



# The Burning Bush

---

ISSN 0219-015X

July 1997

Volume 3 Number 2

---

Editorial .....	65
CONFSSIONALISM AND REVIVALISM IN THE SINGAPORE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN MOVEMENT .....	69
Blakely Baynes Hurst	
CALVIN'S CLOCK OF THE SEVENFOLD WILL OF GOD .....	84
Timothy Tow	
HYPER-CALVINISM IN THE LIGHT OF CALVIN .....	89
Jeffrey Khoo	
PREMILLENNIALISM .....	97
Charles Seet	
CREATION <i>EX NIHILO</i> IN GENESIS 1:1 .....	107
Quek Suan Yew	
MY SEVEN-COMPARTMENT SURVIVAL KIT IN GOD'S SERVICE .....	118
Pang Kok Hiong	
GOD'S TACTIC IS HOMILETICS .....	124
Gary G Cohen	
Class Notes .....	83
College News .....	106



# THE BURNING BUSH

Official organ of the student body  
of the  
FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE  
supported by the faculty

**Rev Timothy Tow**, MDiv, STM, DD  
Principal, and Lecturer in Systematic Theology

**Mrs Ivy Tow**, BTh  
Matron, and Lecturer in Greek

**Rev Jeffrey Khoo**, BTh, MDiv, STM, PhD  
Academic Dean, and Lecturer in New Testament

**Rev Koa Keng Woo**, BTh  
Lecturer in Bible Geography and Church Music

**Rev Stephen Khoo**, BTh, MDiv, PhD (c)  
Lecturer in Biblical Studies

**Rev Jack Sin**, BTh, MDiv, ThM (c)  
Lecturer in Church History

**Mrs Jemima Khoo**, BTh, MA, MRE  
Lecturer in Christian Education

**Rev Bob Phee**, BA (Hons), BTh, MDiv, ThM, DMin  
Registrar, and Lecturer in Apologetics

**Rev Goh Seng Fong**, MA, MDiv, DMin  
Dean of Students, and Lecturer in Pastoral Ministry

**Rev Quek Suan Yew**, BArch, BTh, MDiv, STM  
Lecturer in Old Testament

**Rev Prabhudas Koshy**, BSc, BTh, MDiv, ThM (c)  
Lecturer in Hebrew

**Rev Colin Wong**, BTh, MDiv, ThM  
Lecturer in Pastoral Ministry

**Rev Charles Seet**, BTh, MDiv  
Lecturer in Biblical Studies

Editor : Jeffrey Khoo  
Publisher : Far Eastern Bible College  
Printer : Chin Chang Press  
Permit : MITA (P) 240/03/97

*The Burning Bush* is published bi-annually in January and July, and contains theological papers, sermons, testimonies, book reviews, College news, and alumni reports. It is distributed *gratis* to the FEBC family, Bible-Presbyterian Churches, and friends of the College and Church. Interested parties are cordially invited to a complimentary subscription renewable on a yearly basis.

Please direct all correspondence to:



The Editor  
*The Burning Bush*  
9A Gilstead Road, Singapore 309063  
Republic of Singapore

## Editorial

The Far Eastern Bible College remains a Bible-believing and Bible-defending institution of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation Movement. The positional statement hereunder, tabled at the faculty meeting on May 28, 1997, was accepted and adopted by all members of the academic faculty. The statement is not meant to be exhaustive but reflective of the College's convictions on certain biblical-theological views.

A Positional Statement of Far Eastern Bible College, Singapore  
To be Signed by All Members of the Academic Faculty

1. I do believe “in the divine, verbal and plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures in the original languages, their consequent inerrancy and infallibility, and as the Word of God, the supreme and final authority in faith and practice” (*The Constitution of the Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, article 4.2.1*).
2. I do believe that “Under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are now contained all the books of the Old and New Testaments, which are these: OF THE OLD TESTAMENT—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; OF THE NEW TESTAMENT—The Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; The Acts of the Apostles, Paul's Epistles: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, The Epistle to the Hebrews, The Epistle of James, The First and Second Epistles of Peter, The First, Second, and Third Epistles of John, The Epistle of Jude, The Revelation of John. All which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life” (*The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter I, paragraph II*).
3. I do believe that “The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known

to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them. But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have right unto and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner, and through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope” (*The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter I, paragraph VIII*).

4. I do believe that “the Texts which are closest to the original autographs of the Bible are the Traditional Masoretic Hebrew Text for the Old Testament, and the Traditional Greek Text for the New Testament underlying the King James Version (as found in ‘The Greek Text Underlying The English Authorised Version of 1611’ as published by The Trinitarian Bible Society in 1976)” (*The Dean Burgon Society, “Articles of Faith,” section II.A*).
5. I do believe that “the King James Version (or Authorised Version) of the English Bible is a true, faithful, and accurate translation of these two providentially preserved Texts [Traditional Masoretic Hebrew Text and Traditional Greek Text underlying the KJV], which in our time has no equal among all of the other English Translations. The translators did such a fine job in their translation task that we can without apology hold up the Authorised Version of 1611 and say ‘This is the Word of God!’ while at the same time realising that, in some verses, we must go back to the underlying original language Texts for complete clarity, and also compare Scripture with Scripture” (*The Dean Burgon Society, “Articles of Faith,” section II.A*).
6. I do employ the Authorised Version alone as my primary scriptural text in the public reading, preaching, and teaching of the English Bible.
7. I do consider as unreliable all Bible versions (eg the New International Version or NIV) that are a result of the dynamic equivalence method of translation, and those which cast doubt and/or omit verses based on corrupted readings of the Alexandrian or Westcott-Hort Text.
8. I will endeavour annually at the College convocation to affirm my allegiance to the Word of God by taking this solemn oath: “I swear in the Name of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit that I believe ‘the Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is direct utterance of the Most High.

*Editorial*

The Bible is none other than the Word of God, not some part of it more, some part of it less, but all alike the utterance of Him that sitteth upon the throne, faultless, unerring, supreme.”

9. I do subscribe to the system of theology called “Reformed” as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and its Larger and Shorter Catechisms (1643-8).
10. I do dismiss the JEDP theory, and source/form/redaction criticism as products of modernistic scholarship, and do consider them to be illegitimate and destructive means of interpreting the Pentateuch, and the Synoptic Gospels.
11. I do believe that “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly” (*The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter I, paragraph IX*).
12. I do reject the neo-evangelical hermeneutic of Walter C Kaiser, namely, the Analogy of Antecedent Scripture, as fallacious (see Kaiser’s erroneous interpretation of the prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ in his paper, “The Promise of Isaiah 7:14 and the Single-Meaning Hermeneutic,” *Evangelical Journal* 6 [1988]: 55-70).
13. I do reject Hyper-Calvinism in its denial of God’s common grace, and of the free offer of the Gospel.
14. I do believe in the biblical doctrine and practice of personal and ecclesiastical separation from all forms of unbelief and apostasy, viz Romanism, Ecumenism, Modernism, Charismaticism, and Neo-evangelicalism.
15. I do reject as false the tongues-speaking, demon-casting, faith healing, dreams and visions, words of wisdom/knowledge/faith, prophecies, slaying of the Spirit, holy laughing and dancing of the Pentecostal, Charismatic, or Vineyard Movement.
16. I do believe God created the universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), and do regard Genesis 1:1 as an independent clause stating the first creative act of God (cf John 1:3, Col 1:16, Heb 11:3).
17. I do believe God created all things perfectly and very good in six literal or natural, and not figurative or poetic, days.
18. I do believe the Genesis Flood was global or universal, and reject all other views which attempt to limit the geographical extent of the Flood.

*The Burning Bush 3/2 (July 1997)*

19. I do believe Isaiah 7:14 is a strictly messianic prophecy historically fulfilled only by Jesus Christ who was conceived supernaturally in the womb of the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit as announced by the angel (Matt 1:22-23, Luke 1:26-35).
20. I do subscribe to the premillennial view of eschatology that recognises a distinction between Israel and the Church.
21. I do reject the so-called “Biblical/Christian Counselling” of today (as taught by Gary Collins, Larry Crabb, Frank Minirth et al) that is influenced by Freudian or humanistic methods which essentially question the sufficiency of Scriptures, and the power of the Gospel.
22. I do reject the modern-day Church Growth movement (as promoted by George Barna, Bill Hybels, C Peter Wagner et al) which advocates worldly techniques or carnal methods to increase church membership.
23. I do uphold and promote the good name, doctrine, and ethos of the Far Eastern Bible College in accordance to God’s Word, and do protect her from detractors and enemies from without and within.
24. I do serve the Far Eastern Bible College because I love Jesus Christ who has called me to be a minister of His Word, and do intend with the Holy Spirit’s help to faithfully declare “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), and to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3) to the glory of God the Father.

This issue of *The Burning Bush* contains papers that attempt to articulate the above positions exegetically (Quek Suan Yew on Gen 1:1), theologically (Timothy Tow on Theohelitism, Jeffrey Khoo on Calvinism, Charles Seet on Premillennialism), historically (Blake Hurst on the Bible-Presbyterian Movement), and homiletically (Pang Kok Hiong on requirements for ministry). There is also the graduation address—“God’s Tactic is Homiletics”—by Dr Gary Cohen which I am sure you will enjoy.

We thank our readers for writing in to tell us what they think about our articles. We have received letters of appreciation from Australia, UK, and USA. With God’s help, we will continue to publish papers that will encourage our students, alumni, and friends to keep true to His Word. May He increase, and we decrease (John 3:30).

J K

# CONFESSIONALISM AND REVIVALISM IN THE SINGAPORE BIBLE PRESBYTERIAN MOVEMENT

Blakely Baynes Hurst

As Bible Presbyterianism in Singapore approaches its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, one is led to reflect on the ethos that has nurtured this vigorous body of separationist Protestants. Over the years the Bible Presbyterian movement has proven its resilience despite a sometimes tense relationship with other denominations and certain doctrinal controversies within the Bible Presbyterian network itself. Indeed, church growth scholar Keith Hinton in his *Growing Churches Singapore Style* has documented that for the period 1971-83, the Bible Presbyterian Church enjoyed the third fastest growth rate (242% per decade) among Protestant denominations in Singapore.<sup>1</sup>

But it is the manner rather than the quantity of growth in the Bible Presbyterian Church that is most distinctive. From its inception among a few English-speaking families in the old Teochew Life Presbyterian Church on Prinsep Street, the Bible Presbyterian movement under its founding pastor Rev Timothy Tow Siang Hui eschewed foreign subsidies and maintained a strict policy of self-support. Drawing on its own resources, the church has planted some 150 congregations and parachurch organisations in Singapore and overseas in Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia. Other Bible Presbyterian initiatives include the establishment of two theological schools, a well-known home for senior citizens and a major chain of Christian bookstores.

Because a full account of the reasons for Bible Presbyterian growth would far exceed the scope of this brief paper, I wish to draw attention to one specific aspect of the Bible Presbyterian heritage, namely, the long-standing conflict in the Reformed-Presbyterian tradition between confessionalism and revivalism. This conflict erupted into open ecclesiastical warfare on at least two occasions among American

Presbyterians—in the Old Side-New Side schism of 1741-58 and in the Old School-New School split of 1837-69. In asking why local Bible Presbyterianism has grown into what it is and not something else, one must grasp the fact that the Bible Presbyterian network in Singapore holds together the confessional and revivalistic tendencies that Presbyterians in the past have often put asunder.

To support this contention, it will be helpful first to define the terms confessionalism and revivalism and briefly explain how these two come into conflict in the history of American Presbyterianism. Against this background we shall consider next the way in which confessionalism and revivalism shape the emergence of the Bible Presbyterian movement in America out of the matrix of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920's and 1930's. The final step is to trace these two threads from America to Singapore, where a distinctive form of Calvinistic revivalism emerges under the leadership of Rev Timothy Tow.

### **Confessionalism and Revivalism in Presbyterian History**

Confessionalism is a type of Christian belief that stresses adherence to a definite doctrinal position contained in a written creed. Allegiance to a specific creedal statement is, for the confessionalist, a necessary, if not a sufficient, test of full Christian fellowship. Some would argue that Protestantism is inherently confessional, as Lutheran and Reformed theologians felt constrained from the very outset of the Reformation to define their position in writing over against the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, eg, the Augsburg Confession (1530) and the Scots Confession (1560). Interestingly however, the Anabaptists who constituted the more radical wing of the sixteenth century Reformation, in general disavowed the use of written confessional statements (one important exception being the Schleithem Articles of 1527) on the principle that “the Bible itself is our creed.” Among English-speaking Reformed believers, including Presbyterians, the most influential creed has undoubtedly been the Westminster Confession of Faith (1648).

Revivalism is a type of Christian piety that places great emphasis on vital religious affections, especially the experience of being ‘born again’ into a personal relationship with the living God. The chief priority in a revival is heartfelt piety and trust in God’s forgiveness issuing forth in a life of consecrated service to God and one’s neighbour. Great revivalists are often motivated by deeply-held theological convictions, yet



## CONFESSIONALISM AND REVIVALISM

revivalism in general is more popular and less intellectual in orientation than confessionalism, which insists on well-informed assent to a detailed, precise and comprehensive theological framework. While revivalistic impulses are by no means absent from European Protestantism, as the rise of pietism in Germany and Wesleyanism in England attest, nowhere has revivalism flourished more than in America.

The history of American Presbyterianism bears the stamp of both confessional allegiance and revivalistic fervour. These two did not always rest easily together. During the Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century, a schism erupted in the Presbyterian Church between the Old Side confessionalists and the New Side revivalists. This conflict was rooted partly in sectional and ethnic differences; the leaders of the Old Side were immigrant ministers of Scotch-Irish extraction who had settled in the more established towns and cities, while the partisans of the New Side were typically native-born Americans ministering on the western frontier. At a theological level the issues at stake were the validity of revivalistic preaching and experience as well as the place of the Westminster Confession in defining Presbyterian identity.

The English Calvinist George Whitefield was the leading itinerant preacher of the American Great Awakening. Addressing an audience in Philadelphia, he eloquently expressed the spirit of the New Side revivalists:

“Father Abraham, whom have you in Heaven? Any Episcopalians?” “No.”  
“Any Presbyterians?” “No.” “Have you any Independents or Seceders?”  
“No.” “Have you any Methodists?” “No, no, no!!!” “Whom have you there?”  
“We don’t know those names here. All who are here are Christians—believers in Christ—men who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his testimony.” “Oh, is this the case? Then God help us, God help us all, to forget party names, and to become Christians in deed and in truth.”<sup>2</sup>

The leader of the New Side Presbyterians, a young firebrand by the name of Gilbert Tennent, launched a broadside against the Old Side in his 1740 sermon, “Danger of an Unconverted Ministry,” in which he denounced the lack of living piety among many of the learned defenders of Calvinist orthodoxy.

On the other hand, to the Scotch-Irish leaders of the Old Side, many of whom were graduates of distinguished universities in the old country, the New Siders’ evangelistic zeal and indifference to the finer points of

theology smacked of dangerous enthusiasm and possibly heresy. The Old Siders, who controlled the machinery of the Presbyterian Synod, refused to ordain the graduates of the fledgling New Side seminary known as the "Log College." When Gilbert Tennent protested concerning this policy, he and his New Side colleagues were ejected from the Presbyterian Church, whereupon they established their own New Side Synod. This rift lasted 17 years (1741-58) until a compromise was reached, the terms of which are described by church historian Lefferts Loetscher:

The antirevival group also made the important concession that thereafter candidates for the ministry should be examined as to their "experimental acquaintance with religion." The revival group on its part agreed that irresponsible and unproved denunciations of fellow ministers were to be forbidden; that ministers might not intrude uninvited into the congregations of others; and that greater deference was to be paid to the authority of the church courts. By these and other provisions, the two Synods were reunited in 1758 on the basis of the Westminster standards.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the underlying tensions between confessionalism and revivalism lingered in the reunited Presbyterian Church and erupted again some 80 years later during the Second Great Awakening in America. This time the confessional party was known as the Old School, in opposition to the New School revivalists. The Old School-New School schism revolved partly around the issue of slavery. New Schoolers were in general much more forceful in advocating the abolition of slavery, while the Old School, which was stronger in the slaveholding Southern states, declined to take a definite, official position, leaving the matter to the conscience of the individual believer.

The theologians of the New School had clearly moved further away from Calvinist orthodoxy than their New Side revivalist predecessors. Under the influence of N W Taylor (1786-1858), leading exponent of the so-called "New Haven theology," New School Presbyterians adopted a more Pelagian/Arminian anthropology that altered the traditional Calvinist doctrines of total depravity and predestination. Church historian Mark Noll explains the stance of the New School in these terms:

People had a "power to the contrary" when faced with moral choices . . . sinfulness arises from sinful acts rather than from a sinful nature inherited from Adam. All people do in fact sin, but they are not predetermined to do so by human nature itself. The New Haven theology was a powerful engine for revival and reform, since it provided a rationale for trusting God while exerting one's own energies to the fullest. This New Haven Theology arose

## CONFESSIONALISM AND REVIVALISM

out of the Calvinist tradition, but its emphasis on human capacities carried it in the direction of the Methodism that was then exerting such a dramatic influence on American religion.<sup>4</sup>

The main bastion of Old School Presbyterian resistance to these doctrinal innovations was Princeton Theological Seminary, founded in 1812; as the *Dictionary of Christianity in America* observes,

Princeton Seminary became the intellectual centre of Old School Presbyterianism. The Old School opposed many of the popular emphases of nineteenth-century American Protestantism.<sup>5</sup>

Foremost of the Princeton Old School theologians was Charles Hodge (1797-1878), who proudly affirmed that “there had never been a new idea at Princeton Seminary.” Against the Arminian tendencies of the New Schoolers, Hodge championed a position summarised by church historian K S Latourette as “Augustinianism as represented in Calvin, the Westminster Confession, and the historic faith of the Reformed Churches.”<sup>6</sup> At the end of the American Civil War (1865) however, the Old School and New School synods entered into negotiations that resulted in reconciliation of the two parties, thus bringing to an end a 32-year split (1837-69). Given the extent of New School deviations from traditional Calvinism, the very possibility of such a reconciliation indicates that an inclusivist tendency to allow greater latitude for doctrinal divergence within the Presbyterian church was already underway several decades before the onset of acute controversies over theological liberalism and biblical criticism.

### **Confessional and Revivalistic Influences upon the Formation of the Bible Presbyterian Church in America**

The birth of the Bible Presbyterian Church on September 6, 1938 is one outcome of a complex struggle for the soul of American Presbyterianism. During the 1920's several major Protestant denominations in America, including the Methodists, Northern Baptists and Presbyterian Church (USA), were torn asunder by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. Modernists subjected the Bible to skeptical criticism and attempted to bring the teaching of the church into conformity with contemporary secular theories of ethics, psychology, natural science and other disciplines. Fundamentalists repudiated the modernist innovations and stood firmly for traditional notions of biblical authority. At the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly of 1923,

the fundamentalist party succeeded in passing an ordinance requiring all candidates for the ministry to signify their assent to the following five doctrines, deemed essential to the Christian faith: (1) the inerrancy of the Bible, (2) the virgin birth, (3) the vicarious atonement, (4) the bodily resurrection, (5) the historicity of the miracles recorded in the New Testament. This action, though a symbolic victory for the fundamentalist cause, failed to root out modernist influences from the Presbyterian Church.

As the ecclesiastical struggle continued through the 1920's, control over Princeton Seminary, the flagship theological institution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), became a high priority for both sides. Among the anti-modernists at Princeton, the most eminent and outspoken was the formidable New Testament professor J Gresham Machen (1881-1937). Machen stood at the end of an unbroken line of apologists for Old School Presbyterian orthodoxy at Princeton, a line stretching from Archibald Alexander through Charles Hodge and later B B Warfield. When, in spite of Machen's utmost efforts, the Princeton Board of Governors was reorganised in such a way as to leave the door open to modernist teaching at the Seminary, Machen and several of his faculty colleagues at Princeton withdrew to form Westminster Theological Seminary in June 1929.

For the remainder of his life, Machen worked tirelessly to oppose theological modernism and to promote Reformed Orthodoxy. He played an instrumental role, for example, in establishing the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (1933) to support conservative Presbyterian missionaries outside the official channels of the Presbyterian Church (USA). As the inclusivist coalition solidified its control over the institutional machinery of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Machen was eventually defrocked in 1936 after being charged with insubordination and disturbing the peace of the church because of his involvement with the Independent Board. Machen's final legacy (undertaken in the months just prior to his untimely death from pneumonia on January 1, 1937) was thus the creation of a new denomination, originally known as the Presbyterian Church of America, later renamed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

When Machen resigned his faculty appointment at Princeton in 1929, there were 29 Princeton students who withdrew from the seminary to follow their conservative mentor to the newly-founded Westminster

## CONFESSIONALISM AND REVIVALISM

Seminary. One of these 29 was a determined young man by the name of Carl McIntire (b 1906), who would become one of the first graduates of Westminster. From the beginning McIntire showed great zeal in the fundamentalist cause. His attacks upon modernism and his involvement with the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions resulted in his being expelled, along with Machen, from the ministry of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in 1936.

At the same time serious divisions began to appear within the conservative Presbyterian camp itself. The premature death of Machen deprived the nascent Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) not only of its pre-eminent theologian but also of the only commanding personality capable of keeping the denomination united. It soon became apparent that there were at least two irreconcilable schools of thought within the OPC. One group, identified with Westminster Seminary, inclined toward an amillennial, figurative interpretation of eschatology and advocated Christian freedom to use or abstain from alcohol and tobacco. The other group, headed by McIntire, believed in a premillennial eschatology by which Christ would return to earth to establish and rule over an earthly kingdom lasting 1000 years. McIntire also took a strong prohibitionist stand against the use of alcohol. When the OPC declined to adopt either premillennialism or prohibition, McIntire and his allies again chose the course of ecclesiastical separation. Their first step in the summer of 1937, even before the official inauguration of the new Bible Presbyterian denomination, was the establishment of Faith Theological Seminary in Wilmington, Delaware.

So the Bible Presbyterian Church in America is very much a product of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. This bitter conflict in some ways actually obscured the differences between confessionalists and revivalists, as both made common cause against radical modernist revisions of the traditional faith. Yet both confessional and revivalist strands made distinctive contributions to the formation of Bible Presbyterian identity. The historical linkage with old Princeton via Machen and Westminster Seminary constitutes the confessional heritage of Bible Presbyterianism. In *A Brief History of the Bible Presbyterian Church and its Agencies*, we find this emphatic statement:

The Bible Presbyterian Church is a confessional church, standing without apology and reservation for the historic Christian faith and for that great body of doctrine on which the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

stood consistently from its inception in colonial times until the destruction of the witness in 1936 by judicial decision. The Bible Presbyterian Church is prominently and pronouncedly a doctrinal church, and finds that doctrine most purely and adequately expressed in the great Confession of Faith issued by the Westminster Assembly of 1647.<sup>7</sup>

Concerning revivalism, the Bible Presbyterian Church shared the general fundamentalist emphasis on bringing in a bountiful harvest of born-again souls before this present evil age draws to a close. In the following quotation from an official Bible Presbyterian document explaining the reasons for Bible Presbyterian separation from the confessional Presbyterian Church of America (later Orthodox Presbyterian Church) established by Machen, the revivalistic intent is unmistakable:

Without impugning the sincerity of those who dominated the then Presbyterian Church of America, it was felt by many that, due to a peculiar combination of circumstances, there was no possibility that that body would ever become a widespread or effective witness to the great spiritual succession of American Presbyterianism . . . so for the sake not only of the principles at stake, but also with a view to the need for the establishment of a great nation-wide witness to the Word of God, there were many who believed that the then “Presbyterian Church of America” as it had existed up until that time represented a “false start.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus the confessionalism of the Bible Presbyterian Church is concerned not only with the purity of truth but also with persuasion—sound theology ought to bring forth demonstrable fruit in the form of a mass grassroots movement for reform within the Protestant churches. This Bible Presbyterian concern for “a great nation-wide witness to the Word of God” owes much to the spirit of revivalism which brought the Gospel message to ordinary folk in plain and simple language.

### **The Calvinistic Revivalism of the Bible Presbyterian Movement in Singapore**

On a cold January day in 1948, a young man from the distant tropics arrived in Wilmington, Delaware at the campus of Faith Theological Seminary. The path to Wilmington had been circuitous; the road ahead leading from Faith Seminary back to Singapore after the completion of his theological studies in 1950 would be anything but straight and smooth, yet in a pastoral career spanning nearly half a century, through ecclesiastical controversies and personal tragedies, the basic convictions

## *CONFESSIONALISM AND REVIVALISM*

of that young man, Tow Siang Hui (given the English name ‘Timothy’ by his American seminary classmates) have remained unshaken. Because the development of the Bible Presbyterian movement in Singapore is so inextricably linked to the personal history of its founding pastor, the focus of this section will be on the synthesis of confessional and revivalistic themes forged by Rev Timothy Tow.

Tow Siang Hui was born in Swatow, China in 1920 and emigrated with his family to Malaya in 1926. The Tow family had Christian roots reaching back to the pioneering days of the English Presbyterian Mission in Swatow: Tan Khai-Lin, the first Presbyterian convert in Swatow (1859), was Tow Siang Hui’s maternal great-grandfather. Siang Hui’s grandfather became pastor of the English Presbyterian Church on Upper Serangoon Road, Singapore. While his immediate family settled in peninsular Malaya, Siang Hui was sent for schooling in Singapore, where he graduated first in the Anglo-Chinese School class of 1937.

Despite his Christian upbringing, Tow Siang Hui’s conversion came at the age of 15 through the preaching of the extraordinary Chinese evangelist Dr John Sung. In several of his published works, Rev Timothy Tow bears witness to the deep and abiding influence of John Sung’s ministry on his own life and thought. A brief reprise of Sung’s career may therefore shed some light on the revivalist heritage of the Bible Presbyterian movement in Singapore.

Born in 1901 into a Methodist pastor’s family in the Hinghwa region of Fukien province, John Sung was set apart from birth for the Christian ministry by his parents. A good student, Sung left China in 1920 to undertake advanced studies in America, eventually receiving a PhD in chemistry from Ohio State University. Recalling that he had been consecrated by his father to Christian service, Sung then declined several secular job offers to enrol in the prestigious Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

At Union, a stronghold of theological modernism, his faith was deeply shaken and he even contemplated suicide, until the night of February 10, 1927, early in his second semester when Jesus appeared to him in a vision and said: “My son, your sins are forgiven! Your name is now changed to John.” After this decisive encounter with Jesus, the life of John Sung was radically transformed. At the campus of Union Seminary he repeatedly recounted the story of his conversion and called on his

liberal classmates and lecturers to repent and be saved. The seminary authorities, believing Sung to be mentally deranged, committed him to a psychiatric hospital, where he remained for 193 days, until at last he was extricated through the good offices of the Chinese Consul to America. This period of enforced confinement became a kind of theological retreat in which it is said that Sung read through the Bible 40 times.

Upon his repatriation to China, John Sung embarked on a course of itinerant evangelism that would carry him to the most distant corners of China as well as to the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. Sung's first visit to Singapore came in 1935 when he preached a series of messages at the Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church. In his book *John Sung My Teacher*, Rev Timothy Tow gives this vivid first-hand account of Sung's preaching:

Like Nicodemus this was the first time I ever heard about being born again. Expounding the story of his encounter with Jesus in John 3 verse by verse, Dr Sung pointed his finger at me, "Are you born again? If not, you can never go to heaven! Do you have the new life of Jesus in you? If not, you are bound for hell!" . . .

As I struggled within, I caught a glimpse of younger brother Siang Yew's hand going up. While the struggle raged there came a nudge suddenly from his side. This shot my hand up, as by an electric shock! As my hand went up, my sin-burden rolled down! I saw myself kneeling with Pilgrim at the foot of the cross, released forever from the sin-burden.<sup>9</sup>

When John Sung died in 1944 at the age of 43, his health broken by his relentless schedule, he left a spiritual legacy that lives on in China and Southeast Asia. Apart from the preaching bands which undertook street evangelism under John Sung's influence, many individuals were also moved to enter full-time Christian service. Keith Hinton, writing in 1985, observes that "throughout Singapore today one finds key Christian leaders and influential lay people who attribute not only their conversion but their model of devotion and commitment to service to the ministry of John Sung."<sup>10</sup> One of those who answered the full-time call during the Singapore Pentecost of 1935 was the youthful Tow Siang Hui.

In *The Asian Awakening*, Rev Timothy Tow explicitly describes the continuities between revivalism in the John Sung tradition and the subsequent development of the Bible Presbyterian movement in Singapore. First, there is a personal connection in that several key first-generation Bible Presbyterian leaders, including Rev K C Quek, Rev C T



Hsu, and Dr Tow Siang Hwa, were all active participants in the John Sung revival. Second, the Bible Presbyterians emulate John Sung's example in travelling evangelism and missions. True revival begets evangelism. Third, there is the emphasis on systematic biblical study. John Sung was known as a man of one Book; likewise, examining the curriculum of the Far Eastern Bible College, the seminary established by Rev Tow in 1962, one finds a strong biblicist orientation towards familiarising students with the text of Scripture itself, eg, Bachelor of Theology candidates are required to study at least two years of either Greek or Hebrew, while Master of Divinity candidates are required to read three years of Greek and two years of Hebrew.<sup>11</sup> Fourth, Bible Presbyterians adopt John Sung's adamant opposition to theological liberalism in all forms. Rev Tow remarks: "we inherited the separatist spirit first from John Sung as he spoke against the modernism and social gospel of the thirties . . . One famous saying of John Sung to warn us from liberals is, 'To starve will not die, to eat poison will die.'"<sup>12</sup> Fifth, in discussing John Sung's homiletics, Rev Tow approvingly mentions that in his preaching, Sung spoke the language of ordinary people, used colourful anecdotes, illustrations and allegories to great effect, and employed appropriate musical choruses at intervals during the sermon to drive the message home: "although the doctor's sermons invariably lasted two hours, there was never a dull moment, not like the dry-as-dust lecture-type sermons droning from many a Sunday pulpit, sending many off to Slumberland."<sup>13</sup> The cumulative significance of the above-mentioned affinities appears from the following claim in *The Asian Awakening*: "the Bible Presbyterian Church Movement in Southeast Asia, etc. today is energised by several forces, but that which is the main thrust is the same Spirit that raised up John Sung."<sup>14</sup>

Let us now continue with the story of the youthful Tow Siang Hui in order to discover the confessional roots of Singapore Bible Presbyterianism. After completion of his schooling, Tow Siang Hui worked as an interpreter in the Supreme Court of Singapore, initially under the British colonial administration and later under the Japanese during World War Two. The end of the World War opened a horizon of new opportunities for an ambitious young man in the prime of life. Having been offered a place in London University and the Middle Temple to read law, and with his father's financial backing, Tow Siang Hui had already booked passage in March 1946 on a cargo boat for England, when

the death of his mother and his infant daughter within the space of five weeks brought him up short. As he reflected on the Chinese proverb “Man’s life like morning dew” and thought back to the vow of his mother that he, her eldest son, should become a pastor, he resolved to relinquish worldly aspirations once and for all.

Instead of law school in London, his steps would now be directed to Nanking, China, for theological studies under the venerable Dr Chia Yu Ming. In Nanking, Tow Siang Hui heard about the Bible Presbyterian Faith Theological Seminary in the USA from one of his lecturers, an American woman missionary of the China Inland Mission. With her encouragement and in light of his English-language school background, he applied to Faith in 1947 and was pleasantly surprised to be offered a scholarship. The spiritual pilgrimage begun in China was now to continue in America.

In *The Singapore Bible-Presbyterian Church Story*, Rev Timothy Tow records his initial impression of Faith Seminary and Dr Carl McIntire:

The first time the Singapore student met Dr McIntire was at the full-hour Chapel at Faith on a wintry morning in January, 1948. The speaker had a commanding personality and spoke passionately on the need for a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation. . . .

As the speaker called for young men to arise and take up the cross to follow Jesus in this 20<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation, the Singapore student’s heart was strangely warmed. From that day onwards his heart was knit to that of the speaker as Jonathan’s to David’s.<sup>15</sup>

While deep personal and theological ties were forged during Timothy Tow’s three years at Faith, it should be noted that the Bible Presbyterian movement in Singapore has always remained organisationally and financially independent of the Bible Presbyterian Church in America.

When Rev Tow returned to Singapore in October 1950 to pastor the new English congregation of Life Presbyterian Church on Prinsep Street, what theological lessons did he bring back from America? One mark of Faith Seminary’s influence could be seen in an earnest insistence on separation from unbelief, compromise and false teaching, a stand which led to the creation of Life Bible Presbyterian Church as an independent entity apart from the mother Life Church in 1955. In an article entitled “Our Bible-Presbyterian Heritage” in the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary journal of Far Eastern Bible College, Rev Tow asserts: “from our association with the

## CONFESSIONALISM AND REVIVALISM

Bible Presbyterians in the USA, and from teaching received at Faith Seminary, we have also taken a separatist stand . . . against ecumenism, Romanism, Communism, Neo-evangelicalism and the charismatic movement.”<sup>16</sup>

But Timothy Tow received more from Faith Seminary than the fundamentalist principle of separation, for the linkage of Faith to the old Princeton confessional tradition ensured a thorough indoctrination in Reformed theology. Consequently, Bible Presbyterianism as embodied in Rev Tow and the Far Eastern Bible College is not simply revivalistic and separatist; it is also staunchly Calvinist, as is apparent from the following passages:

if you want to know the roots of this Church and our faith, I must say English and Scottish Presbyterianism and John Calvin . . . the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms which are the standard of our Church and all Presbyterian Churches throughout the world were composed by English divines . . . these were Calvinistic men. Their confession of faith is blue-blooded Reformed theology. So our doctrinal position is also royally Reformed, our system of government Presbyterian, not Episcopal nor Congregational. . . . The five points of Calvinism, but above all the inerrancy and infallibility of Holy Scripture, are reverently taught at our Far Eastern Bible College . . . let it be stated here that any one to be admitted into the brotherhood of Bible Presbyterian ministers must believe and thoroughly know what is comprehended in the Westminster Confession. Or else, let the same person join another church, since he is not of the same faith.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, the Life Bible Presbyterian Church Membership Handbook (1995), a manual designed for instruction of the laity, explicitly affirms the traditional five points of Calvinism, namely, total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints.<sup>18</sup> More evidence as to the Calvinist ethos of Bible Presbyterianism in Singapore may be gleaned from the Far Eastern Bible College prospectus: of the 22 required theology units in the core curriculum, no fewer than 14 are devoted to the content of Calvin’s *Institutes*, the Westminster Standards, and the writings of the twentieth century American Reformed theologian J O Buswell.<sup>19</sup>

The above discussion might be summarised by saying that the Bible Presbyterian movement in Singapore is Calvinistic in theology and revivalistic in spirit. Nor has this harmonisation of confessional and revivalistic characteristics taken place at a purely theoretical level. This

singular type of Calvinistic revivalism has evoked a strong response in Singapore, and it has done so without outside support and in spite of schisms occasioned by doctrinal differences and personality clashes. Given the general unpopularity of Calvinist theology on the contemporary Protestant scene, one might be tempted to conclude that adherence to Calvinism has limited the appeal of the Bible Presbyterian message, but church growth scholar Keith Hinton offers an alternative perspective when he points out that “churches which were clear in their beliefs, strict in their membership requirements, rather isolationist and actively evangelistic, grew much faster than those with a social message, ecumenical associations and easy membership terms.”<sup>20</sup> Hinton’s principle implies that people are more loyal to a church with a clear, distinctive message. Thus at least from a church growth standpoint, the clear Calvinist stance of the Bible Presbyterian movement is not a liability but an asset, for this stance differentiates Bible Presbyterian teaching and reminds members and potential members that theirs is a unique tradition worthy of their loyalty.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Keith Hinton, *Growing Churches Singapore Style: Ministry in an Urban Context* (Singapore: OMF Books, 1985), 116.

<sup>2</sup> William W Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 141-2.

<sup>3</sup> Lefferts A Loetscher, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 70.

<sup>4</sup> Mark A Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 233.

<sup>5</sup> J R Fitzmier, “Old School Presbyterians,” *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, eds. Daniel G Reid, Robert D Linder, Bruce L Shelley, and Harry S Stout (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 843.

<sup>6</sup> K S Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953), 1262.

<sup>7</sup> *A Brief History of the Bible Presbyterian Church and its Agencies* (1965), 10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Tow, *John Sung My Teacher* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1985), 24-5.

<sup>10</sup> Hinton, 22.

<sup>11</sup> *Far Eastern Bible College Prospectus*, (Singapore, 1997), 18.

## CONFESSIONALISM AND REVIVALISM

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Tow, *The Asian Awakening* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1988), 66.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Tow, *The Singapore B-P Church Story* (Singapore: Life Book Centre, 1995), 51-2.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Tow, "Our Bible-Presbyterian Heritage," *Far Eastern Bible College Thirtieth Anniversary Magazine* (Singapore, 1992), 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>18</sup> *Life Bible-Presbyterian Church Membership Handbook* (Singapore, 1995), 13-16.

<sup>19</sup> *Far Eastern Bible College Prospectus* (Singapore, 1997), 17-8.

<sup>20</sup> Hinton, 28.

---

*Blake Hurst is a PhD candidate in the field of history of Christianity at Rice University, Houston, Texas. He first visited Singapore in 1990-1 through a US government Fulbright Scholarship for postgraduate research in economics at NUS, and returned to Singapore in November '96 to carry out doctoral dissertation research on theological education in Southeast Asia. In September '97, he will begin studies at the Stanford University Law School.*

---

## Class Notes

**Eddy Ho Pitt Lup** (BTh '75) has been appointed dean of the English department of Malaysia Bible Seminary.

Rev Dr **Bob Phee** (BTh '77) led Sembawang Bible-Presbyterian Church to start a new outreach called Moriah Bible-Presbyterian Church. The ground breaking service at Simei was held on February 23, 1997.

Rev **Tan Eng Boo** (BTh '78), pastor of Grace Bible-Presbyterian Church spoke on "Life After Death" at the FEBC Gospel Rally on March 8, 1997.

Rev **Eric Kwan** (BTh '82), and **William Teo** (CertBS '90) have joined the ministry staff of Zion Bible-Presbyterian Church.

Rev **Stephen Khoo** (BTh '85) has been released by Life Bible-Presbyterian Church to be the pastor of Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church, Melbourne, Australia—an outreach of Calvary BPC.

Rev **Haposan Siregar** (BTh '87) was conferred the MA in Missions by Sekolah Tinggi Theologia Injili Indonesia (STTI) on June 16, 1997. His thesis was on the history and growth of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Indonesia.

---

**Continued on page 117**

## **CALVIN'S CLOCK OF THE SEVENFOLD WILL OF GOD**

Timothy Tow

The subject originally assigned to me for the 15<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the ICCC was "Calvin Alive." When the ICCC convened in Geneva in 1950 for its 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress, we laid a wreath on Calvin's tomb. Though he is dead for 433 years, his theology is alive. Like Abel who offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, he being dead yet speaketh (Heb 11:4).

Yes, Calvin is alive today and he speaks most eloquently through his 1650-page masterpiece *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He spoke to my heart through an elective course on the *Institutes* taught by Dr John Sanderson in the heyday of Faith Seminary, 1948. I became immediately an ardent disciple of the great theologian. During the summer of 1948 I read the four books of the *Institutes* right through, with the help of Chambers Dictionary, the best for theological terms.

After my graduation from Faith Seminary and we founded the Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore, we taught Calvin's theology as one of the core subjects in our curriculum. In 1975 we made an abridgement of the first two books. By July 1997 we are endeavouring to have the abridgement of all the four books printed in one volume of 600 pages. If you desire a copy of the complete works, please print your name and address clearly with the Congress Office, and we shall mail it to you.

Now, from the study of Calvin's *Institutes*, in which he, of all theologians, probes most deeply into the mysteries of God's decrees, I would present it more graphically as "Calvin's Clock of the Sevenfold Will of God." A clock tells time by its three hands, the hour hand, the minute hand and the second hand. But these are out-workings of the mechanism beneath the face of the clock. The moving hands are simple to read, but not the inner workings of the clock.

## SEVENFOLD WILL OF GOD

In this brief study of the complex will of God from Calvin's teaching, we can classify them under four headings: **The General:** (1) Preceptive, (2) Desiderative. **The Specific:** (3) Directive, (4) Cooperative, (5) Punitive and "Chastitive" (*Chastitive* is a new word we've coined from the word *chastise*). **The Extraordinary:** (6) Permissive. **The Predetermined:** (7) Decretive.

### Preceptive

Preceptive comes from the word *precept* (ie command, moral instruction). God's commands, moral instructions are given to us in an open Bible. The more Bible we read the more we know of His holy will for our lives. The Bible is a torchlight to shine on our pathway through this dark world here below (Ps 119:105). It is a road map to guide us to our destination (Ps 119:35). Calvin believes in verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, infallible and inerrant, in the strongest possible terms. In book I chapter VII, paragraph 1 of his *Institutes* he says,

It is only in the Scriptures that the Lord hath been pleased to preserve His truth in perpetual remembrance. It obtains the same complete credit and authority with believers, when they are satisfied with its divine origin, as if they heard the very words pronounced by God Himself.

### Desiderative

The second aspect of His general will is His Desiderative will. When Jesus gave us John 3:16 he was offering the whole mankind His saving grace. It is of His character, loving and merciful, to desire all men to be saved. "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek 33:11). Now, the hyper-Calvinists will retort that God's love is only to the elect. So John 3:16 is directed to the elect, not to all mankind. Those who so say try to out-Calvin Calvin. For if you read Calvin's commentary on John 3:16 he says God's saving grace is extended to the whole world. But not all will believe. Here comes Augustine's famous diction, "Sufficient for all, efficient for the elect." To say John 3:16 is offered only to the elect is like holding a grand Christmas sale with a proviso "Only buyers need enter"! Are you a Christian? Believe in Him now and you will be saved, elect or no elect. Indeed, if you truly trust Him, love Him, you are elect (Rom 8:28).

The Specific Aspect of God's Will may be delineated in three main parts: The (3) Directive, (4) Cooperative, (5) Punitive-Chastitive.

### **Directive and Cooperative**

The Directive may be seen in Abraham's command to his servant to go back to his country in Mesopotamia to get a bride for Isaac. So the servant went. And when he went at the command of his master the Lord blessed him with quick success. He found Rebecca with little trouble, and he testified, "I being in the way, the Lord led me" (Gen 24:27) This blessing of God we call His Cooperative will, number 4 of His Sevenfold Will.

### **Punitive-Chastitive**

Conversely, when Balaam the Gentile prophet was tempted by the Moabite King Balak with sevenfold honours to curse Israel, and he was minded to go, God permitted him, but to his death. When we deliberately go against God's Will which is already revealed, we are justly punished—this is the Punitive will of God, fifth on the list. A corollary to God's Punitive will is His chastisement. His "Chastitive" will against David for his sin is a corrective from a loving father. So David was taught a grim lesson, but he did not go into perdition like Balaam. Those punished under God's Punitive Will are lost. Those under His paternal chastisement are spared. A father's cane is a sugar cane.

### **Permissive**

The Extraordinary refers to God's Permissive will. Normally God will not allow Job to be hurt. Since Satan's accusation of Job insinuated that God's servant loved Him because of material gains, God permitted Satan to take away all his possessions including the lives and properties of his ten children. Job underwent the test and came out with flying colours. Satan was defeated. Now, when God permitted Satan to bring misery to Job, He purposely permitted from His Omnipotence. He did not permit because He was too weak to resist Satan like an old indulgent father giving way to his wayward son. How do we react when God allows troubles to overwhelm us? Let us say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15). Calvin is most emphatic on suffering for Christ's sake. His emblem is a hand holding a heart with these words,



## SEVENFOLD WILL OF GOD

“My heart I offer to You, Lord. Promptly and sincerely.” God’s Permissive will is the sixth in His Sevenfold will.

### **Decretive**

The seventh and last aspect of God’s will is the deepest, like the mechanism of the clock. It is the Predetermined or Decretive will. Ecclesiastes 3 tells us that our birth, death and marriage or singlehood are predestinated of God. So is our salvation. If God did not elect us to be saved before the creation of the world, we would not be saved. Now when He planned to save us, it was entirely “according to the good pleasure of His own will” (Eph 1:5). Nor did He choose us because He foresaw we would be better than others. This is proved by Paul’s statement on Esau and Jacob (Rom 9:1-13):

(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

Thus we are saved by grace, through faith, not of works lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9).

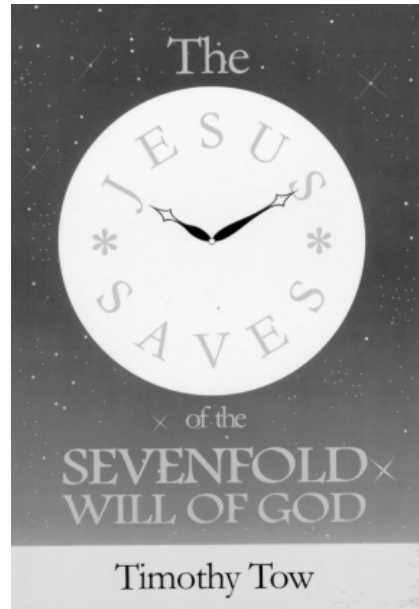
### **What About The Lost?**

The most difficult question to answer is, what about the lost? Did God also predestinate them? Most certainly, or else how can He be God Almighty, All-knowing, All-present? Although God had predestined the lost, the loss of the lost is due to themselves. God is not author of sin. Let us illustrate with a moot question familiar with law students. Suppose I invite you to my birthday party. On your way to my party, you step on a banana skin and break your kneecap. Am I answerable at law? The verdict is “No.” Law judges on the immediate cause, not the remote cause. So does divine justice. Thus Jesus says of Judas, “The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born” (Mark 14:21). The matter of predestination never crossed Judas’ mind. The reason why he betrayed Jesus was his hatred of the Lord for His not assuming kingship to fight the Romans (John 6:15). His motive in serving the Lord was materialistic. Oh, how he would become His Prime Minister! As he parted company with his Lord, Jesus said of him, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas

Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray Him” (John 6:71).

Calvin clearly sees the blame in the reprobate to rest on themselves. In book III chapter XXIV paragraph 17 of his *Institutes* titled, “Election Confirmed by the divine Call. The Destined Destruction of the Reprobate Procured by Themselves,” he concludes: “The doctrine I maintain still remains unshaken, that the reprobate are hated by God, and that most justly, because being destitute of His Spirit, they can do nothing but what is deserving of His curse.”

This completes our very brief study of Calvin’s Clock of the Sevenfold Will of God. This is a synopsis of His teaching from a comprehensive study of the Bible. For a fuller study, I offer you my book on the *Clock of the Sevenfold Will of God*. “Calvin Alive.” Amen.



---

*Rev Dr Timothy Tow is senior pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, and principal of Far Eastern Bible College. The above message was delivered to the 15th World Congress of the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC), February 12-21, 1997, Santiago, Chile.*

---

# **HYPER-CALVINISM IN THE LIGHT OF CALVIN**

Jeffrey Khoo

Calvinism is that system of doctrine derived from the great French theologian—John Calvin (1509-64)—author of the famed reformed manifesto called *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536). However, “The Calvinism of some men is not the Calvinism of John Calvin, nor the Calvinism of the Puritans, much less the Christianity of God.”<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon who said that was referring to an erroneous version of Calvinism called Hyper-Calvinism. The prefix “hyper” (Gk: *huper*) means “above” or “beyond.” Hyper-Calvinism is thus a twisted form of Calvinism that goes beyond what Calvin in accordance to Scriptures had taught. So it is necessary to identify the aberrant doctrinal distinctives of Hyper-Calvinism to prevent any misrepresentation of true Calvinism. The errors are basically two: (1) the denial of common grace, and (2) the denial of the free offer of the gospel.

## **Denial of Common Grace**

Common grace must be distinguished from saving grace. When we talk about saving grace we are referring to the Holy Spirit’s regenerative work on the sinner through the Gospel of Christ reconciling him to God (Rom 3:24, Eph 2:8-9). On the other hand, common grace is God’s favourable bestowal upon all of mankind of those things necessary for creaturely existence on this sin-plagued earth (Ps 145:9, 1 Tim 4:10). These non-soteric blessings include the gift (1) of time for man to repent (Rom 2:4, 2 Pet 3:9), (2) of the conscience for sin’s restraint (Gen 20:6, Rom 2:14-15), (3) of intelligence, and talent for the arts and sciences (Exod 31:2-11, 35:30-35), and (4) of rain, sunshine etc, for all to enjoy (Matt 5:44-45, Acts 14:16-17).

## **Hyper-Calvinistic View of Common Grace**

Hyper-Calvinists reject the doctrine of common grace. According to them, God hates all unbelievers, and works all things towards their destruction.<sup>2</sup> One of the favourite proof texts cited is Mal 1:2-3 (Rom

9:13). This passage does speak of God hating the wicked, but the Hyper-Calvinistic interpretation is flawed because of *its failure to distinguish between common grace and special grace.*

### **Calvin's View of Common Grace**

Did Calvin teach common grace? There is no question that he did. Consider his words in his *Institutes* 2.2.14,

The power of human acuteness also appears in learning these [ie the arts] because all of us have a certain aptitude. . . . Hence, with good reason we are compelled to confess that its beginning is inborn in human nature. Therefore this evidence clearly testifies to a universal apprehension of reason and understanding by nature implanted in men. Yet so universal is this good that every man ought to recognize for himself in it the peculiar grace of God.<sup>3</sup>

Consider also what he said in the *Institutes* 2.2.15,

When we come upon these matters in secular writers, let that admirable light of truth shining in them teach us that the mind of man, though fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts. If we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, nor despise it wherever it shall appear, unless we wish to dishonor the Spirit of God. . . . Shall we deny that the truth shone upon the ancient jurists who established civic order and discipline with such great equity? Shall we say that the philosophers were blind in their fine observation and artful description of nature? Shall we say that those men were devoid of understanding who conceived the art of disputation and taught us to speak reasonably? Shall we say that they are insane who developed medicine, devoting their labor to our benefit? What shall we say of all the mathematical sciences? Shall we consider them the ravings of madmen? No, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without great admiration. We marvel at them because we are compelled to recognize how preeminent they are. But shall we count anything praiseworthy or noble without recognizing at the same time that it comes from God?

In his *Institutes* 2.2.16, Calvin makes a distinction between common grace and special grace,

We ought to understand the statement that the Spirit of God dwells only in believers (Rom 8:9) as referring to the Spirit of sanctification through whom we are consecrated as temples of God (1 Cor 3:16) [special grace]. Nonetheless he fills, moves, and quickens all things by the power of the same Spirit, and does so according to the character that he bestowed upon

## *HYPER-CALVINISM IN THE LIGHT OF CALVIN*

each kind by the law of creation. But if the Lord has willed that we be helped in physics, dialectic, mathematics, and other like disciplines, by the work and ministry of the ungodly, let us use this assistance [common grace].

In Mal 1:2-3 (cf Rom 9:13) God said, “. . . I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, . . . .” This statement has to do with God’s special grace, not common grace. He chose to save Jacob rather than Esau. However, God’s refusal to bestow on Esau His special grace does not negate His bestowal of common grace on both elect and reprobate. Calvin indeed saw a distinction between special grace and common grace:

. . . the Jews are reminded of God’s gratuitous covenant [special grace], that they might cease to excuse their wickedness in having misused this singular favour [special grace]. He does not then upbraid them here, because they had been as other men created by God, because God caused his sun to shine on them, because they were supplied with food from the earth [common grace]; but he says, that they had been preferred to other people, not on account of their own merit, but because it had pleased God to choose their father Jacob [special grace].<sup>4</sup>

The reprobate receive the blessings of common grace, not because of God’s decree of reprobation, but because of His goodness and kindness (Matt 5:45, Acts 14:17, 17:28, Rom 1:19, Jas 1:17). His decretive will (ie special grace), and desiderative will (ie common grace) must be clearly distinguished or else we may seriously misrepresent the character of God.

### **Denial of the Free Offer of the Gospel**

What is the free offer of the gospel? It is the Calvinistic view that the gospel is to be preached to all indiscriminately, and that God sincerely invites everyone, elect and reprobate, to repentance and salvation in Christ.

### **Hyper-Calvinistic View of the Gospel Offer**

Hyper-Calvinists deny that there is such a “well-meant” offer of the gospel by God. In their view, God does not desire the repentance of the reprobate. They do not believe that God is capable of loving the whole world, yet effectively saving only those whom He had already chosen before the foundation of the world. This does not necessarily mean that Hyper-Calvinists do not believe in preaching the gospel to all people (Matt 28:19-20). What it does mean is that in their preaching the gospel, the love of God may only be applied to the elect, and not the reprobate.

Thus, they consider it wrong in evangelism to tell someone, “God loves you,” not knowing whether he is elect or reprobate. They would rather say, “God loves the sinner,” in their mind applying it only to the elect. So the “world” of John 3:16, for example, is the world of *the elect only* (ie, “For God so loved the *elect*, that He gave . . .”).

### **Calvin’s View on the Free Offer of the Gospel**

Did God sincerely offer the gospel of Christ to the world at large? Calvin answered in the affirmative. Consider his comments on the term “whosoever” in John 3:16, Acts 2:21, Rom 1:16.

On John 3:16, “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,” Calvin wrote,

The outstanding thing about faith is that it delivers us from eternal destruction. For He especially wanted to say that although we seem to have been born for death sure deliverance *is offered* to us by the faith of Christ so that we must not fear the death which otherwise threatens us. And he has used a general term, both *to invite indiscriminately all* to share in life and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is also significant in the term ‘world’ which He had used before. For although there is nothing in the world deserving of God’s favour, He nevertheless shows He *is favourable to the whole world when He calls all without exception* to the faith of Christ, which is indeed an entry into life.<sup>5</sup>

On Acts 2:21, “that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” Calvin commented,

So however much a man may be overwhelmed in the gulf of misery there is yet set before him a way of escape. We must also observe the universal word, ‘whosoever’. For God *admits all men to Himself without exception and by this means invites them to salvation, . . .* Therefore since *no man is excluded from calling upon God the gate of salvation is set open to all*. There is nothing else to hinder us from entering, but our own unbelief.<sup>6</sup>

On Rom 1:16, “the gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God to every one that believeth,” Calvin said,

God does not work effectually in all men, but only when the Spirit shines in our hearts as the inward teacher, . . . *The Gospel is indeed offered to all* for their salvation, but its power is not universally manifest. The fact that the Gospel is the taste of death to the ungodly arises not so much from the nature of the Gospel itself, as from their own wickedness. By setting forth one way of salvation, it cuts off confidence in every other way. When men withdraw from this one salvation they find in the Gospel a sure

evidence of their ruin. When, therefore, *the Gospel invites all* to partake of salvation without any difference, it is rightly termed the doctrine of salvation. For *Christ is there offered*, whose proper office is to save that which had been lost, and those who refuse to be saved by Him shall find Him their Judge.<sup>7</sup>

There is no question that Calvin has a doctrine of common grace:

Paul makes *grace common to all* men, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is *offered to all*. Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is *offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men*, yet not all receive Him.<sup>8</sup>

### **Calvin's View of God's Love for the Reprobate**

Does God, in a certain sense, love those whom He had not elected? or are His feelings toward the reprobate pure hatred? Calvin did see God as loving all men in general, while at the same time loving the elect in a special way. Calvin pointed out the various degrees of God's love in his exposition of Mark 10:21 where Jesus is said to love the rich young ruler. Calvin explained,

. . . since *God loves all His creatures without exception*. It is therefore important to distinguish degrees of love. So far as relates to the present place, it is enough to hold in sum that God embraces in His fatherly love only His children, whom He regenerates by the Spirit of adoption, and that, because of this love, they are accepted at His judgment seat. According to this sense, to be loved by God and to be justified before Him are synonymous. *But sometimes God is said to love those whom He neither approves nor justifies*. The preservation of the human race is dear to Him (the preservation which consists in righteousness, justice, moderation, prudence, loyalty, temperance), and therefore He is said to love the social virtues; not that they merit salvation or grace, but because they aim at something which He approves. . . . Thus the question which might be put is answered, that Christ loves the proud and hypocritical man, although there is nothing more hateful to God than these two vices. For there is no absurdity in God loving the good seed which He has sown in some natures, while rejecting the persons and their works on account of their corruption."<sup>9</sup>

On 1 Tim 4:10, “. . . God, who is Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe,” Calvin wrote,

. . . God's kindness *extends to all men*. And if *there is no one without the experience of sharing in God's kindness*, how much more of that kindness

shall the godly know, who hope in Him. Will He not take special care of them? In short, will He not keep them in all things safe to the end?"<sup>10</sup>

On 2 Peter 3:9 where God says He "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," Calvin commented,

*This is His wondrous love towards the human race, that He desires all men to be saved, and is prepared to bring even the perishing to safety. . . . It could be asked here, if God does not want any to perish, why do so many in fact perish? My reply is that no mention is made here of the secret decree of God by which the wicked are doomed to their own ruin, but only of His loving-kindness as it is made known to us in the Gospel. There God stretches out His hand to all alike, but He only grasps those (in such a way as to lead to Himself) whom He has chosen before the foundation of the world.*<sup>11</sup>

Ezekiel 18:32, and 33:11, reveal the heart of God toward the reprobate, "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye." "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." How can the Hyper-Calvinist then say that there is no measure of love whatsoever in God for those whom He had not chosen to save?

### **God's Desiderative Will**

Hyper-Calvinists are unable to see how God can be gracious to all, and yet at the same time be gracious to some; and willing to save all when He had already willed that only the elect would be saved. To them, it is a contradiction that God Himself cannot reconcile. It must be categorically stated that there is absolutely no contradiction in the gospel offer, and in the grace God shows to both the elect and reprobate. It behooves Calvinists to understand those concepts properly by distinguishing God's decretive will from His desiderative (from "desire") will as Calvin himself did. Dr Timothy Tow explains this aspect of God's will,

It is God's character not to exult like Nero in the torture and death of his Christian subjects, nor like Hitler exterminating six million Jews with a stone-dead heart, but the very opposite. God is good. God is love. So it is in Himself to see sinners turn to Him in repentance, for He is not willing that any should perish.

Thus when we read John 3:16, the most famous verse in the whole Bible, 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,



## HYPER-CALVINISM IN THE LIGHT OF CALVIN

that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,' we take the plain, simple sense that salvation is offered to all mankind. John 3:16 expresses the desiderative will of a God of goodness, to both the good and the evil (Matt 5:45). But there are the Hyper-Calvinists who see God's goodness only on the elect, that they cannot but conclude the world (*cosmos* in Greek) to be the world of the elect. John 3:16 is not a universal offer of the Gospel but a limited one. This is like holding a sale for a departmental store with a restrictive sign under the word SALE—'only buyers can enter'! Now, if these Hyper-Calvinists know there is an aspect of God's will known as the Desiderative, their blind spot on God's Abounding Grace would be removed. 'I counsel thee to buy of Me . . . anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see' (Rev 3:18). . . . By the desiderative will of God we will see clearly what is succinctly stated by Augustine on the effectualness of Christ's death—'sufficient for all, efficient for the elect' . . .

Now, when we see the desiderative will of God applies to all men, we will be the more zealous to spread the Word to as wide a field as possible. We will not like those Hyper-Calvinist Baptist ministers, when approached by William Carey to support his mission to India, be heard saying, 'God had predestined whom He would save. He doesn't need you!' How like the Sale in that departmental store we have mentioned above that has a restriction beneath the big sale sign: 'Only buyers can enter'!

But our God is not static. Our God is dynamic. Our God is not a computer. Our God is Controller of the universe and Comforter to the Church, yea, even to you and me, who says 'And him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out' (John 6:37). God's grace is not bound, but abounding. John 3:16 is God's universal offer to salvation to everyone who believes. When you believe, you will soon know from Scripture you are elect.<sup>12</sup>

If Hyper-Calvinists must insist on denying the reformed doctrine of common grace and of the free offer, they insist against Calvin, and would justifiably have to wear the title "Hyper." We hope they would shed it.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Iain H Murray, *Spurgeon Versus Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995), 68.

<sup>2</sup> Hyper-Calvinism is represented in the literature of the Protestant Reformed Churches (USA), namely, *The Standard Bearer*, the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, and by the books of Herman Hoeksema, Herman Hanko, David Engelsma, and others published by the Reformed Free Publishing

Association. See *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, s.v. “Hyper-Calvinism,” by Peter Toon.

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed John T McNeill, trans Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 273-5; parentheses mine. Calvin’s concept of common grace is also found in 1.3.1-3, 1.4.2, 1.5.3-4, 1.5.7-8, 1.11.12, 1.13.14, 1.17.1, 2.2.12-27, 2.3.3, 2.7.1, 3.2.32, 3.7.6, 3.9.3, 3.14.2, 3.20.15, 4.10.5, 4.20.1-4, 4.20.9-11. See also H Henry Meeter, *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*, 6th ed, rev Paul A Marshall (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 50-6.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, trans John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, nd), 5:464; parentheses mine.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St John 1-10*, trans T H L Parker (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1993 reprint), 74. Italics mine.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles 1-13*, trans John W Fraser and W J G McDonald (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1989 reprint), 62.

<sup>7</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans Ross MacKenzie (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1991 reprint), 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-8. See also “Free Offer of the Gospel,” in Graham Miller, *Calvin’s Wisdom* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 119-20.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke*, vol 2, trans T H L Parker (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1989 reprint), 257-8.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, trans T A Smail (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1991 reprint), 245.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St Peter*, trans William B Johnston (Grand Rapids: Wm B Eerdmans, 1989 reprint), 364.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Tow, *The Clock of the Sevenfold Will of God* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1991), 40-6.

# **PREMILLENNIALISM**

Charles Seet

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus has promised to return. It also provides us with some clues about what will happen before His Return, during His Return and after His Return. And if we want to gain a complete picture of what will happen, we have to study the prophetic passages of Daniel 2, 7, 11:36-12:13, Ezekiel 37-48, Zechariah 12-14, Matthew 24, 1 Corinthians 15:20-57, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and most of all Revelation 4-22. Now it will not be possible for us to look at all these passages here, but I trust that if you are keen on this subject you will take time to study them carefully by yourself. If you were to interpret them literally with an unbiased mindset, you will probably arrive at the scenario described below.

## **The Premillennial View of Christ's Return**

Before Jesus returns, several powerful empires and nations will rise and fall, culminating with a very powerful rule of the whole world by one person who is called the Beast or the Antichrist. By the time the Antichrist appears, the Gospel of Christ would have been preached in the whole world, but there would also be a great falling away from the faith by the church at large. The Antichrist will make a peace treaty with the nation of Israel at first but then he will suddenly break this treaty and will oppress Israel, and demand to be worshipped in the Temple as god. This will be a time of great suffering for Israel but God will send miraculous plagues of judgment to punish the whole world. Another end-time figure called the False Prophet will appear on the scene and together with the Antichrist, they will respond with miracles of their own done by the power of Satan.

In the midst of all this turmoil, the greatest military offensive in all history will be launched against Israel. And just at the moment when everything seems bleak, Jesus Christ will return as King of kings and Lord of lords to save Israel and defeat the Antichrist and the False

Prophet and cast them into the lake of fire. And then, according to Revelation 20, Satan will be bound for a thousand years in the bottomless pit. During the thousand years Jesus will rule on earth together with all the raptured and resurrected saints. All Israel will be saved and will worship Christ in a glorious temple described in the book of Ezekiel. The world rule of Christ will result in the most perfect peace, order and harmony that this world has ever known. This peace and harmony will even extend to nature; lions will eat straw, children will be able to play with snakes which will no longer be poisonous.

At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released to stir up one final rebellion against God on earth, but once again God will defeat him and this time he will be cast into the lake of fire to burn forever. All the dead who are not saved shall be resurrected, judged and cast into the same lake. The old heaven and old earth will then be utterly destroyed, and a new heaven and new earth will appear in their place, together with a new city which is the new Jerusalem where the saints will dwell forever with the Lord.

What I have just described to you is the result of taking all of the eschatological data found in the Scriptures plainly and literally and it is known as the premillennial view of Christ's return. Why is it called premillennial? Because in this view, Jesus returns before the thousand years. This distinguishes it from two other views: postmillennialism and amillennialism. According to those in the postmillennialist position, Christ will return *after* the thousand years and not before it. According to those in the amillennialist position, there is *no literal one thousand years*. It is just a symbol for the present long period of time between Christ's first and second coming.

Of these three views, the one that is held by the Bible-Presbyterian (B-P) Church is the premillennial view, as stated in the B-P Constitution. There are five reasons why we hold to this view, and reject the other views.

### **Premillennialism is Based on a Literal Interpretation of Scripture**

We firmly believe that God had given the Scriptures to us in a clear, simple and straightforward manner. The message is meant to be accessible to the rank and file who belong to God. No special class of

## PREMILLENNIALISM

people such as prophets, teachers, theologians or scholars stand between the people and the message. All of this argues for a principle of interpretation that brings the meaning of the Bible within the grasp of the rank and file of the people of God. This principle, clearly stated, is that of *taking the Scriptures in their literal and normal sense*, and understanding that this applies to the whole Bible, including passages on eschatology. If the plain sense of such a passage makes good sense, there is no need for us to seek some hidden or symbolic meaning.

Any other method of interpretation (eg spiritualising or allegorising the text) takes away partially, if not completely, the message which was intended for God's people. For example, the text that we read from Revelation 20 is interpreted by others as follows: The angel mentioned in 20:1 is Christ Himself. His coming down from heaven is interpreted as His incarnation into this world. His act of binding Satan and casting him into the bottomless pit mentioned in 20:2-3, is interpreted as His death on the cross which removed Satan's power over believers. Those who reign with Christ for a thousand years in 20:4 is interpreted to mean the present church age, where Christ is reigning in the hearts of believers. Those who have a part in the first resurrection, mentioned in 20:5-6 is interpreted as those who are born again, and so the resurrection here is not a physical but spiritual one. And the defeat of Satan's final rebellion in 20:7-9 is interpreted as Christ's Second Coming, and thus it is the same event as chapter 19 which gives the details of how Christ will defeat Satan.

As you can see, those who *do not interpret this passage literally*, take quite a lot of liberties with the text, making it mean things that are not natural to the plain sense of the text. The plain meaning of the text is therefore ignored in favour of a hidden, cryptic message, which only those who are qualified can understand. Now I would like you to tell me honestly: when we were reading this passage awhile ago, did any of you arrive at this interpretation of the text? I do not think so. You probably understood the text in its plain sense—that the events in chapter 20 are not the same as those in chapter 19; and that after Christ returns, Satan will be bound for a thousand years while the resurrected saints will reign with Christ over the nations of the world until he is loosed again to be defeated and destroyed forever.

The premillennial view is the view that one would arrive at quite naturally, without having to twist the Word of God and make it mean

things it does not mean. This is the strongest point in favour of the Premillennialist position, but it is not the only point.

We go on now to the second reason:

### **Premillennialism is the View that Has Stood the Test of Time**

During the first three centuries of Church history, this view appears to have been the dominant one. Among its adherents were Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Methodius, Commodianus and Lactantius. It was only in the fourth century, when the Church was given a favoured status under the Roman emperor Constantine, that the amillennial position was accepted. The famous Church father—Augustine—developed this position. It is the position of the Roman Catholic Church until today.

But though official Church doctrine remained amillennial during the Middle Ages, premillennialism continued among certain groups of faithful believers who were against the Roman Catholic Church. But there were some unfortunate extreme groups that were also premillennialists. They revolted, took over cities, and one false teacher by the name of Jan Matthys took control of the city of Munster, called it the New Jerusalem and declared that he was Enoch, preparing the way for the return of Christ. And so, by the time of the Protestant Reformation, *these extreme groups had given the premillennial position a very bad name*. This helps us to understand why the Reformers did not favour the premillennial view, although they firmly advocated the literal interpretation of Scriptures, which set the stage for Protestants to return to premillennialism.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a Calvinist theologian named Johann Heinrich Alsted revived the premillennial view through his book called “*The Beloved City*.” It was this renewed desire for the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth that accompanied the outbreak of the Puritan revolution in England. But once again this view fell into disfavour because certain extremist groups such as the Fifth Monarchy Men were connected with it.

At this time, a new eschatological view gained popularity, namely, *postmillennialism*. People began to believe that when the world is converted to Christ, the earth would enjoy a time of peace and righteousness for a thousand years. Then Christ would finally return for

## PREMILLENNIALISM

the last judgment. But the optimism that gave rise to this view dissipated with the violent political changes that took place in the world and by the time the First and Second World Wars were over, postmillennialism became unpopular and premillennialism made a huge comeback. In the last two centuries, there has been a greatly increased interest in eschatology, and many books and conferences on the last days have become common. Perhaps the greatest influence and impact for premillennialism has come from a group of believers known as *dispensationalists*.

Now while we disagree with the dispensationalists on their view of history as being split up into many dispensations, we do hold to the same premillennial view that they have. Unfortunately this has caused others to think that we are dispensationalists, or that we have compromised on this point with them. This has been aggravated further by the fact that most churches and institutions that are covenantal are also amillennial. Bible-Presbyterians are among the few that are covenantal and yet premillennial.

My whole point in making this survey of Church history is to show you that the premillennial view we hold to is *not a new view at all*. In fact it is the *oldest* of the three views. And though at times it fell into disfavour because of certain radical or extreme groups that espoused it, the Church always seems to return again and again to premillennialism. It has therefore stood the test of time.

Let us go on to see a third reason why we hold to this view:

### **Premillennialism Gives Us the Right Perspective of Our Present Role in Promoting God's Kingdom**

Some who do not hold the premillennial view have lapsed into emphasising social reform, or reconstruction or dominion theology. Augustine himself, the first great advocate of amillennialism, wrote a book entitled, "*The City of God*," in which he made little distinction between the Church and the State.

Following this, the Roman Catholic Church grew to become not just a religious entity but also a political one, with its capital in the Vatican City, the pope as its ruler, and ambassadors sent to other countries. And there is still much emphasis by the Roman Catholic Church on its role to

effect social and political reform, and the most extreme form of this is Liberation Theology.

Now there are others who did not hold to the premillennial position who also fell into the same error of thinking of our role in God's Kingdom as that of effecting social and political change. But premillennialists are not as likely to fall into this kind of error because, to them, it is up to Christ alone to effect these socio-political changes during the millennium. It is not our role to be involved in these things. Our role in promoting God's kingdom now is simply to preach the gospel of eternal life, and to build up the saints with the Word of God. Our task in this present age is to be used by God to change lives, and not social and political institutions.

Thus far we have looked at three reasons why we hold to the premillennial position. We go on now to look at the fourth reason:

### **Premillennialism is Confirmed by Many Verses of Scripture**

The way to test any doctrine is to compare it with other verses of Scripture. It has been wrongly claimed by those who attacked premillennialism that this doctrine rests on only this one passage of Scripture, and therefore has a flimsy basis. They say that Revelation 20 is the only place in the whole Bible that mentions the thousand years, and since the book of Revelation is full of symbols, the whole case of premillennialism rests on a doubtful interpretation of this symbolic passage.

But this is not true at all. There are actually other significant verses that support the literal interpretation of Revelation 20. One important verse is 1 Corinthians 15:23-24

But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

Although there is no mention of a thousand years in these verses, there is clear evidence of a *long time-gap* between Christ's second coming and the end of the world. And this would clearly disagree with both postmillennialism and amillennialism since in both of them Christ's second coming is also the end of the world. Now look at these verses



## PREMILLENNIALISM

again where Paul is describing the chronological order of the various resurrections. The first resurrection was that of Christ, and that took place nearly 2000 years ago. The second one will occur at the Second Coming of Christ—this is when those that are His will be resurrected from their graves. The third one will occur at the end, when death itself will finally be defeated, resulting in all the rest of the dead being resurrected. But when will that take place? Now look at verse 24 and you will see that the verse begins with the word “Then.” Now this word “then” does not mean “at the time of Christ’s coming,” but “after that.” It actually has the same meaning as the word “afterward” used earlier on in the verse, and we have already seen that that word could mean a time span of 2000 years!

Since there are clearly two time intervals in this verse, the second one, which is between Christ’s coming and the end must then refer to the millennium by comparing this scripture with Revelation 20.

Another important verse is Acts 1:6-8,

When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, *wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both *in* Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Here, we notice that the disciples were asking Jesus when the kingdom would be restored to Israel. They wanted to know if they would see Jesus the Son of David reigning now on an earthly throne over the nation of Israel. Now, if the millennial kingdom was a spiritual one and was to begin at the time of Christ’s first coming (as amillennialists claim), what do you think He would have replied? Christ would probably have said something like, “the kingdom is being restored to Israel right now, but in a spiritual, not a political way, as I reign in the hearts of men.”

But Christ said nothing even close to this. Instead, the way that Jesus answered them implied that the disciples were *right to expect a future restoration* of a political kingdom. He said, “*It is not for you to know.*” We observe that Jesus did not make any correction to what they asked, and by this He confirms that the kingdom *will be restored to the nation of Israel*, but it is not for them to know precisely when this will happen. And till today nobody knows the exact date when Jesus will inaugurate His reign as king in Israel.

But while we await that glorious time, Jesus says that we are to be busy extending His present spiritual kingdom by the power of the Holy Spirit. But God also has His future political kingdom in view—the restoration of the kingdom of Israel and the throne of David which they had about 3000 years ago.

And because of this, we who are premillennial maintain a high regard for the nation of Israel. Although the Jews are presently far from God, they are still a special nation in His sight. Even the apostle Paul in Romans 11:25 tells us that *their present state of blindness will end* when God's plans for the Gentiles are fulfilled. They have not been replaced or superseded by the church, because the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (Rom 11:29). God's plans for them are not finished yet.

Those plans of course include their salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. They will not be saved in any way that is *different* from the way we are saved. But the Jews have the additional benefit of the specific promises that God made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David, promises which include the creation of a visible, political kingdom here on earth that owns a piece of prime land by divine right, that brings God's blessing to those who help them and favour them, and God's curses to those who harm them and seek to destroy them. Actually the amazing events that have taken place in the Middle East in the last 50 years have resoundingly vindicated the premillennial view. God clearly continues to be faithful to the promises He had made to their forefathers. And if this is so evident now, then there are greater things yet to come for them in the millennium.

Many Jews today still cherish this desire, and they look forward to the day when the Temple would be rebuilt and sacrifices offered once again and when the Son of David would reign over them. But if the amillennial or postmillennial views are correct, then all their expectation would be for nothing.

And if the Old Testament saints looked forward with the same expectation to these things, how disappointed they would be to find out that they would be fulfilled *only in a spiritual sense*, in the Church, and not in the real, physical sense that they had expected. Has God *misled* them? Does God make promises to people and then not keep them in the way that they believed He would keep them?

## *PREMILLENNIALISM*

If our answer to these questions is “no,” then we must believe that the kingdom will really be restored one day to Israel and that this will happen only when Jesus Christ returns to inaugurate the thousand years of peace.

We have already seen four reasons why we hold to premillennialism. There is one last reason we want to look at:

### **Premillennialism is the Only View that Commends Hope to a World that is Miserably Failing and Seized with Fear**

Just take a close look at what our world is today: a group of nations that are torn with constant disagreements, with strife, suspicion and pride. More wars have been fought in this century than in several thousand years of history before this. Fifty years of negotiations in the Middle East have still not brought about any lasting peace. Recently we have been hearing rumblings of distrust between China and the USA. Countries like India and Pakistan are in political disarray. The future of Hong Kong is uncertain. Good leadership is enjoyed in some nations for a while but then comes the question of succession. What will happen to Russia when Boris Yeltsin dies? And countries that enjoyed the closest ties can become hostile to each other overnight, like in the Contemplacion case that came up between Singapore and the Philippines. Suggestions of a Singapore-Malaysia merger last year produced some unpleasant responses from certain quarters. Even in meetings of foreign ministers there are undercurrents of unhappiness.

All of these are clear symptoms that things are not well in the world. The very best of human efforts will never bring forth the perfect world that people dream of. All the grand schemes and plans of men have failed. And when we look on these things, we feel sad. But at this point, the Bible gives us the hope of a better world to come. One where the paradise that was lost by the first Adam will be wonderfully regained by the second Adam. One where Jesus Christ will establish His righteous rule over the whole world, and it will be truly glorious. In this second Adam, the whole world will finally be subdued and filled according to the divine mandate God gave to Adam.

But if Christ's reign will be absolute, why will it last only for a thousand years, and not longer? And why will Satan still be able to stir up a rebellion against God after those thousand years? Because, as wonderful

as the millennium will be, it is not meant to be permanent. Once Christ has subdued every enemy, every power, rule and authority, He shall deliver His whole kingdom to God. The millennium is not the final phase of history, it is the semi-final phase. Its glory will still be far short of the glory of the *eternal state* with the new heaven and the new earth. For this reason some have called the millennium the *Silver Age*, reserving the term *Golden Age* for the eternal state that will exist after it. All who are in Christ can look forward to that.

---

*Rev Charles Seet (BTh '90, MDiv '97) is Life Bible-Presbyterian Church's missionary to the Philippines. He serves as lecturer at the Center for Biblical Studies Institute and Seminary, Antipolo, Rizal.*

---

## College News

The following “**Basic Theology For Everyone**” evening courses are offered in the July-November '97 semester: (1) Monday: *The Gospel of John* by Rev Dr Timothy Tow, (2) Wednesday: *The Doctrine of Biblical Separation* by Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo, and (3) Thursday: *The Book of Exodus* by Rev Quek Suan Yew.

Eld **Han Soon Juan** (DipTESL, Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation RELC; MA, Columbia University, USA) has returned to the College as English tutor. He is a member of the FEBC Board of Directors, and an elder of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church.

The following students were added to the **FEBC off-campus certificate** course: Bng Teng Ho (Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church, Pandan), Paul Hoole (Calvary Evangelical Church, UK), Elizabeth Seah (Queenstown Baptist Church), and Sim Peng Sin (Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church, Pandan).

The **22<sup>nd</sup> FEBC Graduation Exercises** were held at Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church, Pandan Gardens on June 8, 1997. The 22 graduands were: **CertRK**: Choi Ji Hyung, Olga Danuwino; **CertBS**: Chung Mi Sook, Amos Go Za Sum, Choi Yeon Yi, Park Jong Gyoo, Pornpayung Uansrithong; **DipTh**: Lai Swee Huat, Lazer Sam Lovelyson; **BRE**: Manuela Fernandez, Heng Jee Seng, Eduardo Morante, Thawng Nei Bil; **BTh**: Kim Yong Gyon, Lee Gi Chen, Phoa Ang Liang; **MRE**: Hahn Eun Sil, Lim Tjap Poh; **MDiv**: Hahn Sung Ho, Lau Yeong Shoon, Lim Jyh Jang, Charles Seet.

# CREATION *EX NIHILO* IN GENESIS 1:1

Quek Suan Yew

## Introduction

Genesis—the book of beginnings—has come under the relentless attack of Satan more than any other book of the Bible. The first mention of Satan in the garden of Eden finds him attacking the Word of God subtly, “Yea hath God said, . . . ?” (Gen 3:1). Since that most disastrous dialogue between the serpent and the woman, the father of lies has not abated in his attack on God’s Word.

Satan has many helpers today. He employs many who call themselves “Christian” to attack the Scriptures. They come with a string of seminary degrees. This makes their attacks seem credible and all the more potent. Many unsuspecting Christians have been duped by these “scholars” so-called. Many of such attacks are found in modern Bible commentaries and new Bible versions.

The attack on the first verse of the Bible is an attack on God Himself who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. The doctrine that God as the Uncaused First Cause created all things *ex nihilo* (ie out of nothing) is denied and rejected. Many false teachings have come forth from the misinterpretation of Genesis 1:1-2. We shall critique four of these major views in the light of God’s Word, using Scripture to interpret Scripture, and then present what the Bible teaches as the most correct understanding of God creating *ex nihilo*.

## The Restitution View Explained

This view contends that there was a chaos in Genesis 1:2. This chaos occurred after God had created an originally perfect universe.<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:1 is interpreted as the first creation of God. This occurred sometime in the unknown past. Both the earth and the heavens were perfect with Lucifer as the ruler. The earth was populated by people without souls, and Eden was a garden composed of minerals (Ezek 28). After a certain time,

Lucifer rebelled against God (Isa 14:12-17). Sin entered into the universe. The fall of Lucifer brought the wrath and judgment of God upon this first earth. The judgment came in the form of a flood followed by a global ice-age. This chaos is described in Genesis 1:2.<sup>2</sup>

The restoration of God's creation required a second creative act. Genesis 1:3-31 describes the second act of God's creation, which is not really a creation but a restoration or restitution. Blocher says,

. . . the six days are not, . . . days of creation, but days of reconstruction. God restored the original edifice after the creation suffered a terrible catastrophe.<sup>3</sup>

This cosmic disaster which occurred between the first and second verses of Genesis 1 constitutes a mysterious gap between the two verses. It is commonly called "the Gap Theory." The renowned Scottish preacher and theologian Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) was the first major proponent of this view.

### **The Restitution View Critiqued**

The foundation of this view is based largely upon a clever mixture of fact and fiction. The fact taken from the Bible is the fall of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12-17. Lucifer did fall because of sin, but not in the fictitious world of the Restitution View. Lucifer rebelled against God and was cast down from heaven (Isa 14:13-15). Jesus affirmed this truth in Luke 10:18, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Lucifer's fall probably occurred shortly after the seventh day of Creation (Gen 1:31-2:3). Soon after his fall, Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:1-6).

The creation of a people without souls has no biblical basis whatsoever. The description of Eden as being composed of minerals is a misinterpretation of Ezekiel 28. Ezekiel 28:13-15 describes Lucifer's beauty before he sinned against God. The fall of Satan occurred in heaven, not Eden (Luke 10:18).

Genesis 1:2 is not a description of a chaos. The two words in verse two, *tohu* (without form) and *bohu* (void) describe the unformed and unfilled state of the earth. The earth was gradually formed and filled by God within six 24-hour days. The final result was a resounding "very good" from God (Gen 1:31). There was no chaos. The Restitution View is unbiblical.

## The Dependent Clause View Explained

Rashi (1105 AD), a well-known Jewish scholar, was one of the first to propose the Dependent Clause View of Genesis 1:1-2. He considered Genesis 1:1 the protasis: “When God began to create” or “In the beginning of God’s creation;” Genesis 1:2 the parenthesis: “The earth being/was . . . ;” and Genesis 1:3 the apodosis: “God said, let there be light.” Adherents to this view include Ewald, Sebright, Eirsfeldt, Orlinsky, Speiser and Bauer.<sup>4</sup> A slightly different position was that proposed by Abraham Ibn Ezra (1167). He too saw Genesis 1:1 as the protasis: “When God began to create,” but instead of taking Genesis 1:2 as a parenthesis, he took it to be the apodosis: “The earth was void and without form.” Ibn Ezra’s view was adopted by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) as well as some Bible translations: NRSV (1991); The Living Bible (1971); The New American Bible (1970); The New Jewish Version (1962); and the New English Bible (1961).

The argument for this view is based on the interpretation of the Hebrew word *bereshit* (in the beginning). Rashi commented,

At the beginning of Creation of heaven and earth, when the earth was desolate and void and there was darkness, then God said, “let there be light.” This verse does not appear in order to show the order of Creation and tell us that the heaven and earth were created first. Because whenever the word *bereshit* appears in Scripture, it is in the construct; so too here, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” should be translated as “In the beginning of God’s creating of the heaven and the earth.”<sup>5</sup>

The interpretation of *bereshit* in the construct state means that *bereshit* is bound to the following word or phrase hence demanding the temporal clause translation of Genesis 1:1. Rashi further argued that Genesis 1:1-2 does not teach an actual order of creation because water was created first before the Scripture said that water was created by God. Thus one is compelled to conclude that verse one teaches nothing about the sequence of Creation. [The implication is that God’s first creative act begins with Genesis 1:3, not 1:1. So we cannot use the book of Genesis to teach that God created *ex nihilo* since matter already existed when God began to create.]

## **The Dependent Clause View Critiqued**

Waltke states that if *bereshit* is in a construct state, then Genesis 1:1 must be understood as a dependent clause. On the other hand, if *bereshit* is in the absolute state, then it must be rendered as an independent clause which is the traditional view.

The Hebrew word *bereshit* is composed of two words: the preposition *be* (in) and *reshit* (beginning, first). The word *reshit* occurs 50 times in the Old Testament. Apart from Genesis 1:1, the form, *bereshit*, appears only four other times, always in Jeremiah (Jer 26:1, 27:1, 28:1, 49:34) and always in the construct state.<sup>6</sup> The reason for the construct state is that *bereshit* appears in these four occurrences before a noun, and not a verb as in the case of Genesis 1:1.

It is admitted that, according to Humbert, in all but one instance, *reshit* is used in the construct state. The only exception is found in Isaiah 46:10 where Isaiah says that God declares the end from the beginning, *mereshit* (preposition *me* with *reshit*).<sup>7</sup> This exception, according to Ridderbos, is significant because it shows that the word can be used in the absolute sense. It is true that the construct can occur with a verb (Hos 1:2) but *mereshit* never occurs elsewhere in biblical Hebrew in the construct with a verb.<sup>8</sup>

No other use of *reshit* is quite like the one used in Genesis 1:1 where *bereshit* occurs with the verb *bara* (to create). It is important to note that in Genesis 2:4, Moses used the unambiguous infinite construct rather than a finite tense-form for the dependent clause, “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth *when they were created*” (*behibbare’am*—the infinite construct). If Moses had really intended his readers to understand *bereshit* as a construct, then he could very well have followed Genesis 2:4 and used the infinite construct.

The anarthrous *bereshit* is no indication that Genesis 1:1 is a dependent clause. Konig and Heidel have shown that time designations in adverbial expressions do not need the definite article. Heidel states, “Terms like *reshit* (beginning); *rosh* (beginning); *qedem* (olden times); and *olam* (eternity), when used in adverbial expressions, occur almost invariably *without* the article, and that in the absolute state.”<sup>9</sup> Waltke comments,

Heidel noted that in Greek transliteration of the Hebrew text, . . . and in the Samaritan transliteration, the first word in Genesis appears to have been



pronounced with the article, *bareshit*. He concluded, therefore, that *bereshit* could be used without or with the article without any difference in meaning. It is more likely, however that the change shows that those responsible for this reading were under the impression that the absolute sense demands the use of the article and accordingly altered the oral tradition.<sup>10</sup>

All the ancient versions (LXX, Vulgate, Aquila, Theodotian, Symmachus, Targum Onkelos) construed *bereshit* as an absolute and Genesis 1:1 as an independent clause. In the Masoretic Text, *bereshit* is accented with the disjunctive Tiphcha. This means that according to the Masoretes, *bereshit* has its own independent accent. Evidently, the Masoretes saw *bereshit* as an absolute.<sup>11</sup> Based on these arguments, there is no need to consider the dependent clause view as a viable option in understanding Genesis 1:1.

### The Title Verse View Explained

This view teaches that Genesis 1:1 is an “introduction” to the account of God’s creation. Genesis 1:1 is merely a caption or general heading for the whole creation account in Genesis.<sup>12</sup> The narrative of God’s creation begins with Genesis 1:2 which is a description of the scene that existed before God’s first creative act took place in Genesis 1:3. Some Bible versions like the *The New International Version* (1971); *The Jerusalem Bible* (1966); and *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (1961) accept this view. The NIV for example renders Genesis 1:1-3 thus,

Gen.1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Gen.1:2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Gen.1:3 And God said, . . .

Note that in place of the conjunctive “And” (so KJV in verse 2) is the disjunctive “Now.” Genesis 1:1 is thus rendered a title verse, not to be taken as part of the creation narrative. This view is very similar to the Dependent Clause View in that the latter interprets Genesis 1:1 as a temporal clause whereas the former interprets it as a title or sub-section indicator like the one found in Genesis 2:4a.<sup>13</sup> Like the Dependent Clause View, this view also implies that the Book of Genesis does not teach the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* since the narrative proper begins not at Genesis 1:1 but 1:2 with the earth already existing.

This view offers four main arguments. The first has to do with the *toledoth* formula in Genesis. The Hebrew word, *toledoth* means “generations.” Genesis 2:4a is thus translated, “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when God created them.” *Toledoth* occurs at the beginning rather than at the end of the sections. Other occurrences of *toledoth* in Genesis are: 5:1 (of Adam), 6:9 (of Noah), 10:1 (of Shem, Ham and Japheth), 11:10 (of Shem); 11:27 (of Terah), 25:12 (of Ishmael), 25:19 (of Isaac), 36:1 (of Esau), and 37:2 (of Jacob). In all of these 10 occurrences, the word *toledoth* is used to introduce the section as a title or caption. In view of this, it is suggested that Genesis 1:1 has to be a title verse introducing Genesis 1:2-31 as the creation narrative.

The second argument concerns the *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (ANET). From the ANET, there appears to be a pattern in the writing of cosmogony in ancient times. Take for example the *Enuma Elish* which is a Babylonian account of creation:<sup>14</sup>

1. Circumstantial clause describing the negative state before creation: “When on high the heaven had not been named . . .” (*Enuma Elish* I:18).
2. Main Clause: “Then it was that the gods were formed . . .” (*Enuma Elish* I:9).

The book of Genesis is observed to resemble this literary pattern of emphasising a *toledoth* formula in Ancient Near Eastern writings.

The third argument has to do with syntax. The *waw* (translated as “and,” “but,” “now,” “even,” or “also”) occurs as the first word of Genesis 1:2 accompanied by a noun and a verb. This argues for a disjunctive *waw* rather than a consecutive one.<sup>15</sup> It is argued that the disjunctive *waw* functions to dislocate the present narrative from the previous one.

The fourth argument involves the understanding of the primitive readers. It is argued that the people in those days were not concerned about whether God created *ex nihilo* or not. It is claimed that the ancient people were not interested in the question of the origin of matter, but of the process of creation. Creation *ex nihilo* was not in Moses’ mind when He wrote Genesis 1:1, and thus cannot be the meaning or intent of Genesis 1:1.

## The Title Verse View Critiqued

Although this view accepts Genesis 1:1 as an independent clause, it is erroneous in teaching that Genesis 1:1 is only a title, and so has nothing to do with creation *ex nihilo*.

The first argument examined: The 10 *toledoth* formulae found in the book of Genesis does not prove that Genesis 1:1 is a *toledoth* formula. The word *toledoth* does not appear in Genesis 1:1. If God had wanted us to understand Genesis 1:1 as a *toledoth* formula then he would have used the word *toledoth*. He did so 10 times in Genesis, so why not in Genesis 1:1?

The second argument examined: The *Enuma Elish* is very unlike the Genesis account of creation. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* could not have originated from sinful man. It can only come from the almighty God who actually created the world without any preexisting material. Waltke astutely observed that there is no exact similarity in structure between the *Enuma Elish* and the Genesis account. Whereas the Babylonian myths use “*enuma*” and the Sumerian myths at times start with “*udda*” to introduce the dependent clause, the corresponding point is only with Genesis 2:4b (where the *toledoth* formula is used), not Genesis 1:1. Quoting Waltke,

None of them begins with the equivalent of the “bereshit” (“in the beginning”) of Genesis 1:1. In fact, Genesis 1:1 has no parallel in the ancient Near Eastern mythologies. Gunkel recognized long ago that “the cosmogonies of other people contain no word which would come close to the first word of the Bible.”<sup>16</sup>

The third argument examined: This argument seems to carry the most weight, but on closer examination we find that the syntax does not actually favour the Title Verse View. Waltke and O'Connor say that the disjunctive *waw* involves two common types of disjunction. The first describes a continuity of scene and participants, but a change of action, while the other is used where the scene or participants shift.<sup>17</sup> With this in mind, we see that the first type of disjunction fits very nicely with the view that God created the heaven and the earth in Genesis 1:1 and then focused His attention on the earth which was without form and void. From verse two onwards, God starts to shape and to fill the “without form and void” earth. There is a continuity between the first two verses of Genesis (ie from heaven and earth to earth only), emphasising that God alone is Creator.

The fourth argument examined: This argument is very subjective. It is impossible to know with any degree of certainty the mindset of the people who lived nearly 3,500 years ago. To state categorically that they did not care about who created the world and how it was created is to be extremely speculative.

God was the Author of the Genesis account, Moses merely His amanuensis. God is the only One who knew what happened, and He knows what will happen. It is thus reasonable to argue that the all-knowing foresight of God required Him to state in no uncertain terms in Genesis 1:1 that He created *ex nihilo*. This in anticipation of the godless theory of evolution, and to refute all God-denying attacks against supernatural creation. God taught the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* through Moses in the very first verse of Genesis. From day one, God created the universe out of nothing. The Lord confirms this in Hebrews 11:3, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

### **Theistic Evolution Explained**

Theistic evolution rejects the historicity of the Genesis creation account. The record though trustworthy is simply a poetic representation of spiritual or moral truths, nothing more. Theistic evolutionists accept the processes of organic evolution as the ways God used to create humans. They have no qualms in linking man’s ancestry to the apes. It is their contention that Genesis tells us who created the world, but science tells us how He did it. This view also necessitates the dispensing of the historicity of the fall of man.<sup>18</sup>

### **Theistic Evolution Critiqued**

The heart of theistic evolution is its application of so-called science to interpret the Bible. Science is either placed on par with or above the Scriptures. There is no basis for the proponents of this view to allegorise the Genesis account to fit science. This is faulty hermeneutics. A preconceived notion with biblical proof-texts to support novel ideas is how heresies are made. The Genesis creation account is not poetry. Genesis 1-2 teaches a very important historical fact—the origin of man and of the universe with God as the Creator of both.

For theistic evolutionists to say that they accept the trustworthiness of the Scriptures and then explain away the literalness and historicity of Genesis is double talk. The Bible categorically tells us that God created the earth and how He did it. By the power of His Word He created the world out of nothing in six 24-hour days.

Furthermore, the rejection of the fall of man as taught in Scripture denies that death was a result of sin. God made it very plain to Adam in the garden of Eden that if he were to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil he would surely die (Gen 2:15-17). Eve's deliberate disregard for this emphatic warning led to her downfall. She became complacent and failed to see the serious consequences of yielding to the tempter. Satan's lie that she would not surely die is a direct attack on God's truth. Note that this attack came from the father of lies. Likewise theistic evolutionists have taken the side of Satan by denying the historicity of the fall, and that death is not the consequence of sin. If death is not the result of sin, then there is no need for eternal conscious punishment. The doctrine of annihilation becomes a seemingly valid option, and the literalness of an eternal lake of fire is rejected. One false doctrine leads to the denial of many other doctrines.

### **The Independent Clause View Explained**

This view of cosmogony interprets Genesis 1:1 as a declaration that God created the original mass called heaven and earth out of nothing. Genesis 1:2 describes the world as it came from the Creator's hand, unformed and unfilled.<sup>19</sup> Grammatically, Genesis 1:1 is seen as an independent clause, and verse 2 consists of three circumstantial clauses describing the condition of the earth when it first came into existence. Calvin wrote, "For Moses simply intends to assert that the world was not perfected at its commencement in the manner in which it is now seen, than it was created an empty chaos of heaven and earth."<sup>20</sup>

This earth when first created was uninhabitable. In the succeeding days, God prepared it to sustain life which could reproduce itself according to the natural laws which He has established.<sup>21</sup> In the first three days of creation, God "formed" the earth with light, darkness, firmament to divide the waters, seas, dry land and vegetation; and God "filled" the earth in the next three days with the luminaries, fish, birds, beasts, and man. This view is supported by the majority of the Jewish and Christian interpreters.<sup>22</sup>

## **The Independent Clause View Affirmed**

This view teaches that God existed before all things, and that the heavens and the earth come from Him. When there was nothing, God created matter with its potential for life. Martin Luther aptly summed up all the arguments when he said, “The plain and simple meaning of what Moses says is that all things that exist were created by God and that at the beginning of the first day, . . .”<sup>23</sup>

Scripture interpreting Scripture is the infallible rule of biblical hermeneutics. Hebrews 11:3 interprets Genesis 1:1-2, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” Genesis 1:1 records God’s first creative act, and so God created the heavens and the earth *ex nihilo*.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Bruce Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1975): 136.

<sup>2</sup> Weston W. Fields, *Unformed & Unfilled: A Critique of the Gap Theory of Genesis 1:1-2*, Master of Divinity thesis (Winona Lake: Grace Theological Seminary, 1973), 45-6.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*, trans by David G Preston (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 41.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, “Recent Translation of Genesis 1:1,” *The Bible Translator* (1971): 156-57.

<sup>5</sup> Chaim Pearl, ed and trans, *Rashi: Commentaries on the Pentateuch* (New York: W W Norton & Co, 1970), 31.

<sup>6</sup> Edward J Young, “The Relation of the First Verse of Genesis One to Verse Two and Three,” in *Studies in Genesis One*, ed J Marcellus Kik, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co, 1964): 4.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1975): 222.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 2nd ed, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963): 92.

<sup>10</sup> See Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” 223.

<sup>11</sup> Although this argument is not necessarily decisive since the Masoretes were not infallible, it has its place. Young, “The Relation of the First Verse of Genesis One to Verse Two and Three,” 5.

<sup>12</sup> Franklin Gruber, *The Six Creative Days* (Burlington: Lutheran Library Board, 1941): 43.

## CREATION EX NIHILO IN GENESIS 1:1

<sup>13</sup> Richard Averbeck, “Old Testament Foundations,” unpublished class notes (Winona Lake: Grace Theological Seminary, 1989), 18.

<sup>14</sup> James B Pritchard, ed, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955).

<sup>15</sup> Examples of this may be found in Genesis 3:1ff [“Now (disjunctive *waw*) the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made, . . .] and Gen. 16:1ff [Now (disjunctive *waw*) Sarai, Abram’s wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar, . . .].

<sup>16</sup> See Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” 225.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce Waltke and M O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 651.

<sup>18</sup> See *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, s v “Evolution,” by Pattle P T Pun

<sup>19</sup> See Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,” 216.

<sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis*, trans J King, (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 69.

<sup>21</sup> John Davis, *Paradise to Prison—Studies in Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 46.

<sup>22</sup> Hasel, “Recent Translation of Genesis 1:1,” 163.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Commentary on Genesis*, trans J T Mueller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 9.

---

*Rev Quek Suan Yew is pastor of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church (Pandan), and lecturer in Hebrew and OT at FEBC.*

---

### Continued from page 83

Rev **Colin Wong** (BTh '87), assistant pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, joined the Medical Missions Team to Vietnam in January. Rev Wong is teaching the Epistle of James at FEBC this semester.

Dr **Jeffrey Khoo** (BTh '89) received the Society for Fundamental Studies 1996 Writing Contest Award for his paper—“Christ’s Active Obedience in His Substitutionary Atonement.” The prize was presented at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Commencement Exercises of Foundations Bible College on May 18, '97 in North Carolina, USA. Jeffrey and Jemima (BTh '89) wish to announce the birth of their second child—May Lynn—born on February 22, 1997.

Rev **David Wong** (BTh '89), pastor of Kulai Bible-Presbyterian Church, edited a book—*So Send I You: An Anthology of Testimonies of Calling to Full-time Christian Ministry*—which was released during the B-P Chinese Missions Conference, April 18-19, 1997.

---

**Continued on page 123**

## **MY SEVEN-COMPARTMENT SURVIVAL KIT IN GOD'S SERVICE**

Pang Kok Hiong

Truly I want to thank our God and our dear Lord Jesus for strengthening my family and me to serve Him in the mission field of Saipan. Five years have gone by so quickly. The Saipan Mission continues to exist by the grace of God! Last year we had four baptisms with 107 converts gloriously saved by the changing power of God through the mighty Gospel. Thus far, about 400 baptised members have returned to the Mainland, and are scattered in 16 provinces of China.

This morning, let me share with you my seven-compartment survival kit in the Lord's ministry.

### **First Compartment: Be Certain of God's Call**

Living a victorious Christian life is not easy. This is more so for a preacher! It is the narrowest path of the narrow path (Matt 7:13-14). Many unexpected temptations and difficulties lie ahead when you serve God full-time. If you are not called, you will not do well. This is because serving the Lord full-time requires special grace from Him. "And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Rom 10:15). If you are called, He will see you through. Although there may be all sorts of discouraging oppositions, criticisms, and testings, you just will not give up but will persevere and labour on! The apostle Paul said, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry" (1 Tim 1:12). Paul testified before king Agrippa, "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19).

My friends, what is your vision and calling? This story was told by one of our lecturers when I was a student at FEBC. A fine young man one day told his pastor that he had a vision from the Lord, and in the sky were the letters "P C." He was so excited about this that he told his pastor,



“Pastor, God has called me to Preach Christ!” The Pastor looked gently at this young man, and asked, “How do you know that ‘P C’ stands for ‘Preaching Christ’ and not something else? It may be the Lord wants you to ‘Plant Corn!’”

Are you absolutely sure that you are called by the Lord to serve Him and Him alone? To serve the Lord is the highest calling. It requires not only a desire to please God, but also a very personal call from God that He wants you to serve Him—the King of kings and Lord of lords. Your call into full-time service is not your choice but His. God wants you to be His special instrument in an appointed ministry.

### **Second Compartment: Know Your Mission**

When I was in the National Service, I learnt about giving “Operational Orders.” It is extremely crucial for a junior commander to know the *mission* he is undertaking for his superior. Likewise in God’s ministry we need to know what our specific mission is. The ministry is not ours. We have to ask our Superior—the Lord Jesus Christ—what His mission for us is. All the famous characters in the Bible knew exactly what God wanted them to be or do. They were successful men of faith because they obeyed Him and were faithful to their calling. What mission has God entrusted to you? Now that you are here in Bible College, prepare and equip yourself for it.

I thank God for FEBC not just for supplying me with all the materials, textbooks or class notes for my ministry, but also for training me to be an all-rounder in God’s ministry. You may not even touch your class notes again after you leave this place, but you have become an effective all-rounder in the specific area the Lord has placed you in. As for me, it is China Missions. I plan to focus on China Missions all my life, God willing.

Once you know the specific ministry the Lord has put you in, *concentrate on it and do it well*. Be singleminded and give your whole heart to this special task. We are but stewards, or servants. “It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:2). What is faithfulness? It is simply being obedient to the Master’s orders! No master will find a steward useful if he does not follow instructions.

### **Third Compartment: Return to the Basics**

The apostle Paul is most learned, but he said these words to the knowledge-boasting Corinthians in 1 Cor 2:1-2,

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

Do not consider yourself a theologian, a lecturer, or pastor if you are not doing the basic work of evangelism leading unsaved ones to Christ. To be successful in the ministry, you need not be a gifted preacher or a renowned writer with many published books. You just need to be yourself and do what is most needful in the ministry.

I remember Rev Timothy Tow once said in the homiletics class, “If you have nothing to preach, preach Christ; then you will not go wrong.” Yes, how true. But you yourself must be convinced that Jesus Christ is the only one who saves; His Cross and His blood are most powerful. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom 1:16).

Preaching Christ is most basic for every servant of the Lord. “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5). Preaching is His ordained method to save lost sinners. The lessons on conversion, regeneration, repentance, confession of sins to Christ, and accepting Jesus as personal Saviour are never obsolete. In fact, this is the key to true conversion, and forming a true Church of Jesus Christ. For “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). And “how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14). What is the use of a preacher if he is not preaching Christ?

So, dear friends, go back to the basics: give a tract, determine in your heart to share the gospel wherever you go and whenever you meet an unbeliever.

### **Fourth Compartment: Realise Your Helplessness**

Jesus said in John 15:5, “I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: For without me ye can do nothing.” In the ministry, we just have to commit everything to Him and trust in His providence. I do not convict or convert

a soul; Jesus does. Only Jesus can save sinners from the guilt and bondage of sin

The great apostle Paul knew very well this very important principle of total dependence on the Lord in the ministry. In 1 Cor 1:17-18; 2:4-5, he said,

For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. . . . And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Obviously, no matter how well we present ourselves in writing or in preaching, if it is without God's blessings, it comes to nothing (Ps 127:1). "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech 4:6). We are but God's instruments and unprofitable servants no matter how much people praise us, and how many people are being blessed in our meetings.

### **Fifth Compartment: Be Motivated By God's Love**

Our motive for staying in the ministry should be this: the love of Christ constrains me. This is the greatest motivation of all. All the great servants of the Lord in Church history were motivated by the realisation that the Son of God has died for them on the Cross of Calvary. Amazing love! He died for me! If just one of these: money, sex, fame, power is the motive of your service, you will surely quit or die! 2 Cor 5:13-15 says,

For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us: that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

I love Him and want to serve Him simply because He first loved me. Jesus asks, "Lovest thou me?" If we say yes to Jesus, His reply will be: "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). In the ministry of God, we must love and feed the flock of God. When there is love (God's love), the sheep will abound!

### **Sixth Compartment: Practise What You Preach**

Is Christ being magnified in you? “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim 4:16).

When I was an Officer Cadet in the Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI), we were called “Officer Cadet Trainee (OCT) so and so.” I remember a store-man telling us off, “OCT . . . Only Can Talk!” Are we Officer Cadets of the army of God who can talk only? How is your personal relationship with the Lord and with the people around you? Are we easily tempted by money, sex, pride and status? Are we wasting our precious time while we are now in the Bible College? Be grateful, be joyful, and be gracious in giving and receiving. May God help each one of us to be positive in taking criticism from others. May we live each day like Jesus our Master who is “the Word made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.” May we fundamentalists speak the truth in love, and be patient with people who have not understood biblical separation. Guard yourself; people are watching you, and your actions speak louder!

### **Seventh Compartment: Guard Against Self-glorification**

It is very easy for us to think that the ministry which we have been entrusted with is “my” ministry, gloating over what “I” have contributed to the work. We need to realise that we are but servants or stewards in His great vineyard. We are too often, intentionally or unintentionally, stealing God’s glory while doing His work. Remember, no one is indispensable in the ministry. Yes, God graciously put you to work, but He can also replace you at any time with someone who is more humble and faithful than you!

May we be reminded that the chief end of man is “to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” We are nothing if He does not help us. It is a privilege to serve Him. At the end of the day we are but unprofitable servants. We have nothing to boast about. “Whether therefore, ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).

### **Conclusion**

These seven points are by no means exhaustive in the discussion of this topic. May we take heed to these few thoughts. The Lord’s return is very soon. I pray that each one of us will be counted faithful before the

judgment seat of Christ on that glorious day. The glories of this earth is nothing compared to the glory to come. So, dear comrades, let us press on to love Jesus, and to make Him known to people around us. Amen.

---

*Rev Pang Kok Hiong (BTh, '92) is a missionary of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church to Saipan where he ministers to workers from China. The above was a message preached to FEBC students during chapel on January 6, 1997.*

---

**Continued from page 117**

**Elia Chia** (BTh '94) received his Master of Divinity from Singapore Bible College on May 9, 1997.

**Anne Wong** (BTh '94), staff-worker of Maranatha Bible-Presbyterian Church, made a trip to Kuching, Sarawak, March 18-22, 1997, to visit **Marilyn Nanta** (DipTh '92) who has established a hundred-member church in Kuching, Sarawak. Anne also managed to meet up with **Tram Epoi** (BTh cand), and Rev **Jo Young Chun** ('96). Marilyn and Young Chun took part in the 8<sup>th</sup> Life-FEBC Holy Land Pilgrimage, May 3-19, 1997.

**Charles Seet** (BTh '90, MDiv '97) was ordained a minister of the gospel on June 1, 1997 at Life Bible-Presbyterian Church. As missionaries of Life Church, Charles and Frieda (BTh '87) with their children—Stella and Michael—have returned to the Philippines on June 2 after a year-long furlough. Charles lectures at the Center for Biblical Studies Institute and Seminary, CTMF PO Box 1031, Antipolo, Rizal 1870, Philippines.

**J S Heng** (DipTh '92, BRE '97) has been appointed principal of Life Bible School, Kenya, Africa.

**George Skariah** (BTh '94, MDiv '96) is appointed lecturer in NT at Jubilee Memorial Bible College, Madras, India. George and Bessy (MRE '96) were recently blessed with a baby girl—Abigail.

**Jack Sin** (MDiv '96) was ordained a minister of the gospel before his congregation at Maranatha Bible-Presbyterian Church on May 25, 1997. Rev Sin is working towards the ThM at Far Eastern Bible College, and will begin teaching Church History in the new semester.

**Yiew Pong Sen** (MDiv '96) who graduated with a BA from Bob Jones University in 1987 visited his alma mater from March 17-21, 1997 to attend the annual Bible Conference and the first alumni reunion for his class of '87. He was among the first BJ students to graduate under the WORLD Fund Scholarship. Pong Sen continues to serve as deacon of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, and warden of Beulah House.

Rev **Alex Wugu** (BRE cand) has a baby girl—Joanne Rhee Nasong'o. Alex is teaching at the Bible College of East Africa, Nairobi, Kenya.

## **GOD’S TACTIC IS HOMILETICS**

Gary G Cohen

First, of course, we wish to express our congratulations to the graduates, and our thanks to the Lord for bringing each of them to this significant milestone in their lives. We acknowledge their labours and sacrifices, and also that of their parents and spouses, to bring them to this happy moment. We also commend this school for its excellence in curriculum and preparation, realising that being a graduate from this institution means that a sound preparation in the historic Christian faith has been imparted. It is now up to the graduates, as well armed soldiers of Christ, to display bravery and courage on the spiritual battlefield to which they are being sent.

### **“Tactic” and “Homiletics”**

When this topic—“God’s Tactic Is Homiletics”—was requested of me, my first reaction was that it sounded awkward; but just as a beautiful pearl is often uncovered when we lift up the awkward and ungainly shell of an oyster, so this seemingly odd topic contains a vital truth for the Christian graduate of today. The text for our message will be the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> verse of that magnificent first chapter of First Corinthians. As you turn to it, if you have your Bible, let us define our terms.

*Collins English Dictionary* defines “tactics” in this way: “Military: The art and science of the detailed direction and control of movement or maneuver to achieve an aim or task” (*Collins* 1979, 1479). The word “strategy” is today reserved in the military for the larger global or theater military plans; tactics refer to the operational plans for the battlefield where brigades and battalions, companies and platoons, engage the enemy. Thus here, God is the great strategist who has worked out the entire plan of salvation, and the plan to defeat sin and Satan from beginning to end. The Apostle Paul refers to this all-encompassing strategy of victory in Ephesians 1:4-5,

## *GOD'S TACTIC IS HOMILETICS*

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

Yes, God's strategy could well be defined as this all-embracing plan to save those whom he has chosen by His grace. But let us define His "tactics," or singularly "tactic," as referring to the local earthly battle scene, wherein this year's graduate will fight under the banner of the Lord—and, God's tactic for us to accomplish our assigned mission is "homiletics." Now "homiletics" is "the art of preaching or writing sermons" (*Collins* 1979, 702). Thus we have it, "God's tactic is homiletics" means that God's method for winning the lost, mobilising the Church for missions, and for purifying the believer through the testimony of the Spirit, is through the preaching of the Word. This is exactly what is summed up so well in our text, 1 Corinthians 1:21-24,

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

### **God's Tactic for Winning the Lost is Not through the Wisdom of This World**

First, let us observe that God's tactic for winning the lost is not through the wisdom of this world. This certainly doesn't mean that we should despise learning, as some wrongly do; it rather means that learning apart from God and His word, is vain. It doesn't mean that we can't learn any thing from secular knowledge. Moses was learned; Paul was learned; St Augustine was learned; Luther and Calvin were learned. Spurgeon was learned. Luther said that a Christian did not have to know Hebrew or Greek to be a good Christian, but if he wanted to do battle with the heretics he needed to learn these languages. So too, God used Calvin's great learning to doctrinally stabilize much of the Protestant Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Even Festus, the Roman Governor, upon hearing the Apostle Paul, shouted out, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad" (Acts 26:24).

No, our text means that the wisdom and learning of this world, which rejects God and His Word, are flawed. This wisdom, outside of God, is what the Greeks were searching for—wisdom, *sophia*, in the Greek.

1. *The Greeks in their own wisdom created a Pantheon* of gods on Mount Olympus that was exceedingly foolish. While some of their brilliant philosophers were making observations on ethics and duty which would be read for twenty-five centuries, these same Greeks in human wisdom created a scandalous group of gods and goddesses who were totally devoid of morality and ethics. These gods rose no higher than the wild Canaanite gods or the Babylonian or Egyptian gods, like Horus the hawk, or Sebia, the crocodile god. Say, isn't this what the so-called Jesus Seminar is doing today—carving out a god of their own making, in their own image?
2. *The Greeks in their own wisdom created a democracy* that could not see beyond the walls of their cities. They, in their own wisdom (sintainted limited wisdom) were never able to develop any loyalty nor love for other Greeks from different cities. Thus Greek democracy, was a democracy that could not see beyond its city walls, and the disunity of the Greeks caused that civilisation to collapse in 200 BC when confronted by the first Roman legion.
3. *The Greeks in their own wisdom created a government* that crushed their very wisest of thinkers. Socrates, they forced to take poison because his wisdom criticised the leaders of Athens; Plato, was outlawed from Athens for ten years because his wisdom criticised that city's flaws; and Aristotle and his wisdom lived long, only because a brute of a leader—Alexander—whom he had tutored when young, protected him. Yes, no wonder the Apostle Paul rightly declared that God's tactic for saving the world and the lost is not through the wisdom of this world.

### **God's Tactic for Winning the Lost is Not by Working Signs and Wonders**

Secondly, let us observe that God's tactic for winning the lost is not by working signs and wonders, as a spiritual magician. This is what the religious leaders and zealots in our Lord's day were looking for (1 Cor 1:22). This is what Satan tempted Christ to do in His ministry, when he



challenged our Lord to turn the stones into bread, and when he dared the Lord to leap from the Temple. But Christ's witness to His deity and His messiahship was, as ordained by the Father, the testimony of a life lived in a totality of holiness and faith. Christ's messiahship was self-authenticated by His holiness! Christ as a real man not only shared the human body, but he shared our position in this world—He did not do magic tricks or signs when he was hungry; rather He—like we must—waited in faith upon the Father's provision for His needs. Even when He was about to be crucified, He trusted in and waited upon the Father's provision, and did not resort to His miraculous powers to escape. No, He trusted in the Father—like we must—when we are in trials. And it is precisely in this seeming weakness of strength, that His almighty power was shown; and shown with a holiness that testified against every one who would reject Him as Saviour. It is this homiletical proclamation of this divine-human Christ and His cross that we bring, by which God has deigned to show His mighty power to save!

Yet, in the Crucified Christ is seen the power of God! He did perform many signs, but not to help Himself nor to save Himself. He worked miracles out of love and compassion upon the crippled and blind of this world—but He would not perform signs merely to force belief; His plan was rather forged in a testimony of His holiness, and those who were called saw this holiness, and beheld this power, and they believed. Yes, no wonder the Apostle Paul rightly declared that God's tactic for saving the world and the lost is not through the working of signs and wonders, as spiritual magicians.

### **God's Tactic for Winning the Lost is by the Proclamation of Christ Crucified**

Thirdly, let us observe that God's tactic for winning the lost is by the proclamation of Christ crucified. This proclamation of Christ crucified is what those of 1 Corinthians 1:24 "who are called" will hear. Of course, Romans 8:30 tells us that it is the efficacious call of God's Spirit that brings them to Christ, which uses the spoken and written Word as it is proclaimed. Jesus said in John 18:37, "Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice." Jesus said in John 10:16, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice." Paul declared boldly in Romans 1:16 that it is "the gospel of Christ," that homiletical proclamation, "which is the power of God unto

salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

Thus graduates, you must never be ashamed of the homiletical proclamation of the gospel! It is the power of God (Rom 1:16)—and the Jews want to see power. It is the wisdom of God (Col 2:3)—and the Greeks want to hear wisdom. It is the sword of God (Heb 4:12)—and the mighty of this world can only be defeated by this two-edged weapon.

When I was a young soldier, I was issued my first rifle. Before that, as a child, I had played with wooden guns and said, “Bang, bang;” but these wooden guns—like the world’s wisdom, like the world’s wonders—had no power. When I discovered that one could hit a bull’s-eye at 300 yards, I felt great power as a soldier carrying my rifle. This is much like the power that you graduates have when you proclaim God’s Word, homiletically! In fact, it is said that the power of the preacher, in Protestantism, is “declarative.” Our power comes not from an archbishop’s chair, but from the Word of God! Thus a preacher, with God’s Word in his hand, can rebuke a king.

Yes, “God’s tactic . . .”—His method for winning the lost, testifying against the world, and guiding the Church—“. . . is homiletics.” That is why Paul makes it the theme of Romans when he cries out, saying, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16).

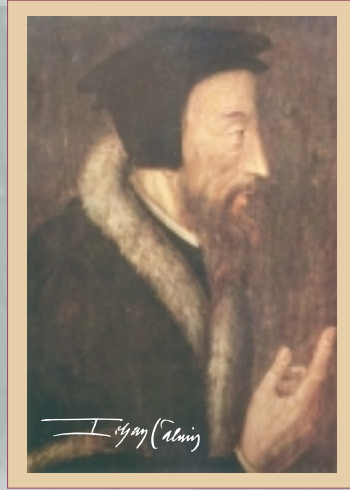
That is why Paul enjoins young Timothy, his graduate of the hour, to “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim 4:2). With the Scriptures in your hand, you hold the power of God to move men, mountains, and nations. And this power is a healing power, and a saving power. No wonder the Apostle cries out, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things” (Rom 10:15 quoting Isa 52:7).

Graduates, may you have beautiful feet—because “God’s tactic is homiletics.”

---

*Dr Gary Cohen, President of Cohen Theological Seminary, delivered the above message on the occasion of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Graduation Service of the Far Eastern Bible College, June 8, 1997.*

---



An Abridgment of

# CALVIN'S INSTITUTES

OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION  
BOOK I – IV

**Timothy Tow**

Available at

**FEBC Bookroom**

9A Gilstead Road, Singapore 309063

Tel : (65)2549188 Fax : (65)2506955

Email : [febc@pacific.net.sg](mailto:febc@pacific.net.sg)

Internet : <http://www.lifefebc.com>

*Opening Hours*

*Mon - Thu 10:30 am to 8:00 pm*

*Fri 10:30 am to 6:30 pm*

*Sat 1:00 pm to 6:00 pm*

*Sun 9:30 am to 10:15 am*

*12:00 pm to 1:00 pm*

○ Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness

Far Eastern Bible College  
22<sup>nd</sup> Graduation Exercises  
June 8, 1997

