Kenya which exists to “stimulate depth of growth on the African publishing and book trade scene through developing writers, training editors, and marketing high quality books by African authors who address African realities, as well as promoting works by international authors who have a message relevant to the African context.”

Review of Topical Articles

In the topical section of ABC, there are 79 articles from 52 contributors with Tokunboh Adeyemo contributing seven, Yusuf Turaki contributing eight, Samuel Ngewa contributing eight, Soro Soungalo contributing three, and Adama Ouedraogo, Isabela Apawo Phiri, Rubin Pohor, Mae Alice Reggy-Mamo, Abel Ndjerareou contributing two articles each. The editorial team comprising the General Editor, four theological editors and three theological advisors contributed 30 of the 79 articles.

The arrangement of the articles seems to be aimed at some form of continuity between the commentary and the articles. The topical articles are interspersed among the books of the Bible. For example, in the commentary on Ruth are found two articles, the first on “Refugees” (in the first chapter of Ruth) and the second on “Widow Inheritance” (in Ruth chapter three). The article on “Witchcraft” is placed within the comments of 1 Samuel 28:3–25 which concerns the witch of Endor.

The articles give a generally accurate picture of African practices and traditions. It ought to be noted that Africa cannot lay claim to one culture, as practices differ from tribe to tribe and what may be cited concerning a particular tribe may not be applicable to another tribe. There is also a topical supplement where a different writer would comment on a topic related to the Bible in a particular context. This when integrated well allows the commentary to focus on the text and the article to focus on the topic at the same time.

Kwame Bedaiko is one of the theological advisors and he wrote the first article titled “Scripture as the Interpreter of Culture and Tradition”. This first article requires special attention as it sets the tone. The opening paragraph of the article states that the ABC is an attempt to “relate the Scriptures and African cultures” in order to make the Gospel “relevant to African cultures.” (3). Bedaiko then goes on to define what he means

by culture and by Scripture before going on to talk about “Bringing Scripture and Culture Together.” (4). In his definition of culture, he asserts that one’s culture is the worldview that determines what is acceptable and what is not, and governs one’s values, norms, and life in general. He says that “culture is our worldview, that is, fundamental to our understanding of who we are, where we have come from and where we are going.” He then goes on to explain that salvation “encompasses not just our ‘souls’, but also our culture at its deepest level.” Using this as a basis, he then states that “we need to allow Scripture to become the interpreter of who we are in the specific concrete sense of who we are in our cultures and traditions.” In order to do this, he goes on to describe the Scriptures variously and with different pictures offering a reason why Scriptures should be the interpreter of culture and tradition. It is at this point that his article becomes problematic as he shows a syncretistic bias. Further, his misleading presuppositions colour his view of the purpose and function of Scripture in relation to culture and tradition. For example he defines Scripture as a “prism” and says that “when our cultures pass through the prism of Scripture, we see them in a new way. The light and shade intrinsic to our cultures are revealed.” (3). By so thinking, Bedaiko presumes that African cultures and traditions have biblical parallels and are intrinsically godly. This is misleading. His description of Scripture as a record of God’s engagement with culture causes him to see “a model for encouraging, identifying and controlling all subsequent engagements of gospel and culture.” This assumes that all cultures and traditions are on an equal plane with Scripture. This comes out most boldly in his statement that “Africans have a strong sense of their pre-Christian religious journey and should be alive to this participation in Scripture.” This statement was made when he defined Scripture as “Our Story”. By the end of his article, he is talking about “the process of bringing the gospel and culture together”. (4).

With Bedaiko’s philosophical backdrop in mind, this reviewer will now discuss the topical articles under the following headings: (1) African Traditional Practices, (2) African Political Challenges, (3) African Social Challenges, and (4) African Biblical Challenges.

Articles Dealing with African Issues

African Traditional Practices

When dealing with African traditional practices, there are difficulties which have arisen from the common approaches to this

subject. The common approach is either a blanket condemnation of all practices without any scriptural scrutiny or a pretexting of practices by seeking similarities in the biblical accounts and using those accounts as support for the continuance of traditional practices. The latter has been used by some of the writers of ABC.

The writer of the first article talks about how “Africans have a strong sense of their pre-Christian religious journey” (4) and makes syncretic statements like “In the OT, as in African traditional religion,...” (138), “In Africa and in the Bible...” (390), “In many cases, African taboos are similar to prohibitions found in the Bible.” (159). But why should these apparent similarities present “a strong pre-Christian religion”? Do they not instead show the total depravity of man regardless of his tradition or culture? *“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.”* (Rom 3:10–11). Isabel Phiri made an excellent observation when she says, “it is important to start by recognizing that the Bible contains the gospel, but that this gospel was revealed in the context of human cultures. One, therefore, needs to distinguish between the gospel that leads to salvation and the culture of the people that God was dealing with.” The gospel of God and the cultures of man are not the same.

The article on “witchcraft” is a well-balanced one that addresses a prevalent yet ignored African practice. The writer rightly says that “many professing Christians are unaware of what the Bible teaches on this subject.” (374). He cites pastoral negligence as the main reason for this state of ignorance and calls for “an urgent need for the culturally postulated reality of witchcraft to be addressed pastorally with seriousness, sensitivity and respect.” (374). He also rightly distinguishes between sufferings caused by demonic affliction and sufferings caused by bad moral decisions, which distinction is lost especially in Charismatic circles where even Malaria can be attributed to demons.

African Political Challenges

The articles that relate to African political challenges seem mainly to revolve around leadership and governance with articles like “Democracy” which contrasts the historical African form of governance with the modern forms, highlighting the effects the moving from one form to another have produced. The article then concludes with a biblical

rejoinder and reminder with regard to political authority. The article on “Christians and Politics” also addresses the topic from the leadership and governance angle. This article points out that Christians should participate in politics but focuses mainly on the vying for political positions. He rightly defines participation as “exercising one’s rights to vote and be voted for, speaking against any wrong doing by those in power and holding leaders accountable for their actions.” (1001). His article would have been more profitable had he addressed the voting patterns in Africa which are a big part of the political challenges faced, and party affiliations have gagged many from speaking out against wrongdoings. The article on “The Church and the State” on the other hand gives a good biblical balance of the relationship between the church and the state. The writer rightly points out the extremes that are prevalent in the isolationist stand (as taken by the Jehovah’s Witnesses) and in the activist stand (as propagated by Liberation Theology). He then goes on to give the biblical functions of the church in relation to the state which are priestly, pastoral and prophetic.

African Social Challenges

There are many social challenges in Africa and the ABC identifies those that are common to the different parts of Africa. In addressing these social challenges, there are articles that take an activist stand but do not offer any biblical solution. For example, the article on “Street Children” fails to present the proper roles the church and its members can play. The writer says inanely, “The church needs to build up this love within communities. It also needs to become an advocate for children who are already on the streets working ‘to let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream’ (Amos 5:24).” (1240). But how should justice and righteousness be seen and be done? How can the church fulfil this or is this the duty of the state?

There are articles that give a good biblical perspective of social challenges in Africa even pointing out where the African society is straying on these issues. For example, the article on “Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage” focuses on the biblical pattern of marriage and marriage being a covenant between the husband and the wife against the African understanding which sees marriage to be “between the community and the wife.” (1149). The article also addresses the issue of divorce by citing and applying the relevant verses in the Gospels, and the Pauline Epistles of Romans and 1 Corinthians quite to the

point. The article however did not address remarriage in relation to widowhood (which is a very difficult issue because of the African view of marriage). Another article that addresses a social problem biblically is that on “Wealth and Poverty”. The writer reinforces biblical principles using biblical illustrations and also distinguishes poverty that is due to a “skewed economic order” driven by “laziness or slothfulness”. He then gives a good summary of biblical guidance on wealth.

African Biblical Challenges

The articles that address challenges to the Christian faith in Africa are those that deal with how African traditional beliefs and practices have found their way into the churches. Although some of the articles do not address these issues directly, they do a good job of highlighting them. For example the article “What Is the Church?” gives a biblical understanding of the Church in answer to the question at hand. Similarly, the article on “Healing” exposes the effect of the African traditional understanding of the pastoral ministry. The writer points out that

The traditional understanding of the cause of disease has survived in African Christianity, as is clear from the popularity of prophets and faith healers. The clergy are expected whether justifiably or not, to authenticate their ministry by exercising powers traditionally credited to religious persons, such as healing, unveiling hidden things, predicting the future, and being able to bless and curse effectively. When such powers are not present, members drift to other churches, attend other healing services, and consult spiritualists and fetish priests. (447).

This has made pastoral ministry difficult as many are deceived by false miracles and reject sound doctrine. This also explains why the Charismatic signs-and-wonders movement is very popular in Africa.

The article on “Prophets and Apostles” looks at African Christianity as a means to liberating Africans. He says that “the African prophets and apostles allowed for the proclamation of equality of blacks and whites in faith and ministry” and that it has served to separate “the Christian faith from all colonial political connections.” To him, these effects are positive and “justify the reputation these men enjoy.” As far as this reviewer is concerned, the article firstly ignores that Africans are inclined to men whose ministry or work is similar to powers traditionally credited to religious persons. Secondly, the picture presented by the article has nothing to do with the calling and ministry of the biblical prophets and apostles. Finally, the article

is based on the assumption of the continuation of the office of the apostles and prophets. These three observations make the article highly questionable.

Articles Dealing with Social Issues

The ABC presents a general picture of the effect of a non-doctrinal ecumenism. This is seen in some of the clearly contradictory positions held on the same issues when discussed under different headings. In addition to that, some of the articles seem to want to stir up the church into social or political activism rather than to seek to present a Christian perspective that would build up Christian spirituality or drive towards Christian maturity. One who reads the articles without discernment would imbibe everything both the good and the bad. One who reads carefully would be confused by the different directions the differing articles are taking. Some of the articles present good biblical principles on how to deal with the issues that are unique and problematic in the African context. They highlight what is wrong, where it is wrong, and why it is wrong and then provide the biblical antidote to the problem that is unique to Africa. Articles that are exceptional in this regard include articles on:

Debt

The writer on this topic was careful to present a biblical case for avoiding debt. He then deals with African traditional practices that are driving many into debt in this age, and what debt would often reveal concerning a man and his dealings. He concludes by pointing out how debt can be avoided and how one can get out of debt. His final statement applies the same principles from a personal level to the national level and shows knowledge and concern for the state of African nations.

Polygamy

The article on “The Bible and Polygamy” clearly distinguishes between the gospel and culture, and emphasises marriage as monogamous “involving one man and one woman” (430). Although polygamy was practised for various reasons as seen in the Bible, the record shows that those who practised it “suffer the consequences of their decision.” (430). It was not God’s will for man to have many wives. Man has only himself to blame for the bad situations and consequences that arise out of polygamy.

Environment

The article on “The Christian and the Environment” is unlike other articles which address social issues. Unlike the other articles, it does not drive for some form of activism, but rather presents a biblical perspective of the social problem that is not only African, but global. The article presents what the Bible says concerning three factors that “in particular are harming God’s creation” (616). and how they affect both life and environment and closes with an appeal to “look after” God’s “creation” as a manifestation of Christian obedience both in personal responsibility, and as communal and national duty. Further, the writer’s employment of the term “creation” emphasises the biblical perspective which has been adopted which stands in stark contrast to the atheistic perspective of many environmentalists who speak of “mother earth”.

It is generally noted that the articles which begin with a biblical exposition of the topic turn out to be better articles than those which begin with the African or traditional perspective. The latter end up doing exactly what was warned against in the previous article. The worst are those that sought to equate African practices or traditions with biblical ones. This can be seen for example in the following articles:

Taboos

In this article, the writer distorts and skews the biblical doctrine of total depravity by stating that “Total depravity really means that human beings have lost the power, rather than the knowledge, of how to do what is right”, and goes on to suggest that Christians “may also benefit from performance of some ritual that symbolizes their deliverance” from the taboos and the fear that those taboos instill in them. (159). The definition given is skewed as it does not present the truth that fallen man does not know God nor seek God (Rom 3:10–12; Ps 14:1–3, 53:1–4). Fallen man does not fear God at all (Rom 3:18; Ps 36:1). Fallen man is given over to a reprobate mind due to his rebellion and rejection of God (Rom 1:19–23, 28). Hence the “knowledge” of the totally depraved man is not an attempt to seek God, but, evidence of fallen man fleeing from God or fighting against God.

Initiation Rites

The writer on this topic after giving her definition of what an initiation rite is, goes on to claim that initiation rites are found in the Bible citing the example of circumcision and baptism. The thrust of the article

seems to be advocacy for the resurgence of initiation rites which are on the decline due to “negative aspects” in their practice like “the traditional use of one knife to circumcise a number of initiates” and the spread of HIV/AIDS through this practice. This is finally voiced in her concluding paragraphs where she says, “The African church, therefore, needs to actively revive initiation rites,” and that “Christian initiation rites can be a powerful tool in shaping the lives of Christian teenagers”, in an attempt to promote a sort of syncretism and the “Christening” of African traditional religious practices.

Violence

The writer on “Violence” begins with a biblical presentation and exhortation but fails terribly in the area of application. The last paragraph reads more like an article on political or social activism tempered with “the effectiveness of Jesus’ model.” How the writer manages to lump together Dr Martin Luther King Jr, Liberation Theology, Black Theology, Culture Theology, Feminism and Marxian Theology and present them in a positive light as showing the influence of Jesus’ model is baffling.

Role of Women in the Church

The article on the above topic has nothing to do with the church and the role of women since the writer makes very little attempt to explain the issues as addressed in Scripture. In addition to that, the language adopted by the writer does not glorify God and is unbecoming of Christians. Thus it is sad that the article made its way into the book and that the editors and advisors allowed such strong language. “Deeply entrenched patriarchal, hierarchical and sexist attitudes and practices” (1471) is the writer’s description of the leadership of “many of the churches in Africa.” “General principles within a particular culture” is her description of “1 Corinthians 13:34” (the correct reference is 1 Cor 14:34) and 1 Timothy 2:11–14. She seems to equate the spirituality of the church with how much women are accorded leadership in the church. Her authority for this is not drawn from Scripture but from “one African-American womanist scholar” who pontificated that “if it was not for the women, you wouldn’t have a church.” Her prevailing thought and drive is revealed in her final sentence when she writes that “women still face a daunting task in advocating and modelling gender justice in the church and in society.” The article is not helpful since the writer seems to advocate that unless women occupy leadership positions in the church,

the gender injustice in church and society will not change.

The mixture of good and bad articles undermines the goodness of the book, especially since some articles contradict others and since the bad articles seem to deviate much from the Scriptures and Christianity, and the good articles do not correct the errors that have been introduced by the bad ones. Though the articles are set in the context of commentaries relating to the topic, the contributors too do not address the errors contained in the articles. This makes the book hard to recommend.

Review of Interpretive Commentary

The interpretive commentary and application of the Bible is done by different contributors with Adeyemoh Tokunboh (*Judges, Daniel, 2 Peter and Jude*); Ahoga, Augustin Cossi (*Jonah, Nahum*), Andria Solomon (*Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and James*); Coulibaly Issiaka (*Jeremiah, Lamentations and 2 Corinthians*); Habtu Tewoldemedhin (*Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs*); Samuel Ngewa (*Genesis, Deuteronomy, John, Galatians, and 1, 2, & 3 John*); Weanzana Nupanga (*2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah*); and Yilpet Yoilah (*Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*) handling multiple books of the Bible.

As stated in the general introduction, the review of the interpretive commentary of ABC will focus mainly on passages of significance from (1) a Protestant perspective (16th Century Reformation), (2) a Fundamentalist perspective (20th Century Fundamentalism), and (3) the eschatology of ABC.

Protestant Perspective

The Protestant perspective focuses on the five Solas of the Reformation. The 16th Century Protestant Reformation distinguished the Protestant Church from the Roman Catholic Church by the stand they took on matters of faith and salvation. The Reformers developed a system of doctrines when they separated from the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). The Reformation cry as summarised by the Latin word “Sola” meaning “alone” or “only” was applied to Grace, Faith, Scripture, Christ and the Glory of God—*Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Sola Scriptura, Solus Christus and Soli Deo Gloria*—each *Sola* being a corrective of the RCC errors in the doctrine of salvation. An examination of the ABC in respect to the above shows that the commentary takes a Protestant position. This

can be seen in the examples below.

In 2 Timothy 3:16, the ABC affirms the Verbal Plenary Inspiration (VPI) of Scripture by pointing out that translating the verse as “*All scripture breathed by God is...*” has the problem of it being taken that “God has not inspired every passage of Scripture.” It then rightly asserts that “*All Scripture is inspired of God*” (eg 2 Pet 1:20–21). (1471).

In Romans 5:8, the ABC affirms the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, pointing out that “we had no merit in ourselves and were powerless to save ourselves.” It goes on to explain that “believers will not be forsaken by God; they are secure in him.” (1359).

In Ephesians 2:8–9, the ABC affirms that salvation is by faith alone and not by works: “Our salvation is not the result of any human effort or thought. It was planned by God the Father, implemented by God the Son, and is applied to us by God the Holy Spirit. All that we have to do is to accept it by *faith*.” (1429). A similar emphasis is seen in Romans 3:21–31 which is aptly titled “Justification by faith in Christ alone” affirming that righteousness “can be obtained only by faith in Jesus Christ” and that “there is nothing we can do to be justified but believe in Jesus Christ” (1357).

In 1 Timothy 2:5, the ABC affirms that salvation is through Christ alone by pointing out the two natures of Christ, that the Mediator “though perfect God, was also human.” (1470). It also affirms that Christ though supreme “can still sympathize with our weaknesses” (1496), pointing to Him as the only Intercessor between God and man (Heb 4:15).

In 1 Corinthians 10:31, the ABC affirms the doctrine of the glory of God as the goal and end of life by pointing out that “the overriding consideration in all circumstances and in dealing with anyone, regardless of their race or religion (see 9:19–22) must simply be to bring glory to God (**10:31**) and not to cause anyone to stumble (**10:32**).” (1389).

The five *Solas* of the 16th Century Protestant Reformation corrected the errors and abuses of the RCC and are still relevant today. Thus ABC’s claim to be Protestant is certainly true.

Fundamentalist Perspective

The Fundamentalist movement of the last century like the Protestant Reformation was a response to a departure from Biblical Christianity. While the Reformation was a response to the errors and abuses of the RCC, the Fundamentalist movement was a response to the rise of Liberalism or Modernism. Fundamentalism affirms the following fundamental doctrines which Liberalism denies: (1) Inerrancy of Scripture, (2) Virgin Birth of Christ, (3) Substitutionary Atonement of Christ, and (4) Resurrection of Christ, among other fundamental doctrines.

The Fundamentalists reject Higher Criticism. ABC also rejects Higher Criticism. For instance, the authorship of the Pentateuch is consistently assigned to Moses (9), and the authorship of the Psalms (73 out of 150) is assigned to David, and written before and not after the exile (605). The commentators in dealing with the different Gospel accounts are careful to take the traditional view of the Gospels, that similarities and differences between the accounts are due to their respective purposes. There is no indication whatsoever that the commentators employed source, form, redaction criticisms in their approach to the Gospels. The commentator on the Gospel of Mark for example wrote, “The fact that the three synoptic gospels give similar accounts of events does not mean that their human authors were dependent on each other’s writings, as some scholars argue... The differences between them can be explained in terms of their different purposes as well as the unique personalities of the human authors.” (1171).

Although the ABC generally takes a Fundamentalist approach, it is to be noted that some of the commentators adopt a weak position on some of the fundamental doctrines as evidenced by the following examples:

Doctrine of the Virgin Birth

The virgin birth of Christ in Isaiah 7:14 is not strictly affirmed by ABC. The commentator talks about childbirth according to African cultural interpretation and goes on to present the message as the “end of Judah’s enemies (7:16)”. He then goes on to present two contexts—the first is the historical and the second the prophetic. In the first context, the child is a reference to Hezekiah who was “one of the most faithful kings”, and the second context is a reference to the future Christ (815). This double-meaning interpretation of that great messianic

prophecy is erroneous. James Orr, in no uncertain terms, wrote that there can only be one meaning to the prophecy and that the prophecy can only refer to Christ,

The idea of the Messiah, gradually gathering to itself the attributes of a divine King, reaches one of its clearest expressions in the great Immanuel prophecy, extending from Isaiah 7 to 9:7, and centering in the declaration: "The Lord Himself will give you [the unbelieving Ahaz] a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14; Cf. 8:8, 10). **This is none other than the child** of wonder extolled in chapter 9:6, 7... This is the prophecy quoted as fulfilled in Christ's birth in Matt. 1:23, and it seems also alluded to in the glowing promises to Mary in Luke 1:32, 33.²

Doctrine of the Deity of Christ

The deity of Christ is stressed in the Gospel of John. The commentator points out that those "who argue for the 'a God' translation deny the full deity of Jesus. ...[and] throughout his gospel, John strongly affirms Jesus' deity." (1252). This despite his use of a weak English translation (the NIV), which instead of translating it as "Only Begotten" rendered it only as "one and only." Nevertheless, he refers to the "only begotten" verses as proof that Jesus is "*God the One and Only*". Adopting the variant reading in John 1:18, he refutes the Jehovah's Witnesses' denial of the deity of Christ (1252).

Although the commentator affirms the deity of Christ in John 8:58, he does not follow the traditional interpretation which considers the "I am" to be a reference to the name of the LORD as revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Instead he simply says, "The Jews took Jesus' words as an insult to Abraham, their greatest ancestor. Not only did Jesus present himself as equal to Abraham, but he claimed to be older than Abraham! Such an insult should be punished by death (8:59)." (1271). The other "I am" statements in John also are not given any special emphasis as pointing to the deity of Christ though they are mentioned as "key 'I am' sayings in the Gospel of John" (1264). This is in stark contrast to the commentator of Exodus who clearly points out that "I am who I am" was God's name that "is extremely rich in meaning. ...It is a name that expresses the truth that God has always existed and will always exist. The Lord's emphasis that this will be his name *from generation to generation* is an assurance of his permanent presence among his people (3:15)." (91). This ought to have been the emphasis placed in the "I am"

statement of Jesus.

Other passages that stress the deity of Christ are not given the doctrinal emphasis in the commentary. For example in Titus 2:14, the commentator weakens the case for the deity of Christ by not being dogmatic or categorical in applying the Granville-Sharp rule to the phrase “our Great God and Saviour.” The Granville-Sharp rule makes the two titles refer to the same person, but the commentator says,

This phrase can be translated in two different ways, depending on whether we take the whole phrase ‘our great God and Saviour’ as referring to Jesus Christ, or whether we see it as referring to the glory of both ‘our great God’ and ‘our Saviour Jesus Christ.’ It seems that the first translation is more likely to be the correct one... It can thus be argued that 2:13 is a strong statement of the divinity of Christ. (1485).

The same construction is used in 2 Peter 1:11, 2:20, 3:2, 18 and the commentators too do not point out or emphasise the deity of Christ.

Doctrine of the Substitutionary Atonement

In Romans 3:24–26, 1 John 2:1–2, and Hebrews 2:5–18, the commentators present the role of Christ as Advocate, High Priest and Saviour through His humiliation (taking upon the nature of man) and crucifixion in simple terms and yet clearly stressing the substitutionary atonement of Christ.

The Fundamentalist movement was known for its militancy and strong stand for the truth and opposing and exposing falsehood. Although the fundamental tenets of the faith are generally held by the commentators, not all subscribe to the same tenets. The result is a commentary that seems to speak with two tongues or two voices. This greatly undermines the commentary’s unity and coherence since one commentator might present a certain view or approach in one book and another might present a very different view or approach in another book. The compromising approach of ABC and its failure to be dogmatic in matters relating to the fundamentals of the faith make it more Neo-evangelical than Fundamentalist in stance.

Eschatology and Prophecy

The ABC is generally weak in its interpretation of prophecy as it takes a historical approach in most of its interpretations. As such, prophecies are seen as fulfilled in history, and the fulfilment of

messianic prophecies is regarded as a sort of afterthought because of historical failures. For example in the interpretation of Psalm 2 which is traditionally regarded as a messianic psalm, the writer claims, “The prophets gave the people the hope that one day a king, an Anointed of the Lord, a true Son of God, would come and rule in righteousness and bring salvation and peace to Israel and the world. So although this psalm referred originally to a historical king of Israel, it came to be interpreted as speaking of the Messiah.” (610). This pattern can be traced throughout the messianic psalms including Psalm 22, in which the commentator says, “we will think first of what the psalmist suffered and then of the suffering of Christ” (630). Also in Psalm 110, the writer seems to disregard the literal return of Christ to rule and reign on earth when he says,

There is a difference between the situation of the OT king and the NT understanding of Christ our King. The king in the OT was a warrior-king, given strength by God to overcome his enemies, who were regarded as enemies of God and under God’s judgment (110:6). But Christ is the Prince of Peace. The enemies he fights are, above all, spiritual enemies, the forces of evil that challenge his rule of blessing. He seeks those who will come to the Father through him as their great High Priest, and then offer themselves willingly to serve him and bring others to acknowledge him as Lord. (715).

By so saying, the writer not only adopts a historical approach to the messianic psalms and prophecies, but also rejects the literal interpretation of the coming of Christ. The end-time prophecies in the ABC are interpreted inconsistently—some literally while others allegorically, which will no doubt bring about much confusion.

Paul Lee Tan rightly points out this important hermeneutical principle in interpreting prophecy, “There is nevertheless a practical way to determine whether future events will transpire as predicted. It is to look at past fulfillments of prophecy. The manner of past prophetic fulfillment indicates the manner of future prophetic fulfillment.”²³ We however do not find this in the ABC. In the commentary on the prophecies of Daniel in chapters two and seven which give the timetable for the Gentile powers that will rule over Israel, there is the conspicuous absence of the kingdom of Christ and nothing is said of a literal millennial rule of Christ on earth. Thus, if the preceding kingdoms in the same vision were literal kingdoms that exercised dominion, it infers that the future kingdom also has to be one that is literal in its rule and dominion. When the commentator discusses the

“Stone Kingdom” of chapter two, he simply says, “The fifth kingdom is yet to come” (995) with no indication or discussion as to what this fifth kingdom is or will be. In contrast, the commentary of Zechariah does identify a literal and personal kingdom of Christ in Zechariah 8:3 writing that, “The dwelling of God with his people is the supreme blessing that will come with the messianic reign of Christ in his kingdom on earth.” (1083).

However, when we come to the book of Revelation, the commentary presents a position that opposes a literal millennial rule. In Revelation 20, the commentator says that the term “throne” in Revelation is always placed in heaven, and the phrase “to reign” refers simply to the presence of royalty rather than the exercise of authority. He also argues for one resurrection and not two saying that the premillennial position “assumes a second resurrection, which the text does not mention at all, and also faces the problem that the saints are in heaven, and not on earth during the one thousand years.” (1576). His view of Revelation 19:11–22:5 is that “Christ’s coming is portrayed through a series of symbolic pictures.” (1573). The commentary on Zechariah 8, 12, and 14 however presents a literal reign of Christ on earth.

Generally the ABC does not provide an in-depth exposition of the prophetic passages and avoids critical issues. The return of Christ is merely mentioned in passing in many sections. The glaring inconsistencies and contradictions are revealed especially when readers check the cross-references provided by the writers. For example, in Zechariah 14:2 it is stated, “On that day, the Lord will *gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it* (14:2a; see 12:3; Ezek 5:8; Rev 16:13–21). The coalition of ‘all the nations’ suggests that there will be one world political system at that time.” (1090). But when one turns to the references given, one finds that the commentary in Revelation 16 takes an allegorical view with this contradictory statement, “It seems likely that John is not predicting a literal battle at this place, but is using it as a symbol of the final attempt of the forces of evil to defeat God’s supremacy.” (1569).

Although among the contributors, there are five who studied at Dallas Theological Seminary including the General Editor and the writer of the commentary on Revelation, the eschatology in the ABC is neither here nor there. The only commentator who takes a sound eschatological position is the one who commented on Zechariah, who studied at Trinity International University (formerly known as Trinity Evangelical Divinity School).

Weaknesses of the Commentary

Non-Dogmatic Approach to Contentious Passages

The interpretive commentary, in important places, fails to give definitive interpretation of the texts in order to accommodate the variant views within the association. This can be seen for example in the commentary of Genesis 1:1–31 where the writer says, “This account of the creation in six days (whether taken literally as twenty-four hour days or figuratively as representing long periods of time) reveals a methodical God who created different things one after another with precise purpose.” (11). This allowance for divergent views for the same text not only seeks to avoid the issue, but also puts doubt on the Word of God. In John 5:17–47, the commentator in giving an illustration of a “friendly argument” concerning the chicken and the egg which he was once asked to settle, leaves allowance for other interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2, other than a literal 24-hour day. (1262).

The Bible does not teach an atheistic (evolutionary) process of creation, but rather a divine theistic creation. There is no room in the text to allow for the figurative use of the term “day” since (1) it is used together with the numerical adjective, (2) the day is described as comprising the evening and the morning, and (3) the fourth commandment appeals to the creation week as a work week consisting of six literal days. Interestingly, in Exodus 20:8–11, the commentator rightly observes that “the Jews calculate days in accordance with the pattern in Genesis 1 (“there was evening and there was morning”) and thus regard each day as beginning at sunset, rather than at midnight. Thus their observance of the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week lasts from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday.” (111). The methodical God who created different things in proper order and precise purpose also put in the context a clear evidence that the days are literal 24-hour days in Genesis 1:5, 14–19. Thus, the use of the “day” has no figurative nuance “representing long periods of time” in the context of the creation account.

Avoidance of Crucial Doctrines

On the different passages regarding the gifts of the Holy Spirit, there is no emphasis on the cessation of the extraordinary gifts. In the commentary on Ephesians 4:7–16, the comments fail to expound that the gifts of the apostles and prophets are no longer in the Church since they have been withdrawn, having accomplished their purpose of “laying the

foundation for God's church." (1433). The text allows for the continuation of all the gifts by stating, "This cluster of five gifts is often referred to as the fivefold ministry of the church. It is basic and fundamental to the planting and growth of the church. All other gifts are supportive." (1433).

The doctrine of biblical separation is strangely avoided and missing from the commentaries of 2 Corinthians 4:14–7:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:1–15; 1 Corinthians 5:1–8 and the other passages that obviously teach it. In some of the passages, reference is made to church discipline but nothing is said about the duty to separate. The closest to it being discussed is Ephesians 5:1–7 where the writer concludes his comments on the section by warning, "God's standards cannot be replaced by permissive teachings. Those who teach otherwise are deceivers, and both they and those who accept their false teachings will be subject to God's wrath (5:6–7)." (1435). Another comes from 2 John where the commentator through illustrations from Ghanaian proverbs insists that "Believers should have nothing to do with deceivers." (1537). In Jude 3–4, the commentator rightly addresses the need to contend for the faith by using a Yoruba proverb which says, "You can go to bed when there is a snake on your thatched roof, but you can't do that when the thatch is on fire." (1539). By so doing, he aptly equates the dangers facing the church with fire and that "matters of life and death demand immediate attention." (1540). He then rightly observes that "standing in the same tradition, Jude calls on his readers to fight for the purity of the faith. It is an ongoing struggle in every age and generation (see 1 Tim 6:12)." (1540). Incredulously, he then goes on to weaken what he has just emphasised by stating this: "by 'faith' he does not mean an elaborate system of theology, but the simple teaching regarding Christ and the salvation he provides that was presented by Peter (Acts 4:8–12) and Paul (1 Cor 15:3–5)." (1540). This statement undermines the fact that the "elaborate system of theology" is supposed to be the systematic teachings of the whole counsel of God as found in the Bible, and not only the Gospel.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The ABC seeks to promote a non-doctrinal ecumenism. This is seen in some of the clearly contradictory doctrinal positions it has taken and the non-dogmatic treatment or avoidance of certain issues. Such an ecumenical approach does more harm than good. Considering the low theological education in some parts of Africa, inconsistency is harmful.

The undiscerning reader would imbibe both the good and the bad. The unlearned will be confused by the differing views and may even be misled into believing in the wrong view (eg non-cessation of sign gifts, promotion of women to ministerial leadership etc).

On the other hand, the ABC especially in the interpretive commentaries presents good applicatory emphasis in relation to issues that are unique to the African context. Although the individual books are not dealt with in the same depth, they are related to African issues and culture. This reviewer finds the commentary on Zechariah exceptional in terms of its sound exposition of eschatology. The commentary on Exodus was also biblically and theologically conservative by not employing the higher-critical method and interpretation.

Overall, the ABC can only be recommended as a supplementary resource to pastors, theological students, and laymen who are theologically grounded as it is informative on the divergent theological positions that are confronting Africa. For all the information that it contains, it serves as an excellent reference material, but for all its divergent views and theological positions, it cannot be seen as a safe and sound reference tool considering the general decline in the quality and orthodoxy of theological education in Africa today. The ABC is a testimony to the confusion that non-doctrinal ecumenism brings, and of the increasing need to promote good Reformed theology and provide sound biblical literature to Christians and churches in Africa today.

Notes

¹ Tokunboh Adeyemo, Gen Ed, *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers: 2006), 1612pp.

² James Orr, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (Chicago: Testimony Publishing, nd), 12 (emphasis added).

³ Paul Lee Tan, *A Pictorial Guide to Bible Prophecy* (Hong Kong: Nordica International., 1991), 26. "A consistent, literal approach (read: normal) to Bible prophecy awaits Christ's coming *before* the Millennium and *before* the Great Tribulation. This is the premillennial and pretribulational position."

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IN PURSUIT OF THEOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE: A TESTIMONY

Michael Koech

Background

I came to understand God's plan of salvation through Ephesians 2:8–10, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* This explains my coming to Christ from an unexpected background. My parents sent me to a Roman Catholic school for the sake of education. I was thus exposed to the Roman Catholic version of Christianity. I made a commitment to be a Roman Catholic having attended all the catechism classes and subsequently got baptised.

I read the Bible for the first time when I went to secondary school. It was an English Revised Standard Version. I interacted with students from different denominations. Some disagreed with my faith and challenged me from the Scriptures. That was the beginning of my search for the way of salvation.

At about that time, the parish priest allowed us students to read the Bible in church although he did not encourage us to read it. This was nevertheless a great step towards my salvation. Within a short time a spontaneous Bible study group was started. It was informal but it worked to raise questions about some of the doctrines of the Roman Church. Brethren from a neighbouring church also did the same. We combined our study groups and met almost every Sunday afternoon. It was not long before we were separated from the main church and conducted our services in another school classroom. There was no intention to leave the church but we rejected some of the worship practices of Rome because they were not supported by Scripture. We then believed that we were saved but we did not understand the meaning of salvation as the Bible teaches.

Subsequently the priest told us politely to leave the church since we were not in agreement with the doctrines of the church. One of the leaders of our group invited the founding pastor of Africa Gospel Unity Church (AGUC), the Rev Dishon Kesembe to start a church for us. The number of our group was about 100 and two churches were started instantly.

Salvation

The move to a Protestant church was another step in the discovery of biblical truth. The Lord used the words in Acts 4:12 to give an assurance of salvation. It reads, “*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*” That means salvation is by Christ alone. Previously we learned to pray to Christ, to angels, to Mary and to the saints. The whole thing was confusing, but now I found assurance of salvation in knowing the scriptural truth.

I was not only saved, I became a Protestant Christian. The word “protestant” originated from the disciples of Martin Luther, who protested against Roman Catholicism upon learning the biblical truth. When we were in the Roman Church, Protestants were ridiculed and we were made to think that they were not believers. The providence of God worked in a wonderful way so that today I am what I had never expected to be in my early life. I am not only a Protestant but also a pastor of the church that propagates the faith.

Bible Knowledge

My call to the Christian ministry was driven by the desire for Bible knowledge. My background had kept me from the basic knowledge of scriptural facts. In the Roman Church there was a question-and-answer book written by a priest entitled *Where Is the Truth?* In it were answers based on the church’s tradition and dogma without biblical basis. When we interacted with students from various denominations there was much debate about different doctrines. A particular group—the Seventh Day Adventist—added to my confusion in understanding the Bible. I read John 8:32, “*Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*”

The new church that we had joined did not have any trained pastors to answer many of our questions. The priest’s question in his book still lingered in my mind. But the Lord assured me that truth exists. While I was in that predicament, a missionary of the Independent Board for Presbyterian

Foreign Missions (IBPFM)—the Rev Raymond Carlson—with pastors from Independent Presbyterian Church (IPC) in Kenya came to visit our church as invited by our pastor. Their main mission was to seek for students to study at the Bible College of East Africa (BCEA). The same missionary followed up with a number of visits. I enrolled at the BCEA in May 1975 and I was persuaded that I would get the answers to many questions. However I was still not clear about the call to serve the Lord full-time.

Call to Ministry

Enrolling in Bible College put me in a new environment. There was the academic side and the spiritual. I had the desire to learn and to grow. In the first week, I was scolded by the tutor for not completing an assignment. I learned my lesson then and did not fail after that. Then there was the daily chapel hour. I learned so much from the messages and was persuaded that the Lord had called me to full-time service. Mark 1:16–20 where Jesus called the early disciples to follow Him touched me. He told them that He would make them fishers of men. That was the ministry I was entering. The testimonies of other students also helped. We spent much time talking about our experiences and our expectations. My call to Christian service thus came to a point of no turning back. Our teachers also shared their experiences and this also had great bearing on my decision. I accepted the call not knowing what the future held.

God Answers Prayer

One of the courses in the college curriculum was Bible Prayers. We went through many lessons and experiences of answered prayers in the Bible. Chapel messages also touched on the subject very often. This made me a Christian with a firm belief that God answers prayer. A believer with strong faith in God's power to answer prayer is a complete Christian. Jeremiah 33:3 was one of the verses I memorised and the teacher would make us repeat in unison in class, "*Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*" The teacher stressed that there is no substitute in drawing close to God in prayer and having communion with Him. This means that when we pray, we also allow Him to speak to us through His Word. God answers prayer was one of the lessons I learned at the Bible College.

Fundamentalist

I also became a Christian fundamentalist. This does not mean religious extremism known in other religions and some Christian sects. The word “fundamental” as a noun is thus defined, “A leading or primary principle, rule, law or article, which serves as the ground work of a system; essential part; as the fundamentals of the Christian faith” (Webster’s Dictionary). A fundamentalist is thus one who exercises faithfully the primary principles of the Christian faith.

The 9th World Congress of the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) was held in Nairobi, Kenya from 16 to 27 July 1975. This was ahead of the World Council of Churches’ (WCC) assembly that would be held in November the same year. The ICCC led by Dr Carl McIntire was opposed to the Ecumenical Movement and Liberalism and the WCC. The theme of the ICCC congress was “I Am the First and the Last” and the text was Isaiah 45:22, “*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*” All messages were based on this text. This opened my understanding of international religious conflicts and pointed in the direction of true faith. (Incidentally the Rev Timothy Tow was one of the delegates and was editor of the daily newspaper at the congress.) This congress consolidated my faith and made me a fundamentalist.

Evangelism

As a Bible College student I developed a strong passion for evangelism as Christ gave the Great Commission. Our church leadership was poorly organised, so we formed a youth committee of nine and decided to target the youths. During the first school holidays we evangelised for three weeks and gathered at one centre on the Lord’s Day. We taught the youths everything we had learned including the danger of Ecumenism. At the end of that year we were able to gather 300 of them in a youth camp.

Evangelism became part of our ministry to this day. The churches that I have pastored have been built through evangelistic outreach. This exercise is informed by the exhortation of Paul to Timothy when he said, “*But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry*” (2 Tim 4:5). Presently we are trying to reach some of the unreached tribes in Kenya. The Lord has led us to evangelise the Pokot tribe. This outreach is still at the initial

stages but there is promise of a good response. This need was brought to our attention after our missions' conference in December 2015. My colleagues are also engaged in outreach to other unreached tribes in parts of Kenya and Tanzania.

Youth Leadership

When I graduated from BCEA, I was appointed the youth secretary for East Africa Christian Alliance (EACA). At that time we visited many parts of Kenya to teach and organise youth fellowships. We also taught children in Vacation Bible School (VBS). Many of them today are faithful adults in the church. The youth fellowship has been sustained all these years and has contributed in a big way the growth of the church. One of the obstacles in reaching adults in many African societies is the practice of polygamy. Reaching young people is one strategy that will prevent them from falling into this sinful practice. There is a need for wisdom in guiding adults who are already trapped in that practice.

Far Eastern Bible College

I came to Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) in January 1984 and graduated in May 1987 with a Bachelor of Theology (BTh). What I achieved is best described in 2 Timothy 2:15, "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" I learned to unlock many theological secrets mainly through the Rev Timothy Tow's lessons in Calvin's Institutes and Old Testament History. I also learned Greek and Hebrew bringing me closer to the original text of the Bible. Passion for missions also increased because of the good example set mainly by the principal.

Upon my return to Kenya, I led in the training of pastors at Bomet Bible Institute, a ministry I am engaged in to date. As pastor, I also serve at the pulpit. I have served in four churches to date and have given direction to AGUC in matters of faith. I have just taken office, on 12 April 2019, as Bishop of AGUC.

It was refreshing to return to FEBC in 2003–2005. I came when the College was engaged in controversy over the doctrine of the Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) of the Bible. After careful study and weighing of evidences, I did not find difficulty in taking the position of the faculty of FEBC. I also contributed a short article that appeared in *The Burning Bush* in July 2006. Also at that time, one of the lessons

was to read the New Testament in Greek and I have since been reading a chapter of it a day. I also learned information technology, to use the computer with its various applications and electronic library. I learned more lessons to improve my teaching skills. The words of Paul, “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*” (Phil 4:13), came true, especially when we were greatly pressed to complete our assignments. I thank the Lord that I was able to make it and was greatly encouraged. I went home with two degrees but the skill acquired is more important than a paper certificate.

Doctor of Religious Education

Presently I am here to be conferred the degree of Doctor of Religious Education. “Doctor” in this context means teacher. Thus, the title is not to impress others or be used for the sake of it. It must be practical as a teacher of true religion. It is my prayer that I will always be one who teaches faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Tim 2:2). If this is done, my pursuit for theological education is not in vain. As the years advance, our physical body begins to slow us down but we will serve to the last bit of energy. Paul looked forward to a crown of righteousness when he bade farewell to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:8. We can expect the same when we have done our work faithfully here on earth. Like Paul we will pass the torch to the next generation.

Young people are challenged to acquire good knowledge of the Scriptures and be faithful in propagating the gospel. There is always a need to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). To this end we have been called. Praise be to the Lord.



The Rev Dr Michael Koech (BTh, MDiv, ThM, DRE) is the Bishop of Africa Gospel Unity Church in Kenya. He is also Principal of Bomet Bible Institute and Chairman of the East Africa Christian Association. The above testimony was given at the end-of-term thanksgiving service of the Far Eastern Bible College, 3 May 2019.

BACHELOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE PROGRAMME FOR BCEA STUDENTS AND GRADUATES

The in-ministry BMin degree programme of Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) is offered to Bible College of East Africa (BCEA) students and graduates who are preparing for or are currently in full-time Christian ministry, and desire to further their theological studies to upgrade their qualifications to the next level without having to disrupt their ministry.

Admission Requirements

- (1) Applicants must complete the application form and submit to the office of BCEA (Nairobi, Kenya).
- (2) Applicants must show evidence of God's call to full-time Christian service and be in full-time ministry. A letter of appointment to their ministry by the supporting church/ministry/organisation must accompany their application.
- (3) Applicants must have successfully completed the four years Advanced DipTh programme of BCEA with a minimum GPA of 2.5.
- (4) Applicants must submit two letters of recommendation from their church or ministry superiors or supervisors.
- (5) There will be a charge of 1,000 Kenyan shillings per credit. Students will not be allowed to graduate until their school fees have been cleared.

Programme Requirements

- (1) Students must complete 32 credit hours of studies in prescribed or elective courses offered via FEBC's video lectures conducted on campus at BCEA. Only courses not taught in the BCEA curriculum may be offered.
- (2) A capstone paper must be submitted after all the courses are completed successfully with a minimum GPA 2.5. This programme requires three years to complete.

Graduation Requirements

- (1) The student must earn 32 credits from the BMin programme with a minimum GPA of 2.5, and submit an approved capstone paper.
- (2) The student who has completed all his course requirements with a minimum GPA of 2.5 will be considered a candidate for the degree. As a candidate, he is required to submit an approved capstone paper before qualifying for graduation.
- (3) Those who do not achieve a 2.5 minimum GPA will not be allowed to proceed to the capstone paper. He will have to take additional courses or retake the courses he did poorly to attain to the minimum GPA required for candidacy.
- (4) Students must be in the full-time ministry for a minimum of two years before the conferment of the degree. A testimonial by a supervisory pastor, church board or relevant ministry authorities certifying that the candidate is of approved Christian character and has rendered exemplary Christian service must be presented to the faculty.
- (5) In addition, the college might require students to submit sufficient documentation to prove that they are active in full-time service during the course of their study. This would include documents like church programmes/schedules/bulletins etc.
- (6) Hardcopies of the completed application and all required documents (official transcripts, testimonies, recommendation letters etc) of successful candidates are to be sent to FEBC.
- (7) The successful candidate must be present at the graduation service held in FEBC for the conferral of the degree. Travel expenses to be borne by the candidate. Conferral of the degree in absentia only in exceptional cases.

In-Ministry Schedule

Year 1

1st term (1st – 3rd week of April) – 6 credits

2nd term (1st – 3rd week of August) – 6 credits

3rd term (1st – 2nd week of December) – 4 credits

Year 2

1st term (1st – 3rd week of April) – 6 credits

2nd term (1st – 3rd week of August) – 6 credits

3rd term (1st – 2nd week of December) – 4 credits

- There will be 2 cohorts in the BMin programme. Those who do not complete the 1st year will not be allowed to enter the 2nd year.

Administrative Personnel

- (1) Coordinator: James Chen
- (2) Assistant coordinator: George Maina
- (3) Supervisors: Rev Dr Mark Kim, Rev Eben Yoon, Rev Lazarus Ngige, Miss Eunyoung Bai,
- (4) The BCEA administration and faculty will be fully responsible in coordinating the programme, supervising the students, and grading the papers and exams.

Course Assignments

- (1) Pre-class assignment: Students to prepare before the first lecture on-campus. Students are required to read books published by FEBC relating to the course, and submit reading logs and summaries.
- (2) In-class assignment: Students to submit daily when on-campus for lectures. Study questions tied to the lectures are to be answered and completed on a daily basis.
- (3) There will be an exam at the end of every course.

Rights and Obligations

- (1) FEBC has every right to change any part of the programme as and when it is deemed desirable or necessary. BCEA may not change any part of the programme unless approved by FEBC.
- (2) FEBC will confer the degree only when it is satisfied that all programme requirements are met. It retains the right not to confer the degree if the candidate does not show good Christian conduct or does not have the recommendation of the BCEA faculty.
- (3) Either party or both parties (FEBC and BCEA) may decide or agree to terminate the programme at any time.

College News

FEBC started its new semester with a day of prayer on January 2, 2019, from 8.30 am to 12.30 pm. About a hundred Board, faculty, staff, students and friends met in the Life Bible-Presbyterian Church sanctuary at 9A Gilstead Road.

The Principal delivered the opening word by reminding all students that God requires total submission and surrender of all His full-time servants, and this must begin when we start out as full-time students. The primary scriptural texts for this principle are Matthew 10:37–39, *“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. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it”* and Matthew 16:24–25, *“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”*

FEBC’s founding Principal—the Rev Dr Timothy Tow had often reminded his students, “Be prepared to die if you want to serve God.” This is a call to unconditional service. We serve the Lord whether there is (1) pay or no pay (1 Cor 9:14–19), (2) thanks or no thanks (1 Cor 4:9-13, 2 Cor 12:15), regardless of (3) good times or bad times (2 Cor 11:23–30, Phil 4:11–13).

Five new full-time students joined the College last semester—Deccarlo Balongcas Igot (Philippines), Georgy Permyakov (Russia), Han Wei Wei (China), Jonathan Ryan Hendricks (India), and Shin Eui Jong (Korea).

Total enrolment last semester (Jan–May 2019) was 633: 72 day students (fulltime: 46, part-time: 26), 335 students in the Basic Theology for Everyone (BTFE) night classes, and 226 distance learning students. **Students enrolled from these 15 countries:** Australia, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Russia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The lecturers/tutors and courses offered last semester were:
Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo: Systematic Theology IV (Eschatology), Calvin’s Institutes II, Greek Exegesis II; **Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew:** Minor Prophets I, Contemporary Theology II, Hebrew Reading II;

Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy: Homiletics, Pastoral Theology II, Biblical Covenants; **Rev Stephen Khoo:** Esther; **Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo:** Bible Geography I, Church Music III; **Rev Tan Kian Sing:** Philippians; **Mrs Ivy Tow:** Greek Elementary II; **Mrs Jemima Khoo:** The Christian School, Pianoforte; **Miss Carol Lee:** Adult Christian Education, Thinking and Study Skills; **Dr Jose Lagapa:** Biblical Apologetics; **Rev Clement Chew:** Hebrew Elementary II; **Mr Samuel Joseph:** Greek Reading II; **Mrs Anne Lim:** English Intensive II; **Mrs Irene Lim:** English Intermediate II; and **Eld Han Soon Juan:** English Advanced II.

Dennis Kabingue (MDiv 06, ThM 08) our Greek Reading tutor has returned to his home country in the Philippines. We thank him for his service at FEBC since 2008. **Samuel Joseph** (MDiv 18, ThM 19) replaces him as Greek Reading tutor. **The Rev Clement Chew** (MDiv 13, ThM 15) is promoted to the position of Lecturer with effect from January 2, 2019.

Elder Tai Mern Yee was inducted into the Board of Directors of FEBC on May 12, 2019. Elder Tai is an Elder of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. There are now a total of eight members on the Board.

Daily Vacation Bible College (DVBC) course on “Bible-Presbyterianism: History and Theology” was held at the Life Bible-Presbyterian Church Sanctuary, 9A Gilstead Road, May 6–11, 2019. The topics and speakers were as follows: (1) “History of the B-P Church” by Jeffrey Khoo, (2) “Doctrine of Biblical Separation” by Ko Ling Kang, (3) “Doctrine of Premillennialism” by Joshua Yong, (4) “Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration and Preservation” by Samuel Joseph, (6) “Essential Practices” by Clement Chew. Students took an exam to earn one credit. The lecture notes are downloadable from FEBC’s website: www.febc.edu.sg (sv Publications/FEBC Press).

The 4th Bible Lands Pilgrimage, May 19–31, 2019, led by Dr and Mrs Jeffrey Khoo saw a total of 42 pilgrims from nine churches embark on a trip to Turkey, Greece and Italy to study Church History (Acts of the Apostles and 16th Century Reformation). Flying Ethiopian Airlines allowed us to tour Addis Ababa twice during the long transit at the start and end of the journey. We took advantage of the long layover to visit Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia under the Rev Ephrem Chiracho, an FEBC alumnus (BTh 01, MDiv 03). Other alumni serving with him are his wife Gete Sisay Taye (BRE 03) and Engida Tefera Zeleke (DipTh 10). The pilgrims carried 120kg of books for the

library of Gethsemane Bible Institute. Pilgrims earn two credits when they submit a research project after the trip.

FEBC's 44th Graduation Service was convened on the Lord's Day, May 12, 2019, at Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. The speaker was the Rev Michael Koech—Bishop of Africa Gospel Unity Church and Principal of Bomet Bible Institute in Kenya. He spoke on the topic “No Retirement in God's Service” (Luke 9:23–26). Twenty-nine graduated with their certificates and degrees: (1) **Certificate of Religious Knowledge (CertRK)**: Ang Kim Kung Milton, Boo Kiah Wee Mark, Chan Cheow Lien Audrey, Choo Hwee Leng Jovena, Chua Poh Eng Melissa, Dorcas Koshy, Ho Hui Lin, Jude Thaddeus Papel Gabales, Lim Kwee Wah Jeanette, Lin Enhui Eileen, Ng Li Li Sharon, Ng Siew Gek Adelene, Poh Zhongxian Adrian, Tan Chung Huat Josiah; **Certificate of Biblical Studies (CertBS)**: Choong Kai Shuin, Kim Ye Chan, Kwa Lye Huat Harry, Serene Lee, Tang Sheng-Hui Joelson; **Diploma in Theology (DipTh)**: Chin Li Seong Doreen, Tang Tuck Kong Allan; **Bachelor of Religious Education (BRE)**: Aprilaiza Saldivar Sible; **Bachelor of Theology (BTh)**: Van Sin Piang, Wang Shuai Yong; **Master of Divinity (MDiv)**: Li Yahui (*magna cum laude*), Lim Seh Beng Benjamin (*cum laude*); **Master of Theology (ThM)**: Joseph Robert Samuel Vijeyaraj (*summa cum laude*); **Doctor of Religious Education (DRE)**: Michael Kipyegon Arap Koech; **Doctor of Theology (ThD)**: Trinipilo Garsuta Lagapa.



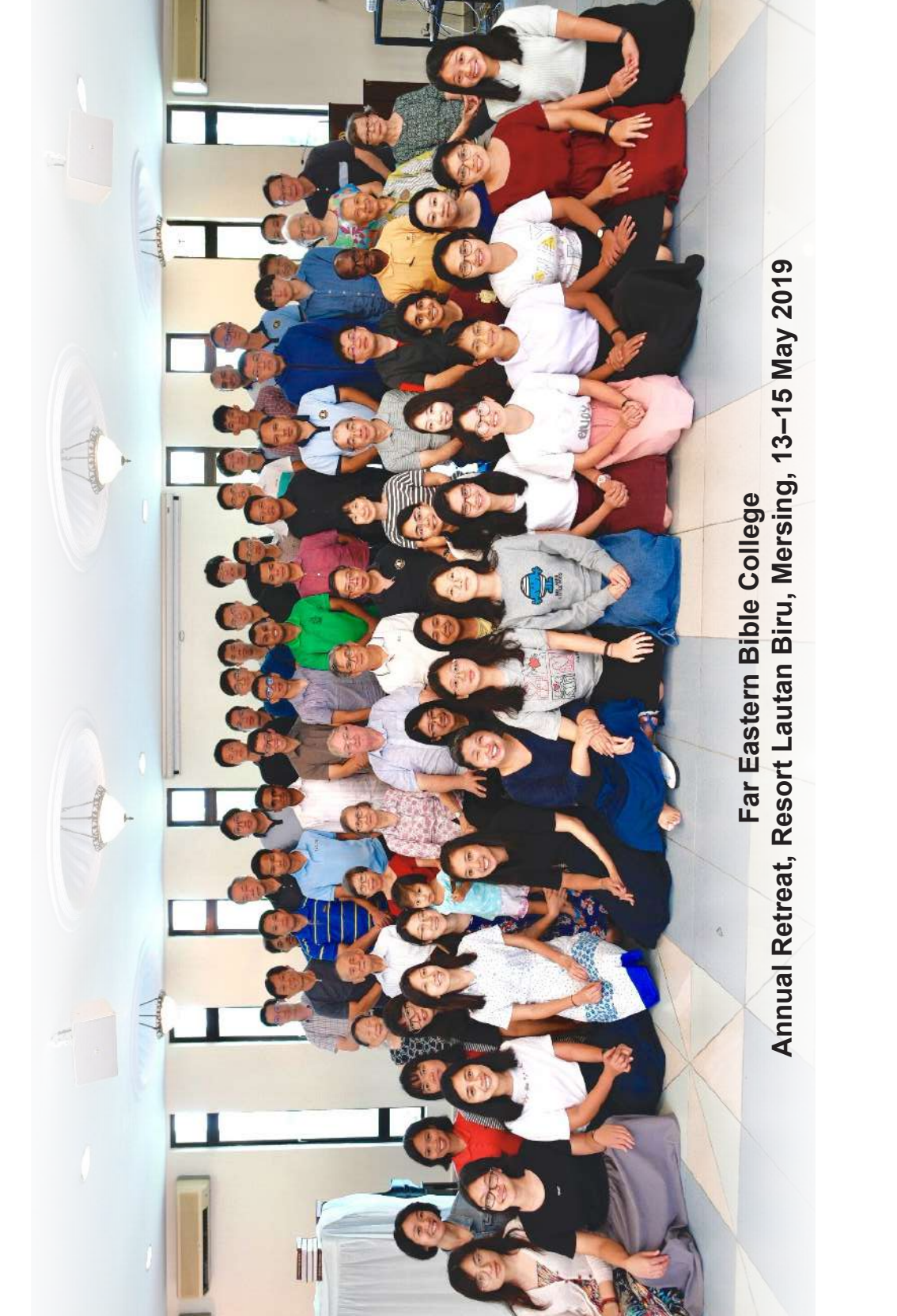
Dr Jose Lagapa & family



*L-R: Bishop Michael Koech (DRE), Dr Jose Lagapa (ThD),
The Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo (Principal)*



Samuel Joseph (ThM) & family



**Far Eastern Bible College
Annual Retreat, Resort Lautan Biru, Mersing, 13–15 May 2019**

O Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness

**Far Eastern Bible College
44th Graduation Service
Class of 2019**

