



# The Burning Bush

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# THE BURNING BUSH

Theological Journal of the  
FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE

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## Editorial

**“Without the Bible College, the Church would die”** said the Rev Dr Paul Contento who laid the foundation stone of the Far Eastern Bible College. Why? There is a two-fold reason: The Bible College is needed to (1) promote the Church by feeding and equipping her members with the Truth of God’s Word, and (2) protect the Church from false teachings that seek to destroy the Truth of God’s Word. Dr Contento’s statement has its biblical basis in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in His Great Commission, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” (Matt 28:20), and of the Apostle Paul, “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:27-32).

When one becomes a Christian, one is called to be a student of the Bible (2 Tim 2:15). A Christian, whether he likes it or not, is automatically enrolled in God’s Bible school. He is called upon to feed on the milk and meat of God’s Word not only for his own spiritual nourishment and growth but also for the sake of bringing others to the saving knowledge of the Truth (1 Tim 4:16). Every Christian embarks on a lifelong programme of theological learning that will never end.

Institutions of Biblical learning and theological training are not without Scriptural precedents. The family unit for instance may be considered a Bible institute where parents are teachers and children students (Deut 6:4-9). The church, too, may be seen as a Bible institute where pastors and elders are responsible for teaching the whole counsel

of God to God's people both young and old be it over the pulpit, in the Sunday school, in Bible studies, in fellowship groups, in neighbourhood Bible communities, in vacation Bible schools, or in church camps and retreats (Matt 28:20, Acts 20:26-28).

Formal theological training for those called to full-time ministry is not foreign to the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, we find Bible colleges in the days of Samuel (1 Sam 19:20) and of Elijah (2 Kgs 2:3,5; 4:38). Samuel was principal of a school of prophets in Naioth (1 Sam 19:19-20), Elijah founded one in Bethel and another in Jericho (2 Kings 2:3-5), and Elisha had one in Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38). In the New Testament, we see Jesus Himself forming His college of 12 disciples. The 12 underwent nearly four years of full-time theological training under the Master so that they might become Apostles of His church. We also have the Apostle Paul starting a Bible institute in a lecture hall owned by a man named Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). Paul's work in this Bible institute led to the Gospel of Christ being preached throughout Asia Minor, and churches being founded in Ephesus, Colosse, Hierapolis and the seven cities of Revelation 2-3.

The vital need for a fundamentally trained clergy and the evangelistic vision for world missions led the founding pastor of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore—Rev Dr Timothy Tow—to found the Far Eastern Bible College in 1962. It is without doubt that the Far Eastern Bible College is one of the key reasons for the steady growth of the Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore. Keith Hinton in his book—*Growing Churches Singapore Style*—has documented that between 1971-83, the Bible-Presbyterian Church was the third fastest growing church (242% per decade) among Protestant denominations in Singapore. Now in 2003, there are no less than 60 congregations in the Singapore Bible-Presbyterian movement, and the growth has in no wise abated especially in the church planting missions of the various Bible-Presbyterian churches not only in East Asia, but also in Australia, Canada, England and now even Africa (see *The Singapore B-P Church Story* by Timothy Tow).

Since 1962, the Far Eastern Bible College has geared itself primarily to the training of pastors and missionaries in its undergraduate and graduate courses. At the outset, FEBC offered Bible-centred theological training leading to the Diploma in Theology and Bachelor of Theology degree. In 1991, the college introduced the Master of Religious Education

and Master of Divinity programmes for those who already have university degrees. In 1995, the Bachelor of Religious Education degree was added, and in 1997, the Master of Theology for the equipping of those specifically called to the teaching ministry.

FEBC is very much a part of the Bible college movement. The Bible college movement began with the great preacher Dwight L Moody who strongly opposed the modernism found in the universities and seminaries of his day. Moody Bible Institute was thus founded and soon became known as “the West Point of Fundamentalism.” Sadly, Moody Bible Institute is no longer the fundamentalist institution it was founded to be. Not just Moody, but many a Bible college and theological seminary today have shunted from their original fundamentalist moorings.

Nevertheless, the Lord has preserved some old institutions and raised up new ones to meet the challenges of these apostate times. He has not left Himself without a remnant and a witness. Insofar as Far Eastern Bible College is concerned, we have not wavered from the original fundamentalist purpose and stance. It is equally heartening to note that a number of our graduates are actively involved in the Bible college movement. In Myanmar, we have Rev Robert Thawm Luai who though theologically trained, studied with us for a semester at Dr Carl McIntire’s recommendation, and returned to found the Far Eastern Fundamental School of Theology with the support of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, Singapore. In Indonesia, we have two Bible institutes—in Batam, there is Calvary Bible Training Centre, headed by Rev Kiantoro Lie with his team of lecturers, all FEBC graduates, namely, Samson Hutagalung, Phoa Ang Liang, Roska Sihombing, and Johnyanto. And in Medan, there is the Indonesia Bible Institute started by Rev Haposan Siregar. In Kenya, we have Rev Dr Mark Kim, principal of the Bible College of East Africa (a missions work of the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions, USA) in Nairobi with his faculty of mostly FEBC-trained lecturers, namely, Rev Stephen Masila, Rev Geoffrey Lidodo, Francis Onyango, June Tan, Ephrem Chiracho, Gete Sisay, and Violet Malongo. In Kenya, we also have Rev Michael Koech who is principal of Bomet Bible Institute. Jonathan Langat, a graduate of Bomet, has just completed his MDiv studies at FEBC and is returning to teach at his alma mater. In Cambodia, we have two Bible schools started by our Korean alumni—Rev Moses Hahn and Rev David Koo with Surish from Singapore. A number of our Cambodian graduates—John Saray, An Sitha and Kin

Bopha—are assisting Rev Hahn. The Bible college ministry of our graduates will no doubt accelerate the growth of God’s kingdom as more faithful men are being trained to evangelise the world and edify the church.

There is thus a vital need today not only to train a new generation of faithful pastors to serve in churches, but also faithful lecturers to teach in Bible colleges and seminaries. For this reason, the college offers a postgraduate programme leading to the Doctor of Theology (ThD) degree. FEBC’s ThD programme seeks to produce highly qualified leaders for the Bible college movement who will boldly teach and defend the Holy Scriptures within the whole spectrum of Biblical and Systematic Theology.

FEBC’s ThD programme has the endorsement of the following world-renowned scholars. Dr John Whitcomb, former professor of OT and director of doctoral studies at Grace Seminary, wrote these encouraging words: “Thank you for the good news! As our Lord may bless and provide, men will be coming from many lands to study God’s Word with you there. No real need to come to America anymore for Th.D. studies.” Dr D A Waite, president of the Dean Burgon Society, likewise wrote: “Your Th.D. program sounds great indeed, and we’ll be praying that the Lord will give you many students that will stand strong for God’s preserved Hebrew and Greek Words, the English King James Bible, and accurate and faithful translations in all the languages of the world. I am happy that you have a vision of training others in fulfillment of 2 Timothy 2:2 ‘And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.’” Dr Paul Lee Tan, author of the monumental homiletic tool *Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations*, wrote: “I am delighted with the news that FEBC is offering the Th.D. degree program. I know that the students will be blessed with good, solid Bible training and teaching. Usually, seminaries offering such high-level degrees tend to be ‘broad’ in their doctrinal stance, but I know FEBC will prove that it is possible to be firm and fundamental in doctrine, and yet offer post-graduate level training.”

We must not forget another important role of the Bible college—the training of the laity. The biblical and theological grounding of the laity is crucial for the health and growth of any church. All Christian men and women ought to know their doctrines well. To study the Bible and to

know theology is not just the responsibility of the clergy but also of the laity. I am sure every child of God desires to please his Father in heaven. How to live a victorious Christian life? There is no short cut. Every Christian needs to engage in an intensive, systematic study of God's Word (2 Tim 2:15). Fathers need to know the Scriptures in order that they might make wise decisions that would protect their family, to lead their wife and children in the right paths (Ps 19:7-11). Mothers need to know the Scriptures so that they might nurture their children in the grace and knowledge of God (2 Tim 1:5, 2 Tim 3:15). Young people today need to know the Scriptures so that they might overcome the many temptations that entice them daily at every corner. Whether we are a Christian employer or employee, we need to know the Scriptures so that we might employ biblical ethics in our business or profession that will glorify God in the midst of a corrupt and perverse society.

It is thus vital that all Christians know well the divinely inspired Manual of life which is the Holy Bible. For this reason, the Far Eastern Bible College since the beginning has offered evening classes for the laity. Those who successfully complete 10 courses (chalking up 20 credits) will earn the Certificate of Religious Knowledge (CertRK). There is also the off-campus certificate for those who are stationed overseas or cannot attend the classes at night. FEBC seeks in every way possible to promote biblical literacy in the church. Elders and deacons of the church, Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders in the fellowship groups or neighbourhood Bible communities should spare no effort to get themselves well-grounded and prepared to serve as leaders. A church that studies together stays together. Truth unites!

When the lay members of the church are adequately equipped with the Word of God, they become a mighty force in missions and evangelism. Armed with sound biblical knowledge, they would be able to impart God's truth correctly and confidently. Souls would be converted and lives changed, and God would be pleased to add to the church such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). This applies to those involved in short-term missions as well.

The Bible college has indeed an important role in missions and evangelism. We ought not to underrate its importance in the life, health and growth of the church.

J K

## A STANDARD RAISED

Timothy Tow

### **Text: Isaiah 59:1-21**

During the early days of the Pacific War, when Japan was advancing on Southeast Asia, I was working for the British Information Department as a monitor of enemy broadcasts. With the enemy rolling down on little or no opposition, and city after city falling into Japanese hands, you can imagine how dampened the spirits of our people were. In the gloom before the fall of Singapore, however, there came a light from a distant voice across the seas. It was VOA, the Voice of America broadcasting. It stirred my innermost being with a deep yearning. It sparked a hope within me for liberation and freedom. Heard from the distant voice, coming over so solemn and majestic at the conclusion, were the strains of “The Star-Spangled Banner”:

*O say, can you see, by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight  
O'er the ramparts we watched were so gallantly streaming?  
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.  
O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*

So “The Star-Spangled Banner” that had rallied this great nation in the Second World War had also inspired subjugated people with a deep yearning and a bright hope; also, I'm sure, all freedom-loving people.

But do you know by whom this anthem was written, and the circumstances under which it came to be written? “The Star-Spangled Banner” was composed by an American lawyer named Francis Scott Key. The circumstances under which it came to be written were as follows: In 1814, during the British naval attack on Fort McHenry, one of the forts defending Baltimore, Francis Scott Key was negotiating with the British



fleet in Chesapeake Bay for the release of a friend who had been captured. During the night, when the British stepped up their bombardment of the fortress, Key's anxiety was correspondingly heightened. But when morning came and Francis Scott Key saw the American standard still flying over the fortress, he gave vent to his pent-up feelings. Thus "The Star-Spangled Banner" was born. It has since become the national anthem of the United States of America. Yes, it was the "Stars and Stripes" flying high over the American fortress that inspired the writing of this anthem, that in turn rallied a nation to loyalty and action, and continues to give hope and courage to the downtrodden and oppressed.

### **A Standard Against the Flood**

A banner, a standard, a flag, is a soft fabric that flutters in the breeze. But it has a nation-rallying power for freedom and victory no other instrument of war or peace possesses. What is said of the banner, the standard, the flag in the physical is true also in the spiritual. Thus Isaiah in a perilous day of Judah's history when the dark forces of evil reigned supreme, when "truth is fallen in the street," prophesied, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him" (Isa 59:19).

Today, we of the end times are living in the darkest period of church history. Though the church outwardly has become a great and mighty institution and can say with Laodicea, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," she is condemned as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev 3:17). The indictments of the prophet Isaiah upon Judah for the flood of her sins can be multiplied tenfold and applied to the times in which we live. The catalogue of Judah's sins of lying and cheating, of hypocrisy and intrigue, of scheming and plotting, of a Jerusalem Watergate Isaiah has exposed like a spider's web; yea "their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works" (Isa 59:6). The blacker list of injury and injustice, brutality and bullying, killings and murders are likened to snakes seething and hissing out of a viper's nest. Thus did both John the Baptist and our Lord denounce the Church bosses of their day as "a generation of vipers" and "serpents" (Matt 23:33). Their "hypocrisy and iniquity" are called "whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones" (Matt 23:27).

### **Moral Pollutions of our Times**

Last year, the whole world was shocked and polluted by the putrefying smell of 900 men, women, and children rotting in a so-called Christian commune in the steaming jungles of Guyana. These had died in a massacre and suicide by coercion at the behest of undercover Marxist, Rev Jim Jones, a so-called ordained Christian minister. Equally shocking this year to us from the Orient, even to those outside Christ who inherit a high moral code like Confucianism, is the manufacture of sex films by the Rev Ted McIlvenna and the Rev Laird Sutton of the United Methodist Church and the showing of them to 4000 churches, colleges, and other groups. These films, cunningly contrived, and produced by the two “reverends,” show not only stark-naked acts of intercourse, but every “style” of perversion too shameful to mention, so that “if you don’t know how, here is how you do it” (*Reformation Reader*, April, 1979). Such immorality would make a loving couple of wild ducks visiting our seminary pond this spring turn away their heads in shame, and it further disgraces the good name of America. As if this were not enough, a state governor on the other side of New Jersey has just given his blessing to homosexuals by officially declaring a “Gay Pride Week,” while the apostate church follows suit in the ordaining of male perverts and lesbians to the Christian ministry, which is condemned forever: “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections; for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet” (Rom 1:26-27).

How is it possible for an enlightened Christian West to permit such convulsive immorality? Ah, here is how the Deceiver does it! Do you know it is only during the last decade or so that an innocent-looking word has crept into usage in the English language and has now become so fashionably popular? It is actually the coining of two words to make a new one—viz.: the coupling of the words *life* and *style*. Under this terminology, sin is subtly covered. Sin putting on a new semantic dress becomes a “lifestyle.” If what has been condemned before, like homosexuality, is to be accepted, calling it a new “lifestyle,” like a Paris 1979 spring dress fashion, subtly makes it acceptable. Immodest dress for girls and long hair for men are no more a shame (1 Cor 11:14), but a

lifestyle of the seventies. Men and women cohabiting for a few years and suing one another for “palimony” (a new legal term just invented by a California judge) when they are fed up is creating the latest American “lifestyle” under ERA (Equal Rights Amendment). Divorce can be obtained for as little as \$120, while wedding rings are offered for hire to those not too sure of enduring bliss. These are current advertisements of changing “lifestyle.” Alas! Are these not saddening symptoms of sin and total depravity of human nature? Time will not permit me to go into abortion, the murder of babies, some of which when brutally sucked out, I’m told by a Christian nurse, actually cry “Ma!” Whatever “lifestyle,” it is the twisting and turning of the old serpent’s tail, dripping with filthy droppings and blood. I hate to use this counterfeit word. In Isaiah’s words, it is “a spider’s web.”

As the prophet has seen through it all, “Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands” (Isa 59:6). To whom are these words of the pulpit addressed? To the wicked Jews of his day? To the bad guys in the World Council of Churches? It is well to take heed that God’s Word applies first of all to us! To you and to me who have come to hear what God has to say to us in this Tenth World Congress, to us who are to raise a standard for the truth against this flood of outbursting evil on every hand in these last days. As the Lord’s army under Joshua cannot advance into Canaan except they be circumcised, and as the reproach of Egypt rolled away, so should we be first to heed the prophet’s admonition: “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil ...” (Isa 1:16). “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa 59:1-2). Is there anything hidden deep inside our personal lives that is eating away like a cancer? O the deadliness of sin unconfessed and hearts unwashed by the blood of the Lamb! Why not get right with God in your room tonight? ... Or shall we let unconfessed sin keep on gnawing, gnawing, gnawing?

### **A More Deadly Sin**

Now, there is a more deadly sin that destroys us; and that is, as Dr Chia Yu Ming my teacher in China has said, the sin of the mind and the

sin of the spirit, the sin of rejecting truth, the sin of wilful ignorance! In the words of Isaiah, Judah has forsaken judgment, “in transgressing and lying against the LORD, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood” (Isa 59:13). “For truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth” (Isa 59:14-15).

One fitting backdrop of these words of condemnation is the prophet’s confrontation with apostate King Ahaz. This is recorded in Isaiah 7 and 2 Kings 16. Because Judah had backslidden from worshipping the living and true God (1 Thess 1:9) and given herself to idols and heathen sacrifices, so God had permitted her to be attacked by the kings of Israel and Syria. Since Judah was the Lord’s chosen one, His covenant abideth.

He sent the prophet to assure the nation of His mercies in the midst of war preparations. When the Lord graciously condescended to show His protecting presence with a sign from heaven, or in the sea, the unregenerate king hypocritically answered, “I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD” (Isa 7:12). This hypocrisy is ripped aside by Isaiah’s scathing denunciation, accompanied with the famous prophecy on Christ’s virgin birth. Isaiah retorted, “Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa 7:13-14). What were Ahaz’s innermost reactions? I’m sure he who disbelieved the Word of God in the offer of His outward manifestations of salvation had also spurned the virgin birth.

Today, the enemy has come in with a flood of philosophies to destroy the Church. There is Roman Catholicism with many superstitions, then Deism and Rationalism, out of which has come Higher Criticism. As “they hatch cockatrice’ eggs, and weave the spider’s web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper” (Isa 59:5), so out of the 18<sup>th</sup> century destructive criticism of Holy Scripture has come the reptile Modernism, or Liberalism, which Dr Machen has called “a pagan religion.” From Modernism, or Liberalism, has come Barthianism, or Neo-Orthodoxy, and a proliferation like the hydra of every “style” of high-sounding anti-Christian theology, the latest of which is Neo-Evangelical “scholarship” so called. Though the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) has been raised of

God during the last three decades to offset the ecumenism of the World Council of Churches (WCC), which today is degenerated to a self-glorified socio-political gathering of professional churchmen, our greatest fight is with Satan masquerading within it, whose work of mischief is to attack God's Word. Of this hidden adversary our Lord says, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44).

The greatest lie Satan has spread in this generation is the teaching through neo-evangelical professors of the Fuller Seminary type. They proudly concede that the Bible has "limited inerrancy." A corresponding subtle attack from even greater heights of conceit (the sin that brought Lucifer's downfall) is to criticise the Bible's so-called "grammatical errors." Fancy a Greek professor picking on John's or Peter's "uncouth" rhetoric when he himself cannot stammer a kindergarten rhyme in modern Greek. Let him say in grammatical, modern Greek,

*"Little Bo-peep has lost her sheep,  
And doesn't know where to find them ..."*

After all, if Greek scholarship is to be profound, the *koine* must be deepened by the classical and broadened by the modern. And how much Shakespearean English do these Greek professors know if the King James Version offers them a double superlative? Please let them point out the grammatical error of Acts 26:5, "that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee." How true is the observation by Herbert Spencer, "When a man's knowledge is not in order, the more of it he has, the greater will be his confusion." And better still is Paul's verdict, "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him" (1 Cor 8:1-5).

### **The Battle For the Bible**

The Battle for the Bible is the life-and-death struggle in our generation as never before! It has been observed by Dr Charles Woodbridge that there have been three periods of great controversy between truth and error in the course of Church history. The first period occurred in the time of Constantine in the controversy between Athanasius and Arius. It came to a head at the Council of Nicaea, AD 325, when Arianism was condemned. It was a fight over the person and

deity of Christ. The second period occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Luther's repudiation of popery. The fight centered on the work of Christ, "for the just shall live by faith." The third period is now, since "scholars" began to pick on the Bible because they themselves are "blind" (19<sup>th</sup> century to this day). This attack is on the Word of Christ. What is the main battle this Council is waging? It is not so much with communism, or ecumenism, or "Billy Grahamism" as with the father of lies whose work of mischief from the Garden of Eden to this day is to destroy God's Word.

The doctrine of the plenary, verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture is taught by none other than the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The classic declaration on this doctrine of doctrines is found in the famous Sermon on the Mount. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt 5:17-18). Our Lord guarantees His Word perfect and pure to the last letter, "to the cross of a *t* and the dot of an *i*," if you would. Here is God's standard, like the "Stars and Stripes" over the fortress at Baltimore flying high, to resist Satan's all-out onslaught. Here is the second standard of the ICCC Doctrinal Statement, resisting the foe of our faith. Truly our Declaration on the Bible's inerrancy, infallibility, and supremacy has rallied all of you sons of the faith throughout the world to come here and stand with the Lord of Truth. "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth" (Ps 60:4).

For the strengthening of every seminary and Bible college within our movement, let me offer this declaration of Far Eastern Bible College, Singapore, for mutual encouragement:

Far Eastern Bible College deems the doctrine of the plenary, verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture, inerrant and infallible, to be the cornerstone of all other doctrines. Every member of the Board of Directors and Faculty must, under solemn oath at a special service held each year, subscribe to absolute belief in this doctrine to the exclusion of the latest neo-evangelical leaven of "limited inerrancy" and so-called textual and grammatical errors. These are Satan's newest tactics for discrediting the everlasting and ever-living words "that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4). As Satan constantly changes his tactics in order to beguile, if possible, even the elect, we declare that any question directed against the person and work of Christ, such as His deity, virgin birth, miracles, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection, and personal, visible return is deemed an attack

## *A STANDARD RAISED*

on the immaculate Lord Himself. Any question posed against the Bible is deemed an act of rebellion against the Triune God.

We affirm with Dean Burgon of Oxford that “The Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word of God, not some part of it more, some part of it less, but all alike the utterance of Him who sitteth upon the throne, faultless, unerring, supreme.”

### **The Standard Bearer**

Now the standard, which is the Word of God, and its subsidiary the ICCC Doctrinal Statement, insofar as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation is concerned, requires a standard bearer. Isaiah says, “And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor” (Isa 59:16). In Ezekiel, the Lord laments, “And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none” (Ezek 22:30). Praise God, in the year that King Uzziah died, when the Lord sought for such a man “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us,” then Isaiah replied, “Here am I; send me.” Praise God, when the enemy came in like a flood in our generation in the rise of the ecumenical movement and organization of the WCC, God raised up a man, our beloved president Dr Carl McIntire, to be His standard bearer. We thank God for giving him the wisdom and courage to counter by a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation Movement, organised as the ICCC, in Amsterdam in August of 1948, at the same place and time the WCC was organised. We thank God that for His own Name’s sake, He has raised him up from a fatal disease as He did King David in Psalm 41. Thank God, today is a day of victory for one who has suffered all kinds of abuse and sustained every kind of attack for Jesus’ sake.

Who is the standard bearer? Not a great company of people; no, not numbers, not a mighty organization, not a powerful financial backing, but a man. A man like Isaiah who “trembles at his Word” (Isa 66:5), a man like David “after God’s own heart.” Our prayer for the ICCC is that God may give our president above all a double portion of His Spirit, as He gave Elisha, after Elijah. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” is the further testimony of a later prophet, Zechariah. And we pray, indeed, the Lord may give our president the extra years he has asked, according to his faith.

### **In the Succeeding Years**

But it will be a great mistake on our part to leave the brunt of the battle to our president. It will be a graver error to join the ICCC merely for shelter and refuge, and always to receive and to get. It will be a greatest loss of blessing and hotter if we younger members, sons of the faith, have never grown up to take our place, to stand in the gap in our own battle line to fight the wars of the Lord. For after the Lord has put His appointment on a man, a leader, to do His work, He promises He will raise up successors. At the conclusion of this text, there opens a vista of continuing ministry in the succeeding years, should the Lord tarry; “As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever” (Isa 59:21).

As Isaiah is succeeded years later by Jeremiah, and Jeremiah’s witness was extended to Babylon through Ezekiel, so has God raised up sons to this precious heritage from generation to generation. So, we see them, heroes and sons of the faith, in modern Church history since that great revival of religion in the sixteenth century. Luther has his Melancthon, Zwingli has his Oecolampadius, Calvin has his Beza. Knox has many, many spiritual sons, one of whom, William Chalmers Burns, brought Pentecostal revival to Scotland in 1839. Later Burns became the pioneer missionary to our ancestors in South China, yea, even to Southeast Asia.

The struggle for the faith in the United States of America in this generation may be traced to Dr J Gresham Machen. He stood against the flood of unbelief in the old Princeton in 1929. After his death on January 1, 1937, the mantle was seen to fall on McIntire. What commission have you received from the Lord since coming to Cape May?

### **The Standard Into All the World**

Today we are hearing anew the call that came to young Isaiah, “Whom shall we send, and who will go for us?” Can it be that no young man will answer? Can it be that no one will yield his life to serve the Lord full-time from such a great world congress? Did you hear 20



## *A STANDARD RAISED*

French-speaking African nations calling for a French-speaking evangelist?

“When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him” (Isa 59:19). Yes, with that standard, a man, a young man, yea even a woman! You are one. You are weak. The standard, the banner, the flag is a soft fabric that flutters in the breeze. These are weak instruments, but in the hands of Almighty God, our witness, like “The Star-Spangled Banner” that rallies a mighty nation, has been felt “unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

The standard of the ICCC exalting the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, has rallied you, the people of God, from the four quarters of the earth. “Red and yellow, black and white,” you have come, following that banner, to this great land of the United States of America. What a gathering out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation (Rev 5:9), a foretaste of the heavenly Kingdom to come, as we worship and fellowship together before our Saviour and King. But soon this conference is over, and the same standard will lead us back to our respective homelands. To Canada, to Central and South America, to Europe, to Africa, to Asia and the Far East, to the islands of the sea, yea, even to Australia “down under.” Let us covenant with the Lord to hold high this standard, that perishing men and women in this flood of pollution and apostasy of the last days may be drawn out to the foot of the cross, to find purification and forgiveness of sin and life everlasting in the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, but Who is coming again as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the King of kings, Lord of lords, and judge of the nations before whom “every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father,” Amen and amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! “When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.”

The following anthem is by Rev J S Scarrow, delegate from New Zealand to the Third General Assembly of the Far Eastern Council of Christian Churches (FECCC), Singapore, 1956. It is to be sung to the tune of “Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts.” The circumstances under which it came to be written are similar to those that produced “The Star Spangled Banner” by Francis Scott Key. Brother Scarrow, delegate from New Zealand, also looked with stirred emotions to the Standard we had raised

*The Burning Bush 9/2 (July 2003)*

in Singapore in 1956 for the Third General Assembly of the Far Eastern Council in our battle for the faith. While the plane in which he was travelling neared the Singapore coastline and the lights of the Lion City twinkled like a hundred thousand stars, he lifted up his heart to his Lord and Captain, Who, through the Singapore Standard, was calling him to battle:

*All Scripture, Lord, as Thou hast said,  
Through holy men, inspired to write,  
Is given to Thy Church on earth  
To furnish fallen men with light.  
We meet to pledge with solemn vow,  
Thy written Word shall ever stay.  
Nor shall we wrest one smallest part,  
Nor add thereto nor take away.  
The Word made flesh was virgin born,  
Eternal Son of God is He.  
Two natures—God and man in one—  
Redeemer through His Blood to be.  
Born of Thy Spirit, Lord, we praise  
One only God, and Three in One.  
O Abba Father, hear our praise:  
Thou lovest the world and gave Thy Son.  
We therefore strive, contending all  
Not in our strength; the battle's Thine.  
O speed the promised day of Christ,  
That blessed day, that glorious time.*

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*Rev Dr Timothy Tow was President of Far Eastern Council of Christian Churches. The above address was presented before the 10<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Council of Christian Churches Cape May, New Jersey, June 15-28, 1979; originally published in The Reformation Review, July 1980.*

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## REVISIONISM ANCIENT AND MODERN

S H Tow

God had spoken: His Word standeth sure, forever settled, inerrant, infallible, perfect. Who dare doubt or question it but the father of lies and enemy of truth. His master stroke “*Yea, hath God said?*” stumbled our first parents and plunged the race into sorrow and curse.

That was revisionism of the spoken word at the dawn of history.

In time God gave the Written Word: holy men of God wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. That Word was denied to God’s people by unfaithful custodians, until God sent the Reformation and the Bible of the Reformation—the King James Version (KJV)—to lift the darkness of a thousand years.

Lovers and defenders of the KJV affirm with Dean Burgon of Oxford that

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. 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.

Through three centuries, the KJV reigned supreme, the unchallenged and unrivalled Word of God. But the enemy of truth, with diabolical cunning and subtlety, schemed its overthrow through a “Committee of Revision” headed by Westcott and Hort, masterminds of subversion and champions of corrupted and doctored texts.

Their “Revised Version” of 1881, a masterpiece of intrigue, and “secret weapon” of the Counter-Reformation, breached the dike of Holy Scripture, and a hundred corrupt “Modern English Versions” poured through the floodgate of Revisionism. In the century following, corrupt versions had *all but* replaced the King James Bible.

Thank God, it was *all but*: He has yet a valiant remnant who stand against the tide of corrupt English Versions, like the faithful *seven thousand in Israel* (1 Kgs 19:18), their knees have not bowed before the Baal of Modern Revisionism.

This Twenty-first Century “Battle of the Versions” intensifies as the father of lies uses every wily stratagem to overthrow the citadel of Biblical fundamentalism, hurling false accusations against the beloved translation and the underlying texts.

But we affirm our unshakable faith in the KJV as the very Word of God—the best, most faithful, most accurate, most beautiful translation of the Bible in the English language that is based on God’s infallible, inerrant, inspired and preserved texts.

May all who love the Word of God affirm with the Scripture, that “*the law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple*” (Ps 19:7), and that “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (2 Tim 3:16,17).

Let God be true but every man a liar. God’s Word is truth. Only the KJV and its underlying texts preserve that truth perfectly.

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*Dr S H Tow is senior pastor of Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church, and author of Beyond Versions. The above is taken from the Preface of KJV Q&A: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About the KJV and its Underlying Texts (to be published soon).*

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## A BIBLICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE “ALPHA COURSE”

Jack Sin

The latest novelty in the ecclesiastical scene is the course started from the UK, called the “Alpha Initiative.” Dr George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury commented, “I have been encouraged to see the growth of use of Alpha courses.” His support for Alpha has been echoed by many others and church leaders of major denominations, including R T Kendall, Charles Colson, Jack Hayford, J I Packer. International evangelist, Luis Palau, has teamed up with Alpha to provide follow-up programmes for his evangelistic rallies. The British *Daily Telegraph* in February 1998 remarked, “Alpha courses have been run in Roman Catholic, Methodist and Baptist churches, and many report that it has been a very effective way of drawing young people back into the church.” *The Guardian* (UK) in March 1998 said, “where once there was Billy Graham, now there is Alpha.”

The Alpha course has purportedly huge success. It is estimated that 3,000 courses run regularly three times a year. It is widespread not just in UK but also in many parts of the world—USA, Russia, Europe, Africa, and Asia. By 1997, an estimated 500,000 people have attended the course. Its popularity underscores the widespread influence it has on a large segment of the Christian community. The Alpha course has come to Singapore under the auspices of the Chapel of Christ the Redeemer. The course book, *Questions of Life and The Alpha Initiative*, by Nicky Gumbel, with tapes and videos and other resources, are sold in local bookstores. The book has sold 250,000 copies worldwide.

The foundation of the Alpha course was originally laid in 1977 through the work of Charles Marnham, but Nicky Gumbel popularised it many years later. Nicky Gumbel, the author of the newly revised Alpha course, read law at Cambridge, and theology at Oxford. He is now an ordained minister, and on the staff of Holy Trinity, a notorious

charismatic church in Brompton, UK, that supports the Toronto Blessing. Gumbel popularised the Alpha course in 1993 by creating an acronym for Alpha which effectively sums up what Alpha is all about (*The Alpha Initiative* [Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1999] 51):

- Anyone can come
- Learning and laughter (i.e., having fun)
- Pasta (i.e., food)
- Helping one another
- Ask anything

Essentially, Alpha is a 10-week course of 15 talks that concludes with a weekend celebration party. The content of the course is deeply charismatic. The course strongly emphasises the manifestations of the Spirit, in signs, wonders, healings, miracles, and tongues-speaking.

So, what are the errors and dangers of the Alpha course?

### **The Alpha Course Presents Another Gospel**

The Alpha course, though teaching some truths, has introduced error subtly in the name of sharing the gospel. The wooing of people using a superficial and artificial gospel message is a wily method, enticing them into believing a lie that is mixed with half-truths. It seduces with attractive but deceptive videos.

Alpha's freestyle presentation of the gospel contains no emphasis on repentance whatsoever. It ignores John the Baptist's call for repentance in Matt 3:8, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance." Did not the Apostle Peter preach in Acts 2:38-39, "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call"? A gospel without repentance and self-denial is no cross-centred gospel at all. It is a different gospel as Paul puts it in Galatians 1:7-8. The course attempts to take away the gospel's "offensive elements," giving it a sugar coating so that people might find it easy to "accept." It presents a man-pleasing and man-centred gospel rather than a God-honouring and Christ-centred gospel. Humanistic tactics are used to subtly draw people to Christ without requiring self-denial and repentance.

What must a man do to follow Christ? The Lord Himself says in Luke 9:23, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and

take up his cross daily, and follow me." There is a need to make the gospel understandable to ordinary people, but this must not be done at the expense of truth. God forbid that in making the gospel simple for the common folk, a new gospel is concocted in the process.

### **The Alpha Course is Charismatic**

The Alpha course has a strong predominant charismatic orientation. In his book—*The Alpha Initiative*—Gumbel dwelt at length on the supernatural display of the power of the Spirit, and taught that as the disciples of old, believers today should also heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out demons. He openly proclaims that he believes that these supernatural sign gifts have not ceased. He wrote, "such signs, wonders and miracles are part of the kingdom which was inaugurated by Jesus Christ and continues to this day. Hence we should expect today to see the supernatural display of the power of the Holy Spirit as part of his kingdom activity and as an authentication of the good news. ... we see the dynamic effect of the coming of the kingdom of God accompanied by conversions, miraculous signs, healings, visions, tongues, prophecy, raising the dead and casting out evil spirits. The same God is at work today among us. Evangelism can still be dynamic and effective."

Gumbel in his book teaches how a person can pray to receive the gift of tongues. This is one of the most important sessions of the whole Alpha course. He wrote, "When praying for people to receive the gift of tongues I have found the greatest barrier is a psychological one—making the first sound. Once a person has made the first sound the rest usually follows quite naturally. In order to help people to get over this barrier, I explain this difficulty ... Then I start to speak in tongues slowly so that they can follow. Once they have made the first sound they are usually away praying in their own language. I encourage them to try and concentrate on their relationship with God and try, as far as possible, not to be self-conscious. Rather they should concentrate on praising God with the new language he has given to them." Gumbel went on to report that those who started speaking in "tongues" were so filled with joy that they burst out laughing. Others were so overwhelmed by the Spirit that they found it hard to remain standing, and started falling.

It goes without saying that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as taught in and practised by Alpha is seriously flawed.

## **The Alpha Course is Ecumenical**

The Alpha course adopts an ecumenical stance that is accepted by liberal, ecumenical, neo-evangelical churches, including the Catholic Church, having been endorsed by the late Cardinal Basil Hume, former Archbishop of York. In the Alpha training manual, section 13, Gumbel teaches that the difference between Protestantism and Catholicism are insignificant compared to things that unite them. He said that it is wonderful that the Spirit always bring churches together and at all cost.

The Alpha course is given to spiritual compromise and accommodates Catholics without a need for conversion. This is undoing the work of the God-initiated 16<sup>th</sup> Century Protestant Reformation. Under the guise of an evangelistic programme, it presents a watered-down gospel that is acceptable to all, including the Catholics. It has come across to many as non-threatening, informal and user-friendly. Nicky Gumbel himself said that New Agers found themselves perfectly at home with it, “[Those] coming from the New Age movement find that rational and historical explanations leave them cold, but at the weekend away they are on more familiar territory in experiencing the Spirit.”

Alpha’s support base is suspect. It finds encouragement from those who oppose the true evangelical faith. Even liberals, Catholics and New Agers, who have abandoned the evangelical faith, find much good in Alpha. Such acceptance of the Alpha course by the enemies of the gospel speaks volumes concerning its questionable contents.

## **Conclusion**

We are living in a confused and deceptive world today. Fakes, counterfeits and charlatans are everywhere. Many gullible friends have fallen prey to them. Many are desperately trying to seek God but find Him in all the wrong places. Others are looking for a convenient Saviour, without the need for repentance and discipleship, and Alpha presents that to them. Others are sincerely misled. Jesus warned in Matthew 7:20-23, “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”



And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Arsenic sweetened by honey is still deadly. A half-true gospel is ten times deadlier than an overtly false one. The Alpha course is thus seductively potent and poisonous. Paul warned in Acts 20:29-30, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Separation from such men, methods, and materials is the key to purity and holiness (2 Cor 6:14-18).

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*Rev Jack Sin is pastor of Maranatha Bible-Presbyterian Church, and lecturer in Church History at Far Eastern Bible College.*

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## **Class Notes**

**Mike Manning** (DipTh 75) is the new executive director of Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF), Singapore. For more information on Mike and the CEF, go to <http://www.cef.org.sg>.

Rev **Burt Subramaniam** (DipTh 79, BRE 96) was conferred a doctoral degree by Cornerstone University, USA, in May 2000. He is currently developing a mobile, modular, ministerial training programme for Tamil gospel workers in Singapore, Malaysia and India.

Rev **Yap Kim Sin** (BTh 82) was conferred the Doctor of Ministry degree by Biblical Theological Seminary in 2001. His dissertation: *A Handbook on Teaching and Preaching of Joel and Malachi Complemented by a Daily Devotional*.

**Peter Lee (Lester)** (BTh 75) is currently pursuing his Master of Arts degree at the University of Wales. He is researching into the areas of religion, politics, and international relations. His email: [lee@chimedex.com](mailto:lee@chimedex.com).

**Sun Sokha** (DipTh 02) married Lee Nam Soon on November 25, 2002. Sokha is now pastoring a church in Battambang, Cambodia, while Nam Soon is completing her studies at FEBC.

**Tee Chung Seng** (BTh 02) married Chin Shu Fang on November 4, 2002 at Kelapa Sawit Bible-Presbyterian Church, Malaysia. Chung Seng is serving at Kelapa Sawit and its Bukit Batu outreach.

## **A CRITIQUE OF MODERN CHURCH GROWTH STRATEGIES**

Prabhudas Koshy

Churches everywhere are lured into adopting modern marketing techniques in order to increase their church size. Churches are exhorted to change because the expectations and the ways of a modernised society have changed. It is said that adopting modern marketing philosophies and techniques is to the church's advantage. Pastors nowadays seem to have lost their conviction that the way the church should grow is to keep worldly philosophies out and the truth of God's Word in. There is a vital need to warn against the dangers of applying secular marketing methods into church ministry. These methods will subtly undermine the spiritual integrity and mission of the church.

The secular marketing philosophy of today appears to be as significant as the invention of the printing press in the time of the Reformation for the propagation of God's truth. Just as the reformers used the printing press to promote the gospel, so the church today must use current marketing strategies. Such a comparison is misleading to say the least. One is an idea, the other an instrument. It is fallacious to compare apples with oranges.

The Reformers, in obedience to God's Word, rejected the worldly philosophies of their times. Their ministry of the Word was governed by the Word alone—*Sola Scriptura*. Their battle cry was, "Back to the Bible." They resisted every vain philosophy. It is only in the Holy Scriptures that the church should find its wisdom and power.

If any lesson may be learned from the Reformation and the printing machine, it is that the church should take advantage of advances in communication technology to promote the gospel of Christ. The internet for instance, is a great tool for the spreading of God's truth.

The printing machine is a neutral thing and cannot on its own influence the content of Christian ministry, Modern marketing ideas

however are based on a set of worldly presuppositions and principles that do not help the reformation of the church. On the contrary, it would accelerate the deformation of the church. The church instead of being an ecclesiastical institution becomes more like a business corporation with the pastor as the Chief Executive Officer. What is worse is that many churches are no longer worship places, but entertainment centres. The Church's acceptance of the mentality and ideas of the marketing world is no reformation but deformation

Now, let us examine three proposed marketing models for church growth.

### **Specialist Model**

It is said that the world today looks for specialised services in all areas of life. So the church is told to go with this "specialist mentality" of the consumer world. The church must likewise specialise. The church must start to provide specialised services (e.g. phonic classes, cooking lessons, sport activities etc.) to attract the public.

Where in the Bible do we find such a church growth strategy being taught? Certainly not in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). The Lord Jesus Christ who gave His Church the Great Commission understood this only too well. Jesus drew the multitudes. They crowded around Jesus. But what did the people want. They wanted physical healing, free food, and miracles to excite their senses. Were they interested in spiritual things?

Spiritual food is what sin-sick people need. When the Lord preached the gospel and called sinners to repent of their sins and believe on Him, they responded, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" The multitudes left Him (John 6:66). Finally they crucified Him. Jesus employed no worldly techniques to win the lost.

People have not changed. Sin has not changed. And the solution to sin remains the same. It is Jesus Christ. He is the answer to life's problems, and He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. The Word of God must change sinful people, and not vice versa. Jesus let the multitudes go. He did not try to win them back by softening His message. Neither did He change His method to make the gospel more attractive.

The specialist solutions that many churches dish out do not generate true spiritual growth. For example, the so-called "Christian psychology" offered by so-called church specialists or Christian counsellors have long

betrayed the sufficiency of God's Word (2 Tim 3:16-17). The church's fascination with psychology has dulled the people to the sinfulness of sin. Peace and forgiveness are offered without any requirement for genuine spiritual renewal and repentance.

One can be sure that such crowds that congregate in specialist churches will quickly disappear as soon as God's Word is truthfully expounded and faithfully preached. People are attracted to specialist churches with their specialised activities. Yes, the crowds will come, the pews filled, but how many come because of this: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68)?

### **Supermarket Model**

We are told that the church must adopt a "one stop, shop all" philosophy so that people can see the church not just as a place of worship but also a place that provides for all their physical needs. This may be an effective approach towards marketing a product in the business world, but it is a terribly destructive model to adopt for the church. The supermarket strategy operates under the principle: "the customer is sovereign." Employing such a policy would mean that the church must be customer-centred rather than God-centred.

George Barna, in his book, *Marketing the Church*, urges the church to adopt such a supermarket strategy. He said that there are different types of marketing that are all geared towards making "both the producer and consumer satisfied." Consumer satisfaction, then, requires the content of preaching to be adjusted according to the comfort levels of the people. The audience determines the content and character of the pulpit ministry. It goes without saying that sermons will become very diluted. In order to bring in the crowds, pastors are encouraged to preach "guilt free sermons."

The business mentality towards ministry will not enhance a church's spiritual integrity and growth. Once such a mentality is adopted, the church will become more interested in numbers and revenue, and not truth and holiness. Demographic information, community surveys, door-to-door polls, and congregational questionnaires become the new tools. Information drawn from such sources is considered essential to developing a workable marketing plan for the church. In many seminaries, especially in the States, pastors under training are told that

they cannot reach people effectively without making use of such marketing tools.

The greatest error of modern-day church growth strategies is that it denies the sovereignty of God and the sufficiency of Scripture. The modern pastor does not believe that the church would grow by means of God's ordained method of preaching the pure Gospel and teaching the whole counsel of God.

The Great Commission is not a marketing manifesto. Preaching the Gospel without any dilution of its message is what God demands. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16); "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" (1 Cor 2:4-5); "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18); "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 stumblingblock, 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. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor 1:21-25).

### **Support Model**

It is said that since we are living in a stressful society, the church must provide support groups and other stress-relieving programmes for all who come to church. The church must meet the "felt needs" of the people. The "felt needs" of people are things like loneliness, fear of failure, a poor self-image, depression, anger, resentment and other emotional or mental difficulties. Such difficulties are not due to sin but to the environment or to circumstances. People are counselled to look without not within, to blame others and not oneself. People are taught to think well of themselves, and made to feel good about themselves despite their sinful thoughts, feelings and behaviour. "Support groups" are formed for this reason. It is obvious that in typical church growth

strategies like the support model, people's emotional needs are taken more seriously than their real but unmet spiritual deficiencies that Scripture addresses.

But what does the Bible teach? How can a person find the peace of God? The only way is for him to be reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. So what we need urgently is not the support groups where people sit in circles and talk about their personal struggles, but pastors and teachers who are biblically and theologically trained to analyse people's problems in the light of Scripture and tell them where they have gone wrong, and how they can be reconciled to God who is their only source of help and comfort.

The church has the duty to support and counsel the weak but not in the ways of the world but in the ways of God. Sin must be confronted. Peace will not come until sin is dealt with. "There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked" (Isa 48:22). "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa 57:20-21).

Increasingly, today's church leaders are becoming like the leaders of the ancient Israel of Jeremiah's time. They assure people of peace without dealing with their sins. It is a false peace that they offer. In Jeremiah 6:13-17 we read,

For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.

The Apostle Paul wrote likewise, "And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom 3:17-18).

Real lasting peace exists only when one comes to Christ on His terms. The Church needs to emphasise that it is only through Christ and His promises that peace comes. "I will hear what God the LORD will

speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly. Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps 85:8-10). “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them” (Ps 119:165). “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength” (Isa 26:3). Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). He also said, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom 8:6). “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7).

Real success is not getting results at any cost. It is not prosperity, power, prominence, popularity or any other worldly notions of success. Real success in ministry is doing the will of God regardless of the consequences. The following are biblical principles for genuine church growth in these last days. They are taken from 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

- (1) Remember your calling (v1)
- (2) Preach the Word (v2)
- (3) Be faithful in and out of season (v2)
- (4) Reprove, rebuke and exhort (v2)
- (5) Don't compromise in difficult times (vv3-4)
- (6) Be sober in all things (v5)
- (7) Endure hardship (v5)
- (8) Do the work of an evangelist (v5)
- (9) Fulfil your ministry (v5)

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## **FILIAL PIETY AND BURIAL CUSTOMS**

Tan Eng Boo

### **Statement of Problem**

Chinese Christians in a non-Christian home often face the dilemma of what they should do on occasions of death and burial in the family. The situation can be so complicated at times. As such, it is needful for this matter to be handled with extreme care and sensitivity. Dr Poh Boon Seng says,

Many Christians are so blissfully ignorant of the significance of various rites carried out during a Chinese funeral. When a death occurs in the family, he is caught off guard and does not know what to do. There are also times when he has to attend a funeral of a friend or a relative. Then there is the annual All Souls Day when he is faced with the various rites carried out by the family.<sup>1</sup>

This article seeks to address these issues so that Christians can be aware of what they should do, and be a good witness and testimony for Jesus Christ. The Christian is to be the salt and light of the earth (Matt 5:13-14). This paper also seeks to provide alternatives as to how the church and her members can provide the necessary help and comfort to the bereaved person.

The non-Christian Chinese, many of whom are Buddhists, Confucianists or Taoists, are steeped in filial piety. The loyalty and devotion of younger members of the family to their elders is seen especially during the event of death. Every family member is expected to perform a certain ritual for the deceased. Not to do so is seen as a mark of disrespect, and causes one to be looked upon as an unfilial son or daughter. It brings shame and disgrace to the family. This is expressed in *The Classic of Filial Piety*: “The service of love and reverence to parents when alive, and those of grief and sorrow to them when dead. These completely discharged the fundamental duty of living men.”<sup>2</sup>



The non-Christian Chinese also see the performing of these rites as their final farewell and obligation to the deceased. They wish for the deceased to have a happy life in the next world, and hence, they will perform the rites. The ceremony, therefore, is very important to them.

The Chinese Christian had better have a correct understanding of Chinese rituals and their significance so that they can deal with these issues wisely from a biblical standpoint. Oftentimes, Chinese Christians compromise their faith by participating in the funeral rites. One of the reasons could be a lack of biblical instruction on this matter. Others may compromise because they do not think that participation in these rituals is wrong for a Christian. There are others who are pressurised to perform the rituals by their family and relatives.

The loss of a loved one is a very emotional experience. We have to be prepared for it and even be prepared to counsel church members before the event. Not to do so would be detrimental to our Christian faith and testimony. We are to do all things to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31).

### **The Significance of Filial Piety and Burial Customs**

Filial piety is one of the virtues of man. Chinese culture places a great deal of emphasis on this matter. To the Chinese, filial piety is a religious or quasi-religious practice. It is said, “The Chinese family is the crux of society, so the family is the orbit around which religion revolves, ancestor veneration is the centre of that family religion.”<sup>3</sup> Even in death, the ancestors’ spirits are regularly acknowledged by the living. Family members will show their respect to the dead by “performing rituals and other spoken tributes, leaving gifts or sending them off by burning paper and other materials. Ancestors, if not worshipped, are at least highly revered.”<sup>4</sup>

It has been said that there are three ways in which a son can show his filial piety to his parents:

Feed them while they live, mourn for them when they die, and offer sacrifice to them after they die. In feeding, the important thing is obedience; in mourning, it is the sadness; and in sacrifice, the respect. When one has done these three, one can rightly be called a filial son.<sup>5</sup>

Failure to perform these rituals only constitutes a lack of respect for the deceased. One of Confucius’ followers, Hsun Tzu, explained that such

rites are the expression of man's will, emotion, remembrance, and love. They represent the height of loyalty, faithfulness, love, and respect.... With sorrow and reverence, one serves the dead as he serves the living, and serves the departed as he serves those present. What is served has neither appearance nor shadow, and yet the social order is completed in this way.<sup>6</sup>

Why is this act so important to the Chinese? It is important because it is a fulfillment of human relationship. Confucius said, "To serve those now dead as if they were living, and those departed as if they were still with us: this is the highest achievement of true filial piety."<sup>7</sup>

These rituals have always been an important feature in Chinese culture because they are a show of what it means to be a filial person to the deceased. As Chinese Christians, we must always be mindful of this aspect. However, we must not compromise our Christian testimony by performing these rituals with them (Matt 5:14). For us Christians, we also believe that the deceased has either gone to heaven or hell after death (Heb 9:27; Luke16:22-23).

### **The Rituals and their Religious Significance**

The traditional Chinese believe that the soul of the deceased must make its way to the "Western Heaven" after death. Many rituals are conducted by family members to assist the deceased in this journey. According to Chinese belief, all souls, good or bad have to be present at the purgatory *Yamen* at the time of death. The good ones may go directly to the Western heaven after a tour of purgatory. In Taoist belief, "The deceased person must go down to hell and be judged according to the way he lived in this world, whether he did good or evil. He must go through ten halls and receive ten different judgments."<sup>8</sup> Naturally, children do not wish for their departed parents to suffer too much in hell or remain there for too long. So they arrange for an elaborate religious ritual and ceremony so as to appease the gods and persuade them to be lenient to their ancestors.

While there are many rituals in the Chinese funeral, we will only look at some common ones. These are religious in nature and tainted with superstitions. Let the Christian stay out of these rituals (2 Cor 6:16).

### **Washing and Clothing the Deceased**

The sons of the deceased perform this ritual by symbolically wiping the body of the deceased three times with water. This ritual is important

because according to Chinese belief, “a person with an unclean body will be despised and punished in Hell.” After the washing, the deceased is dressed. Some personal belongings are also placed in the coffin for use in the afterlife. A pearl (today it is usually a coin to bribe the official of the next world or a grain of rice to ensure that the dead would never grow hungry) is placed in the mouth of the deceased to ensure a smooth journey. Coins are put in the person’s left hand for paying the guardian spirit. Shoes are put on the person’s feet to prepare for the long journey.

Christians should not participate in these superstitious rituals. We believe that the dead at death enters heaven if the person is a believer (2 Cor 5:8). God shall comfort the Christian for the afterlife is a life with God in heaven (Luke 16:25, 2 Cor 5:1).

### **Presentation of Food and Paper Money**

Although these rituals are elaborate in varying degrees, the basic items are rice, some meat dishes, incense and paper money. The Chinese believe that, “the offering of food and joss paper signifies the continuing interdependence between the living descendants and the dead relative.”<sup>9</sup> It is believed that “paper-money is often offered today as an attempt to “bribe” the spirits (i.e., the hungry ghosts, so that they would not harm us and also to win merit for our ancestors; and our ancestors, so that they would bless us).”<sup>10</sup> A dual purpose is seen here as the living also seek to be protected from such spirits, but more so, the offering is done for the deceased as it is “offered to make the journey easier for the departed soul. Paper money is scattered on the road to buy the goodwill of malicious, wandering spirits, that they may not molest the wrath of the deceased on its way to the grave.”<sup>11</sup>

Christians should not get involved in this matter of offering paper money to the deceased. The dead and the living do not have any contact (2 Sam 12:23). The spirits of the departed cannot return to harm us (Heb 9:27). We need not fear any evil spirit (Rom 8:31). Christians should also abstain from folding paper money etc. (1 Thess 5:22). This is not their job. Other forms of help can be rendered instead.

### **Religious Service**

The religious service is an elaborate one. The ceremony is usually conducted by Buddhist or Taoist monks and all the mourners are expected to participate. This is a religious rite “during which the soul of the deceased is supposed to be led through its journey into the spirit-

world.”<sup>12</sup> The eldest son must carry the urn of joss sticks (or lantern) and follow the priest to represent the dead, being guided to “heaven” by the priest. The son plays an important role in performing this required ritual. Confucius taught that male heirs could only perform the funeral rites:

For this reason, the Chinese consider it most unfilial not to produce sons. The absence of male heirs will mean the end of the worship of the whole line of ancestors, which will be disastrous. As a result, non-Christian parents adamantly opposed to their sons, especially their eldest sons, being baptised. Baptism will mean the end of ancestral worship. It would be the same as not having sons and is therefore considered most unfilial.<sup>13</sup>

If you are the eldest son in a non-Christian family, you may face a severe opposition to your faith, especially when it comes to your baptism. Be prepared for it.

During such religious services, prayers are also chanted to appease any spirit that may seek to hinder the deceased on his journey. Prayers and incantations are also made to enable the deceased to cross the bridges. Incense must be lit to the bridge god at every bridge for permission to cross the bridge. Permission must be sought from the god of the earth for burial.

As Christians, we should never get involved in any of these religious rituals. We must stay out of anything that has to do with the monk leading the way. This is no time to be emotional. If we follow the monk, we are saying that we agree with him in all that he is doing. There is no agreement between the temple of God with idols (2 Cor 6:16).

### **Holding a Funeral Wake**

This is done so as to allow for relatives and friends to visit the family and pay their last respects to the deceased. The wake may last from three to seven days. During this period, many rituals are performed.

One of the most significant rituals during the wake is for people to come before the altar of the deceased and pay their respects. Most people would bow before the altar or photo of the deceased. They would do so with a lighted joss-stick and they would bow three times. Some people bow without any joss-stick. This is a form of worship of the dead! The Rev Dr Timothy Tow says, “to bow to the dead is a form of worship, like bowing to ancestral tablets and family idols.” Let me also quote what Dr Poh Boon Sing has to say about this matter:

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In the Bible, bowing involves kneeling or prostrating oneself to the ground, and not just stooping the head while standing. A progression from the Old Testament to the New Testament may be noticed, in which bowing becomes increasingly associated with worship. (Matt 4:9, Mark 15:19). In the Bible, the number of occasions of bowing to God and the Lord Jesus Christ is far more than the cases of bowing to creatures. Godly individuals always forbade others to bow down to them (Esth 3:1-5, Acts 10:25-26, Rev 19:9-10, 22:8-9). From this we conclude that worship is due only to God, and Christians must not bow to any persons.<sup>14</sup>

If we want to show our respect, we can always stand for a minute before the altar. There is no need for us to bow before the altar or photo of the deceased.

It is always good for a Christian's testimony if he were to go straight to the altar to show respect for the deceased when attending a wake. Let us not follow the non-Christian during such time when "joss-sticks are burned to worship the dead and to make contact with the soul of the deceased."<sup>15</sup> "The people who follow this custom know that this practice has this meaning."<sup>16</sup> Christians must not use joss-sticks at all. This is not a matter of custom or culture but is religious in nature. We are not to worship a person.

### **Band in a Funeral Procession**

The funeral procession is normally headed by a band of musicians. The music is meant to frighten away malicious spirits lurking around the funeral site. They are also meant to announce the arrival of the deceased to the spirit world and to bid him into their midst. Such bands should not be employed in Christian funerals. Christians should not adopt non-Christian rituals.

### **Some Related Superstitions**

Visitors to the wake as well as to the funeral are usually given a strand of red thread or small red packets containing two coins to ensure that they get rid of any bad luck.

There are also several common items served during such occasions because they are deemed to bring good luck to everyone: "Sweets are served to remove the bitterness (bitter taste in the mouth) of the loss. Groundnuts and melon seeds (commonly used to signify fertility) is served so that the living might have more children to help "replace" the loss."<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the red thread, many people today do not know the meaning and significance of the groundnuts, sweets and melon seeds used at the wake. For most people, these edibles are simply for consumption only. As Christians we do not need to take the red threads or red packets offered to us because we are not superstitious. We can politely refuse these things. If they are left on the table, we need not take them.

What about the edible items? Should they be eaten? This should not pose a problem if they have not been offered to the idols. Eat them, but do not forget to give thanks to God first (1 Tim 4:4-5).

### **Biblical Principles of Filial Piety**

For not participating in idolatrous or superstitious rituals, the Christian is often criticised for being unfilial. Many unbelieving Chinese are against the fact that the Bible forbids ancestor worship. Many take this as a great offense against Chinese culture. They cite verses like Matt 10:37, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,” as proof text of their charge.<sup>18</sup>

Such an accusation is both unfair and untrue. Filial piety is indeed taught in the Bible. In the days of Moses, God commanded His people to honour their parents (Exod 20:12). The New Testament also emphasises this teaching in Eph 6:1-3, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That is may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.” Filial piety is not something new to Christianity. It has been taught since the days of the patriarchs in the Old Testament.

It must also be made clear that filial piety must be seen in the light of children showing their love and care for the elderly, their parents etc. while they are still alive. This is the best way to prove our filial piety to our loved ones. In a famous essay by Ou Yang Shieu, a noted scholar and statesmen in the Sung Dynasty, he said,

It is more important to provide respectfully and affectionately for the needs of the parents when they are alive, rather than worship them by burning paper money and spreading a feast before ancestral tablets which are mere superstitious practices.<sup>19</sup>

I remember conducting a funeral for a Christian lady in June 1995 and encountering opposition from her eldest son, who was not a

Christian. He wanted to put some food for his deceased mother, and offer paper money to her. I found out that this “filial son” was never filial to his mother when she was alive. Now that she was gone, he wanted to put on a show of filial piety to impress his friends and relatives. There may have also been a sense of guilt that caused him to act in this manner.

How can a Christian show his filial piety to his parents? A Christian shows filial piety while his parents are still alive. “A son honoureth his father” (Mal 1:6). Jesus said, “Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death” (Matt 15:4). “My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Prov 6:20). The Bible pronounced a curse on those who dishonour their parents. God was very serious about this matter (Exod 21:15, 17; Lev 20:9; Prov 20:20, 30:17). Disrespect for parents will bring punishment from God. “And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death. And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death” (Exod 21:15, 17). “The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it (Prov 30:17).

Reverencing our parents is an act of piety towards God for parents function as God’s representatives to children on earth.<sup>20</sup> While our parents are still alive and are able to enjoy our relationship with them, we should take full advantage of this. They are the ones who brought us into this world, nurtured and fed us and gave us good things in life. How could we not honour them in return? “We honour them by being obedient to them as far as possible, by caring for them and by consulting them when making any major decisions. When such warm relationship exists, there will be ample opportunity to witness to them about Jesus Christ. Too many Christians, though concerned for the salvation of their parents, fail to cultivate this warmth. As a consequence, they find it so difficult and awkward to discuss spiritual things with them.”<sup>21</sup>

There are a number of ways to show filial piety. When our parents are still alive, give them due honour. Do not humiliate them. Obey and honour them: “Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father” (Prov 28:7). Do not abuse them physically: “He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach” (Prov 19:26). The Bible says that the arrogant and rebellious perform such disgraceful and shameful acts: “There is a generation that curseth their father, and

doth not bless their mother. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men” (Prov 30:11-14).

When our parents are still alive, it is the responsibility of children to feed and support them. Confucius especially pointed out that “in feeding one’s parents, the important thing is not the richness of the food, but the pleasure and happiness of the parents.”<sup>22</sup>

Jesus set for us a good example. While on the cross, He entrusted His earthly mother to the care of His disciple, John (John 19:26-27). In the OT, we find Joseph taking care of his father for 17 years when he was Prime Minister of Egypt. When his father died, he personally brought his body back to Canaan for burial. Joseph “served his father with respect when he lived, and buried him with respect when he died.”<sup>23</sup>

When our parents are still alive, we must exhort them gently. They are not sinless! Do not rebuke them openly before others. “If a believer has unbelieving parents, he not only needs to honour them, feed them, and not to disgrace them, but he must also admonish them and lead them to the Lord. Helping one’s parents to walk in the true way is one of the filial pious deeds.”<sup>24</sup>

When parents are still alive, be thankful for them. The saddest thing is that when we want to express our thankfulness to our parents, they may not be alive to receive it. Do it now when they are still with us. Bring them out for lunch or dinner. We do not have to wait until Father’s Day or Mother’s Day to do so. Dr. John Davis said, “My grandmother used to say with some emphasis, ‘Don’t buy flowers and visit me when I’m dead, do it when I’m alive so I can enjoy it.’”<sup>25</sup>

When they are gone, we remember them. Filial piety is not measured by the pomp of the funeral or the luxury of the gravesite sacrifice, but by the honour, glory, feeding, admonishing, and thanksgiving one had been offering to parents while they were still alive. After they die, we can only remember them, not worship them.

How should we remember our parents or ancestors? Be like Joseph in Genesis 50, by giving our loved ones an honourable funeral. We do not need to overspend, but we need to give our loved ones a decent burial. We



can also remember the anniversary of their death. Publish a word of remembrance of the person in the newspapers. Visit the grave to clean it, and to place flowers as a token of our love. This may be done in the spring festival of *Qing Ming* (All Souls' Day). This is an important occasion for the Chinese. This occasion reinforces the ethic of filial piety. It is a major Chinese festival.

Before embarking on this trip to the gravesite, Christians ought to talk to their loved ones to inform them that they would want to do things like cleaning the gravesite, preparing food and drinks for those who are going etc., but not perform any of the religious rites. They must show their relatives that they love their ancestors and do miss them too, but are not willing to compromise their faith by going through the religious rites. Such gentle reminders show our sincerity and sensitivity. When Christians display such faith and love, unbelieving family members may be more sympathetic to the gospel message.

### **Necromancy: A False Filial Piety**

Respect and honour to the living is biblical, but communicating with the dead is not. Necromancy is forbidden in the Scriptures. God commands in Deut 18:9-14,

When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so to do.

Necromancy contains two ideas: "One involves the worship of ancestors and the other is that the dead may be consulted for purposes of determining the future."<sup>26</sup> This is done through a medium.

*Zhong Yuan Jie*, which is popularly known as the Festival of the Hungry Ghost, falls around August. Similar to *Qing Ming*, this festival is a time to think of the dead. "For the Buddhist, this festival emphasizes

filial piety. To the Taoist, this festival includes prayers to the wandering souls throughout the world.”<sup>27</sup> It is said that,

the Taoist believe that the graves of hell are opened on the first day of the seventh month, allowing unborn souls to wander the world for food and other necessities. Throughout the month, food and joss papers are offered to these hungry ghosts.<sup>28</sup>

Most Chinese observe this occasion by offering prayers, food, and paper money to the deceased. “The underlying theme for such a festival is filial piety. It is a remembrance of one’s loved ones and even friends.”<sup>29</sup> The matter of necromancy comes in when the living have communion and contact with the dead. Lest the deceased return with vengeance, the Chinese believe that they must be in touch with the dead. Vengeful ghosts are said to “have been abandoned by their living families.”<sup>30</sup>

Necromancy is also the act of contacting the dead for purposes of divination. “Such divination presupposes that the dead are part of the family who has gone beyond death into the spiritual realm. With spiritual realities, they become eyes of the living to guide those who have not yet reach the other side.”<sup>31</sup> “In other situations, necromancy employs dreams and visions, a common form through which the dead communicate their wishes.”<sup>32</sup>

The basic belief of the Chinese is that the soul never dies and there is a continual relationship between the living and the dead. This belief has led to ancestral worship and necromancy. When a person dies, he is regarded by his family as a “god” and is believed to be able to look after the welfare of the family.

Oftentimes, the family uses a medium to communicate with the deceased to find out if he is happy, well fed and well housed in Hades. “Mediums are often called in to help send offerings to the deceased or even make special arrangements for their comfort.”<sup>33</sup> “At other times the wishes of the dead are apparent only after evil has occurred and when a diviner interprets the cause of the misfortune as dissatisfaction of the dead with the living.”<sup>34</sup>

The Bible forbids any contact with the dead. As Christians, we must not have anything to do with necromancy. At the moment of death, the dead goes to either heaven or hell (Luke 16:22-23). There can be no communication between the living and the dead (Luke 16:27-31). The dead cannot come back to the world of the living, even in a spirit form.

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If it is impossible to communicate with the deceased, then with whom are the mediums communicating? “Usually when a medium calls up someone from the dead, it is a demonic deception: that is a demon impersonating someone who is dead will begin to speak through the medium.”<sup>35</sup> Demons know the past history of the deceased. The devil is a master of deception.

When a Christian is asked to participate in a séance, he should explain to his loved ones the danger and deception involved. If need be, the pastor or a mature Christian could be invited to warn them of the dangers of such meetings through a study of the Scriptures (Lev 19:31, 20:6, Deut 18:10-14, Isa 8:19).

While we want to be sensitive to our loved ones and show our filial piety, we must never compromise our beliefs. It is far better to communicate with the living now, than to wait until they are gone and then seek to speak to them.

### Conclusion

Chinese culture is steeped in filial piety which often involves idolatry. Chinese Christians are often seen to compromise their faith by participating in the many rituals. They need to be instructed. It is imperative that they understand the requirements of God, and seek to observe biblical principles in their lives. If Chinese customs and culture infringe on biblical standards, we must, at all cost, seek to honour God (1 Sam 2:30), and to obey His Word. We must also seek to explain to our loved ones the reasons for our actions so that they would not think that we are in any way unfilial.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Poh Boon Sing, *The Christian in the Chinese Culture* (Malaysia: Good News Enterprise, 1986), 77.

<sup>2</sup> Max Muller, ed, *Sacred Books of the East*, vol 3 (np: Krishna Press, 1910), 448.

<sup>3</sup> Keith W Hinton, *Growing Churches Singapore Style* (Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship, 1985), 44.

<sup>4</sup> Philip M Steyne, *Gods of Power* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1990), 81.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>6</sup> Vergilius Ferm, *Religion in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1948), 105

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>8</sup> Ardon Albrecht and Singi Go, *A Guidebook for Christians on Taiwanese Custom and Superstitions* (Taipei: Taiwan, 1970), 100.

<sup>9</sup> Steyne, *Gods of Power*, 127-8.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Tong, *Ancestral Veneration* (Singapore: The Christian Library, 1993), 37.

<sup>11</sup> C A S Williams, *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1968), 110.

<sup>12</sup> Poh, *The Christian in the Chinese Culture*, 79.

<sup>13</sup> Rin Ro Bong, ed, *Christian Alternatives to Ancestor Practices* (Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1985), 85-6.

<sup>14</sup> Poh, *The Christian in the Chinese Culture*, 117-8.

<sup>15</sup> David Hock Tey, *Chinese Culture and the Bible* (Singapore: Here's Life Books, 1988), 79.

<sup>16</sup> Albrecht and Singi, *A Guidebook for Christians on Taiwanese Custom and Superstitions*, 119.

<sup>17</sup> Tong, *Ancestral Veneration*, 28-9.

<sup>18</sup> Tey, *Chinese Culture and the Bible*, 73.

<sup>19</sup> Lit-Sen Chang, *Evangelization Among Buddhist and Confucianists, "Let the Earth Hear His Voice"* (Minneapolis: World Wide Pub, 1975), 839.

<sup>20</sup> R.K Harrison, *Leviticus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 196.

<sup>21</sup> Poh, *The Christian in the Chinese Culture*, 41.

<sup>22</sup> Tey, *Chinese Culture and the Bible*, 79.

<sup>23</sup> Princeton Hsu, *The Bible and Chinese Filial Piety* (Hong Kong: Baptist Press, 1970), 109.

<sup>24</sup> Tey, *Chinese Culture and the Bible*, 82.

<sup>25</sup> John J Davis, *What About Cremation?: A Christian Perspective* (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1989), 93-4.

<sup>26</sup> John J Davis and John C Whitcomb, *A History of Israel: From Conquest to Exile* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 253.

<sup>27</sup> Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations, *Chinese Customs and Festivals in Singapore* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 1989), 63.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>30</sup> Frena Bloomfield, *The Book of Chinese Beliefs* (London: Arrow Book, 1983), 54.

<sup>31</sup> Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 184.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>33</sup> Davis and Whitcomb, *A History of Israel: From Conquest to Exile*, 76.

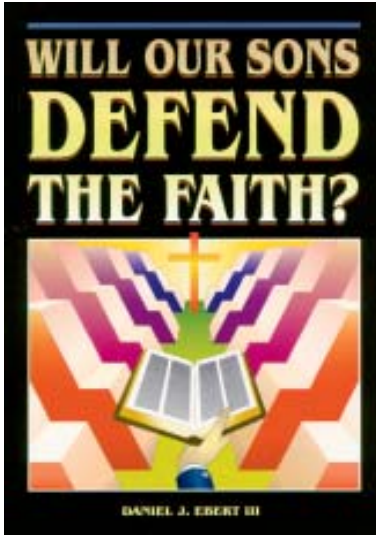
<sup>34</sup> Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 185.

<sup>35</sup> Hal Lindsey and C C Carlson, *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* (London: Lakeland, 1972), 155.

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*Rev Tan Eng Boo is pastor of Grace Bible-Presbyterian Church.*

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### PREFACE TO THE REPRINTING OF THE THIRD EDITION

At the instance of Rev. Charles Seet, a co-labourer with the author for seven years in the Philippines, we have great pleasure to reprint this important book.

We have known Rev. Dan Ebert III for two decades. We have become his good friend for his loyalty to our Lord in exposing the Devil's devices to undermine the Word of God.

Like the Monkey-god who can change himself seventy-two times except for his tell-tale wriggling appendage, whatever form Satan has adopted to attack God's Word,

whether it be the old Liberalism or Neo-orthodoxy, the Social gospel or Neo-evangelicalism, is exposed to the bone by our friend.

A new form of attack on God's Word, however, has arisen. It is by the proliferation of translating the Bible based on the corrupt text of Westcott and Hort since the mid-twentieth century. This has caused an alarm bell to be sounded by Edward F. Hills, David Otis Fuller, D. A. Waite, David W. Cloud, G. A. Riplinger, S. H. Tow, the Trinitarian Bible Society, not the least Far Eastern Bible College. The hundred "versions" now flooding the market, headed by the NIV (New International Version) are now further condemned by the ICCC (International Council of Christian Churches) at its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, August 1998, to be "perversions". We support only the King James Bible which has served the Church for almost four hundred years as being the most accurate and faithful translation based on the time-honoured and time-preserved Textus Receptus.

We believe with the Westminster Confession that "the Words of the Lord are pure words as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt **preserve** them from this generation **for ever**" (Ps 12:6,7). Available at the FEBC Bookroom ([febcbkrm@singnet.com.sg](mailto:febcbkrm@singnet.com.sg)).

## **BURIAL OR CREMATION?**

Jeffrey Khoo

The Synod of the Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore in May 1987 passed a resolution stating that burial and not cremation is the biblical way of putting to rest the body of those who have been called home to be with the Lord. In the Life B-P Church constitution (7.10) on Funerals, it is stated, “The normal practice of the B-P Church is to bury the dead.”

What are the reasons for the B-P church to adopt this position on burial and not cremation? The reasons are based on Scripture and Doctrine. We shall first examine the practice of cremation in the light of Scripture, and then present the doctrinal reasons why we ought to bury and not cremate.

### **Why Not Cremation?**

Cremation is a method for the disposal of the dead by burning. This method is not new. It has ancient origins, and was practised by the Canaanites in the time of the Old Testament. In the light of the Old Testament, we learn that cremation is not only a heathen practice but also a sign of divine judgement.

#### **Heathen Practice**

Dr John J Davis in his book, *What About Cremation?*, said that cremation “was both early in origin and widespread in geographic scope. For the most part, it was associated with pagan ideas about the essence of life or mythical beliefs regarding the afterlife.” Cremation is tied to the heathen practice of offering human sacrifices. God commanded the Israelites not to follow this cruel and hateful practice in Deut 12:31, “Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters *they have burnt in the fire* to their gods.” For the heathens, cremation was the way to send off both the living and

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the dead to the netherworld. Is it no wonder that non-Judeo-Christian religions like Hinduism and Buddhism also practise cremation?

The Jews regarded the act of cremation as a form of idolatry. Israel in keeping herself distinct from the heathen nations, and in obedience to the command of separation, practised burial instead of cremation. To prove that the divinely sanctioned method is burial and not cremation, the Jews cited Deut 21:23, “His body shall not remain all night upon a tree, but thou shalt in any wise *bury* him that day” (see also Gen 23:19, 35:8; Deut 34:6; 1 Kgs 11:15, 22:37, Ezek 39:15).

### Divine Judgement

Cremation is also a sign of judgement. In the Old Testament, cremation was done to dishonour or punish those who had sinned against God. Achan for his sin of idolatry was punished by fire. God said, “And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be *burnt with fire*, he and all that he hath, because he hath transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he hath wrought folly in Israel. ... And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? The Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and *burned them with fire*, after they had stoned them with stones” (Josh 7:15, 25).

Fire is a symbol of God’s judgement. When the wicked priests—Nadab and Abihu—offered strange fire before God which He commanded them not, “there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD” (Lev 10:1-2). God destroyed the homosexual cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with brimstone and fire (Gen 19:24). The nation of Moab, too, faced God’s fiery judgement, “For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime: But I will send a fire upon Moab” (Amos 2:1-2). In the New Testament, we find the same teaching that fire and burning point to God’s judgement and disapproval. In Acts 19:18-19, the newly converted believers renounced their heathen past by burning all their books on witchcraft and sorcery. The Apostle Peter prophesied that God would destroy the whole universe one day by fire, “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Pet 3:7). At the judgement before the Great White Throne, all the fallen angels and all the finally

impenitent will be cast into the lake of fire for eternal punishment (Rev 20:14-15).

In both Testaments, believers have always been buried. The Old Testament patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—were all buried (Gen 25:8-10, 35:29, 49:33, 50:1-13). The same is true in the New Testament: John the baptiser was buried (Matt 14:10-12), Lazarus was buried (John 11:17), Stephen was buried (Acts 8:2), our Lord Himself was buried (John 19:40-42).

Dr Davis has rightly concluded, “The biblical record of burial is clear that inhumation was the only acceptable practice among both Jews and Christians. Although the practice of burning the human being is not absent from the Old Testament; when it appears, it is cast in a negative light.”

### **Why Burial?**

Why is inhumation or burial the biblical way for Christians? There are two doctrinal reasons why we should bury and not cremate. We bury because of (1) the doctrine of the resurrection and (2) the doctrine of the body.

### **Doctrine of the Resurrection**

As Christians, we believe in the bodily resurrection. Burial is meaningful to the Christian because it points to the future resurrection. This was certainly what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he said, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection” (Rom 6:4-5). When we bury the human body, it is like sowing a seed into the ground; at the appointed time, it will sprout out of the ground as a plant. God will one day raise up our body just as He raised Christ’s (1 Cor 15:42-44). Cremation, on the other hand, with all that fire and burning, would only evoke thoughts of punishment and judgement. Would not the message on the Christian’s blessed hope of a future resurrection be contradicted by rolling a casket into the furnace? The fire gives a picture of hell, not heaven. Clearly, cremation illustrates the eternal destiny of unbelievers, and not of believers. The hideous sight of a body stoking up the furnace will only bring more sorrow and grief to



## *BURIAL OR CREMATION?*

the bereaved, not hope and comfort. The message of the resurrection is lost when we cremate our dead.

### **Doctrine of the Body**

The Bible teaches that a human being consists of two parts: (1) the spirit and (2) the body. These two parts are not only distinguishable but also separable (Gen 3:19, Luke 23:43, 46, Eccl 12:7). Both the spirit and the body are important. The spirit is that part of man that relates to God (John 4:24, Rom 8:16) while the body is that part which allows man to subsist on earth. For Christians, the body is also the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Although at death, the spirit will be separated from the body, both will be rejoined at the time of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:44). So the body is not merely “a shell that contains the nut.” When a believer dies, he is said to be sleeping (1 Cor 15:51). When a person sleeps, he expects to wake up. This awakening will happen when Christ returns. So the body is an important part of man and must be treated carefully even at death.

The Jews understood the doctrine of the resurrection and of the body (cf John 11:24). That was why they treated the body of their departed loved ones with great care. Consider the following Jewish burial procedure:

- (1) Eyes of deceased closed by eldest son or next-of-kin (if necessary) (Gen 46:4).
- (2) Body washed (Acts 9:37).
- (3) Body anointed with aromatic spices (John 12:7, 19:39, Mark 16:1, Luke 24:1).
- (4) Body wrapped in cloth (Matt 27:59, John 11:44, 19:40).
- (5) Body not to be mutilated (Lev 19:27-28, 21:5, Deut 14:1).
- (6) Body carried to a tomb on a wooden bier (2 Sam 3:31).
- (7) Body is finally placed in a simple grave, cave, or rock-cut tomb (Luke 23:53).

The Church pretty much kept to the Jewish and biblical practice of burial. Dr Davis noted that “the early church practiced inhumation and rigorously opposed cremation. Prompt burials followed death and a special memorial service was conducted the third day following the believer’s death. The choice of the third day was a means of reaffirming belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the ultimate resurrection of

all believers. ... The overwhelming consensus of early church writers and leaders was that cremation was associated with rites that were incompatible with many basic tenets of their faith.”

The B-P church like the early church practises inhumation and opposes cremation. As such, B-P church members should choose burial, and should inform their next-of-kin, who might be unbelievers and might prefer cremation, that their wish is to be buried and not cremated. B-P pastors should only conduct funerals that are by burial.

### **The Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore Statement on Cremation**

The following statement was published in the *Far Eastern Beacon*, July 1987:

#### **The Situation**

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

#### **Scriptural Considerations**

The Scriptures plainly teach:

- (1) Christians are to love their own bodies (Eph 5:28), even at death, the corpse is not to be lightly disposed of, having been associated with the soul of a departed loved one. God’s judgment upon Adam was that at death, Adam should return to the ground: “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen 3:19).

## *BURIAL OR CREMATION?*

- (2) The patriarchs and their spouses were buried, viz. Abraham (Gen 25:9), Sarah (Gen 23:19), Isaac (Gen 35:29), Rebekah (Gen 49:31), Jacob (Gen 50:5-7,13), Leah (Gen 49:31), Rachel (Gen 35:19-20) and Joseph (Josh 24:33).
- (3) Our Lord Jesus was laid in a tomb and buried (Matt 27:60; 1 Cor 15:4).
- (4) Burial of the believer at death is compared to being “sown in corruption” (1 Cor 15:42,44). This exemplifies faith and hope of the resurrection.

### **Why We Should Not Cremate**

- (1) In the Scriptures, in some cases non-burial is a mark of God’s judgment and curse, eg the disposal by burning of Achan and his family (Josh 7:24-25), of harlots (Gen 38:24; Lev 21:9) and the disposal of Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:10,34), of King Jehoiakim (Jer 22:19).
- (2) Christians are reminded to glorify the Lord by life or by death and that “whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s” (Rom 14:8).
- (3) To see the disposal of a loved one’s corpse by cremation is usually painful to the bereaved and violates the sacred memory of the dead.

### **Exceptions**

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

### **Conclusion**

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

- (1) Exhort and encourage all our members to plan for funerals by burial and not by cremation.
- (2) Disseminate such Scriptural teaching to our children and fellow-Christians so that they, too, will come to the same Scriptural understanding and persuasion.
- (3) Remind BP pastors and leaders to avoid officiating or giving undue support to cremation. Cremation should only be decided on as an exception and after consultation with the Board of Elders.

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## **REPROBATION: IS GOD FAIR?**

Chan Tuck Whye

Two questions have been on the mind of the writer for a period of time. They concern the unsaved condition of the reprobate. By applying the knowledge learned from the course on Soteriology, he will now attempt to answer certain commonly raised questions concerning reprobation.

The first concerns the judgement of the unsaved who have not heard the gospel message. Such people may be living in places where the gospel is not preached. For example, the tribesmen living in inaccessible jungles. Obviously from the time of the scattering of the people at Babel (Gen 11:8) until today, there have been many under this category who have lived and died through the generations. This also includes people living in modern societies who have not heard of the Saviour in Jesus Christ. They may have grown up in environments practising false worship, such as in Muslim or Buddhist communities where people truly have not heard the gospel being preached in their lifetimes. Also included in this category would be the mentally retarded and young children who die before having knowledge of the gospel.

### **Is God Fair?**

Under these circumstances, a seemingly natural question to ask is, "Is God fair to condemn a person who did not have the opportunity to hear the gospel? How can God condemn such a person if he was not given the chance to receive Jesus Christ?"

First of all, we shall show that a sinner, left on his own, will not choose God nor seek after Him. And because of this, God's wrath is on him. In Romans 1:18-20, we see that every human being knows there is a Creator God:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed

## *REPROBATION: IS GOD FAIR?*

it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

No one can give the excuse that he does not know there is a God of Creation. God has revealed His existence to man through His Creation. The invisible things of God are clearly seen from the works of Creation. This is likened to a person who when seeing a painting, knows there is a painter who painted the painting. When he sees a sculpture, he knows there is a sculptor who made the sculpture. A person of sound mind cannot look at a painting and say he does not know how the painting came about or that there was a painter who painted the painting. Similarly, when a person sees the works of Creation (eg. the trees, birds, himself, etc.), he knows there is a Creator. He cannot say he does not know how the created things came about or that there was a Creator who created them.

If someone says there is no God (i.e. an atheist), he is deliberately lying to himself because deep within him, he knows there is a God of Creation. All atheists know there is a God of Creation. They may deny that God exists for fear of judgment or their own self-centered reasons. This is because if they were to admit that there is a God, they would then have to face the dilemma of whether to receive or to reject Him. Receiving Him would mean having to acknowledge that they are sinners, confess their sins, seek forgiveness, and live their lives in obedience to God. It would mean forsaking their present sinful lifestyles. Man in his sinful unregenerate state will not want to do that. On the other hand, rejecting Him would mean they have to face judgment for their sins, which is something sinners would not like to believe also. Therefore, man will choose to deny that God exists, and continue with their lives in sin.

There cannot be a case where a person truly thinks there is no Creator. Verses 19-20 of Romans 1 say so. Strictly speaking, there are no genuine atheists in the world. They only profess to be such.

Having established that man knows the existence of his Creator, Romans 1:21 goes on to say that he will not glorify God nor thank Him. He will not worship God.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Also, Romans 3:10-12 says that all humans will not look for God of their own accord.

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

As such, God's wrath is upon them. Verses 18-21 of Romans 1 confirm this. "For the wrath of God is ... against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (i.e. sinners) ... because that which may be known of God is manifest in them ... (and) because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

Every human being is guilty of this act against God. This is because of the sin imputed on them by Adam's act of disobedience. Adam as the representative of man, failed the test to obey God, and his Fall brought sin and death to all mankind (Rom 5:12-21).

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is the condition of all human beings born in sin. Their hearts being darkened by sin will cause them to reject God. Left on their own, it

*REPROBATION: IS GOD FAIR?*

is inconsequential whether the gospel message is presented to them, whether they are living in a remote jungle without hearing the gospel or whether they have attended church and heard the salvation message preached a hundred times. Man, in his unregenerate state, is blind to the gospel and will simply not acknowledge the true living God nor worship Him. This is true for all sinful humans. Whether or not they have the opportunity to hear the gospel will not change this sinful nature or make them want to glorify God.

However, through unconditional Election, God by the pleasure of His good will, chose some to be saved before time.

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 (Eph 1:4-5).

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you (John 15:16).

God is not unfair to choose only some to be saved but not others. This is explained in Romans 9:14-23, where man is likened to clay, and God, the Potter, has every right to do whatever He pleases with the clay.

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.

Moreover, all men deserve to die in the first place because they know there is a God but will not glorify nor thank Him as their hearts are darkened by their sin (Rom 1:21). God's grace towards the equally undeserving Elect should not be treated as unfairness to the Reprobate, because all deserve to be condemned in any case.

According to His appointed time, the Elect will come to hear the gospel and be saved. God will open their eyes and hearts to the gospel and grant them understanding to accept the Saviour through special illumination from the Holy Spirit. After accepting Jesus Christ, their regenerate souls will then acknowledge God as the Creator and worship Him.

It is important to know that the salvation of man is dependent wholly on God. Man's choice of God is not at all dependent on man's own wisdom or the goodness of heart. We have already shown earlier that man will never choose God of his own accord. It is God who chooses. It is He who determines who should be saved by His grace.

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13).

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9).

So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy (Rom 9:16).

Salvation is of the LORD (Jon 2:9).

Having affirmed this truth, we can safely say that God sees to it that those whom He had chosen to save would believe on Him in due time. God would ensure that the gospel reaches them, and faith is imparted to them. How He does it is beyond man's understanding and scrutiny. As for the tribesmen, He may send missionaries to preach to them and cause them to accept the Saviour. For the mentally retarded, He may grant them a heightened intelligence to understand. For elect babies, He may cause the Spirit to work in them in the manner sufficient for their salvation to be realised. Neither location inaccessibility nor lack of intelligence can hinder God from saving whosoever He intends to save.

Concerning the question of fairness, we can now see the problem faced by those asking this question. The reason why such a question is



asked in the first place is due to the failure to understand that there is absolutely no good within an unregenerate soul born in sin that would cause him to seek after God. Such a person is condemned regardless of whether he has heard the gospel, for he is blind to it. Secondly, whether a person is saved is not dependent on whether he chooses to accept Jesus Christ, but rather whether God had indeed chosen him in the first place. Therefore, whether or not he is given the opportunity to hear the gospel does not in any way contribute to his salvation, for it is not for him to choose Jesus based on his own ability (in fact we know he will certainly reject). Since the reprobate is incapable of choosing Jesus, he cannot say that he is deprived of the opportunity to choose Him.

### **Is God Responsible?**

The second question concerns the responsibility of Reprobation, “If God has decreed some to be saved (Election) and others to be lost (Reprobation), isn’t He being unfair to the unsaved? Isn’t God responsible for the lost state of the reprobate since He has decreed that they be lost?”

The first part of this question has been answered earlier.

As regards the doctrine of Reprobation, we know that since God “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11), it follows necessarily that the loss of the lost is within the decrees of God. The two passages below show the unsaved are themselves held responsible for their lost state.

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil ... He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (John 3:18-19, 36).

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess 2:10-12).

Man’s lost condition is ultimately due to his inherent sinful nature that causes him to reject God. They will therefore “not believe in the name of

the only begotten Son of God” (regardless of whether the opportunity presents itself), for they “loved darkness rather than light.” John 3:36 says that “the wrath of God abideth on him.” This is the wrath of God mentioned earlier in Romans 1:18-21, because “when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful.”

It is further emphasised in the following passages that God does not have pleasure in seeing the wicked die.

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? ... For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye (Ezek 18:23, 32).

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).

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4).

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9).

What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory (Rom 9:22-23).

This is evidence that God is not responsible for the lost state of the unsaved. Although He did not elect them to be saved, neither did He deliberately “unelect” them to be unsaved. They were already lost and deserved death when they disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, Adam being their representative. Therefore, they are fully responsible for their own lost condition.

To conclude, the writer would like to use a simple analogy to illustrate all the points discussed in this paper. Suppose there were 1000 criminals locked up in jail in a certain country. And on the country’s 50<sup>th</sup> independence day, the President decided to pardon 50 prisoners and set them free. Now, the remaining 950 criminals still in prison have no right to cry unfairness for they had indeed committed crimes worthy of imprisonment. Neither should they have the right to question the President why he chose those 50 and not them. The President is not

accountable nor answerable to them at all. His special favour upon the 50 cannot be construed as unfairness towards the 950. Also, the President cannot be held responsible for their imprisonment. They are to be blamed for their own crimes. They are in no position to make any demands. They are at the mercy of the President.

This study on the doctrine of Salvation has benefited the writer immensely. He wishes to thank God for providing the understanding on this topic during the course of study.

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## College News

The January 2003 semester saw an intake of **13 new students** from the following countries: **Cambodia**: Chum Chanraneth; **Jordan**: Maher Sulti Habeb Al-Nimri; **Korea**: Jun Ji Chun, Lee Chang Ha, Lee Gun Eui, Park Mi Oak; **Malaysia**: Lim Ren Muh, Andy Tan, Yap Kim Chuan; **Singapore**: Ruth Lim Sue Ting, John Loo Lay Gee, James Tan Tay Yong; and **Tanzania**: Elibariki Peter Nanyaro. The full-time student enrolment now stands at 110 from 18 countries. The *Basic Theology For Everyone* evening classes have a total enrolment of 250 part-time students.

The **FEBC Gospel Rally** was held at Life Bible-Presbyterian Church on March 29, 2003, 7.30 pm. Rev Quek Suan Yew preached on the topic: “Only Two Gates” (Matt 7:13-14).

FEBC held its **28<sup>th</sup> Graduation Exercises** on May 11 at Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church, Pandan Gardens. Dr S H Tow, senior pastor of Calvary BPC, was the convocation speaker.

## **SCRIPTURAL DIRECTIONS AGAINST MAN-PLEASING**

Tan Kian Sing

Are you afraid of man? They could be your bosses, superiors, business partners, parents, spouses, teachers, church elders, or even your close friends. Are you careful of pleasing them and gaining their favour?

Last Thursday, *The Straits Times* carried a news report about a well-known chef who was said to have shot himself because his restaurant was rated “less than perfect” by food critics. The chef was said to be “extremely sensitive to criticism.” It was a sad story. Do you wonder how man can have such powerful control over the life of another human being, and how people can be so much affected by the favour or censure of man that it becomes a matter of life and death?

The Holy Scripture warns us against man-pleasing, and this does not contradict the teaching on how we may and must please man as unto God Himself. We must honour, obey, and please our parents, rulers, and superiors in all things that they require us to do, in the Lord. “Honour thy father and thy mother” (Exod 20:12). “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Col 3:20). “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right” (Eph 6:1). “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers ... Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God” (Rom 13:1-2). “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matt 22:21). “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates” (Tit 3:1). “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme” (1 Pet 2:13). “Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh” (Col 3:22). God has given certain men authority over us, and we are obligated to render the respect due to them, but not merely as to man. We must understand that these are men whom God Almighty has placed in the several places of authority. The power given

*SCRIPTURAL DIRECTIONS AGAINST MAN-PLEASING*

to them over us are from God, for God, and not against God. They are to be honoured, obeyed, and pleased not in opposition to the higher authority of God, but as unto God Himself. There are therefore limits and ways as to how far we are to give our due respect to man.

Now if we obey man more than God, and in doing so, we go against God; if we value the favour and approval of man more than God's, or go against God's approval in order to gain man's favour; and if we fear man's censure or displeasure more than God's, we are putting man up on a high pedestal, in the place of God. We are idolising man. This is a great and grave sin against Almighty God. It is a violation of God's commandment to worship Him and Him only with no other gods or idols. "Thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (Exod 34:14).

What is our chief end in life? Are the concerns of our hearts and lives centred around man? Do we care too much how man observe us, seek always to please man in all things that we do, and allow man to rule our lives with regard to our joy or sadness in life? The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Man's chief purpose in life is to serve God; and if he will do it faithfully, he will enjoy the blessings of God abundantly. Let not man compete for our hearts and lives. God should be on the throne in our hearts and He should have the rightful control over our lives. Let not man stand in between God and us. The Lord Jesus should be the only Man to stand in between God and us, to mediate for us before God the Father. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5).

The Holy Scripture forbids that man be thought above that which is written (1 Cor 4:6). Man should be valued or regarded, like all other creatures, as subordinate and subservient to God. There are many injunctions from the Word of God that advise and warn us against the sin of man-pleasing. "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" (Isa 2:22). "And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Matt 23:9). "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (Matt 23:8). "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm" (Jer 17:5). "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes" (Ps 118:6, 8, 9). "Let me not, I pray you, accept

any man's person, neither let me give flattering titles unto man. For I know not to give flattering titles; in so doing my maker would soon take me away" (Job 32:21-22). "As for me, is my complaint to man?" (Job 21:4). "Do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal 1:10). "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment" (1 Cor 4:3). "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:26). "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt 5:11-12). "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers" (Eph 6:6; Col 3:22). "So we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts" (1 Thess 2:4). These passages express explicitly that it is against Scripture that we should indulge in inordinate man-pleasing, give respect to man more than they deserve, and exalt man higher than they should be placed.

Let us be ever watchful that we do not fall into the sin of idolising man. One who pleases man does not take God into account and therefore makes it his business to satisfy man. Remember that it is a dangerous sin to gain favour from and seek to please man. Let not this sin prevail against us from pleasing God which is our business and duty in this life. "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl 12:13). Therefore watch against the sin of man-pleasing as we would guard against any other earthly things which do tempt us to idolise them and cause us to neglect our love and devotion to God.

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*Pr Tan Kian Sing is pastoring Berean Bible-Presbyterian Church.  
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# THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD IN MY LIFE

Ephrem Chiracho Ouchula

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). I would like to share with you the goodness of the Almighty God and the marvelous things He has done for me. There are four turning points in my life that testify of the grace and faithfulness of God.

## **From Spiritual Darkness into His Marvelous Light**

In my family, my father was the first person to believe in Christ. My mother used to worship an evil spirit called “Hawai” through a sacred snake. My father spared no effort to preach to her the gospel of Christ. Eventually, my mother denied her Hawai and believed in Christ.

I followed my parents to church. However, I did not believe in Christ, nor know of my sinfulness. My parents took for granted that I was saved. I was not. And so, when I started secondary school, I left the church and began to live a sinful lifestyle. While in that spiritual darkness, I joined Alemaya University of Agriculture in September 1988.

The first turning point in my life came after a few months into my first semester of studies at the University. My health deteriorated under stress. It came to a point where I lost all hope in life. In such a desperate situation, I opened my mouth to blame God for my ill fate. In my own eyes, I was righteous, and God was my enemy. The opposite of course was true. God, out of His bountiful mercy and love, condescended to save me. On that bed of agony, God filled my broken heart with a sweet message of forgiveness, peace, and hope of eternal life. The darkness of spiritual death gave way to God’s marvelous light of salvation. I received Christ my Saviour into my heart. What a blessed and memorable moment! Since then, the Lord has graciously preserved my life. As my Heavenly Father, He cares for me in times of joy or sorrow, strength or weakness, health or sickness, plenty or lack.

### **From Height of Success into Valley of Distress**

The second turning point occurred between March and May of 1991. This was the period when civil war in Ethiopia reached its climax. The Minister of Defence made a proclamation which was binding on all students in the various colleges and universities. The institutions were shut down, and we were taken to a military training base. Thus, I found myself sliding down the ladder of life from the height of success into the valley of distress. My situation changed from that of a promising university student into a somewhat desperate soldier. My dreams turned into a nightmare. Worse of all, by the end of two months' training, the rebels had won the battle, and our lives were at stake. There was no choice but to run for our lives. I fled to Kenya on May 28, 1991 for refuge. I was in the company of thousands of soldiers, students, and civilians. If it were not for God's sustaining grace, I would not have been able to bear that pain. In Kenya, there was no proper camp accommodation for all the refugees who flooded into that land. We were kept in a bush, as a temporary refugee camp, where there was no water, food, or shelter. The only water we could find was from a stream into which the sewage of a certain town was disposed. The water was stinky and bitter. But that was the only water we had for the next two months. We used it for drinking, bathing, washing clothes, and cooking food. We should all have been dead through plague or disease. But the sovereign hand of God blessed and sanctified the water for us. Later, we were moved to a slightly better place. However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees decided to reduce the number of refugees in the camp. Through indirect means, they forced our repatriation by depriving us of shelter and food, or by feeding us with expired foodstuff. We were treated as mere animals with no human value. Yet, the good hand of God was upon me to protect, comfort and give me grace to persevere.

### **From a Labourer of Mammon to a Fisher of Men**

After the rebels had established their government, they called all refugee students to return and continue with their studies. That was really great news! Most of my friends returned home and resumed their studies. I was, however, deprived of that privilege. But this was by God's higher hand. At that time, I was facing a great trial. My heart was overwhelmed with fear for my aging mother and younger brother. My father had passed



away. My goal in life was to complete my studies and make money. Yet, the Lord convicted my heart to continue on in the refugee camp.

It was in September 1991 that God expressly called me into His full-time ministry. I was perplexed. I had to decide to follow either my will or God's will. But, did not Jesus say to His disciples, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt 16:24). By His divine grace, I gave up my personal ambitions, and decided to answer God's call. That was the crucial turning point in my life, from fishing for mammon to fishing for men. But who will take care of my aged mother and my young brother? That was a genuine concern, but who is better than God to take care of the widows and the orphans? So, my heart was comforted, and I continued to live in the camp for about four years serving in the Ethiopian Refugee Christians Evangelical Church. Let me say a word to those whom the Lord is calling to serve Him: Put your genuine concerns into the hands of the Almighty Father and answer His call. Remember that once you lose this great opportunity, you will lose it forever, for you can live only once in this life before eternity comes.

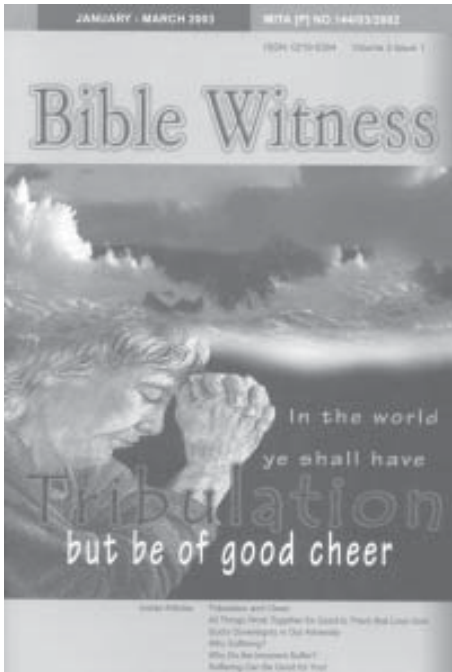
### **From the School of Ordeals to the College of Prophets**

As soon as I realised the divine call into full-time ministry, I began to pray for God to open a door for me to study His Word and be fully equipped to do His great work. And God gave me the privilege of studying His Word at the Bible College of East Africa (BCEA), Nairobi, Kenya, from 1995-1998. There I perceived that the call to a preaching and teaching ministry requires me to be grounded in the Bible and in Theology. I continued to pray that God would open a door for me to further my studies. The Lord used my teachers to arrange for my studies in Singapore at the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC). I was a student at FEBC from January 1999-May 2003 where I graduated with a Bachelor of Theology (BTh) and a Master of Divinity (MDiv). This is truly grace upon grace. Just imagine from where the Lord has lifted me up! He is a great and glorious God. He is a faithful God and is no respecter of persons.

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*Ephrem now teaches at the Bible College of East Africa, and hopes in future to set up a fundamental ministry in his home country, Ethiopia.*

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**BIBLE WITNESS** is a magazine for the nurture of individual spiritual life, a magazine for every Christian home, and a magazine for Bible study groups. Visit the Bible Witness website for discussion questions based on the articles of the magazine. You may print out the questions and use them to facilitate discussion in family worship, Bible study groups, etc. You may also use them for individual study.

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**“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid  
... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good  
works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt 5:14, 16).**