



FAITH OF OUR FATHER

*Oral History of
Timothy Tow Siang Hui,
Founder of
Singapore Bible-Presbyterianism
and Far Eastern Bible College*

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FAITH OF OUR FATHER

Oral History of Timothy Tow Siang Hui, Founder of Singapore Bible-Presbyterianism and Far Eastern Bible College

The Rev Dr Timothy Tow (1930–2009) is the founding father of the Bible-Presbyterian Church (BPC) in Singapore and by extension Southeast Asia. He also founded the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC). He was pastor, theologian and missionary, encapsulating the duties of the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20). In 1950, after he returned from America with his theological degree from Faith Theological Seminary, and moved by the 20th Century Reformation Movement under the Rev Dr Carl McIntire, he founded the very first BPC in Singapore which is Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. In 1962, FEBC opened its doors with him as the first Principal. As the Rev Dr Paul Contento of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) said when he laid the foundation stone of FEBC, “Without the Bible College, the Church would die”, FEBC has been used by the Lord to nurture those called to full-time ministry who have become pastors, teachers and missionaries of the Bible-Presbyterian denomination and movement. There are now 43 BPCs in Singapore (as of 2020), not counting those in Southeast Asia and other parts of the world (Africa, Australia, Canada, China, India, UK).¹

It is 70 years since the BPC in Singapore was founded. It is timely that the story of her founder and her founding be revisited. This special issue of *The Burning Bush* features the transcript of the interviews the Oral History Centre had with the Rev Dr Timothy Tow in 1998. Readers are also directed to other special issues of this journal that record the life and times of the Rev Dr Timothy Tow, and the testimonies of those who have been blessed by his life and ministry: “Essays in Honour of Timothy Tow” (July 2000), “Truth Unfailing: A Tribute to Alma Mater” (July 2002), “I Remember Timothy Tow” (July 2010), “FEBC’s Golden Jubilee: 50 Years Holding Fast the Faithful Word” (January/July 2012), “Purified Seven Times: In Thanksgiving for God’s Preservation of the King James Bible and the Far Eastern Bible College” (July 2015). A CD-

Rom containing Rev Tow's articles in his church weekly, books, hymns/songs, sermons, yearbooks, videos, interviews can be found in "He Being Dead Yet Speaketh: Remembering the Life and Teachings of Pastor Timothy Tow on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary Thanksgiving of True Life Bible-Presbyterian (2003–2013)." All the resources above can be found in the Timothy Tow Memorial Library, Far Eastern Bible College, 9A Gilstead Road, Singapore 309063, and from FEBC's and True Life BPC's websites (www.febc.edu.sg, www.truelifebpc.org.sg).

Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore

The Oral History Centre within the National Archives of Singapore (NAS) was the brainchild of the late Dr Goh Keng Swee. As a member of the first Cabinet, Dr Goh laid the foundation of Singapore's economic progress and developed the defence forces. Established in 1979, the Oral History Centre captures the memories of diverse groups of people for the benefit of future generations of Singaporeans.

It was against this backdrop that the Rev Dr Timothy Tow gave separate oral interviews with the NAS in 1984 on the Japanese Occupation of Singapore in World War II, and in 1998 on his life and ministry in Life Bible-Presbyterian Church and Far Eastern Bible College, spanning over five hours.

The one hour of recording on the Japanese Occupation has an English transcript which is available online.² The 1998 recordings however had no transcript until now. With these transcripts, it is hoped that future generations of Singaporeans and historians will have a better understanding of their origins and history. It is hoped that when they study the history of their Church, Bible-Presbyterians will have a better understanding of their founder—the Rev Dr Timothy Tow. When read together with the numerous well-documented books written by Rev Tow, it is hoped that Christians, especially Bible-Presbyterians, will remember and not forget where they came from, who they are and what they stood for.

The 1998 interviews were done by Patricia Lee, Senior Oral History Specialist at the Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore. The transcript was prepared by Wong Shuk Min. To God be the glory!

Interviews with the Rev Dr Timothy Tow by the Oral History Centre, National Archives of Singapore, National Library Board

Interview 1

Interviewed by Ms Patricia Lee, 27 March – 9 December 1998

Special Project: Accession Number 002007

Reel/Disc 1: 00:28:57

Synopsis

Born 28 December 1920, China. Pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. How he became a pastor. Family background. Turning point in life—John Sung Revival of 1935 in Singapore. Education in Anglo-Chinese School and Raffles College. Another turning point in life—death of his mother and daughter. First marriage. Death of wife and daughter. Second marriage.

Transcript

This is a recording with Rev Timothy Tow, Accession Number 002007, Reel 1.

Ms Patricia Lee (PL): Rev Tow, can you tell me your age, date and place of birth?

Rev Timothy Tow (TT): I was born on the 28th of December, 1920, in Swatow, Guangdong province.

PL: What about your calling as a pastor? How long have you been pastoring?

TT: I have been Pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church since October 20, 1950.

PL: So that will be almost coming to 48 years?

TT: That's right.

PL: Tell us a little bit more about your calling as a pastor? How did it come about?

TT: Well, theologically speaking, it may be a long story and to trace quite deeply into the roots of my faith. And it may interest you to know that this goes to the fourth generation before me. In my great grandfather, maternal great grandfather, so his name is Tan. Tan Khai Lin.³ He heard an English Presbyterian missionary in Swatow.⁴ In those days, they rent a shophouse and then they have this used as a Gospel station. He heard

the Gospel then and was converted in 1859 when he was also baptised. He brought the news to his mother. The father had died already. And interestingly, when the mother heard it, she was not against him. But rather, with silence, heard the whole story of his conversion. And so the mother also got converted and was baptised. Then they came to my grandfather and my grandfather was chosen to be the son-in-law of this Rev Tan. He also, the first convert of Swatow, became a pastor. And so he gave his daughter in marriage to my grandfather who also became an evangelist of the English Presbyterian Mission. In those days we had all the English missionaries taking care of us. So my grandfather was a Christian minister and later on, of course, they came to Singapore and he was a minister of the English Presbyterian Church. It came to my father and he had the privilege of studying in the Swatow English Presbyterian Mission Hospital. And they had a training programme of five years. After learning five years, he became a doctor under the British training. I still got his diploma in my house which can be a good testimony. So my father was also a devout Christian and he became an Elder of the church. And my mother too was a very devout Christian but from their young days, they were brought face to face with the great revival in China. And the lady evangelist, her name was Miss Dora Yu. Dora Yu Cidu.⁵ In those meetings, my mother was born again. My father I don't know but he was also very much touched and later on another great evangelist came to Swatow and my parents were greatly blessed through Rev Ting Li Mei, first revivalist of China.

PL: Which year are we talking about?

TT: That would be after 1910. So these are my deep roots of religion and revivalism in our family. Then it came to my turn in 1935 while I was studying in the ACS. I was in Standard 7, age 15, when Dr John Sung came from China. And it was a tremendous revival that touched many young people so that the MGS and ACS had to shut down to let the young people come to Telok Ayer Church, Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church.⁶

PL: You are talking about 1935?

TT: 1935. To hear the Gospel. And then I was soundly converted there. 1935. And at the meeting, I gave my life to the Lord but I must refer to my mother. When I was born, she dedicated me to the Lord. And it was also confirmed by my grandfather's prayer. My grandfather also prayed for me. And so the Lord accepted my dedication. And 35, my mother and myself. But when I grew up, and passed my Senior Cambridge, I was

very worldly ambitious. And so I do not know why but somehow I just went to Raffles College, predecessor of NUS and I took up science. And of all things, I'm in the arts stream to take science. So after one semester, one term, three terms in the year, I failed flat. Three subjects – Higher Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics. I failed the first two. I was first boy in ACS. You can still see the plaque there. I'm number two after Lim Kok Ann, 1936. Seow Poh Leng medallist. We were first in the Senior Cambridge you see.⁷

PL: Lim Kok Ann was the former Dean of the Medical Faculty, right?

TT: He was Professor. Lim Kok Ann. But 1937 is my name. I got first and got the Seow Poh Leng medal. But I went to Raffles College and I failed. So you can see what a blow that I was ground to powder, I should say.

PL: How do you explain that? From being a top boy right to the bottom?

TT: Well, it is simply that I was doing something just out of vainglory, thinking I'm going to get a science degree so I'll be somebody. And why did you do it? I cannot tell you. Just to be qualified with a degree that's all. Plainly, God was against me. So the more science I did, the more furious I became. We are given 14 sums to do a week. And that was really terrible. I didn't like to do sums. So that is the beginning I dislike my studies.

PL: Why did your mom choose to offer you to the Lord? Why were you the chosen one and not your brothers?

TT: Well, the reason is she has married I think at 24 and after three years, my sister came. In those old days, they expect after one year to have a boy. That's everybody's, the Tow clan, the whole family expected her to have a son. After three years a girl. After another three years came me. So before I was born, she made a vow like Hannah, like Samuel. This one if it is a boy, I will give it to you. So when I came, I was the first boy. So she dedicated me to the Lord.

PL: You mentioned something about your grandfather's prayer?

TT: My grandfather was there. So he prayed for me. Dedicated me to the Lord.

PL: So your calling to be a pastor?

TT: Well, then the story is quite long. The war came. By that time, I was certified interpreter of the Supreme Court. Because after I failed in Raffles College, I met my friend Quek Kiok Chiang. He is now Pastor of Zion BP Church or rather Faith BP Church. And he said to me, "Why

don't you come and join me?" And I thought it was a very good idea because I like languages. So I studied Chinese, English, dialects and I graduated after one and a half years. So by January 1940, I was already given a place in the Supreme Court as interpreter. Then the war came on 7 December 1941. If you were going through the university just about that time whether you graduate or not, they had a hard time. So during the Japanese days, I worked very hard at my Japanese. And there was this entrance exam to the Judicial Officers Training Institute started by the Japanese. And out of 386 competitors, I was one of 12 chosen because I was very good in Japanese. I became a law student. Twelve of us only. And we were all taught by the lawyers, magistrates, whoever they may be; but they had no jobs so they were very happy to be teaching again. And after the war, I went back to my interpreter's job because the British Military Administration came back. But they were all dressed in military uniforms, under the military.

PL: The BMA?

TT: The BMA. So, I was very happy when my father one day sent my brother from Batu Pahat. They were staying in Malaysia. And my younger brother said to me, "Dad is going to give you \$4000 if you go and finish your law in England." I passed my law by 1945 June. So I got myself admitted to both London University and Middle Temple. And I was going to set out in March buying a ticket from Mansfield, Ocean Building.⁸ The cargo boat was called Argus. I was to pay 90 pounds and then suddenly my mother in Batu Pahat, after five days of illness, died. And so I cannot set out. I had to go back and attend the funeral. The boat sailed but it was very early because it was the same year Kuan Yew went to England to study.⁹ In fact, he went there in October. He was late. I read his book. He was late for one or two weeks. But I was going in March. I would have gone six months ahead of him. But then, because of my mother's death, I delayed and stayed with my father in Batu Pahat. But in five weeks' time, I got a telegram from my wife from Singapore to Batu Pahat to say that baby is going for an operation this morning. Seven months old. With the intussusception of the intestines. Blocked up. So I took a taxi immediately to come to Singapore. I went to see her at the KK Hospital. And I saw my wife pinching her. She's dead already. The operation was unsuccessful. Well, that was the time that I was brought face to face with God. I suddenly, seeing the sad, my wife getting hysterical, crying you know, and pinching her, "Get up! Get Up!"

Well, I said man's life's like morning dew. What shall it profit? Then I had a fainting sensation. They put me down on a sofa. And there I saw as it were, I was like a rich young ruler with half a million dollars in each hand but I was like a dying man. Cold and clammy, you will have to let go. And all the world, the glitters of the world, appeared to be a smouldering heat of rubbish and ambers. And I was facing total darkness. Then I prayed to God, "God, if you let me live again, I will serve you all my life." Then I woke up. And then they saw me, glowing like an angel, whereas I was like dying the previous minute.

PL: Was it a medical condition you were under?

TT: No. I was perfectly healthy. But the impact of my wife pinching the baby girl, she's dead, so struck sorrow in my heart, that I gave up the will to go to London. I said, "Well, man's life is like that and I'm going to die too." I feel like dying. So I said, "Lord if you give me back my life, I will serve you all my life."

PL: You uttered the prayer on the spot?

TT: On the spot I prayed. After the prayer, I regained my strength again. And I looked like an angel. Then I told my brother, Dr Tow Siang Hwa, who was by the side, my second aunt was there and she gave me some rabbit soup to drink. I got much better. Then I told them, "Well, everything is over. Let's go home." No more London and China because China is where I had the connection to go for training. So when I went to tell my second uncle, he had a downcast face because he was very ambitious, that I being his nephew should go and finish law and be somebody. Of course, I had very great ambition to be someone in the world—politician, power, money all these things. But I was struck down through this experience by my baby's deathbed in the hospital. And she was a little girl of seven months old. So that was the turning point of my life that now I willingly give myself to the Lord. Though I, in 1935, as a young man, when I was in school, I gave myself to the Lord. But the trouble is when I grew up, I was very ambitious. In my subconscious mind, I said, "Lord, give me 30 years vacation. Then I come and serve you." That was a subconscious prayer. But after this, it was a total change.

PL: Your mom's death, what impact did it have on you?

TT: It did not have any impact on me because I was that earnest to go to London. And my wife was crying and said, "You are going to leave me

without any consultation.” “Never mind, I’ll go there two and a half years and when I come back, we will be alright. You stay here with daddy.” That was in Batu Pahat. My father was practising in Batu Pahat.

PL: Mrs Nancy Tow later on passed away too.

TT: She was married to me since January 12th 1940. By December 1940, we had our first son. She lived with me together from 1940 to 1965. So we had been married for 25 years.

PL: Can you talk a little bit about your relationship with Mrs Nancy Tow and your children then?

TT: I loved my wife very much. And through her we had John who is now in America, Lehia who is now a missionary wife, Shen Pan and Shen Min these are two sons, Lily, Lilyn and Le Anne. Seven children. Lilyn was the one who died that brought me back to the Lord. After I went to America and came back, I had two more children. Lily and Le Anne. But it was in 1965 when we had a fatal motor accident at Bidor which is on the way to Cameron Highlands. Bidor then Tapah. At Bidor, the motor accident occurred. A young man, a deacon of the church, was driving my Beetle and my wife was sitting at the back of the car with the two girls, Lily and Le Anne and my aunt was sitting in front. But because of the impact with the lorry, three lives were lost immediately. My wife, my aunt and Le Anne, the youngest daughter. So, seven children, two are gone. One is at the hospital and the other one was taken on the road.

PL: How would you describe your relationship with Mrs Nancy Tow?

TT: My relationship with her was very good. I loved her very much. But we used to have occasional quarrels. And that is due to the fact that I’m dedicated to be a pastor but she said, “When I married you, you were not a pastor.” Main thing was money. As a pastor, my salary was very small. She had to work as a midwife. Her salary was \$160. And together with our salary, we can pull along with it but very straitly, without any money left. So money was partly but the reason why we quarrelled was that we were not compatible with each other. I mean our nature. But that was occasional, not frequent. But every now and then, it will flare up for nothing. One thing is we were also too young. I married very young.

PL: How old were you when you married?

TT: Twenty.

PL: How did you get to know her?

TT: Love at first sight.

PL: Can you elaborate on that?

TT: I went to Chin Lien Bible School and it was just started. This school was started in the wake of John Sung's great revival. So many wanted to study the Bible. So two ladies from China, missionaries from China, they started a school. Miss Leona Wu and Miss Ng Peck Luan, who is still alive and she is now 91 or 2. This goes back to 1937. So my wife was also from Batu Pahat. And her father was a pastor. Methodist. And I somewhat know that she is staying there, just around the corner. But one day my mother took me to see Miss Wu, the Principal of the Bible school. And there I saw her. I was so surprised. Being a very young man, I fell in love with her immediately there. Then I realised that she was staying just around the street. My father has a dispensary clinic on the side road and she stays on the main road. So that was how I got a chance to see her on and off. That was 1938 that I met her. So by 1940, we were married. In the early part of the year. With the whole Tow clan very happy because I got my uncle, especially my second uncle. So the whole family came up. Her family is very respected. Her father was a pastor and so we were married in Batu Pahat.

PL: The death of Nancy Tow and your daughter at the car accident. How did it impact your life?

TT: Of course, I was so shocked. Lily was semi-conscious, making a whining noise. Her life was still there. Lily is the other daughter. Le Anne was taken with my wife and my aunt. I was the leader of seven cars going up to Cameron Highlands for the Bible camp. But I still held myself intact. That I could drive the kombi, Volkswagen van, all the way up to Cameron Highlands while my wife, my aunt and my youngest daughter were kept at Tapah hospital in the mortuary. Because they were dead. They kept them in the mortuary. And I went up to the mountain but the next day I drove down to go to Ipoh to look for three coffins. And the most wonderful thing is that we want the western coffins, not the Chinese coffins. There were two big coffins for the two adults and then there was a small coffin for my daughter. The only small coffin available. So it was a very wonderful lesson that the Lord provided even for this. Le Anne, the youngest daughter. She was eleven and a half.

PL: Did it have any significant impact on your life as compared to those days when your baby died at KK hospital? It was a turning point in your life to go into full-time. What about the death of Nancy and your daughter?

TT: Well, that was something so sudden but I just bowed down to the Lord. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. To this day, it is my spirit. Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. Job 13:15. I had no quarrel with the Lord. I just submitted.

PL: Tell me about your second marriage to Mrs Ivy Tow and your children.

TT: Ivy was my student. And she was my only student. I started the college with three students. But after the first year, we started the college in 1962, all left except Ivy. So she was my student from 1962. By 1965 when the accident occurred, she would be the most senior student. There were other students that came in, maybe by that time I had four to five and that was how the Lord worked out that He provided Ivy for me. And so we got hitched up together.

PL: And your children? How many children?

TT: My children, the son was in America, the daughter was in America, the two younger sons were with me in Singapore and Lily who was injured in the accident was with me. So two children were in America and three with me here.

PL: So today you would have how many children?

TT: With Ivy I've got two.

PL: So you've got nine and two children passed away.

TT: Yes, two passed away.

PL: Rev Tow, let's move back and talk about your younger days. Can you share a little bit about your relationship with your parents and siblings?

TT: We are of the old school and my father was very strict. We lived in a Confucian style—the respect to the parents, and we love our parents very much. So all this while from the beginning, we were educated in Singapore while my father had his practice in Kluang and Batu Pahat. But every vacation, we would go back and stay with our parents until about school opening when we come out.

Interview 2

Interviewed by Ms Patricia Lee, 27 March – 9 December 1998

Special Project: Accession Number 002007

Reel/Disc 2: 00:29:49

Synopsis

Described his relationship with his parents. Father's relationship with the Kuomintang. Reasons for migrating to Singapore in 1926. Description of the Tow Clan. His fondness for his elder sister. Journey to Singapore. Shuttling between Senai in Johore and Singapore. Description of attap-house church in Upper Serangoon Road.

Transcript

This is a recording with Rev Timothy Tow, Accession Number 002007, Reel 2.

Patricia Lee (PL): Let's talk about your relationship with your father first. What do you remember him as?

Timothy Tow (TT): He was a very strict father. Confucian style and he's a Confucian scholar though he was a good elder and good Christian man, and we would have our evening devotions. He's very strict. We must all come together to worship after dinner. But he was over strict. When I don't get first boy, and I go back and get second boy, I go back I'll get a caning. That did not go with me. I felt very bitter. But mother I loved so dearly even from young days. Everything I must ask mother. Even, "Mother can I go out and pass water?" I'll ask her. She said, "Of course! You can!" But, you see, I loved my mother so much. So when my mother told me when I was about seven or eight, "When you grow up, you will have to be a pastor." Of course, in my spirit I didn't like it. But because I loved mother I said, "Yes. Whatever mother wants me to do, of course, I will do." So, this is the relationship. And we lived as a happy family. My father is very strict but we respect him. And we have a family worship. We liked it too. The only thing is he was too strict.

PL: Understand that your father was involved in the 1911 Revolution. Do you recall any?

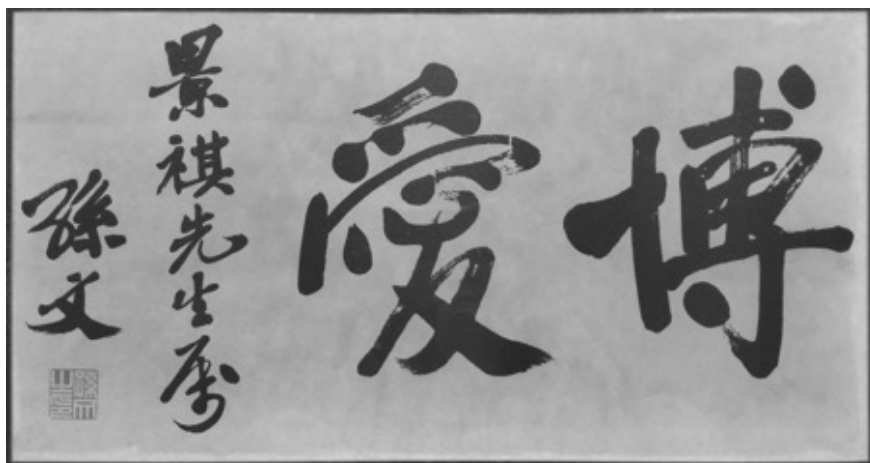
TT: Yes. He was Sun Yat Sen's very loyal follower. He told me he was a gun and bomb runner, carrying these things for the cause of the revolution. I have got, these old pictures are gone already, but I have seen how my father was hobnobbing with all the bigshots in the Chinese government.

PL: You are talking about the Kuomintang?

TT: Kuomintang. When the Manchus fell in 1911, my father was one of the first to cut off the queue. Otherwise, they have all long queues.

PL: So your dad didn't have a pigtail?

TT: I don't think I have a picture of his queue but he cut it off, supporting the revolution. He has got a calligraphy by Sun Yat Sen, not exactly from his hand, but his secretary must have written for him. But, signed as Sun Wen, Sun Yat Sen. Sun Wen, his Chinese name. To Mr Tow Keng Kee, with the two words, "Bo Ai", philanthropic love. It is very famous, "Bo Ai." And I can show you. It is in my house. There is still his calligraphy.



Calligraphy by Sun Yat Sen gifted to Tow Keng Kee

PL: Your father's involvement with Chinese politics, how did it impact your family life?

TT: Sun Yat Sen died in 1925. By that time, my father was linked up with one General Chang Chih-chung who was a very close associate of Chiang Kai-shek. So through him, he got under Chiang Kai-shek to join his ranks. And Chiang Kai-shek appointed him as Medical Superintendent of the military hospital in Canton. Guangzhou. So we all moved up from Swatow to Hong Kong. Hong Kong we went up to Canton to stay for about two years. I still remember my father in all his uniform, he likes to be very stylish, you know. He was a Lieutenant-Colonel. Rank was Lieutenant-Colonel and was superintendent of the military hospital. I remembered in my young days, we went to the teaching hospital, with all the mummies,

with all the bodies, all soaked in whatever it is, and that's where they do the dissecting. I still remember that. But then, after two years, following closely Chiang Kai-shek, the time came when they were going to advance to Nanking in 1927, to capture Nanking. But in 1926, that was the year, Christmas, we migrated to Singapore. My father had a burst of I don't know, his gastric ulcer or what, he vomited blood. He almost died. But my mother prayed for him especially and later on he recovered.



Tow Keng Kee with son Timothy and daughter Siew Ai (circa 1925)

PL: Why did your family choose to come to Singapore in 1926?

TT: The reason is, before that, my father had sent quite some money to my second uncle to buy a rubber estate in Senai. Somehow, he had this investment in Malaysia and my second uncle was doing business and doing planting also. But the estate was bought by my father in Senai. So with this connection, and my grandfather was sent to Singapore already. He was the pastor of Glory Church, Bukit Timah. He pastored the church for a while. My second uncle and third uncle had been sent here to study English. So they learnt English in Singapore. In those days, very early. So with this breakdown in health, my father took me one day to go and see Chiang Kai-shek. I was a very young boy.

When I saw Chiang Kai-shek, he looks like a lion or tiger (roars). Very powerful. I can still remember that. But my father brought me to see Chiang Kai-shek to show him that he did not mean any sinister business. To bring my son along, he could not do anything bad to Chiang Kai-shek. That is his style and Chiang Kai-shek, "Hao, Hao, Hao." I still remember. "You want to resign because you are going to Senai", and because of his sickness, he released him. So that was his goodbye. I still remember his goodbye to Chiang Kai-shek. Otherwise, they were on good terms because he had been serving under him. In 1926, they were all going for the Northern Expedition to bring down all the warlords. Because after Sun Yat Sen died, China was divided into five or six regions. Each with a big warlord controlling and Chiang Kai-shek was going to unify the nation. And I still remember, day and night, hearing the buglers, the soldiers marching and shouting slogans. I myself felt very patriotic, I liked to go and join. Even as a small boy.

PL: You were in Canton then?

TT: Canton. And so we all left Canton and took a boat from Hong Kong, P & O liner, Akbar liner,¹⁰ and we arrived here at Christmas. Just before Christmas. 1926. And we stayed at Selegie Road.

PL: Before we move on to your life in Singapore, let's go back a little bit to your life in homeland China. Can you tell me a little bit about your birthplace, Swatow?

TT: It was a heavenly place. Every day with songs. My father was a doctor. He had a good practice. He was a doctor by the British missionary doctors.

PL: So it was western medicine?

TT: Western medicine. He had five years training. He's got all those training in surgery. I can still show you the certificate. Big diploma, like that. So my father would usually take us out and we had a wonderful life. I went to kindergarten in Swatow and life was very happy. But, my father had made enemies with one of his closest friends and it was because of money. He had come to the South Seas to collect a big sum of money for the building of the Chinese YMCA in Swatow. But his friend who received the money somehow they had a quarrel. The situation was not very clear. And so there was a feud between my father and this man. So my father was arrested and taken into custody not only once but twice. He would have been shot, the one or two days. And so life became very

sad. Father gets arrested and my mother was praying all the time. I still remember those days. But the Lord saved my father in a very miraculous way. I need not tell the story. So from there, we were forced to leave Swatow. So we went to Hong Kong. We stayed in Hong Kong. And now I remember clearly. I went to kindergarten in the Anglican kindergarten in Hong Kong. I studied all my times tables in Cantonese. Even so small we all repeat.



*Medical diploma awarded to Tow Keng Kee
by English Presbyterian Mission Hospital*

PL: That was before you came down to Canton?

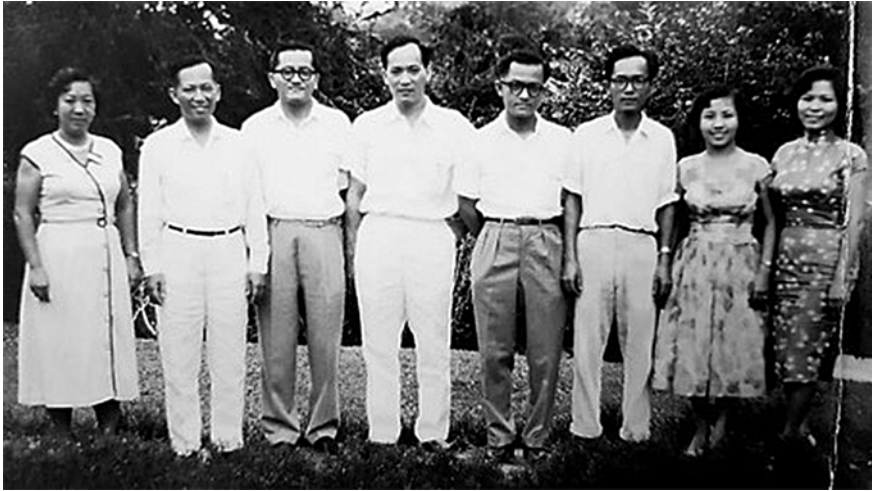
TT: No.

PL: Swatow to Hong Kong.

TT: Swatow to Hong Kong then Canton. Then when I was in kindergarten in Canton, I learnt all my times tables. Today when I do my mathematics, I calculate all in Cantonese because I recited the times table. A few months in Hong Kong then we went to Canton. And we were there for nearly two years. From Canton to Hong Kong, then Singapore.

PL: How big was your family?

TT: It was an extended family.¹¹ In those days, the sisters all stayed under my father's care. Second uncle had come to Singapore to invest and all that. But there were three sisters of my father who stayed with us. He's the commander-in-chief over the three sisters and the youngest brother. We all stayed together.



Tow siblings left to right: Siew Ai, Siang Hui Timothy, Siang Yew, Siang Hwa, Siang Yeow, Siang Hong, Siew Yong, Siew Mui (circa 1960)

PL: So in all how many siblings do you have?

TT: Plus my second uncle's wife and two or three children because my second uncle came to Singapore to do business. So all these were under him.

PL: And from your parents? How many of them? How many brothers and sisters?

TT: My big sister, myself, Dr Siang Yew of Penang who has died already and Siang Hwa, who is the professor. He is over Calvary Pandan. Dr Tow Siang Hwa. There were four of us.

PL: Can you describe a little bit about your Tow clan then back in China?

TT: My father is the supreme boss. And my grandfather, my grandmother also, was under my father. But my grandfather was an evangelist. So he did not stay in Swatow. He would go to the villages to preach. Finished, he would come back. Three-tier family. So would stay with my father. But my grandma died. Then my grandfather came to Singapore with the

two sons, my second and third uncles. That's how the family split like that. And all the rest were under my father. Namely, all the youngest sisters and second uncle's wife and children.

PL: How would you describe the social status of the family then when you were back home in China?

TT: My father was very highly respected. He's a doctor. He has a very good way of making friends. He was able to get to the higher echelons of the government like President Li Yuan Hong. He was the President and my father was in the picture. So he was able to get to mix with all these high echelon people. Of course, people respect him. He is a big shot like that and able to command people like that.

PL: How did it feel then being the son?

TT: Of course I feel very proud. I felt very proud. And he would make me the best navy suit, cap and my name sewn in gold, I still remember. We were very well dressed with my sister. Usually, we were the two oldest, we were very well taken care of. So I felt very proud about our family. I thought we are somebody like that.

PL: What about your relationship with your sister?

TT: She's very dear to me. When she died, I really feel very sad.¹²

PL: She was a doctor too?

TT: She was a doctor.¹³ She took very good care of me especially when I went to study, and my wife was left behind. She would enquire about them and give them medicine and take care of my children.

PL: Reverend, in your younger days, when you decided to be a pastor, your other siblings, most of them were professionals.

TT: Well, my sister by that time, when I went to study Theology in America, 1947, she was already earning, since the Japanese days, she's the last class to graduate from the Edward VII College of Medicine, Singapore.

PL: King Edward seventh?

TT: King Edward seventh and she got her diploma during the bombing days. She scrapped through.

PL: Her LMS?

TT: LMS. Not scrapped through. She did very well. But she was the last class to pass. She was able to practise during the Japanese days. That's how we were able to subsist because her earnings helped to keep the family also.

PL: Coming to Singapore. What happened on the day when you were told that you would be migrating to Singapore?

TT: Oh, we were very happy.

PL: How is that so?

TT: We were going to take the big ship. Cabin class.

PL: P and O liner?

TT: P and O liner. I forgot the name. Anyway, it was a P and O liner. When we were all coming to Singapore, we were all very happy because we were going to sit on the big ship. That's all we knew.

PL: Do you recall any personal preparations before departure? Planning of itinerary? Saying bye-bye to your relatives?

TT: Before we came to Singapore, my father took my mother, my sister and myself on a side trip from Hong Kong to Swatow. The last visit and we went to our village called Iam-tiao where my second granduncle, that was my father's second uncle. He was 82. But he was already in his last days. And because of old age, may be some sickness, he still could understand. My father said, "We must go and pay respects to second granduncle in the village, our home village before we go to Singapore." So that's why I remember our own village, the old church, the pond where I still have faint ideas. And then my father made a big dinner to honour my second granduncle. After we left, he died. So that was something very special before we came down to Singapore. We made a trip to our own village.

PL: Do you miss anybody? Who do you miss most leaving China?

TT: I don't miss anyone because all of us came. None was left in China.

PL: What were your perceptions and expectations about life in Singapore before you came?

TT: I was too small to understand that. We are very happy like going on a picnic. We get to sit in the big boat. That was all we knew.

PL: What about the scene at the time of leaving China? Do you recall the port of embarkation?

TT: Well, it's Hong Kong. We left from Hong Kong. There was nothing to say because our whole family came and I still remember my father commanding and my fourth uncle was helping and getting all on top to the ship. We sailed one week in the South China Sea and the children enjoyed. When there was a storm, we don't get seasick. Children don't get seasick. Very funny and we enjoyed ourselves.

PL: What about the living conditions on board the ship?

TT: We were in the economy class, cabin. That is very good already because we are cabin class. Otherwise, you are in the deck. You go below and you would be like packed like sardines. In a hole. People lived in the hole. It's terrible. I've seen it. We enjoyed very much. There was piano in the lounge and we were having good food, western food. We enjoyed so much.

PL: What was your dressing like during that time?

TT: We have the best clothes. My parents always give us very nice clothes.

PL: Was it dress in oriental style?

TT: Oriental style. The button like that.

PL: Was there any significant event that took place on board the ship?

TT: No, I mean it was quite pleasant. And when you arrived, deck passengers were all sent to St John's island. They must go through quarantine. But we were in cabin class, we just go off straight. The rest had to go through St John's. In those days, you cannot land because you must go through this quarantine you know.

PL: Why would they make the economy class so special?

TT: We were cabin class anyway. We all had nice cabins. So economy class is still cabin class. But below that, you go and stay on the deck. When I went back to China, I was a deck passenger. And we really tasted the rigors, when I went back for training in China. I brought my wife and three children along. And we were deck passengers.

PL: What was your first impression of Singapore when you first arrived?

TT: We are all in the good Christian tradition. First thing is that we must all go to church. And the church was the present Prinsep Street Presbyterian. The red building. But before then, it was a bungalow house in a coconut plantation and when we went to church, it was the old house that you can see in "The History of Singapore." I was there.

PL: What about your grandfather's house at Upper Serangoon Road? Your grandfather was a minister, the present Bethel Presbyterian church?¹⁴

TT: That's right. It turned out like this. Our estate in Senai was also a church because my grandfather when he came to Senai, he's a minister. He did not forget his faith. So he established a church in our own house in the estate.

PL: In Senai?

TT: In Senai. So there were regular services of our own people and then some Christian families that stayed around because it was a sort of a Christian colony. Other Christians came and they bought estates around our place. So they all came to service. Maybe 20 people. One week after we stayed in Selegie Road, at that time the Causeway was just newly opened. Maybe one or two years. So we took a motor car, it's a Ford car. There were only two brands, Ford and Chevrolet. Only two cars. It's very pleasant. It's a canvas-roof type of car. In one hour something, we breezed through 32 miles, we were in Senai. Then we settled in Senai. It was about less than a year when the three-tier family cannot stick together. My father has a hot temper. My grandfather has a hot temper. So father and son they quarrel. And very interestingly, they had to disperse. My grandfather found a job to be pastor of the Bethel church in Hougang. So the two daughters packed off and went with him to take care of him. My eldest aunt, in the meantime, got married. She was married in Shanghai. So the family broke up. My second uncle's wife, he had got his own house, so they also went. So the whole thing got dissolved. Left my father and mother and the younger children and then my sister and I, we came to stay with our grandpa in Hougang, this Bethel church.

PL: Why some in Senai and some in Singapore?

TT: Because my second uncle had to find his own livelihood so he got his own house and his own business. So naturally his wife left my father's care. At first we all came to Senai. He left. My father and grandpa couldn't get along so they split. My father also looked for a job for him. A position in Upper Serangoon. So my grandfather went there to be pastor. Naturally, with Singapore as a base, we grandchildren gravitate to Singapore to stay with him when we go to school in Singapore.

PL: How did you feel when your big sister and yourself have to leave your parents and come to Singapore?

TT: Well, of course, I felt very sad to leave mother. But not sad to leave father because he caned me [laughs]. But then mother was very good. "You must not tell lies. You must study hard otherwise you become a coolie. You must leave me." In fact, I stayed with another friend of father and stayed with my foster mother.

PL: In Singapore?

TT: Yes. *Kai Ma*. She was my kindergarten teacher in Hong Kong. She migrated to Singapore. She got hold of me and said, "You must come

and stay with me.” So I stayed with her for some time. I don’t know, may be a few weeks or a month or two. And all for the sake of acquiring knowledge because we were getting old already. By that time I was seven. And we have no school. So I stayed in Upper Serangoon and went to the Malayan Seminary, Seventh-Day Adventist. I studied there a few months. And then later on, I got into ACS.

PL: You made mention that when you first arrived in Singapore, you were staying in Selegie.

TT: Yes.

PL: Tell me a little bit about the Selegie house?

TT: Selegie is a, I think another, somehow, I cannot say exactly what it is but we stayed upstairs for a few days only.

PL: Rented?

TT: I think a relative’s house. We stayed there for a few days and then we went to church. And after church, the next day, we packed off to come to Senai already. It’s a very transitory situation.

PL: So Singapore was just a transit.

TT: Yes, Just a few days.

PL: The church in Prinsep Street?

TT: Then the church in Prinsep Street. In 1928 or 1929 was built new. But this church has already outgrown itself. They pulled down and built another church. But at that time, we all worshipped in the bungalow house. The house of Keasberry.¹⁵ Reverend Keasberry. Before the building of Prinsep Street red building, there was an old bungalow house.¹⁶ We worshipped there.¹⁷

PL: So what was your family’s connection to the church then?

TT: We are Presbyterian and this is a Presbyterian church. All the Christians from China, when they come to Singapore, they will go to this church. They are bound to go there.

PL: Tell me a little bit more about this grandfather’s house at Upper Serangoon Road. Can you do a little bit of description?

TT: By the time he became pastor of this church, they had built the original church in 1883. Half brick and half wood. But by the year 1927, or 28, the church that was built in 1883 began to deteriorate because the wood was eaten by white ants. The brick structure was alright. So they had to pull it down. So the church was no more. They had to worship

in the parsonage which was a big attap house with a big hall with four rooms. Two rooms at each side. The hall can sit about 40 people.

Interview 3

Interviewed by Ms Patricia Lee, 27 March – 9 December 1998

Special Project: Accession Number 002007

Reel/Disc 3: 00:30:23

Synopsis

Living conditions at home. Names of prominent teachers and school-mates in Anglo-Chinese School. Reasons for failure at Raffles College. Impact of the Great Depression on his family. Description and impact of the 1935 John Sung Revival Meetings. His training as court interpreter. His seminary schools in China and USA. Impact of his overseas studies on the family.

Transcript

This is a recording with Rev Timothy Tow, Accession Number 002007, Reel 3.

Patricia Lee (PL): Talking about the attap house...

Timothy Tow (TT): So this attap house became the parsonage. It is a parsonage but it also became the church meeting place. And its congregation was not very big. We had about twenty odd people, mostly Teochew and lived in Hougang and rather poor people, not very well off. So, we worshipped in this church under grandfather's tutelage. And he was there for nine or ten years until 1937, I think. We disintegrated. So, we had a wonderful time staying in this attap house. That was the wonderful upbringing because we stayed in Singapore to study and go home only during holidays. My grandfather was a real wonderful teacher.

PL: What was the cause of the disintegration then?

TT: Well, first of all, my father and grandfather would flare up. So they are not happy. My grandfather is very thrifty but my father is very lavish.

PL: But was your father not then back in Senai?

TT: Yes, I'm referring to the days in Senai. So because of the disintegration, the clash, my grandfather also left Senai and came to Singapore to be a pastor. That's how the Lord work out in our training, you see. So, we had a very wonderful place for spiritual growth and for

studying in good schools. My sister went to MGS and then we had two aunts. The youngest aunt went to MGS and CEZMS. That was Zenana, Anglican. In 1949, the school was renamed St Margaret's School.¹⁸ There was the Zenana, CEZMS, Anglican. So the two aunts went to the CEZMS school and then my youngest aunt became a nurse. And all staying there in the same place.

PL: What about adaptation to Singapore's life compared to ...

TT: Oh, we are very happy. We live in the attap house so no electric light. So we have got to use kerosene lamp. And I'm the one who takes care of the lamps. And then we have a big well. Double steps. We children have to carry the water to the kitchen. There's no water system. We have to carry water and put that in jugs. And our kitchen is there at the back. My aunts would cook, we children would carry the water, and I manager of the conservancy system. And I'm not afraid of all these, manure, I'm used to it. Not afraid. And we had a lot of bananas. So I bury them from plot to plot. We get the biggest bananas because they get all the riches. That's my job.

PL: So, shuttling between Singapore and Johore, how did you adjust to that?

TT: Well, whenever vacation comes, we happily go back to see our parents. The only thing I don't like is that I get beating because I didn't become first boy. Second only *kena* beating. My father, "You must be first." Of course, I'm mostly first. Once in a while second. You get a whacking. But, anyway, life was very happy because of Christian love, hymns when I go home, I go to church. We are very obedient. And all this upbringing was very good for us.

PL: You were actually staying within the grounds of the church itself?

TT: Yeah, so we take care of the church. We sweep the church, keep it clean and all that.

PL: Let's talk a little bit about your education. Your schooling years at Anglo-Chinese School. When did you join ACS?

TT: I think...19...I joined the afternoon school first.

PL: You came in 1926?

TT: And 1927, I think '27 I got into the afternoon school. And maybe '28 I got into the morning school. I had a waiting list.

PL: Was that at Coleman Street?

TT: Coleman Street, right.¹⁹

PL: Where my office is now. The National Archives of Singapore.

TT: Oh...

PL: Right. Teachers and classmates. Any recollection of them?

TT: Yes.

PL: Their influence on you? Can you share a little with us?

TT: Yes. I think we had a tremendously good education. And the teachers are very dedicated. Some are pastors and they also taught. And I graduated in 1937 and I can still remember Goh Keng Swee. He was two years before me. Lim Kim San, I think, also two years before me. These are the big names. And Hinch was the principal. Very, very powerful. Very good. Strict. So we had very good results. To the teachers, we come to the secondary school. Chew Kia Song,²⁰ Thio Chan Bee,²¹ CB Woodford, and there's one Mr Dempsey, BA, he taught us English. Even Bishop Amstutz, Rev Amstutz. He also would teach us whenever there's a lack of teachers. So, on the whole we had very good training.

PL: Was there any role model for you in ACS?

TT: Well, I think I admired Thio Chan Bee quite a bit. He taught us really good English. Still remember that.

PL: What about any classmates that you get along well with?

TT: Yes, I have some classmates I get along with but I don't think they are well known in this age.

PL: So what happened after ACS? What did you do?

TT: After ACS, I did not know what to do. And my sister was in medical studies. She was three years ahead of me. And then I didn't want to take medicine. And then somehow I chose science rather than arts stream. And that's where I landed up in Raffles College taking science. And that was my first failure. Great failure.

PL: Was there any particular reason you chose to read science?

TT: Just to be vainglorious. Not having any objective. I was not sure of what I was doing. But just to say that I've gone through university, get a degree, that's all I wanted. And I forgot about the consecration to go into full-time. No. I forgot already by that time.

PL: Did your mom remind you?

TT: My mom sort of left it to me. You are big already. And so she did not say much. She did not say much.

PL: Your relationship with your siblings, how would you describe it?

TT: Oh, very, very close. We love one another very closely because we went through the slump. 1929–30.

PL: The 1930s slump. The Great Depression. How did it affect you?

TT: It was... very, very poor. Because we eat only bubur, we are always hungry, we always think of nice food like Cold Storage. I stand outside to smell the smoked ham. Beautiful. I'm so hungry [laughs]. But, anyway, it was good because it deepened character. That we know what it is to be poor, what it is to be in hard circumstances. And that's good.

PL: Actually, that leads me to another question and that is, your earlier years in Canton. I believe you have a good number of years in China. Your family was fairly well known. Good status.

TT: Well, in China we were in good, I mean, in good standing.

PL: Right. Is it not true then that when you came to Singapore, things changed? It didn't get better but it got worse?

TT: We were too young to understand that. We just... we got our parents to take care of us, then we get good education also and we were quite happy.

PL: How did the Great Depression impact your family?

TT: When the Great Depression came, my father did not practise when he came to Singapore. He's China-trained. He cannot. So he has to rely on the rubber estate. But, you tap your rubber, it is not even able to pay the coolies. So actually, many estates stopped tapping because you cannot make any profit. So how do you subsist? My father had to keep on borrowing money from people. And I feel all so sad. I go out with him and he will be seeing another friend, you know, and borrow another sum of money. And we go and borrow otherwise you cannot subsist. So, that make a very dampening impression on me. How sad it is.

PL: Were you not studying then?

TT: I was studying.

PL: You were in Raffles College?

TT: No.

PL: That was much earlier?

TT: Much later.

PL: When did you go into Raffles College?

TT: 1938. But this was 1929, 1930. These were the early days.²² So we ... and my younger brother Siang Yew, he's a doctor in Penang, he has died

already. He died about three years. He had to stop schooling because school fees were \$2.50. Two dollars fifty is a lot of money. And, he was going to Malayan Seminary because we were living in Upper Serangoon. For him to go to school is just half a mile away. Just walk only. But, one day we had no money. My father just stopped him from schooling. So when we heard that he had to stop school, we all cried. We children all wept for him. But after two or three months, he got reinstated. But that is how it impacted us.

PL: You got to stay in school?

TT: Of course, I must stay in school. But then he was the odd one. So my father said better let him stop for a while. And Siang Hwa also starting school. He went to McNair, Towner road. Government school first. Then later on I put him into ACS.

PL: Was getting into ACS difficult then?

TT: Quite difficult.

PL: How did you...

TT: The reason being I was China-born. China-born will have to stand and wait, you see.

PL: How did you manage to get entry into ACS?

TT: Somehow, my mother knocked very hard. My mother was very insistent. And so somehow, I got in through my mother. She must have used all her powers to get people to speak to the principal and all that. Finally, I got in.

PL: And in Raffles College, how did you feel?

TT: Well, it was a misery trip every day. So sad and so unhappy. That every week I've got to do 40 sums. Higher mathematics which I didn't like to do. And that was killing. Going to school is just like going to prison. But, you see, the Lord was grinding me. I was out of His will. My grandfather gave me the Lord, my mother, myself at the John Sung meetings. Of course, until I got married, the baby girl died and then at that point I wanted to go to London, my father was going to give me \$4000. So the third turning point came in 1946. My turning point was when I was born, given. 1935, John Sung. Then, 1946, the death of the baby. Then, I capitulated.

PL: Let's talk about 1935 John Sung revival. How did it have an impact on you?

TT: Well, it is so deep that I can feel it to this day. I never heard of a message that a man must be born again. So, when I was confronted, I am not born again. So, I am not saved. So, I have to receive the Lord after two sermons. The second sermon then, "Are you born again?" I was not, so I put up my hand.

PL: What was the mood like in Singapore then?

TT: Oh, it was overbearing, it was overpowering. You come to the meeting, you don't argue, you can feel a sense of God's presence. That you cannot argue with God. You are a sinner, you are a sinner. You have stolen things, you have been evil, you have been bad, everybody accepts. So, we just confess our sins and receive him. And then there was great praises and great dedications. But then, you see, I was good for only three years. After that I began to drift.

PL: Now Rev Tow, tell me, after 1935 John Sung's revival, what impact did it have in the history of the Singapore churches?

TT: Well, the church was very revived. And they are the main churches. Presbyterian, Methodist, partly Anglican, partly Baptist but not the Brethren churches.

PL: Why not?

TT: Bethesda. I don't know. They were out and the modernist churches. Methodist. They are liberal, they don't care. But the Chinese church. It's the Chinese church that got revived.

PL: And what were the effects on the present church today since the revival?

TT: Well, I think the result can be seen particularly in the BP movement because Rev Quek Kiok Chiang, myself and my brother, we are the three who have survived the revival and we have been serving even from nearly fifty years ago. So that revival fire burns in us. And evangelistic drive is also in us which has given great impetus to the BP movement particularly. And then there are others who were greatly blessed like Elder Peter Yap. He was the interpreter for Billy Graham in 1978. He's another one of the John Sung followers. Such people they are the power, the power that leads the churches.

PL: You mentioned Raffles College. What happened after you finished Raffles College?

TT: I was there only three months. One term I failed already. I ran away.

PL: And what happened after that? You went to the courts?

TT: And then I went to be trained as an interpreter. One and a half years.

PL: Can you tell me about the courses you attended there?

TT: We have to study English, phonetics. That's why I'm teaching phonetics because I studied there. And Chinese and one dialect. Apart from your mother tongue. So I passed my Cantonese. Tomorrow you see me officiate there. I will be preaching in Cantonese. I can do it.

PL: Where did you study your languages?

TT: We studied dialect, Cantonese, under a Cantonese teacher, *Chan Sin Sang*. He's an opium smoker but anyway, he's all classical. And old classics. So we study Cantonese through him. English we have Mrs Harper, she's a teacher of Fairfield Girls' School. But she trained us in phonetics. So we are thoroughly ground to pronounce correctly. And then the rest is up to you. Chinese and English is up to you. Self-study lah.

PL: Was it not in the private school that you attended..

TT: No, no it's a government school. Government training class. We have an English teacher and we have got a Cantonese teacher. These are the two given to us.

PL: What so special about this school that has got a mixture of English and Cantonese?

TT: It's a government school, training scheme.

PL: Do you remember the name of the school?

TT: No, no, we have no name. It is just simply in the Chinese Secretariat Building, you know the Chinese Secretariat?

PL: Where about?

TT: It's near the courts. Small courts. That old building is still there. It's preserved. And we have our classes inside there. And the teacher would come every afternoon to train us in the speech and in the morning, we have our Cantonese teacher who teaches us our dialect, how to pronounce. And we have to go through all the lessons.²³

PL: Now Reverend, I'm not going to cover during the war years because you have already been interviewed on the Japanese Occupation.

TT: Yeah.

PL: So let's pick up after the Japanese Occupation. What exactly happened when the British came back?

TT: That's when I wanted to go to England. And the British came back, I went back as an interpreter serving the same. And then I began to apply for my admission. I got admitted to the London U and Middle Temple. And then...

PL: The turning point...

TT: And then the turning point came. With the death of my baby daughter, I decided now to go to China. And then I had Dr Marcus Chen in Chungking Seminary. I was going to Chungking.

PL: Why did you choose to go to China and not elsewhere?

TT: I don't know. That is the only route open to me. Chin Lien Bible School where I found my wife and I got married before the war. Now after the war, I've got three children and then one, this Lilyn, this seven-month-old baby girl died. They ask me why I want to go to China. Because that's the only opening open to me.

PL: What was your family's reaction to the news that you were going...

TT: Oh, my father was wholly submissive. He said, "This is the will of the Lord." My brother was submissive. He knew that was the will of the Lord. My sister helped me, gave me some money. And they all agreed that that's the will of the Lord.

PL: What about Nancy?

TT: Oh, she was submissive. All together agreed. So I had 14 packs of luggage. Sadly, I said goodbye to my sister at the steps of Boat Quay, you know. The old days, all the junks. I took a sampan to the outer roads. The ship is called *Anhui*,²⁴ an old ship. I got there as a deck passenger to save money. We could not afford to go into the cabin. And so we stayed on the deck. My wife and three children. Those were canvas beds. We spread there. And my aunt in China, she was a missionary in Eng Choon, Amoy, Xiamen. She was there to receive us. So we sail from Singapore to Xiamen. And landed there. And she said, "I will take good care of your family." She was a missionary and she was working in Eng Choon, the interior of China. Not interior but off the coast. About a hundred miles in. And so I went there. I left my wife and two children there. I took my son and we were going to Shanghai and I'm going to leave my son there to my aunt and I'm going to take a riverboat to Chungking. That's how weird the arrangement. It's a very flimsy arrangement.

PL: Can you explain it today why you had such a flimsy arrangement?

TT: Well, I was quite reckless. Well, anyway, trust the Lord. We just go. Harebrained. Not knowing where it is going. So I'm also harebrained not knowing where I'm going. My aunt said, "You are crazy. You are going to Chungking. 2250 miles, 2500 miles. It's going to take over a month to sail. Why won't you go to Nanking (*Nanjing*) that's just over 150 miles from Shanghai?" My aunt was from Shanghai. Married. "You go and hear Dr Chia. Chia Yu Ming. You find him to be tops." So, I went to hear him. I was converted right away. So I did not go to Chungking.

PL: You went to Shanghai?

TT: Then I went to Nanking. I was in Shanghai where my aunt was. And Dr Chia came to Shanghai to preach. Exactly I arrived, he came. So when I heard him, I was converted. So, I went to Nanking.

PL: Rev Tow, I don't quite understand. When you went to China, did you not already have in mind exactly where you wanted to go and where you want to study?

TT: That's right. Chungking it is settled. But when I came to Shanghai, the Lord diverted my steps. Why you want to go 2500 miles inland when 150 miles from Shanghai is Nanking? You can study here. So when I went to hear Dr Chia, I was converted. He was such a powerful preacher. So, I went to Nanking. My son I brought to Shanghai. Stayed with my aunt. Then after the first year, I came out, and my aunt also wanted to visit our people. So, we sailed back to Singapore. Myself, with my son and my aunt. But the third aunt, the young aunt, who took care of my wife and two children in Xiamen, she had bought them a ticket on another boat to send them back because my wife went there, got stuck. And we are all separated. So, they were repatriated before we came back. So finally, I came back to Singapore and then from there, from Singapore, I took a boat, originally from Penang, to New York. Forty-two days. 1947.

PL: Immediately after your return?

TT: Yeah. So that's how I went to America to study. 1947. I arrived there in January 1948. Late for school already. But I studied until 1950, May. When I got my degree and I came back to Singapore. And served until now.

PL: So you are talking in terms of from China to America and again this was unplanned for?

TT: I was led by the Lord in a very marvellous way. Somehow the Lord was leading. I did not know. But, suddenly the door opened for me to go to America because I was studying in Nanking. And there's a missionary

there in the school who said, “You are English educated, I think it is better for you to go to America.” And then she gave me a catalogue, Faith Seminary, and I liked it very much. I write there, and then they returned and said, “Okay, I give you a scholarship.” And then I went to America.

PL: Reverend, what about in terms of financial providence?

TT: Financial providence, again it is a marvellous thing. I had 2000 Hong Kong dollars with me when I left Singapore. In those days, Hong Kong dollars was quite big. Maybe worth 50 or 60 cents. Two thousand. But I got cheated. The 2000 dollars was reduced to only one tenth. Cheated by a friend of my aunt. But the Lord must take away all props, that I have nothing, to trust in Him. So finally when I came back to Singapore, saw my wife. We stayed together for a few weeks. Then my sister gave me 400 dollars. US dollars to buy a ticket from Penang to New York. If I sail from Singapore, it's 450. So to save the 50 dollars, I took a third class train to Penang. I also visited my relatives along the way. So, my sister financed me partly with a small sum. Not very much. When I got to America, from there I learned to trust the Lord and He provided for me. Occasionally, my sister would send me some money. Not too much. But that was good training. I was able to subsist until I graduated. And then I came back in a very glorious way. I came back by way of Europe. The ICCC movement was just started. The ICCC, International Council of Christian Churches. And I was very zealous in the movement. So, I got a free trip from New York to London. From there, went down to Geneva. After the congress, I had a visit to the Holy Land too. The Lord opened. That's marvellous in those days. And I went to Egypt and bought a cargo boat ticket. On the cargo boat I sailed back to Singapore. That's how it is.

PL: I noticed from your sharing that many a time, you were separated from your family.

TT: That's right.

PL: How did the family cope with this arrangement?

TT: Well, that is where the tears are there. I told my wife if I don't go and study in America, I have no training, I cannot do any work. So she agreed. So, while we were separated, three years away from home, in America, so she under my sister's tutelage and teaching, she went to train as a midwife. And she passed. And so the children were under her. She had to earn a living as a midwife while I was studying abroad. And so here the anomalies would come in. One of my sons played truant. Did not

want to go to school without fatherly care. So today he is earning a living by himself because at that point where I was not at home, he deviated and did not study hard. So now he is a security guard and just earning his own living. That is the failure there. So there are sacrifices, there are difficulties in the family as a result of the separation. But I do not want to blame them all. I mean, this is part of the price you have to pay.

Interview 4

Interviewed by Ms Patricia Lee, 27 March – 9 December 1998

Special Project: Accession Number 002007

Reel/Disc 4: 00:30:32

Synopsis

His seminary days and his stand on separation from doctrinal and ecclesiastical apostasy. Differences between the World Council of Churches and the International Council of Christian Churches. Financial providence in the 1950s as a pastor. Split from the Mother Church. Birth of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. Missionary journeys to Malaya.

Transcript

This is a recording with Rev Timothy Tow, Accession Number 002007, Reel 4.

Patricia Lee (PL): Rev Timothy, you returned from America to Singapore in 1950. How did your seminary days shape your stand on separation from doctrinal and ecclesiastical apostasy?

Timothy Tow (TT): It greatly affected, in fact, transformed my understanding on such ecclesiastical stand through my study in the seminary in Wilmington, Delaware,²⁵ so much as that I joined the International Council of Christian Churches which arose in opposition to the World Council of Churches, the ecumenical movement. And the ICCC, the International Council of Christian Churches, held its second congress in Geneva, Switzerland, August, 1950. So, on my way back, after graduation in May, I worked a little while in the ICCC office. And then by August, I left America for Geneva to join at the congress as an observer from Singapore church. And by the request of my mother church, which was the Teochew, "*Say Mia Tng*", "*Shen Ming Tang*", Life Church, Princep Street. By their request, I was ordained in Geneva, in the city of John Calvin,²⁶ as a minister of the Gospel by 24 Bible-

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Presbyterian American pastors. So, you can see the close link between me, a young graduate but ordained by them. So, I came back filled with the spirit of the ICCC. That is the deeper connection. And this was effected by Rev Quek Kiok Chiang. He was an interpreter of the Chinese Secretariat in Singapore and an elder of our church. In fact, he brought the letter of request, representing the elders of Life Church, “*Say Mia Tng*”, and he was present at my ordination in Geneva.



Rev Dr Timothy Tow speaking at the ICCC (Background: Dr C McIntire)

PL: So, this stand on separation from doctrinal and ecclesiastical apostasy, can you elaborate on it for a layman who is listening to your tape?

TT: The World Council as well as the International Council were both inaugurated in Geneva. No. We were both inaugurated in Amsterdam in 1948. The World Council of Churches represents what is today known as the ecumenical movement and the word, “ecumenical” in Greek means “all of the inhabited earth.” So, it means a sort of universalism and being a protestant movement, it is to unite all protestant denominations with final approach to the Roman Catholic Church, to unite with the Roman

Catholic Church. And finally, all worldly religions. That is the ultimate. That is why it is called World Council of Churches. There's no word, "Christian." But the ICCC is the International Council of Christian Churches. It is to unite all Bible-believing churches that will take a stand against ecumenism. And so, Dr Carl McIntire, who is still living today, 92 years old, he is, was the founder of the ICCC in 1948 in Amsterdam. At that time, I was a student in Faith Seminary and he was the President of the Board of Directors. I became so closely knit to Dr McIntire that you can call it a friendship between David and Jonathan. So, you can see how closely I was a disciple of Dr Carl McIntire. And there is a 50th Anniversary coming this August, and I have been requested to speak at this 50th Anniversary of the ICCC, August, 1998. And I'm preparing to go there, now after 50 years.

PL: You mentioned earlier that you worked with the ICCC for a short while.

TT: Yes, for a short while. In their office. Well, it is doing odds and ends. Anything like helping in the cyclostyling of messages, or reading much of the material. Whatever I could do there, I did. But just for a short while, may be one or two months. And August came. Then we went. I was given a free seat on the chartered plane that flew from New York to London. Then from London, we worked our way to Geneva.

PL: Life BP has always been known as a separatist church.

TT: Yes.

PL: Why did you think so?

TT: Because we have not joined the ecumenical meetings and we have taken a definite clear stand against the work of the World Council of Churches. So, we are quite well known for that.

PL: Can you share with us a little bit about financial providence when you were a pastor in the 1950s?

TT: Well, we wanted to be separate from the ecumenical movement and our mother church being one of them, innocently not knowing anything about it, but we were just roped in through the leadership of the English Presbyterian missionaries. In those days, we were still under the English Presbyterian Mission. And they were leaders of the Malayan Christian Council, in those days. And the missionaries that were over us numbered perhaps over half a dozen or ten of them. We were still under them. So, in order to be sort of not under their control, we proclaimed, when I first started out, that we would be financially independent which angered

our mother church a little bit because they were willing to support us. We were their English-born son as it were. But I insisted that whatever offerings come in the Sunday collection would be my salary. And we had only 30-odd adults plus the children amounting to about 45. With this, we started. And I insisted that whatever comes in the bags would be my salary. So, the first month's collection was \$110 and I abided by it but my wife was a midwife and she was earning \$160. So together we have \$270 for the first month.

PL: And you had three children?

TT: Four.

PL: Four children to feed?

TT: I have four children. But I was very happy because I was riding a bicycle which my sister bought for me. A racing bicycle. And I was very happy, I said, "Well, serving God is to carry the cross so whatever comes my way is for the Lord." I was very happy with it. But, I also taught at Chin Lien Bible School in Geylang. And they gave me \$100. So, that added on. Helped us to pull through on a shoe string. However, in a few months, I was getting \$200. And later on the church stipulated that I receive a fixed salary. So I would be getting something like \$250 in a matter of six months. And we were able to carry through very frugally. But I was very happy.

PL: When your church separated from your mother church, and you started the Life BP Church, what were some of the things that you first did to organise the church together?

TT: We did not become a BP church until 1955 because, in the meantime, we still belong to the mother church. And we worked very closely with the mother church. In other words, I would be interpreting for the mother church whenever there's a foreign speaker, from English into Teochew. And sometimes, I would speak in our Chinese service. As a matter of filial piety, you may say, we actually belong to our mother church. And so, we were very closely-knit together. And we've had a very good rapport with each other but we split in 1955 after several years of going to the synod to overture that we separate from the World Council of Churches. Of course, we got defeated. We had about 15 votes against about 46 or 50 votes. So, that's the situation.

PL: How did this come about and how painful was it for you to be separated from the mother church?

TT: We came to a head in 1955. But we still worship in the same church, with our mother church for 12 years. Although we separated and we call ourselves BP, the mother church also did not care very much because we are still with them. We began to attain financial independence in a matter of two to three years, we were quite alright.

PL: How did you organise the English section of Life Church?

TT: We had what you call borrowed elders and deacons from the mother church. They send one or two elders, three or four deacons and then we elect our own deacons, so that was the beginning. But, later on, as we grew older and so forth, there came a clear line that those who like to stick with the English service will now resign from the mother church and be full elders and deacons with our newly-born English service. And that is how we developed and grew.

PL: Can I get you describe the first missionary journey to Malaya in 1951?

TT: That was a matter of after six or seven or eight months. We felt greatly burdened. The four walls of my church could not contain me. I was very restless. So, we got hold of a very dear deacon, Deacon Hsu Chiang Tai. He was all for it, very full of spirit, being one of the John Sung converts. He was a trader and he opened a small store at Orchard Road selling odds and ends, all kinds of things. And he bought a new car, the Fiat Marvelette. It's a two-seater and then we were ready to go. We packed our little two-seater with thousands of Gospel tracts and hundreds of Gospel portions and we got a phonograph and a roll of Gospel posters and a loud speaker. And we drove off trusting the Lord, not knowing exactly where we are going, though with a final destination in Raub, Pahang, where another John Sung convert, a lady, had built two Methodist churches. Raub and Bentong in Pahang. And our idea was to preach in the new villages. These were barbed-wired, surrounded by barbed-wire, new villages, to fight the communists. The uprising. We called them bandits. When you have them all concentrated behind barbed-wire, they will not be able to obtain food. But, if they live in the jungle area and in a rural area, they can easily find supply. But in this way, they were kept from getting supplies. But this helped us to preach the Gospel because the people are concentrated. So, we go there, put up our gramophone, Gospel songs and attract the children and the crowds together and we preached. And then we give out tracts and Gospel portions. And then we go to the next village. One day we covered two such villages. And one session will

take about two hours. And if it is two villages, it is four hours. But with the travel in between and the *makan* and all that ...

PL: How did you plan the trip and why Malaysia?

TT: Well, that is the only place we could evangelise by just driving across the Causeway and there are so many Chinese in Malaysia and all along we went, we didn't speak English. We spoke in dialects, whether it be Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, Teochew. These languages we were conversant.

PL: Did you have any obstacles with the authorities?

TT: No, not at all. They are very happy. The authorities were the British, the British Army. When we went there to preach the Gospel, they were more than happy because we were bringing something good to the people. And in fact, on the way, we met Kenyan soldiers. If they don't smile, you don't see them. It's so dark. When they smile, the teeth reveal themselves. So, we went by way of Fraser's Hill, where Sir Henry Gurney, the High Commissioner for Malaya was ambushed and killed. We went through that region too.

PL: Did you specifically plan your travelling route?

TT: No. We just went along as time and opportunity avail, then we stop at one village. And so the first village we stopped was Tampin but the interesting thing was after preaching in the new village, we came to the old town to find our hotel. Usually, you pay only \$5 per night. They call it boarding house. But lo and behold, we came and met an old friend and he had migrated up there since during the Japanese Occupation and he opened a dispensary. He was a male nurse in Tan Tock Seng Hospital. And he's another John Sung convert. So, when we were walking, along the five-foot way, he accosted us, "Hey, how is it you are here?" And then we said, "We came preaching in the new village and we are now finding a place to stay in Tampin, the old town." They say, "Why? You must come and stay with us tonight." So that was how we found shelter. We also had a series of Holy Land slides, about 120 slides because Rev Quek and myself had visited the Holy Land 1950 on our way back to Singapore. So, I had these slides to show to Christians. And they were very happy, they got their friends. That night we had about twenty people. We showed the Holy Land slides while they enjoyed their hospitality. And the next day we went along and we came to Seremban. And we parked our "Jesus Saves" car. We had a big signboard "Jesus Saves" at the back of the car and the Methodist pastor of the town saw "Jesus Saves." Someone is

staying at this boarding house upstairs. So, he came up and saw, “Oh, you are the famous American-returned pastor. You cannot escape not preaching at my church.” So it was a Saturday. So next day, it was a Sunday and I preached at the big Methodist church in Seremban. The he said, “Oh, we’ve got a small church in Mantin, ten miles down. You are sure to preach for us.” And my good friend, Deacon Hsu, had a broad grin and he said, “Of course, that is your job.” So, went down there and we preached in Mantin. That’s how we preached, not knowing what we are doing. The Lord opened the way.

PL: How long is the journey?

TT: The journey was around seven to eight days.

PL: For you to drive from Singapore to Pahang?

TT: To Pahang, and in Pahang we went to these new villages too and we spoke at about three schools, and principals were very cooperative. They lined up the students, about 200 of them in one school, primary school. So, we preached to them and sang to them. After that, we gave them Gospel of John portions. That’s how we went along. Then, we met the Kenyan soldiers in Bentong. And they wanted to see the slides. So, in the evening, we showed the slides and they were very happy. These soldiers are mostly Christians, you know, Africans, a lot of them are Christians. So, we spoke in English.

PL: What was the response of the villagers like?

TT: Very happy. They did not oppose. At first they thought that we were selling Tiger Balm because we make a lot of noise, the music. But then they saw that we are preaching the Gospel. And, of course, the shopkeepers, they don’t come out. They just, we have a loudspeaker, they can hear. But usually, it’s the children and women, they come and hear. We can gather a crowd of say 50, 70 like that. But after that, we go to the shops and give them the literature one by one. They know that we’ve come. When we give them Christian literature, they did not oppose, they receive them.

PL: So what happened to those who come to accept the faith?

TT: We won’t say accept the faith. They receive it. We just sow the seed. And with the Gospel portions that we give to them, we trust that the Lord would work out something. But I was just sowing the seed. And another way of preaching was as we were coming up from Singapore to up-country, there was a lot of road repair after the war. So

we had a lot of Tamil tracts. And all these are Tamil coolies. We do not have to stop. When we get near to where they are repairing the road, we just throw out one wad of Tamil tracts and they all will go and pick. And that's our job.

PL: How did the second missionary journey differ from the first?

TT: The second missionary journey differed from the first. It took us over two weeks because we went up to Alor Star to Kedah. And on the way, as we pass by Penang, we went to join the Chin Lien Bible School and the Evangelistic League. These are the followers of John Sung. They had a Bible camp up Penang Hill. So, we went there and joined them for a night and with Christian fellowship and also to report to them the work which, of course, they readily received. Plus, showing them the Holy Land slides which they enjoyed. And then we went on up to Alor Star, there's a Baptist church there. We preached in the Baptist church and along the way we stopped also at some of these towns and new villages.



Batu Pahat Evangelistic League Members with Miss Leona Wu (John Sung's interpreter) and Miss Ng Phek Loan, seated 3rd and 4th from left. Mrs Tow Keng Kee and Mrs Tow Lan Yin seated 2nd and 3rd from right. Front row, 6th and 7th from left: Siew Mui and Siew Yong (circa 1936)

PL: Do you have encounters with Muslims?

TT: No. We just tackled the Chinese.

PL: Rev Tow, what happened to the flock, as in the church members when you were away on such missionary trips?

TT: There was no problem because it is a short one. One week and two weeks. And in my absence, we always got some preacher to take over on the Sunday pulpit. But, we did not merely have these two trips. We went several times on the east coast. And we went up to Endau, along the way would be Kota Tinggi, we also preached there. And then Jemaluang and Mersing and Endau. So, we have got four or five villages or towns along the way we also evangelised. And as a result of that, we got hold of Jemaluang for an American Chinese girl, her name is Adeline Char,²⁷ whom we contacted in Geneva, at the conference. And she wrote me, said she feel called to Singapore. So we led her to go to Jemaluang where she established her mission and from Jemaluang, she extended another mission to Endau. And Endau is still going on but Jemaluang has sort of become defunct. And we went to see the British administrative district officer in Mersing. Endau, this Jemaluang is under Mersing. And we went in and say can you give us a place where we can build a church. And he gave us right away. "Alright", he showed us on the map, "this is near the police station. Quite safe for you. Try to develop this piece of land. You can build a church there." We got the land like that because they were sorely in need of missionaries. Anyone that can minister to the people, all behind barbed-wires, they felt it would be an asset.

PL: Can you describe the Malaysia Pioneer movement that was mentioned in your book?

TT: That is our pioneer mission and out of the two missionary journeys to West Malaysia, not counting East Malaysia, out came a station called Kelapa Sawit which we took over permanently in 1954. We went in 1951 and 1952. But as a result of our going up there, we went to Kelapa Sawit after this several more times. And the Evangelistic League, that is the John Sung group, and Life Church, jointly took over this Kelapa Sawit, 26 mile, Kulai Road. And after some years, Life Church took it all over. Now, this coming Sunday, I'm going there to speak at their 46th anniversary.

PL: At Kulai?

TT: At Kelapa Sawit. I'm going this coming Sunday because I was linked with it since 1954. But it was founded in 1952 by Dr Andrew Gih of China, with the cooperation of Ms Leona Wu of the Chin Lien Bible School who is very close to me because I was teaching in Chin Lien Bible School. So, after two years, Dr Andrew Gih gave up. So, Miss Leona Wu asked me if Life Church would join in with the Evangelistic League, to take over this village. And I said, "Alright. We will *gung si*

(Cantonese for share) do it. *Gung si*, we'll do it. But after some years, it came under Life Church and is still under Life Church as it were, spiritually. Now, they are independent but they always try to get us to preach there and we still minister to them.

Interview 5

Interviewed by Ms Patricia Lee, 27 March – 9 December 1998
Special Project: Accession Number 002007
Reel/Disc 5: 00:30:27

Synopsis

Description of his relationship with Quek Kiok Chiang and Hsu Chiang Tai. Growth of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. Conflicts among the Bible-Presbyterian Churches in Singapore. Billy Graham and the ecumenical movement. The King James Version versus the New International Version. The founding and early struggles of Far Eastern Bible College.

Transcript

This is a recording with Rev Timothy Tow, Accession Number 002007, Reel 5.

Patricia Lee (PL): How would you describe your relationships with Rev Quek Kiok Chiang and Deacon Hsu Chiang Tai?

Timothy Tow (TT): We are very close, working three people as one. So, we are known as "The Three Musketeers." We interacted with each other in a most wonderful way. And that's how unity is strength. In no time, by 1956, we were able to host the Far Eastern Council of Christian Churches, the chapter in the Far East, of the ICCC which is the International. And in 1956, we hosted the third Assembly of the Far Eastern Council of Christian Churches, at which Rev Quek and Rev Hsu Chiang Tai were ordained through our council. Also, we had Bishop Thompson of the Reformed Episcopal Church, breakaway from the Anglican, who came. And so he ordained Rev Phoa Hock Seng of Pasir Panjang Church. Phoa Hock Seng was a great follower of John Sung. Immediately after the revival, he turned his house into a church. And he would preach in his house. That was in 1935. But, by 1956, that's after the war. Quite many years, he was still serving the Lord very fervently. So we took the opportunity to ordain Phoa Hock Seng because he was Anglican. So we had Bishop Thompson, one

person, to ordain him. So, through these events, the church moved very fast, with our church having two more ordained ministers.



Rev Hsu Chiang Tai (left) with Rev Timothy Tow



With Rev Quek Kiok Chiang

PL: Talking about church growth, in the first seven years after Life BP came into being which is 1955, how were the other BP churches in Singapore established?

TT: It was mostly through me because I was the only ordained. So, Life Church started a Sunday school in the Sembawang estate in 1957, January the 20th. So, out of this Sunday school has come out today the Sembawang BP Church that is now building a new BP church at Simei. And they got their land at \$6 million. Just to show how from that early beginning we started a Sunday school, 1957, at the Sembawang estate. Today they have grown so big that they have several missions that they are building a new church. And then, we took over Zion Kindergarten at Serangoon Gardens from my good friend Rev Jason Linn of the "Pioneering in Dyak Borneo" fame. He started this kindergarten with funds from Indonesia. He was a foreigner. But then it fell through. They built the kindergarten but they were not able to pay. They paid only partly. So, finally they gave it over to Life Church. And I translated his book and we became good friends. But only we had to pay the debt that they were owing. So we received this. So we started Zion BP Church. And out of Zion BP Church in one year, we had Faith BP Church which is the Chinese congregation. That was in 1957. And I had to be honorary kindergarten principal to promote the work. That's how we struggled along.

PL: And subsequently what about the other churches that sprang out from the...

TT: Most of the churches sprang out from Life Church because I was very restless. And, when we have a door open, I'll go in and help them to start a Sunday school and on Sunday, I preached to them what I preached in my main church, Life. Then we go there at the free hours, whether it be morning or afternoon.

PL: What were the other churches?

TT: So, very quickly from Zion and Faith in Serangoon Gardens, and Sembawang in Sembawang estate, we went over to Redhill and developed Mount Carmel. From there, we went over to Pasir Panjang, and developed Galilee. From there, we went over to Jurong and we developed Jurong. And from there, we went over to Tekong, Pulau Tekong, and we developed Tekong. That year, we developed four churches in a matter of a few months.

PL: Which year was that?

TT: 1960.

PL: You were in Tekong?

TT: There being no other ordained minister except me and Quek, but Hsu was not in the pastoral ministry because he was a sort of honorary pastor. He was still running his business but by 1960, he migrated to New York. And he has been there ever since. Now, he's dead already.

PL: So how would you describe the church growth within the BP context?

TT: Well, it was quite astounding to the people outside because in one year, we developed four churches. Of course, they are very young. And from there, we kept on developing. It is truly the work of the Lord. It was through what we called the "Sunday School Movement." We got our lay people there to start the Sunday school. Then, with the Sunday school, after one or two years, we start the church. And that's how we grew.

PL: Subsequently, we understand that there were some conflicts or disagreement among the BP churches in Singapore. Can you elaborate on that?

TT: The first unhappiness was in 1968 when the Billy Graham movement held an Asia South Pacific Congress. And I was appointed correspondent by the Australian paper, I think it is *New Life*, to report on Billy Graham. I was a correspondent official appointed from Melbourne and I reported on Billy Graham. Of course, I said things that were not to their liking. As a result of which, some members of the church, deacons, one or two deacons were unhappy. Even my brother was not very happy. So, that was the first rumbling. But, the real split came in 1987, 1988. But as early as 1968, there was some unhappiness.

PL: What was the cause of the unhappiness?

TT: Because they said, "Why you are so negative? You always say bad things about Billy Graham."

PL: What was your own personal conviction?

TT: My own personal conviction was that Billy Graham was veering from his original stand because when he became a great evangelist as early as 1949, in Los Angeles, he was a fundamentalist preacher and he announced that he would have nothing to do with modernism, liberalism, communism, right down the line. But by 1957, he changed tune. So by 1968, he was more and more leaning on the other side and commending the pope and so forth. So, I was warning them and said, "You see, this is how he differentiates from his previous stand that he announced." And my brother was against me but in 1978 when ...

PL: As in, Dr Tow Siang Hwa?

TT: Yeah, my younger brother was against me too. But in 1978, when Billy Graham came to Singapore and held a city-wide campaign, you can look back all these historic facts under Bobby Sng's, "In His Good Time", it's all there. And if you read that book, you read about me also. One of the bad boys. But anyway, by 1978, my brother saw very clearly that Billy Graham was veering farther and farther away from his original. So he took a stand in 1978. Very strong. And then he took over the leadership. He became stronger than I. So now, he's the front runner. I'm playing second singles.

PL: So you mentioned about disagreement taking place in 1968 but the actual split came in ...

TT: 1988. 1987, '88, that came to a break.

PL: Can you please elaborate on this?

TT: Well, in the meantime, we observed that there were the younger churches that were not very happy with the mother church.

PL: As in Life BP Church?

TT: Against Life BP, that is the mother church. That is the founding church. And one of them was Mt Carmel. And the younger leadership, although they come to our 25th anniversary, Silver Jubilee celebration of the BP Church, that was in 1975. At that time, I could observe that there was some unhappiness and in my speech, I said, "If you are not careful, this movement that is to withstand the ecumenical movement, in the next 25 years, we will be swept away." But, the prediction came too early. 1975–1988, another 13 years, we broke up. As early as 1975; '68, '75, there was felt an underground current of resistance.

PL: To the...?

TT: To Life Church's strong stand.

PL: Against the ecumenical movement?

TT: They are more sympathetic now to the ecumenical movement, against the mother church, the reformist and Life Church is number one in the lead, you see.

PL: How did you feel about this whole thing, having started and established the Life churches in Singapore to have their little...

TT: To be more philosophical, I had to say, well, you just have to accept the way of all flesh. The founders have struck out, and the younger ones

begin to veer, and then they say we are the extremists and they are the good ones. But we have stood strong from the beginning till now.

PL: What about the mother's church stand against the charismatic movement?

TT: So in 19... we were not very articulate, not very clear without coming to a showdown so we did not know exactly how each pastor felt. But then when we came to a head in 1988, then the young Quek Swee Hwa stood up to stand for charismatic. He says, "These are meaningful ecstatic utterances." But we say that these are jabbering and it is not the work of the Holy Spirit. So the younger leadership already is taking a stand against the original stand of the mother church. And also in the matter of working together with ecumenical people and so forth, the younger set led by Quek Swee Hwa and David Wong of Mt Carmel, these are the two leaders. They also take a different stand. So that's how the split came. 1987 to 1988, there were many meetings to try to reconcile each other but it just could not be reconciled. And in fact, I predicted to Rev Quek, I said, "The Synod will be split." As you will see. By 1988 October 30, we split.

PL: Did you see any positive outcome from the split? Would you liken it to the split between Paul and Barnabas?

TT: No, it is not that sort of a split. In their case, it was a matter of working out their missionary method. But this is a case of different doctrinal stand. It's a different thing between that, between Barnabas and Paul. We just have to split and the split has given rise to good results also as well as bad results. In every situation, good and bad...

PL: Let's talk about the good results.

TT: The good result is that we are no more running a three-legged race. You know running a three-legged race? Instead of four legs, two legs each freely, you now got to work together in an unequal yoke. So when we got split, we have the freedom, each one to develop our own. So, in so far as Life Church, we and Calvary Church, we could strike out and without being hampered. And in their case, they also strike out without being hampered, each one going its own way. But, especially in the use of the Bible, we stick to the old King James as the authorised version, the good version but then, they changed all to NIV, which is the corrupt version. The new translations very popular and it has already supplanted the King James. So, they are on the popular side. They use NIV. We cannot stop them.

PL: I want to put this on historical record for future reference by Bible scholars or researchers. What is your stand towards the NIV version?

TT: I have written with Dr Jeffrey Khoo a first book of theology. It is going to be out in a matter of three weeks, now in the press. And I call it, "A Theology for Every Christian." And book one is "Knowing God and His Word." And in this first book of theology, we have a very good treatment between the NIV and the KJV. And here we show how the NIV is a very much corrupted text by Westcott and Hort. These were the two scholars who determined this but now it has been discovered that they have done a very, very evil thing. So, we are crusading against the NIV so that when we take over the bookroom here, we now have only KJV selling. No more NIV nor RSV nor all the other versions which are corrupt.

PL: On what basis would you say that the NIV is corrupt?

TT: On the basis that they follow the line of Westcott and Hort. Westcott and Hort were two Cambridge Greek scholars and they took over. The KJV has been translated on the basis of the Received Text, "*Textus Receptus*", the traditional text. But when Westcott and Hort came into the picture, they in 1881 had overturned the KJV by putting out a new English version called the Revised Version, RV. And all those things that exalt Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His deity, the infallibility of the Scriptures, have been as far as possible, diluted. But the new text would say, "Oh, we got now two oldest texts called the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. These are better because they are very old. They come from the fourth century." So, whatever they say, and the traditional text they changed. But when they changed, they dilute the Word of God. Well, it's a long story. They also have a new way of translating the Bible called, "Dynamic Equivalence", when they had the liberty of throwing out words to say we translate the idea as a whole. But the exact words are taken out. King James translate word for word. So, for this reason, it has been discovered more and more by a new movement to go back to the KJV. And we are part of it. So, my book of theology will explain very clearly, 176 pages, when it comes out, you will get a copy.

PL: So coming back to this issue about, we talk about positive results about the split among some of the churches, among the BP churches in Singapore. What would be the negative result of this split?

TT: The negative is that the younger churches now have no leadership, have no one to look to. So each one will go on his own. So, they have this idea, that idea, they run on their own, some of them succumb to the new versions. So they accept the new version, without the synod oversight. And, like things we can do better as a united body, now we cannot because we are split into four or five groups. So each group is on its own.

PL: Let's move on Reverend. Let's talk about the Far Eastern Bible College. Tell us a little bit about its inception.

TT: As early as 1954, I met Dr Poulson of the Singapore Bible College. He was an American missionary to Indonesia but he got stuck in Singapore. That was in 1954 and I met him. And we invited him to speak at our Bible camp. At one of the Bible camps, I told him, "I feel the need of starting a Bible college." Year '54. I was only back four years. The burden was getting heavier and heavier on me because I rejoiced so much the truth I got, and we have got young men now coming up to serve the Lord, then you have to send everyone to America, we cannot afford it. So, I thought, we should start a Bible college. But Poulson, hearing this, he caught on. So he started the Singapore Bible College before I could do anything. So, Rev Quek was very close to me at that time, he said, "You must go back to get your Master's degree before you start a college." And yet, I was afraid to head the college because it is no joke to start the college and you are the President. Anyway, I went to study and I got my Master of Sacred Theology, 1958, I studied until 1959. I got it in one year. So, we came back and I kept on driving for it. So, at that time, we developed into a Presbytery. By 1960, we were a Presbytery. That means to say a group of churches already. And the Presbytery supported the idea and gave the green light that we will start the Bible college and we will cooperate with the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions, our American mission board. And they would send someone to be Principal. And we had a missionary to China in mind, Dr John... I forgot his surname. Anyway, he was to come to head the college. But when the time came, nobody came. So, I had to head the college anyway. So, the college was founded in 1962, 17th of September when our Life Church by that time, was almost built. Not this part but the back part. The "L" and the church. But one year before that, 1961, I started the evening theological class for one year in Prinsep Street Church and I had 15 students. But, by 1962, 17th of September when they opened here for

full-time students, we had three. Two from Batu Pahat, and one from Singapore. From Batu Pahat is Ng Sang Chiew and Eddie Chan. Both of them were teachers. They gave up their teaching job. And Ivy was also a teacher, my wife, she was one of the two first girl students. And we started by announcing a four-year programme, granting a BTh to the chagrin and anger of all Singapore church leaders said, “This young upstart, he wanted to grant a degree when the Singapore Bible College did not grant a degree yet.” They were only on a diploma. And I was announcing a degree programme. So, we had brickbats thrown at us from all quarters. So that by the end of the year, two left. So, I had only one student. Ng Sang Chiew went to study in Hong Kong, Alliance Seminary. Eddie Chan went to join Singapore Bible College. And Ivy Tan was going to leave also but the Lord did not give her the liberty so she felt restrained. So, she stayed on. So, by the end of the year, we had one student left. As I was going up to my parsonage; by that time I was staying in the church ...



Ivy Tan and Ng Sang Chiew, FEBC's first two girl students

PL: Already staying?

TT: Yeah, with my first wife. I wept. I said, “Lord, I didn’t know it is so hard. Three students become one. If I knew this, I would not have started the college.” The Lord comforted me. “No, it’s alright. You just stay

put.” So, by the second year, we have four students. Three more students came in, with Ivy, that became four. So, that is not so bad. From there, we struggled for one decade. By the end of one decade, maybe we had 12 or 15 students. The first decade was very, very hard life.

PL: And now?

TT: And now it is very pleasant. And now, I am just coasting along with happiness because I have foremost this teacher here, in my son-in-law. How the Lord bless me, that is Dr Jeffrey Khoo. And he is also Librarian and also Acting Registrar. And I have all the others who come in. Quek Suan Yew, he is taking his doctorate too. Goh Seng Fong, he’s got his doctorate. Bobby Phee, he’s got his doctorate. And Charles Seet and all the rest. We have a panel of about 11 to 12 lecturers. So, we have a full strength of lecturers. I can now cut down to only four hours I’m teaching. At one time, I was teaching 13 hours. So, I’m playing centre forward, half back, goalkeeper, everything.

PL: When you first started the college, how did you go about preparing the curriculum etc?

TT: To be frank, we just prepare along a general principle and year by year to try to provide whatever subjects we can teach. So, it is just like living from hand to mouth and many times, I’m just one lesson ahead of my students because there are so many things to do. However, we had helpers come in and later on, Philip Heng graduated, he helped me. I had a good friend, Hebrew teacher, in Mrs Ben Asher, she was a pure Jew, Jewess, to teach us Modern Hebrew. Then, I had even G D James who helped me to teach evangelism. We have Dr Inches, a medical missionary of the OMF but he taught church history which was his favourite subject. Like that, you see. We just have to play by ear and live from hand to mouth.

PL: How were lectures being conducted in the past in the early years?

TT: We took over one of the dorm rooms.

Interview 6

Interviewed by Ms Patricia Lee, 27 March – 9 December 1998

Special Project: Accession Number 002007

Reel/Disc 6: 00:29:27

Synopsis

Building up a pool of lecturers at Far Eastern Bible College. Explanation for the growth of overseas students. Various degrees conferred at the College. Countries where the students come from. Criteria for admission to the College. Future direction of the College. Missionary efforts in Muar and Rawang. Naming of the 48 churches planted by Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. The Gospel Boat in Indonesia.

Transcript

This is a recording with Rev Timothy Tow, Accession Number 002007, Reel 6.

Patricia Lee (PL): Reverend, can you tell us how did you manage to build up your pool of lecturers in FEBC?

Timothy Tow (TT): First of all, I had my brother-in-law, Rev Dr Peter Ng, who returned to Singapore the very morning we opened school, having got his Master of Theology degree from Dallas Seminary in United States.

PL: That's where you graduated from?

TT: I graduated from Faith Seminary. So anyway, we started off with two teachers. And then I enlisted one Dr Inches of the OMF. He was a medical doctor, but he was well versed in church history. So he stepped in as our church history teacher. So as we went along, Rev Philip Heng graduated from Shelton College with a BA, also from Moody Bible Institute. He went to study in two or three places. So he came in also to help in the teaching. This was in the early days, the first two years. And then I got Rev and Mrs John Grauley. He had his Master's degree also and he came to help me teach in 1964, two years after we started the college. That is a way we build it up.

PL: Did they come in as full-time lecturers or part time?

TT: Full-time. They stayed for four years.

PL: And what was the remuneration like for them?

TT: They were paid by their mission. They were fully paid by their mission. So, we didn't pay them any salary.

PL: But what mission are you referring to?

TT: Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. That is the mission board that sent them.

PL: How many lecturers do you have at the moment?

TT: We have now 12 lecturers. Not counting the English tutors.

PL: And who are your students?

TT: My students now come from 18 countries, all these provinces. Would you like me to name them?

PL: How many students do you have?

TT: Now we've got 90 students.

PL: Nine zero students.

TT: Nine zero, yes.

PL: Now, Reverend. How do you account for the growth of your overseas students?

TT: It is all by the good results of the students themselves, and so they introduce the school from their own good experience. So, you need not advertise your school. If your school is good, then the name will spread and people would recommend.

PL: Right. So from 1962, when the school first started and now in 1998, how many graduates did you have from this school?

TT: Would be at least 350 graduates.

PL: Right. And the degree that's conferred on them?

TT: The degrees that are conferred on them mostly are the BTh, Bachelor of Theology, Diploma in Theology, and now we begin to confer the degree of Master of Divinity. I think about half a dozen so far, Master of Divinity, and also Master of Religious Education.

PL: How so recognised are these degrees that are conferred by FEBC?

TT: We don't care for this—being linked up with some theological association to say that we are recognised. But we have the recognition of the approval of the Lord through their achievements, which I believe is a greater accreditation. For example, we have a Korean student who is coming back from Korea to get his MRE, Master of Religious Education. He's got his BTh, Bachelor of Theology. But he has done a great work in translating two of my books and they are printed in Korean and selling well in Korea and he has also mastered his English well as to start an English service in Korea. And that English service is going on. But then he got promoted. He has been minister to the seamen mission, Korean Seamen Mission. So much so that he has been promoted from Mokpo, it's a small port in the South, now

promoted to Incheon, the port of Seoul. And their association has written us to please ordain him. Sent him back to be ordained by us. So he is going to be ordained this graduation this Sunday, just two more days.

PL: Dr Tow, can I get you to name these 18 countries for us on record?

TT: Yes. Starting with Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, India, Canada, USA, Kenya, Korea, Palau. Palau is a small island near the Guam group. Sarawak, this is Malaysia but we count them as a different entity. And Argentina, Nepal, I've got 17 already.

PL: That's right.

TT: Nepal. So I missed by one [laughs].

PL: That's alright. Are there any certain criteria in taking in new students to the college, in terms of the denomination they come from?

TT: We take in all denominations. Important thing is that the student must be called. If he's not called, he may have a high degree, but he will fizzle. So the important thing is that the person must be called.

PL: What do you mean by called?

TT: That he can testify that he's willing to give up his secular appointments, or jobs, and he feels that the Lord wants him to serve Him full-time. And everyone who is called knows it; they know the Lord is calling me.

PL: So is it then true that you would take in any students even in Singapore, regardless of the churches they come from?

TT: Yeah. We don't care from what church they come. If they're willing to be our student, we will.

PL: Right, and they will go back and serve their own mother church...

TT: Well, we just let them loose, they know what to do. Wherever the Lord will send them.

PL: Can you talk a little bit about the future direction of the college?

TT: I'm very happy with the situation of the college now, because our faculty is fully agreed and committed to the standard of the college. Our doctrine, our beliefs and so forth. Though I cannot say that everyone is exactly the same mind. There may be a little variation. But on the whole, on the fundamentals, I feel that we are quite solidly founded. And that I'm most happy with Dr Jeffrey Khoo, who is our academic dean. And he has been a full product of this college, got his Bachelor's degree here,

went abroad, acquired his MDiv and ThM and also his PhD, so that after his return, he has become my academic dean, librarian and he is the foremost in intellect I believe, and in the matter of theological questions and confrontations, he is able to hold his own and he is the editor of *The Burning Bush*, twice a year, which is the standard bearer of the college and now we are in the fourth year of production. So this journal has been highly regarded by other schools and they keep it on the shelf.

PL: I have this question for you. If all your students come from different denominations, what is the percentage of students, after having attended the college, become convinced of the Life Bible-Presbyterian stand on certain doctrinal issues? The percentage.

TT: That is hard to tell. We teach them, they pass our exams and they accept our doctrines. I believe sincerely because if not, they would argue. But some may just keep quiet, I do not know. However, we believe that it has confirmed a good majority of them in our faith. And they go out with that stand with us.

PL: Can you cite the example of one of your students, who was an Arminian? In his belief?

TT: His name is Skariah. He comes from Kerala, South India, the Saint Thomas Evangelical Church. He's Arminian. So when he studied under me, he was a bit groggy and said, "Well, I have to keep my Arminian position or else when I go back, I'll be in a lot of difficulties." But I was teaching Romans, and when he finished the book of Romans he came to tell me, "Well, Pastor, I am now a convinced Calvinist. I can do no other. I've given up my Arminian position." So I said, "What to do?" And he said, "Well, that's the truth. When I go back they're Arminian and I'm Calvinist." So now he's back in his school and I think he will run into some difficulties.

PL: [laughs]

TT: That is a good example.

PL: Let's backtrack a little bit and talk a little bit about missions. You mentioned very comprehensively your two missionary trips to Malaysia. I understand that subsequently, efforts were also made to reach out to two churches in Muar and Rawang. Can you elaborate on these missionary efforts?

TT: Very soon after our two trips, by 1954, we shared with John Sung preaching band to take over a mission station called Kelapa Sawit.

1954, we *gung si* with the evangelistic league, John Sung group. But after some years, we were the sole supporter. And today Kelapa Sawit is a very flourishing centre at which we've built a very nice church, kindergarten, on a half-acre land on a top of a hill. So that is the first fruit born of Life Church which is in Malaysia. That was our first fruit, first branch. And we did not have our branch in Singapore until 1957. So you can see that three years ahead, we were in Malaysia. We went to Muar and Rawang much later. Rawang was 1966 and we built that church. And Muar is due to one of my students. He belongs to a rich family. But Rev Koa came to study four years at the FEBC, and he graduated, and went back to Muar and formed the Muar Bible-Presbyterian Church on his own, and he would like to affiliate with us. That's the story of Muar, but Rawang was earlier.

PL: Can you tell us the events leading up to the relationship that was built with the people in Muar and Rawang, as you have mentioned in your book?

TT: Well, it started in Rawang 1966. And it was my own teacher in ACS, Mr Chew Kia Song and the wife—the wife comes from Rawang. So they looked me up, said, "Pastor, we need to have you to help in Rawang." Rawang is five miles across Muar River, very near. That they are a dying church, which was founded in 1922, but for two or three decades there was no pastor. So it's been dwindled down to about five to ten people. "You must come and revive our church." So went there. Started to go there once a month. But interestingly when I passed by that way, the Muar people said, "Eh, you're going to Rawang? You're just passing by? You have to minister in Muar also." So I took on two churches. Every month I go there once. And after preaching there for about five years, I began to build a church. Mostly with Life Church funds. It's a very nice church for Rawang.

PL: So what was your weekend like, shuttling up and down?

TT: Well, it's once a month. So after preaching here, and I end by 11.30 or 12 o'clock. By 12:30, I step on the gas. By 4 o'clock I'm in Rawang preaching. So it was a full-day affair. So after that I come over to Muar at 8 o'clock to preach. So by the time I get to bed, it's about 10 to 10.30, all exhausted. The whole day. And that is once a month.

PL: You did this for five years, how do you explain?

TT: More than five years, for years...

PL: Eight years.

TT: It must have been for at least eight years.

PL: How do you account for your motivation of shuttling up and down Johor?

TT: Well, I just feel the urge under the Great Commission. Jesus said “Go into all the world.” And under that compulsion, I was happy to establish churches as far and as many as I could, whenever the opportunity came.

PL: That was really admirable.

TT: Well, as a result of it, Life Church has now at least 48 branch churches. The Lord has given us one per year. And if you want to count, I can count, but of course I would lose count.

PL: Yeah, but can you name as many as you can recall?

TT: Well, to start off, is Kelapa Sawit, it’s the first one.

PL: So we’re starting in Malaysia.

TT: In Malaysia. And then we started Zion. It’s all from Life Church, Life Church funds, we founded it.

PL: Zion as in?

TT: Zion BP now by Dr Quek Swee Hua.

PL: In Singapore right?

TT: In Singapore. Then, from there we have Sembawang, Galilee, Mount Carmel and then Jurong...

PL: That’s Calvary Pandan?

TT: No.

PL: It’s different.

TT: Then Calvary Jurong, my brother branched out from here. Then he started Calvary Pandan. In the meantime, we branched out to Sharon Church, that was in Toa Payoh but now they come back to us. We branched out to East Coast, which is called Grace. And Grace branched out to Shalom and now branched out to Maranatha. Maranatha branched out to Berean. And we have our Chinese service. And then we started a Far Eastern Bible College, that is our biggest branch. The college is founded by Life Church. So these are briefly in Singapore. But then in the meantime in Malaysia, we founded about ten churches. So out of Kelapa Sawit, Kulai Besar, Ayer Bemban, Bukit Batu, then Muar, Rawang, Bukit Gambia 30 miles inland, built a nice church there also. And then we have the Tamil service in Kelapa Sawit. Then we branched out to

Ulu Tiram on the East Coast. And then we have Kemaman and Kuantan. And now we have bought over Mersing and we are going to build up the Mersing resort very soon. Then Kuala Lumpur side, we started two. One is at Taman Seri Melati on the way to Ipoh, and then opposite, two miles there, is Selayang Segar. These are our branch churches in Malaysia. So, we've not counted Indonesia. We've got two churches in Batam, Batu Aji and Tanjong Piayu, with two flourishing kindergartens. And then we started in Medan, two churches. Kalimantan, we supported a big field but we did not make them to be BP. We just allowed them to go on. We started a branch church in Kuching, which is last week, approved by the government, registered. So that is in East Malaysia, Kuching. We have a mission in Chiangmai, the missionary is just around here with the children. Burma is a very big set-up. They've built a college, the size of Life Church, four storeys, this Life Church. And there they have many churches, but we do not want to count them as our own. But we support the college and the churches. But one of our graduates here went back to Burma, and he has started three BP churches. So these are all our branches. And also the orphanage. And to each one of these we have bought them a van. The college gets a van. Andrew Kam is getting his van this week. We've sent him 14,000USD. And Thailand they have a van, Batam they have a van. Our branch church in Kuantan has a van and Kuching has a van. All these vans are bought by us to help them in the mission work. Then we supported Philippines. And now we've got three missionary families in Cambodia. So it's three points, like three churches. And we have established a foothold in Vietnam and supporting two of their bright students, now studying here in the college. So, this is roughly a picture of the outreach.

PL: Looking at the way the church has expanded beyond the shores of Singapore, was it deliberately planned for the expansion?

TT: Never. We never planned anything at all. We have no, what you call five-year plan or three-year plan, no. The important thing is that whenever the Lord opens a door, we enter. Like the church of Philadelphia, "I will open the door that no man can shut." So we go in, and the door opens. It's just all the time trying to catch up. Oh yeah, I forgot Tanjong Pinang, Tanjong Uban, these are our branch churches and we are thinking of going to Bengkalis on the Sumatran coast, a big island. And it's traced to my wife's ancestry from there and they're calling us to go. My wife's maternal grandfather was a Kapitan. Kapitan is captain. The Dutch confer

these big names on community leaders and Ivy's grandfather was a community leader. So, we are going there to return—pay the gospel debt.

PL: When you mentioned West Kalimantan, there was a mention of a gospel boat, in your book. That's quite interesting. Can you talk about it?

TT: We built this gospel boat very exquisitely. Fifty-five feet long. And the main sitting, the main hall, in this boat can squeeze in about 20 people. And then there are nice cabin beds. I've slept there, when I visited the Pontianak. And I purposely want to enjoy sleeping in the boat for a night. This boat was built at a cost of 50,000 Singapore dollars in those days. Fitted with 60-horsepower engine, which was very powerful. And was given over to Rev Djunaidi and his family. They live on the boat and they sail up the Kapuas River. The biggest river of Indonesia is in Borneo, a thousand kilometres long. So, they lived in that boat for about three years, sailing up and down and preaching to station after station and going to tributaries, small rivers. But after three years, they resolved to rather come to land. So, they sold the boat away. So that's where I bought at least three or four pieces of land for Djunaidi, at my instance. The land was so cheap and I saw beyond that if you buy now you *ountong*, you'll make. And so, I helped him look after the boat ministry to establish a kindergarten, a church, a primary school, a secondary school, and an orphanage. And a Bible school also. But it fizzled, and he had only Bible classes at night. But we have spent over half a million dollars in a matter of about 11 years. After which time, we let him go. You have to be self-supporting. We support him 11 years and spent half a million dollars on it.

PL: In all these mission efforts, were there problems with persecution?

TT: No. Though there was a rioting and then they set fire to our college, which burned down half and the fire spread to the neighbouring squatters' camp. These are all refugee settlements. And it came from 1967, there was an insurrection in the area in Kalimantan with Sarawak because of these communist troubles and the dayaks came out and kill people. So many people, many Chinese people ran to form this squatter settlement. So there was once a rioting here.

Interview 7

Interviewed by Ms Patricia Lee, 27 March – 9 December 1998

Special Project: Accession Number 002007

Reel/Disc 7: 00:29:53

Synopsis

Structure of Presbyterian church government. The role of pastors, elders, and deacons. The causes for the dissolution of the Bible-Presbyterian Synod. The KJV-NIV debate, and the NKJV. The bookroom ministry. The hospitality ministry and the purchase of Beulah House. The pastoral chat and the church weekly paper.

Transcript

This is a recording with Rev Timothy Tow, Accession Number 002007, Reel 7.

Patricia Lee (PL): Can I get you to describe the church structure?

Timothy Tow (TT): The structure of the church is based on presbyterian system, that is to say we have no bishop. Nor is it a congregational set-up like baptist, every church is on the local structure. The presbyterian system is that we are autonomous, every church by itself, but we are also linked together with one another to form a presbytery. In other words, the churches are more interlinked. Not like baptist churches, they're just completely independent. We are independent, but we are associated in the presbyterian system, so that as the churches grow, then they form into a presbytery. And as it grows further, we may form two presbyteries. And a synod would be the general assembly. This is the way of church structure. Local set-up we have got the pastor, the elders and the deacons.

PL: I understand that the synod has already been dissolved.

TT: 1988, because of disagreement in the matter of charismatism and separatism, on these two counts.

PL: What about the presbytery?

TT: So the synod is dissolved, means the presbytery is dissolved. Actually, we became so big, so we just call it a synod. And we did not have separate presbyteries, but we meet once a year as a synod.

PL: This you are referring to before 1988 correct?

TT: That's right.

PL: What about now?

TT: So in 1988, the clash came and because we tried to have reconciliation, but it could not be reconciled. So finally, we dissolved it on the 30th of October 1988. Which now has splintered into four or five groups and everyone is practically on its own. But I have very good

rapport and fellowship with my brother's church, and we are the two biggest churches in the denomination. So that if the two big churches get together, it's worth more than 20 churches of the smaller ones.

PL: You've mentioned it has been splintered into four to five groups. What different convictional stand among these four groups?

TT: We are the main group, Life Church, the mother church stands by itself. And then my brother's church is in Pandan and Jurong. We don't have any organic connection, but we have a moral, spiritual connection. We consult each other. So that is one group. The Zion group links up with Mount Carmel and together with Hebron and Hermon, they're the mountain churches, three or four of them. They are of the persuasion that they like to fellowship with the new evangelicals. They're more open and they also have a soft spot for charismaticism, so this is one group. And then there are five or six churches that are together, with Philip Heng, Bob Phee and some of these, they are one group.

PL: What would be this group's convictional stand then, under Philip Heng?

TT: Well, they're not much different from us, but because of these personal backgrounds and there are certain grouches against us, so they form a group. But then now they're splintered. They have sort of not been happy with each other. So the group is not very strong, splintered out. Then we've got another one called Charlie Tan. So he starts his Independent Presbyterian Church, all by himself. So there are four groups, and then stray ones that are not committed here or there, like that.

PL: So most of the students, these leaders, are graduates of FEBC?

TT: All of them. We had ordained so many of our graduates that become BP pastors. Practically all of them are ordained by us.

PL: On what basis and where did you borrow this concept of a synod and a presbytery then?

TT: That is a normal presbyterian practice. We are bound to develop that way according to our ecclesiology, our doctrine of church formation.

PL: The role of pastors, elders, and deacons. How have they evolved over the years?

TT: We have evolved to include deacons in the committee of the elders. This is a tradition we received from our Chinese Life Church from the beginning, 1950. Our mother church, they meet—pastor and elders and

deacons as the highest body. According to the American system, no. It's the pastor and the elders who are the highest. The deacons are under this group. But I have adopted the style of our mother church which included all the deacons because I feel that the deacons sometimes are better than the elders. Because some are old fellas, they get the prestige because they are the old member then you become elder. But, we included the deacons so that if we were to decide anything, we got greater cohesion and better command of the situation.

PL: What about the process of decision-making?

TT: So there's a highest meeting we have once a month, we call it the session meeting. So the session includes the deacons. This is a new development. According to the old system, it's only the pastor and the elders. But here we have the deacons. So when we meet, we have about 25 people, the highest governing body, that's as far as Life Church is concerned.

PL: When was it introduced? The deacons?

TT: From the very beginning. From 1950, we followed the system.

PL: Is there such a thing as someone having the final say in the decision-making?

TT: We are the final say.

PL: So what if there are disagreements among the elders and deacons?

TT: No. We must come to a consensus. We are the highest body. So, well, you may say, the highest body is still the pastor and the elders. But I don't make it like that. We would have to agree among us, including the deacons.

PL: So what if one person disagrees?

TT: Well, then you are voted out, it's no use. We go by vote. Democratic system.

PL: Right.

TT: So if you have one, that's the way, you are outvoted. You got to follow the majority.

PL: Right. So it is using the democratic...

TT: We don't have what you call the majority. Usually, we work for a consensus. So everybody agrees.

PL: And in the event that there are disagreements, then you will go for...

TT: Well, it breaks out underneath. Some would be you know whispering and criticising, all that. But I leave them alone because the truth is the truth. And we have got deacons like that who walk out and they are not happy. OK, leave them. But after some time, they repent and come back. Like the buying of the Beulah House, there was a real great struggle.

PL: What about in terms of the terms of office? In terms of the length of service?

TT: In terms of office, the elders have a hierarchical prestige where they assist the pastor in baptism, in the Lord Supper which the deacons don't do.

PL: Is it an appointment for life for elders?

TT: No, three years per term. But if you are not serving, you are still called an elder but you are sort of retired, but you still maintain the rank but you have no power.

PL: What about the terms of office for a pastor then?

TT: The pastor is the highest so that to be a BP pastor, you feel very honoured. But in the baptist church, the pastor is an employee. And the committee decides. The pastor has no say. That's pretty bad. But here I have a lot of say. But provided if I'm also qualified and I say things that are relevant and don't speak some nonsense. Usually whatever I introduced, I have the full support all the way. Sometimes, they might hold me and I might be too enthusiastic, but on the whole, they are very, very agreeable. So for the moment, I would say I am very happy with my session.

PL: In terms of election of pastor, and elders and deacons, can you comment on it?

TT: Three years once.

PL: By the congregation?

TT: We must all be terminated in the office and go into election. Usually, we will be re-elected.

PL: You mentioned the synod that was at the helm before 1988. Can you describe the roles and functions of the synod?

TT: It had a moderator, like chairman, moderator. And all the pastors, all the elders, are in the synod. The deacons are there but more in the subsidiary role. So then we passed certain decisions. But then we have our branches that don't obey. That's how the split came. We said we will use the King James Version but Mount Carmel says we would like to use

the NIV. You know there's a great tussle. So they did not want to obey us. That is also partly the cause of the split you see.

PL: Right, as an aside since you are talking about KJV and NIV, can I get you to comment on the New KJV?

TT: The New KJV is not so bad as the NIV. And we don't want to use the New King James because they still follow some of the NIV lines in the matter of acceptance of the text. Therefore, we have to drop out the New KJV. They still follow the lines of the NIV. But not as bad...

PL: Right because somehow or the other it falls along the same...

TT: Well, it takes the side of KJV also, but half half. Still not clear you see. But the KJV is one straight line.

PL: Coming back to church structure. Can we capture on record the evolution of the various ministries that came into being since the inception of Life BP in 1955?

TT: You are talking about Life Church or the other churches too?

PL: Let's talk about just Life Church.

TT: Well, Life Church naturally follows the direction of the pastor. So from the very beginning, the idea of a bookshop was in my mind. So I become a colporteur, that means selling Bibles, because we had no place. We built the church, one of the corner rooms became a bookroom and we went on for some time. But there was no manager, so it closed.

PL: Which year were you talking about when it first started?

TT: 1962. Our college was built. So had a little room there and Ivy was a seller of the books. She earned \$40 to pay for her food. But once she graduated and married me, then no one took care of the bookroom. So, that's how the whole thing closed. But 1976, we revived it. So that's where the very nice house you have. Not as big but we expanded. So that was one of the main drives of the Life Church. But because they were selling all kinds of books that clash with our doctrine, we took it back. Now, it belongs to the FEBC. Alright, the development of the bookroom is a powerful, is a very important one. Now, we are selling books and there's the power of the books, reaches far and wide because we have a book centre ourselves.

PL: You mean in 1976 you actually farmed out the place?

TT: I restarted it. With my own capital, \$1000. The pastor didn't want to bother the church, because we were poor in those days. All things not good. So I gave a thousand dollars, and then from there we spin lah.

PL: You mentioned that you stopped it for a while because they were selling some other books that were not in line.

TT: No, we took it back in 1995, let's see...

PL: Who did you take it back from, Doctor?

TT: From Paul Wong. We privatised it. I think 1996, we took it back. But the bookroom is a very powerful branch of the church. Which my other branch churches never get the vision and none of them, even Zion cannot do it, New Life cannot do it. There must be a drive you see.

PL: Yeah, that actually brings to a very obvious observation and that is one of the outstanding things that Life Church has done is to get itself involved in the distribution of publications to its members.

TT: Then my pen, I've written about 30 books now. And our session is very docile, willing to listen to me because our offerings are good. So every time I publish a book, they agree— Take \$1000 and give it free to the members. And the members when they get it free, they also know how to offer back. Some people want to calculate—must sell them and get.... I say no, just give them freely. In that way, not only giving to the members but we minister to a lot of outsiders. Philippines, one year about 30 pastors would write me and we would send them one box of books with a hundred-odd dollars with postage. So this goes out to help them, you know? It's one area. And when they distribute a lot of good pamphlets, it goes to influence people's reading and ideas and doctrine also. Alright that's one. The second one was the founding of the Bible college and this is the most powerful of all. These are Life Church specialised... I'm talking about Life Church. And the idea of the Bible college came from me as the pastor. So finally, the job of support of the college comes from the pastor. So the bookroom first, the Bible college. The third thing is the missions outreach which has proliferated very far. The kindergarten. We founded the kindergarten as part of the service to the public. The government is well pleased with our kindergarten. If we do not have a kindergarten, the government is short of one unit of teaching below primary one. They tried to take over the kindergarten, they failed, the government. They failed. Many years ago they wanted to do the kindergarten. Finally they left it to the private sectors. So we have the kindergarten.

PL: You mentioned about the missions earlier. Can you explain how did you go about setting up the mission's ministry and why was it later on proliferated?

TT: At one time, we had a sort of a common thrust that these smaller churches will also contribute. But this thing somehow fizzled, and each church has its own mission. So all the other churches have their own missionary outreach that makes the work much faster. So the mission's drive is very strong in Life Church.

PL: That is very evident.

TT: And then comes our ministry of hospitality. After we bought over this Beulah house, we paid 7.2 million but now it's worth 55 million because a piece of land along Newton Road, the same size is sold for 57 million. But then because of Beulah house, we are able to house our married students. But now with the guests, and I try to help every nationality. Not only have I got Chinese, not counting our students. We've got Chinese, Filipino, Burmese and Brunei, Thai, all people staying over there. There are about 75 people staying in Beulah house now.

PL: Not necessarily your students too, right?

TT: Yeah. We open to outsiders for a good cause because they need it and we've got spare rooms. And I've baptised eight who come from Mainland China, because they stay here. So, not that you stay here you must attend my church. No, I never make it a condition. But they come and find the Lord and I baptised eight of them.

PL: And who are these people? Are they workers?

TT: Yeah, they're all having jobs, PRs and work permits.

PL: Believers or non believers?

TT: Well, I baptised eight of them. They came not believers, but now they're believers. So they're members of the church, most of them attend the Chinese service.

PL: Ah, so that's what you meant by hospitality ministry.

TT: Yeah, the hospitality ministry has brought in baptised members. But not only that, we helped them, and they are very happy to have the accommodation free. We never charged, never charged them. If they want to leave behind an offering, we accept it. But we give them no condition. We take care of them.

PL: Wouldn't that be a long waiting list to actually come in and stay?

TT: Well, in and out they all come like our members from Indonesia. They come from Batam, from Tanjong Pinang and they know where to find the place. They just walk in and I put them up. And they go home

very happy. Sometimes, they leave behind an offering, sometimes they don't, and that's alright. We take care of them.

PL: But for non-believing hostelites, what would be the criterion for taking them in?

TT: When they are recommended by a member, and this person is a non-Christian, well, I quote Psalm 84 that sparrows and swallows find a nest in your house. But sparrows and swallows are unclean birds. Only the pigeons and the dove are clean birds that can be offered, but sparrows and swallows are unclean. So quoting this, I take them in and try to help them. Many of them are grateful. Short-term policy, they have nowhere to go, they stay two, three months and they go on their way.

PL: As a matter of interest, Rev Tow, how much time do you spend reaching out to the non-believers even as pastor today?

TT: I don't do very much now, it's impossible. You have the church administration, two churches, all the weddings practically on me. They don't want to go to others, they want me to marry them. So this takes time. Funerals, those who are seriously sick and in hospital, you must go visit them. Sometimes we go there and then we have a non-Christian, and after preaching to them, they believe and we baptise them, that is from the non-believers. But my church work and teaching would not give me a special time to say I go out to evangelise the unbelievers, except on a mission trip, like going to Bengkalis, we are going to establish a church there. So I say, well you people go on the first trip, I'll go the second trip. And going to Bukit Batu, they had the first trip, I made a second trip. I'm more like a figurehead.

PL: With so much members wanting attention from their beloved pastor, how do you juggle your time?

TT: That is why I've got my pastoral chat every week. This weekly is my lifeline. It's a very important paper. So they read what I tell them, things happening in the church. These are of great interest to them and that's how we keep in touch. It's impossible, about 1600 members. I'm like a father who met his son and he had 30 sons, and so he asked the young son, you look very familiar, very handsome, who is your father? And then he discovers that was his son but neither the son knows the father, it's a true story. So it's a hard time for me to know everyone. I've tried myself to know everyone; such as going on the trip to the Holy Land that I know, many of these I don't know, they come in I know them, and through

the prayer meeting, through the Bible camp, and through them coming specially to see me.

PL: So you have stopped at the hospitality ministry. Are there any other significant ministries?

TT: As I say, the running of the Life Church Weekly is a pattern for all the other BP churches. Every BP church runs a weekly like Life Church, but we are the one who set the example.

PL: You're talking about the bulletin right?

TT: Yeah, our weekly paper.

PL: It's very informative?

TT: Ours is very small, only one sheet. Some people like to make two sheets, three sheets and advertise nasi lemak is today's makan. I don't want to do that [laughs]. But I put in the most important.

PL: I think many people have been encouraged by your bulletin because it is informative. It tells a visitor or a member what's happening in the church and it gives the impression that it's a very missions-minded church.

TT: And it also has a lot of theological points on this or that. We touch on them, you see.

PL: What about the other ministries such as the Sunday school, the adult's fellowship, the women's fellowship? How did those come about?

TT: Well, this is very interesting. We have a tradition of good Sunday School and especially we have a big adult Sunday School, and then we have the children's ministry to reach down to the youngest which is stressed by Deacon Ong Eng Lam. I must give him the credit for that and because our church is founded on this very free principle of decentralisation. We believe in decentralisation. So our church has got the most fellowship groups. If you count them, there are maybe about 16 of them. One of them is my wife. We came back from America, teaching there for one year 1979, and she felt called to start the children's choir. Now the children's choir has got 60 members and they have their own children's worship and practice of hymns and so forth. It's a very much sought-after institution by the godly parents. They all want to put their little ones to join Ivy's group in the children's choir. So she has developed that sort of an expertise. So the children's choir, you know, they sing once a month or something like that. And that has given rise to the junior worship choir. They also like to more or less follow. Then very

interestingly, the basic was the YF. That was in the beginning. Apart from Sunday school there was the YF and the YF then developed into the YAF because of the age differential.

Interview 8

Interviewed by Ms Patricia Lee, 27 March – 9 December 1998

Special Project: Accession Number 002007

Reel/Disc 8: 00:07:03

Synopsis

Concept of decentralisation in the administration of the church. Question of accountability. How the various fellowship groups are being funded.

Transcript

This is a recording with Rev Timothy Tow, Accession Number 002007, Reel 8.

Patricia Lee (PL): You mentioned that...

Timothy Tow (TT): So, the basic is the YF, then they got promoted to the YAF, then they promoted into AF, they develop slowly like this. And then they develop into the Ladies' Fellowship and the Men's Fellowship. Then, they developed a Young Teens' Fellowship. That is younger than the YF. So, we have got this line, the main line. Then it begins to branch out into specific missions or specific emphasis. So, they form an E-Band, Evangelistic Band. I formed it after John Sung. Sunday afternoon we go out preaching. So, the E-Band came into its own. Then, we have the Missionary Fellowship. Then, we have the Life Bible Class. They are another group. They want to start a church now, you know. They are leaving us when JJ comes back. They want to start a new church. I agree. I believe in decentralisation. So they got Life Bible Class and Sunday Bible Class so they keep on multiplying like that, you see. That is about all, if you count them.

PL: So with this decentralisation sort of ministries, how does the church ensure some kind of coordination?

TT: Well, they have coordination and they have put out another paper called the "Fellowship Update." I think you have seen it. So they have all the activities in one paper. And I think Yeong Shoon is doing it. Lau Yeong Shoon.

PL: What would be the role of the elders and deacons in the involvement of the various ...

TT: Well, they become sought after as advisers. So somebody likes this elder, somebody likes that deacon, somebody likes that assistant pastor, so they request them to be their adviser.

PL: Can you then explain something on the accountability of ministries?

TT: Accountability is that they are happy to give us the minutes, to the pastor. And they attend church. They are part of the church and they do consult the church on certain issues and they are coordinated for example into the Bible camp. Are you coming to the Bible camp?

PL: No, we are attending the Vacation Bible School but not the camp.

TT: So, the family camp is one that coordinates and young people should come in. But this year, young people, fewer are coming in because we did not cultivate them enough and we should have given them better rebate or subsidy in the camping. So our response this year is about 230/40 people. We should have got 350.

PL: Would it then be a requirement by the church for each of these ministries, let's say, to be headed by an elder or deacon?

TT: No. All by their own ranks, within their ranks.

PL: And then when it comes to funding of the ministries?

TT: They are all independent, they got plenty of money each. Interesting. They know how to give and so when they support their own, they may not be giving much to the church. But then the church has its own support by those who don't do anything but attend church. So, some of the rich old ladies may be very happy to give plenty, depending on how you touch their heart strings.

PL: So with this, one of the interesting things about Life BP Church is that in other churches, they talk about cell groups. The existence of cell groups. Is this something we do not see in Life BP and how is that so?

TT: But we have got so many fellowship groups that they are sort of like cell groups, are they not? They function by themselves. They have their own prayer meeting.

PL: In addition to the Tuesday prayer meeting?

TT: Yeah, the YAF I know, they have their own prayer meeting. And, not all, not all, and they have their own meetings anyway. Weekly meetings.

PL: And it is your conviction then to allow decentralisation to take place so that growth...

TT: Which I delight in. I just leave them alone. Never bother them. And that's a strength of Life Church because this will be taking care of quite a few hundred members. The most active. Then, there are those that are very regular in attending church. But they just love to attend church. That's all. And they give to the church.

PL: So, in terms of mission efforts, you could have possibly various members coming to you and say that this is where the Lord is leading me and I'll like to go and they would have the blessing of the church.

TT: They have a wonderful inter-relation and that is the group that is very zealous to go on mission trips. They always go, not once but they go all the time to show they are very intent. So, we do help them on the side. Sometimes, you know the church, usually they spend themselves, but sometimes, we do subsidise them and help them too.

PL: This is really fantastic.

TT: It's very active. Our church here is very active. One reason is that they know they are saved, they are very well indoctrinated in salvation, so everyone is happy to give and to be outgoing.

Interview 9

Interviewed by Ms Patricia Lee, 27 March – 9 December 1998

Special Project: Accession Number 002007

Reel/Disc 9: 00:29:20

Synopsis

On writing songs, and the circumstances that led to the writing of them.

Transcript

This is a recording with Rev Timothy Tow, Accession Number 002007, Reel 9.

Patricia Low (PL): Reverend Tow, you have actually written a few songs. Would you like to tell me exactly the number of songs you have written?

Timothy Tow (TT): I've written 100 songs and choruses. But mostly songs.

PL: At what age did you start writing them?

TT: I began in 1969, when we went to live six months in the Holy Land at Bethlehem. And there I had good fellowship with Dr and Mrs Carlson, American missionaries of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. And Bonnie Carlson, the wife, loaned me a small book

of folk songs. And the folk songs, their tunes are very beautiful and I wrote my first song, "I Want to Walk Where Jesus Walked", based on the tune "I Walked Today Where Jesus Walked." It's a very beautiful song, but my lyrics are quite different. And from there I began to write songs.

PL: Under what circumstances do you write songs?

TT: Well, you must have an inspiration that comes over you, that stirs up your heart, then the words would come. But usually, with the help of a good tune. That's how I write. When a tune inspires me, the words come easily.

PL: Right. Any particular setting, place, timing to write a song?

TT: Well, the Holy Land was really a good setting because when you walked over the places where Jesus walked, that evoked a very warm feeling to say I'm walking where my master had walked and so I wrote quite a few songs based on the geographical situation.

PL: "Bethlehem Sunset Hymn" is one of them?

TT: That is the most interesting hymn. I wrote that in half an hour, the words just flowed so natural.

PL: Under what circumstances was this song?

TT: Well, that was the last song I wrote. The next day we left Bethlehem for Singapore. And that evening as I sat there, in the twilight, the words just flowed so easily. In half an hour, I wrote the song.

PL: There's actually four stanzas to the song and you're talking about the sun and how you feel God's holy presence. "Bethlehem Sunset Hymn", "I Want to Walk Where Jesus Walked", "When Daylight's Fading", "Winter Moon", such songs appear to be very personalised. Can you comment on that?

TT: Well, "Winter Moon" was this. We went to the Shepherd's Field. Well, the Shepherd's Field was quite big, so everybody claims this is the Shepherd's Field and we claim our Shepherd's Field. We went down there to size up the situation for the Christmas Eve service and that was only for a few nights, so it was very cold. The sky was clear but the winds blowing really stung you. I think it must be down to about 40-odd degrees Fahrenheit. And then this evoked in me the feeling of our poor Saviour, living in an animal shed without any windows or wall to cover. So He must have felt very cold. And that's why "Winter Moon" came up because the moon was also very bright. I wrote "Winter Moon." It was winter.

PL: At that point in time, your paper and pen, were they all ready...

TT: No, no. After I came back from the scene, then I wrote it.

PL: Which year was that? Do you recall?

TT: That would be the winter of 1969, near Christmas time.

PL: What about the choice of the music, Dr Tow?

TT: It happened that a young man staying in the Bible college here, not a Bible college student, but he was an outsider, but I received him, a Christian boy. He sent me a Christmas card with a music of "White Christmas." So when I said, "Oh, that's really familiar." That gave me the inspiration, to the tune of "White Christmas."

PL: So, usually the music will come and then the words would come along?

TT: That's right. The music will first inspire my heart. Then the words.

PL: How about the introduction of the songs to loved ones, friends, congregation; the songs that have been written by you?

TT: Well, I can tell you the story of every song.

PL: Yes, please do.

TT: But which song do you want to refer to?

PL: Let's start with "Winter Moon", since we're talking about "Winter Moon."

TT: So, because I was going to be the speaker for that Christmas Eve service, in which I introduced myself as the fourth wise man. The other three wise men brought gifts, I'm the poor fellow, coming from Singapore, the fourth wise man, but I brought myself. That's how it went.

PL: How did it go with the congregation?

TT: Oh, of course they like it very much because I'm the only Chinese. I was the only Chinese in the whole of Bethlehem and everybody knows me. When I walk around, they say, "The *Sini*." *Sini* is Chinese, from the word "Sino", it's China. So, Chinese is called *Sine*. So, when I go and have a haircut, they also know me.

PL: What about "When Daylight's Fading"?

TT: This was during a time of songwriting in America. And it was written in Orlando. I went there, I think in, I cannot remember exactly, maybe the year after I went to marry off my daughter Jemima to Jeffrey Khoo, and their wedding was solemnised in Clearwater. And I think it was the

next year or when I went again. I cannot exactly remember, and I wrote altogether 17 songs.

PL: In the same year?

TT: I was in a great mood to write. So we came to Orlando and the young people say they want to go to see Epcot and Disneyworld. So, I remained behind to write and during that time I wrote this, “When Daylight’s Fading.” And the tune was very inspiring, so the words also came very easily.

PL: How did the tune come about?

TT: Again, I have a song book of folk songs. And it’s a tune I turned to, and I hummed the tune which inspired my heart, so I wrote.

PL: “When Daylight’s Fading”, the lyrics seem to suggest a very reflective mood.

TT: Yeah. Well, maybe I should reflect on my coming last days, as you get older. So, I put myself in that mood to write, to comfort the hearts of the older folks and to point them to the way to heaven.

PL: That’s right, because it says, “My life’s journey’s run. Soon the dark night’s falling, and the weary ones come home. Can I hear my Saviour calling me welcome?” So it does evoke a reflection...

TT: And especially to help the aged who may not be saved.

PL: When was this song first introduced?

TT: Oh, immediately. After singing it, writing it, the next day was Sunday, and we went down to Cape Canaveral. The pastor was my classmate. So he took it for granted, when I came and I suspected he would call me to preach, you see. So when he got me to preach, I sang this song for them. That was the next day, we used it.

PL: Right, two other songs on the Holy Land, “Bethlehem Sunset Hymn” and also one that is “*Yerushalayim*.”

TT: Well, “*Yerushalayim*”, was provoked by Dr Carlson. He says every poet must write one on Jerusalem, pronounced as *Ye-ru-sha-la-yim*. And if you don’t write anything on Jerusalem, you’re not counted a poet. So, that got me to thinking. And the circumstances that provoked me to write was that we visited one of my teachers. I had two lady teachers. We went to learn modern Hebrew at the American Institute for Holy Land Studies. Now, this second lady was an orthodox Jewess. So they’re very strict. And when we visited their home, they were very happy to see us and told us about their religion. Very orthodox, very strict, fundamental. And

by that time, I had written this one. So, I presented it to them. So, Mrs Carlson sang “*Yerushalayim*” to the tune of “How Great Thou Art”, and it so moved them to tears when they hear about Jerusalem. So, that was how it was, the first time sung.

PL: Will you ever introduce it to the congregation, to Singapore?

TT: Oh yeah, I have sung it many times especially when I preach on Israel in Calvary Pandan. Then I got these tunes and songs to sing, and that also brought in a lot of high spirit because it is the words, tailored to the theme of my message.

PL: Closely linked to the Holy Land would be “In the New Jerusalem.”

TT: “In the New Jerusalem” was written after I heard it sung in Chinese at the funeral of Miss Leona Wu, the principal of Chin Lien Bible School, successor to John Sung. And when they sang it, oh it was so inspiring. So, I came home and I said I must write one on our pilgrimage to New Jerusalem. Whatever words they were singing in Chinese, I cannot remember. But it is something to the effect of meeting one another in heaven. That was at a funeral service. So I wrote this one. The words are all from me in English.



Rev Timothy Tow with Miss Leona Wu at Chin Lien Bible School

PL: Which year was that?

TT: 1974.

PL: Subsequently, there were some of the songs which you forwarded to me, one of which is “All Things Work.”

TT: That is very interesting. I went to Saipan at the request of Calvary to make a survey and to report back on the work of Mr Pang Kok Hiong. I think you would know him. And on the way, suddenly, our plane descended so quick. Instead of Seoul, it came down at Pusan. Then they announced that there’s a fog in Seoul. So, the plane cannot land, so we have to wait in Pusan. So, we waited there for three hours and we just sat in the plane. Of course I was very disappointed. I wanted to hurry back to Singapore. When we came to Seoul, we missed our plane already. So we took another, a subsequent plane, but waited some time. So, as I sat in a plane, the John Sung tune (proceeds to hum) came to my mind. So I wrote down “All Things Work Together for Good.” So, during the wait I finished my song. And that’s how it was written because, truly, all things worked together for good, because you cannot help it, you have to sit in Pusan for three hours. There must be something good out of it as for Christians. So when we meet with trouble, we don’t blame the Lord. We rather say “Well, there is something deeper.” So that’s why I wrote this, “All Things Work Together for Good”, in Pusan.

PL: Since this song is about your returning trip from Saipan via Seoul, maybe it would be a good time to get you to talk a little bit about how the church was involved in the ministry in Saipan which was not recorded earlier.

TT: Well, the Lord has used Rev Pang Kok Hiong who is my student. He is a graduate from FEBC and he went there in 1992 or 91, about that time. And immediately, the Lord gave him good results. He preached like John Sung and stressed the need of being born again and he confronted these garment workers. They’re all women. Few men attend his meetings. By that time, when I visited Kok Hiong, the attendance every Sunday night would be around 120 to 150. Now, the attendance goes up to 300, but at that time it was already yielding good result and he was having 100 baptisms at least per year. And when I went to visit the place and to report back his work, I was already very impressed with what the Lord is doing there. So this was after the inspection of his work.

PL: Right, the FECCC theme song?

TT: “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.” I was that seed being crushed. This was the first year of the life of the college. And we had three students. And after the first year, two students left. So I’ve got only one. And that one happened to be my wife [laughs], Ivy. She wanted to run away but somehow the Lord stopped her. In the light of these circumstances, you can know how pressurised I was. The whole of Singapore was against us. They passed a remark, “This young upstart, Timothy, announces a four-year programme granting a degree.” At that time, Singapore Bible College had not granted any degree, and we start, a younger fellow, a new school, and we announced a degree programme. So the talk of the town was very much against us. So you know how marooned and isolated I became. Well, it happened that I was travelling to Kuala Lumpur to help a brother to obtain a visa from Taiwan. And this happened to be, it turned out to be my relative, my cousin’s husband. Of course, being a relative, I did my best to go to Kuala Lumpur to get a visa for him. And as our train was going up from Seremban to Kuala Lumpur, that’s a stiff climb. If you’ve ridden a train, even by car, you know it’s a climbing to... So, the train was struggling, and in that mood, I felt also the same. I was struggling for the Lord. It was a very hard life. And then, in the circumstances of the train pulling up and struggling very much, I felt myself in the same boat. And so out came this song, “Oh Father...”, how do you start off?

PL: I think this one that was given to me, which I wanted to clarify was, the theme song of FECCC, written by Rev Scarrow.

TT: Oh! No, I’m sorry, I thought you were talking about FEBC anthem. But let me... We’ll switch to FEBC anthem, OK?

PL: Alright, sure.

TT: So, “O Father Thou, almighty art.” Can you look up to the words and read...

PL: I don’t have it here.

TT: Oh? The FEBC anthem is not here?

PL: No. It’s given to me, FECCC, “All Scripture Lord as Thou...”

TT: Oh, never mind, I’ll give you that song, FEBC Anthem, the school anthem. So by the time I reached Kuala Lumpur, the words were written. And then, on my way back, I came by way of Malacca. So I went to see my younger brother, Dr Tow Siang Yeow. He’s now retired. He’s an elder of New Life. So, I showed it to him, and he made one or two corrections,

and so the song was written. And I'm very happy and proud of it, that our school has our own anthem. But other schools don't have their anthem. Secondly, the tune is very inspiring. It is the anthem of Faith Seminary, the tune. So I used the tune of my mother school's anthem, to provoke the writing of our FEBC anthem.

PL: So I gather all these songs were written in a moment of inspiration...

TT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. They were...

PL: It was never things that you've planned, or you deliberately had to force yourself.

TT: No, no. It just comes suddenly. Suddenly you get an inspiration. So you quickly put pen to paper and quickly write them.

PL: And it just flows?

TT: Yeah, flows, but of course, rather crude and you keep on polishing, polishing. Sometimes, it's very good, but sometimes you need to polish.

PL: So, how frequent were you writing?

TT: It's very hard to say. Sometimes I say, "Oh, I can never write this time." Like when I went to Canada, to Toronto, and there was no inspiration at all! But then suddenly, I wrote a song on the Holy Spirit. Learnt quite a bit from a writer of songs, the circumstances and the way that he writes.

PL: What about this FECCC theme song?

TT: This is not written by me but by Rev Scarrow from New Zealand. He came to attend our Far Eastern Council Third Assembly. The ICCC, International Council, has got many chapters around the world. One in South America, one in the Far East and one in the Middle East, like that, and one in Africa. So, the Far East has Singapore as more or less its base. And we were a very young church of only six years old. We started in 1950, but by 1956, we were a very young church. We entertained the whole Far East, churches that are in the ICCC, to Singapore. And one of them from New Zealand, representing New Zealand, Rev Scarrow, wrote this while on the plane, about the Scriptures. And when he had landed, he handed this to me and with a tune. So we delight to sing it because it's a very powerful song in defence of the Scriptures.

PL: You made reference to Lifers in the song, "Is this our land, our Beulah land."

TT: That's right.

PL: Now, under what circumstances was this song being written?

TT: Under the pressure for money. We negotiated to buy our Beulah House opposite the church, at 10 Gilstead Road, around October 1989 when the deal was struck, and we had to gather 7.2 million to pay for this house. That is inclusive of lawyers' fees and tax and all other things, around 7.2 million. But Life Church had only two million from our reserves. The church had two million reserves. So we need to get 5.2 million in a matter of six and a half months. And, in the course of collecting the funds, the session felt very wobbly and afraid. We must take at least two million loan for the church, because how can you get 5.2 million in six and a half months? I said no. I said that is against the teaching I got from my grandfather. My grandfather was a pastor. He told me, "Grandson, you don't ever borrow money and you never pay interest." So that has been my church policy ever since I've been pastor. I refuse to loan any money from the bank and I refuse to pay interest. So on that score I said to my session members, "We must all struggle hard and we must all give really from the bottom of our heart, and not just give something as a show, just to get through the situation." I said, "No, we must all give." And so that was one time I got our session, whole session, to give our 13th month and the congregation also followed. Not all, but at least that was the example. But still, we were nearing the time of payment. I think it was by April the 30th we had to pay.

PL: Of the following year?

TT: Yeah, yeah, 1990. April 30th we had to pay the whole sum, 7.2 million. We were now about three-quarters away, and it was very hard going, three-quarters, the hardest. It's like climbing Mount Everest. So I felt very worked up and very sad, and that got me to write this, the Beulah Land.

PL: How did it go with the congregation?

TT: Well, not only this song but another two or three other songs I wrote to inspire them to give. They're not here but in my book called "Chronicles of Conquest", it's all there. And I'll tell you some experience, the reaction of the congregation. And so I wrote them that if you give your money now, it's worth one dollar and 21 cents because if you were to pay interest, that is at least—you gotta pay 21 cents for a rather short period. Hypothetically, I worked it out for them. It touched the heart of the congregation so much that one brother at a prayer meeting like last

night, came and handed me a cheque, folded. And I was very nervous to open this cheque, because I don't know how much, it's a small cheque.

PL: Right...

TT: When I came up, I opened—300,000.

PL: Wow...

TT: Loan. Not gift. But we need the loan and in fact our secret weapon was an interest-free loan. So the people brought 3.1 million interest-free loans. Half of them from outside, friends. A lot of friends outside supported us. They are good friends, they willingly bring. And the people gave 2.1 million. 2.1, 3.1 makes 5.2 and we had a surplus of something like 80,000.

Interview 10

Interviewed by Ms Patricia Lee, 27 March – 9 December 1998

Special Project: Accession Number 002007

Reel/Disc 10: 00:28:57

Synopsis

How the song “Singapura” became an award-winning composition. The challenge of writing an abridgement of Calvin’s Institutes. Events leading to the writing of his first book, “In John Sung’s Steps.” His preference for writing in the early morning. Dilemma in church leadership renewal and the future trend of the Bible-Presbyterian movement in Singapore.

Transcript

This is a recording with Rev Timothy Tow, Accession Number 002007, Reel 10.

Patricia Lee (PL): And that’s how the song became an inspiration.

Timothy Tow (TT): Yes. Then it was very stirring. The tune. The tune is to Annie Laurie. One of the beautiful Scots’ folk songs, I think. It’s a love song to Annie Laurie.

PL: It’s written in thanksgiving for the...

TT: It is the song that inspired them to give.

PL: Now, closer to “Beulah House” would be a song that you’ve written about Life Church, “Come, come, come to Life Church...”

TT: Yeah, that was written many years ago.

PL: Do you want to comment on that?

TT: Well, again, the tune that stirred up the emotions and it's the tune of "The Church in the Wildwood." It's a very famous song. And every time I go to the international conference, the group from Central America would sing this song; every time they would sing this song. Well, that strikes a responsive chord in my heart. So, when I came back, I wrote on, modified from that "Church in the Wildwood." So, it's a sort of a parody, not exactly, but I borrowed some ideas from there. Then I depart from there to write my song. And "Come, Come, Come" is the same, "Come to Life Church."

PL: Would you consider that as a theme song for the church?

TT: So now that becomes a theme song for the church. At every Life Church anniversary, we'll sing this. Only once a year, we'll sing this.

PL: Closer back home would be the song written, "Singapura."

TT: Oh, that. That is my prized song.

PL: How so?

TT: It was second last day of our stay in Israel. We stayed there five-and-a-half months. At that time, Jemima was in my arms. We went there when she was 18 months. We came back when she was exactly two years. So we went to Ashdod. It's one of the seaside ports of Israel. If you look at the map, Ashdod. And we went to the seaside. Carlson brought me along. Said well, you are leaving for home, and it was January. And although it was winter, it was a very sunny day. So we went to the beach. And when I saw the blue ocean, and we are coming to Singapura, at once I thought of Singapura, you see. So at once the words flow. "Oh, fairest isle of southern seas, their waters are so blue." The first two lines came, right away. So I got back to the house and I finished it that evening. And it's the tune to America but Singapura fits with America (sings A-me-ri-ca, Sin-ga-pu-ra, Sin-ga-pu-ra). And that is also a patriotic song. It is a song of America. So I wrote "Singapura" also based on the patriotic feelings of the song to America. And then during that time, after I came back, that was 1970, 71, 72. The Straits Times had a Poet's Corner that was under the charge of Kirpal Singh. He's now Professor of English, I think, in the U.²⁸

PL: That's right.

TT: So I submitted several of my poems and I got three prizes for three poems I submitted. But when I submitted this one, I got a first prize. And

Kirpal Singh was very happy and he said, “This is a good anthem actually for our nation because it talks of God.” Wah [laughs]. Although he’s a Singh, he’s happy because it talks about... We should write a tune for this to be sung. And then he gave me 35 dollars, first prize.

PL: Since then Life has been singing it on National Day?

TT: So I have, ever since I’ve written that, I have sung it for Life Church. Other churches... except Fairfield. One day, Benny Chng, one of our members, brought this song to Fairfield Methodist Church, and said, “This is written by my pastor, you know. That’s a very good song.” So Fairfield Methodist adopted it and they sing it for the National Day. That is the only instance I hear that some other church sings.

PL: Right.

TT: But we sing it in the church, you see, because this is the church praying for the nation. And whether the nation would like to sing this or not, maybe after I die, they would want to sing it [laughs]. Not now.

PL: Okay, just one more song. “Our God Is a Loving Father.”

TT: Well, this is very interesting. I went to Melbourne 1989 and 1990. Each time I went there, I spent ten weeks, to nurture the young church. And when I got there, there was this fellow called Patrick Lee. He was a young man and they were going to Brisbane as a church family. I think two families got together in one van and they were driving to Brisbane, when on the way they met with a fatal accident. The van crashed into a tree and I think at least one, I think two people died. But Patrick Lee would have died if he did not change position. Before the accident, he changed position to the back and a young man, I think his treasurer of the church, and he went to the front and he was killed. So Patrick Lee got converted through this traumatic experience and he became a new man. He was still a student in the university I think, just beginning. Now he has some musical talent and he wrote several tunes and of the three tunes, I’ve used two. And “The Lord Our God Is a Loving Father”, he wrote this tune, it sounds very stately and it’s strictly for a psalm. So I wrote that, on this tune, “The Lord Our God Is a Loving Father”, and it’s based on Psalm 103. And so, I’ve sung this so-called psalm, it’s a psalm, in our church for quite a few times, and it’s been sung by other churches too. So this is out of my contact with Australia, Melbourne.

PL: Generally, when you wrote all these songs, do you have a targeted audience in mind or was it...?

TT: Yeah, we have like “Beulah House”, “Beulah Land” targeted to the Life congregation. But this is a very general one as a good worship psalm.

PL: Likewise for songs from Holy Land to...

TT: Yeah.

PL: Any particular song that actually gave fulfilment to your life?

TT: Right out I’d say the FEBC anthem would be perpetuated in the college, and I feel proud about it because other colleges they just pick one of the songs and sing. “Be Thou My Vision”, that is Singapore Bible College. But ours is specially tailored out of the tears and the struggles of the heart, you see.

PL: Rev Tow, moving on away from songs to books, I understand that you’ve written perhaps more than 30 books.

TT: Yes.

PL: Would you like to comment on one of the toughest books that you’ve written?

TT: Alright. The greatest I think is “Calvin’s Institutes Abridged.” That’s on the top there.

PL: You took three to four years to complete that.

TT: I took maybe about two years to finish books one and two. And then thereafter, I took another one or two years to finish three and four. But then I didn’t publish book three and four until very lately. The reason is that, book one and two, I printed 7000 copies. And I sent 1000 to Dr McIntire in America and they distributed and so forth. And I had 6000. And I was quite a daring fellow to print so many you know. And how the money came I don’t know, I forget how I got the money but it was printed. And it took all these years to consume the remaining 6000. So, I was constrained to print it as one book when it came to the end of the 6000, because there is no more. But before we came to 6000, I said, “Why do I print to sell all this? We sell and we distribute.” And the white book, the first two books in one volume, was very saleable. Dr Stephen Tong, you’ve heard of him? Bought 200 copies for his seminary and this is an illustration of how the books had a very popular sale.

PL: What inspired you to write the abridgement of Calvin’s Institutes?

TT: Because when I went to Faith Seminary in America, and I learnt all the subjects, Greek and Hebrew and all the theology and so forth. And when we came to the theology of John Calvin, and immediately there’s

a grip because Calvin is a theologian of theologians. Because when he writes, it's quite different from others and he writes most progressively and logically and very powerfully and most deeply. So, I was a first year student and was introduced to Calvin's Institutes. I was so gripped by it that in the following summer, three to four months in America, I used the Chambers dictionary to read the four books of Calvin, 1600 pages. With the dictionary, I still have the book, where I annotated the deep meanings of words. So, I was completely sold to Calvin's theology because suddenly, I realised that I have a sovereign God who controls everything. I did not know this because I was a green horn when I came to seminary. And that He saved us and saved us forever. Once saved, always saved. I was very happy to learn this. So, when I came back to Singapore to teach in 1962, I began to teach Calvin. As I taught the course, I began to abridge. So then lately, because we are coming to the end of the sales of the white book, the first volume, then I got books three and four typed out and we print it as one book. And this is about two years ago.

PL: Now, Dr Tow, you have written a variety of books. What actually inspired you to write, just like what inspired you to write the songs?

TT: Well, it started by writing a biography. Joshua Lim, do you know? He's an elder of Calvary. And his son is a minister now. What Lim?

PL: Lim Boon Heng? Lim Hng Kiang?

TT: No, no...

PL: John?

TT: My memory is very bad these days. Anyway...

PL: David Lim.

TT: David Lim. That's right. David Lim. His father is Joshua Lim. Elder of Calvary. He's now partly settled in Perth. He shuttles in between. And his father is called Lim Puay Hian. And Lim Puay Hian was a disciple of John Sung. And Lim Puay Hian in his days saved thousands where John Sung saved ten thousand. He was a lesser light but he also was a very good evangelist. So he was my good friend because my first wife was saved under him. Nancy. And therefore, we become good friends. Of course, I'm much younger than he. So, he was quite sad because his ministry was short lived. Not that he died but he had about five years of very powerful ministry but after that his sermons were not received. On repentance and sin. The people's hearts were beginning to harden. So he had a small ministry, preaching in small churches here or there without

much result. And then he retired in the son's house and lived there for several years. At that time, they stayed at Monk's Hill. Quite near here. And so he died at the age of 74. Quite suddenly. So the son was quite sad. And wept and so forth and I comforted him. I said, "Don't cry. Your father is my good friend. And he had lived a very great life. Alright, I promise to write a book to comfort you." Because I uttered these words. So that was the first book I wrote. Do you have a copy of that?

PL: No. Biography?

TT: "In John Sung's Steps: The Story of Lim Puay Hian." I spent quite a lot of time in research. From all his books and papers and diaries and records, and wrote up this story. And it seems that the way I write it and so forth was very readable. I didn't know that I could write. And that was the first time. So, I think it must be in the year 1975 or 76, I first wrote and this is after I've already written songs. But this was the first book I wrote. No, no. I cannot... No, no. I think the date is wrong. Not 1970. It is... I cannot tell.

PL: It's alright.

TT: But anyway, is it in the list here? "In John Sung's Steps"? Can I have a look at the sheet? No, it is not here. It is my first book.

PL: Right.

TT: So after I wrote this, I began to acquire a taste to write some more. And from there, I launched into writing, but of course, the first one was Calvin's series. That's abridgement, that's not writing but abridgement.

PL: I think one of the significant features in all of your writings is you were able to translate very complex ideas into simple language. How would you explain that?

TT: Well, that is a studied way of writing. In other words, I've purposely presented it in such a way that the lay reader will easily absorb. But if you have some high flown phrase and it may be very beautiful English, but if it doesn't hit, doesn't grip the understanding of the lay person, then it is no good. Then you want to write it in their language so that they can easily grasp. And also, my style all comes from the King James Bible. The King James is very beautiful with balance of cadences, I think you know. So, I write it with the help of much of King James. As David Marshall says, the King James was his literature book. He said that the King James built up his English. And I would say exactly the same.

PL: Did you purpose in your heart every year that you would write certain books or does it come out of inspiration?

TT: Well, as I go along, I seem to have the feeling that I must write at least two books a year [laughs]. But this year, I may be writing three books. The one is with Jeff, "A Theology for Every Christian", and the second on my homiletics, "My Homiletic Swimming Pool." It's coming out. And now it grips me to answer these puritans, very holier-than-thou and legalistic people. "The Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith", I want to write it in a story. I feel that's the best way to grip them.

PL: At what time of the day would you usually do your writing?

TT: In the wee hours of the morning. Usually between two-thirty and four o'clock, five o'clock.

PL: It will be interesting at this point in time to trace a day in the life of Timothy Tow. Would you like to describe how a day is spent productively?

TT: Well, when the term is on, you are regimented. When the term is off, then I've got all the liberty to spend my day. And I do believe that you must get up at a certain time and then to do your quiet time and then it's counted as being the standard norm of holiness. If I'm tired, I just sleep [laughs]. I don't have to keep time because I've been writing from one o'clock to four-thirty. Then, if I don't go and sleep I'll be groggy all day. I must sleep again.

PL: Why the choice of writing it in the wee hours of the morning?

TT: I don't know. You just wake up. It comes to be a sort of a pattern. And you go to bed at say, eleven, but by the time it's one-thirty or two o'clock, you wake up very fresh. So you take advantage of the coolness and the silence of the night to write. And so this morning, I got up at one-thirty and I wrote until three o'clock. This is my off hours, you know. Not when we are lecturing. We are now on vacation.

PL: Is this a daily practice of yours?

TT: Well, if a book is on, that will be more or less every night you get up and you do something about it.

PL: Reminds me of SM writing his memoirs also in the early mornings...

TT: Yeah, yeah, somewhat like that [laughs]. When you get old, you don't sleep that much. And that is an advantage. But I don't care. If I like to sleep and I feel very sleepy, I just go ahead, and I think that is the secret of health. You don't regiment yourself. If you want to sleep, just sleep.

If you can sleep, all the better. But then you get up very fresh. But if you are not satisfied with your having a good sleep, and you regiment or force yourself, it doesn't pay. I let it take its course.

PL: Now, Rev Tow, in wrapping up the history of the Life Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore, can you comment on the renewal of church leadership?

TT: This is a very high mystery. I think we should thank God for Goh Chok Tong, that Lee Kuan Yew has found one and I think he is far above Lee Hsien Loong. If Lee Hsien Loong were to head our nation, he will be going up to see Mahathir, I think. But Goh Chok Tong has a way of humility and he explains it to the people. People like it. Even my brother's Malay driver, "Oh, Goh Chok Tong, good." Lee Hsien Loong... [laughs]. Well, it's not good for me to compare. But I think we have a wonderful successor in Goh Chok Tong. And I think he has really made a mark. In the spiritual world, it's very hard to say. I've got so many assistant pastors. But they just leave me. Some out of ambition, some out of gain, and I wish that I can have a successor who will hold two portfolios. Both pastor and principal. That's how the tradition has been established. So that I cannot quarrel with myself. And when I favour one against the other, it's still a left and right pocket. So everything is very harmonious under one head. As for me now, I have a successor in the college. I'm very happy for Dr Jeffrey Khoo because he has 100 percent viewpoint and principle...

PL: Excellent...

TT: And spirit with me. He believes in all the doctrine of BPism that I teach. And I'm also very happy for the college. That after him like Suan Yew and Jack Sin, Koshy, Bob, Colin, they are all practically of the same wavelength, maybe a little bit, not exactly like Jeffrey Khoo. And I feel that Jeffrey will be able to pass on, and we pray, we really thank God it is now 37 years now that we have maintained this line without being infiltrated. There have been forces of infiltration, to take over. But we have guarded and we've expelled and kept it pure. Under Jeffrey, I believe he will continue, so at least it will last another generation. You know schools, they last one generation and it's toppled.

PL: Right.

TT: Very sad. But for FEBC, we thank God for a continuing, and this is very, very happy. Church, to be fair, I must wait.

PL: Right, would there be any conscious effort on your part to groom any particular leaders to take over you?

TT: Naturally, every leader would want to groom some successor. But then, it is not something that can come by because you wish. It must be, I believe divine intervention too. You wish but if you don't find the real stuff, you know.

PL: Right. How would you comment on the future trend of the BP movement in Singapore then? Future trend.

TT: Well, we are split up, we are split up. And everybody wants to be number one, right? It may be as well because it's no use to run a three-legged race, against the will, and you all tied together you cannot run. So I think it's good to let them have free will now, until such time, maybe one more generation and if they see things eye to eye, that they have now learned the hard way of going out into the cold and each one fending for themselves, and you'd realise this is time for us to gather together, as it is a history in the English Presbyterian Church, they are very strong together. They dwindle off and finally they gather together in the revival. Let nature take its course. But I would not want to gather the people, so all come together. Because I don't see that there is much benefit. If we do, there is still the line of hurt somewhere there and it's not easily patched up. And then if we try to get together with Zion, they are under a modernistic pastor, Quek Swee Hwa. He gets people from Fuller, from Regent, these are all the signers of the ECT and ECT is "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." Well, if he is for the ICCC and for separation, he would not be doing... but he thinks he's very clever, he can get these people to compromise. So we cannot get together.

PL: One last question for you, Rev Tow. What would be your advice for young and aspiring pastors, your personal advice for young and aspiring pastors.

TT: Well, first of all he must know where the Lord calls him. It is very important. You cannot be just dribbling here and there and where the pasture is greener, then you go there. It's no use. And I'm very happy to learn from Kok Hiong because when I went, I went there two times. The first time I told him, at first I asked him, "How long you would expect to stay here?" He said, "Well, maybe five or ten years." I said, "Finish for you, if you say I'm going to die here, you'll succeed." This time I asked him, I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "I'm going to die here." Okay. In other words, wherever the Lord puts us, we must know our call

there and then stick to it. But there are those who are coming up and not very sure and they try to work themselves up. That sort of thing would not work. I know the Lord put me here, that's why I don't move. McIntire had asked me many times, "Come and work with me in America." I said, "Sorry, my place is Singapore." One of the things I know why is because I've got the Chinese languages and there are 13 of our branches now in Malaysia, 11 are founded by me.

Interview 11

Interviewed by Ms Patricia Lee, 27 March – 9 December 1998

Special Project: Accession Number 002007

Reel/Disc 11: 00:01:37

Synopsis

Advice for young and aspiring pastors.

Transcript

002007, Reel 11.

Patricia Lee (PL): You were talking about the Malaysian churches which you have helped.

Timothy Tow (TT): Now, we are growing world-wide and we support Roska, Haposan, Yusniar in Indonesia. Bong in Kuching, Sarawak. Thawm Luai, Andrew Kam in Burma (Myanmar). Jess, Nirand in Thailand, Chiang Mai. And three Korean missionaries in Cambodia. And all these things need sustenance. And the leader must be able to understand their needs, not overspending nor undercutting. And I believe that a pastor is an entrepreneur. He is a businessman for the Lord, to make profit. Profit of souls and profit of even our economy. So, I feel that I'm in a very strategic position to do all these. The less experienced pastor may not be able to handle these things. And then the work will not be growing as fast, as effectively.

PL: Okay, thank you

TT: Alright.

Notes

¹ Directory of B-P Churches, accessed 31 January 2020, <http://www.bpc.sg/directory/index.htm>.

² National Archives of Singapore, <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline>. The interviews can also be found in "He Being Dead Yet Speaketh: Remembering the Life and Teachings

FAITH OF OUR FATHER: ORAL HISTORY OF TIMOTHY TOW

of Pastor Timothy Tow on the Occasion of the 10th Anniversary Thanksgiving of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church (2003–2013)”, CD-Rom. Interviews can also be viewed at the YouTube channel of Far Eastern Bible College, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCf2cO9IWk4v1SrY4b-QHvzg/featured>.

³ “Tow Family Reunion 2018: A Link to Our Past, a Bridge to Our Future”, accessed 21 January 2020, <https://towfamilyreunions.wordpress.com>.

⁴ *Guide to the Archive of the Overseas Mission of the Presbyterian Church of England (the English Presbyterian Mission)*, The Library, SOAS, London, UK, accessed 21 January 2020, <https://www.soas.ac.uk/library/archives/news/file55128.pdf>.

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College News

FEBC opened its new semester with a day of prayer on January 2, 2020. The Principal gave the opening word from Matthew 13:51–52 and spoke on how it is to understand or piece together all that we will learn and experience in our study of God’s Word so that we will behold the glory of our God and His Truth, to see our infallible Saviour and His inerrant Scripture in all their perfection and holiness.

Four new full-time students joined the College last semester: Cho Ji Hyun (Korea), Felix Piratheepan (Sri Lanka), Joyce Park Jong Eun (Korea), Riangwati Gulo (Indonesia). Ji Hyun is an MDiv graduate of Korea Theological Seminary and is here to do his Master of Religious Education (MRE). **Total enrolment last semester (January–May 2020) was 640:** 79 day students (fulltime: 46, part-time: 33), 320 students in the Basic Theology for Everyone (BTFE) night classes, and 241 distance learning students. **Students enrolled from these 14 countries:** Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam.



Two new tutors joined the faculty: **Mr Joshua Yong** who earned his DipTh, BRE, MDiv and ThM from FEBC. He is full-time preacher of Calvary Pandan BPC. Joshua is taking over the Contemporary Theology courses previously taught by Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew. **Mrs Patricia Joseph** replaces Mrs Anne Lim as Intensive English teacher. Mrs Joseph holds a BSc (Hons) and MSc from the National University of Singapore

(NUS), a postgraduate Diploma in Education, and has 32 years of teaching experience in Singapore schools. We thank **Mrs Anne Lim** for her faithful service in the College for over a decade.

The lecturers/tutors and courses offered last semester were: **Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo:** Greek Exegesis II, Heresies and Orthodoxy; **Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew:** Hebrew Reading II, Homiletics, OT History I, Numbers; **Rev Dr Prabhudas Koshy:** Ezekiel II, Systematic Theology II; **Rev Stephen Khoo:** Church History II; **Rev Dr Koa Keng Woo:** Bible Geography III, Church Music I; **Rev Tan Kian Sing:** Epistles of John; **Mrs Ivy Tow:** Greek Elementary II; **Mrs Jemima Khoo:** Childhood Education, Beginner Pianoforte; **Miss Carol Lee:** Theological Research and Writing; **Dr Jose Lagapa:** Biblical Science; **Rev Clement Chew:** Hebrew Elementary II; **Mr Samuel Joseph:** Greek Reading II; **Mr Joshua Yong:** Contemporary Theology IV; **Mrs Patricia Joseph:** English Intensive I; **Mrs Irene Lim:** English Intermediate II; and **Eld Han Soon Juan:** English Advanced II.





Pastor Timothy Tow
with daughter Jemima

Life Bible-Presbyterian Church (founded 1950):

*“Holding forth the word of life;
that I may rejoice in the day of Christ,
that I have not run in vain,
neither laboured in vain.” (Phil 2:16)*

and Far Eastern Bible College (founded 1962):

*“Holding fast the faithful word
as he hath been taught, that he may be
able by sound doctrine both to exhort
and to convince the gainsayers.” (Tit 1:9),
9A Gilstead Road, Singapore 309063*

