



The Burning Bush

ISSN 0219-5984

January 2010

Volume 16 Number 1

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THE BURNING BUSH

Theological Journal of the
FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE

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Editor : Jeffrey Khoo
Publisher : Far Eastern Bible College
Website : www.febc.edu.sg
Permit : MICA (P) 064/03/2009
Printer : Chung Printing

The Burning Bush (ISSN 0219-5984) is published bi-annually in January and July, and contains theological papers, sermons, testimonies, book reviews, College news, and alumni reports. Articles are indexed in the *Christian Periodical Index*. The journal is distributed gratis to the FEBC family and Bible-Presbyterian churches, and available online at www.febc.edu.sg. Local/Foreign subscription rates in Singapore dollars: one year—\$6/\$12; two years—\$10/\$20; back issues—\$3/\$6 per copy. Make cheques payable to “Far Eastern Bible College.”

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THE LEGACY OF JOHN CALVIN IN THE BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Jeffrey Khoo

Reformed and Presbyterian churches this year celebrate the 500th year of John Calvin who was born on July 10, 1509 in Noyon, Picardy, France, and who died on May 27, 1564 in Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin was the great French Reformer of the 16th Century Protestant Reformation. All Reformed and Presbyterian churches trace their ancestry and theology back to him, and the Bible-Presbyterian (B-P) Church is no different.

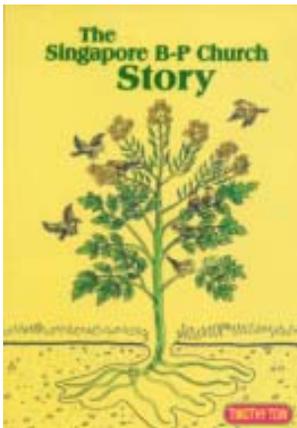
What is Calvin's legacy in the B-P Church? What are the lessons to be drawn for the present and future as we strive to be a faithful church until the Lord returns? Let us look at the history and theology of the B-P Church in Singapore and how we are what we are because of Calvin and other great men of God.

History

The B-P Church in Singapore has seven historical roots, according to the Rev Dr Timothy Tow—her late founding pastor (see his book, *The Singapore B-P Church Story*). Out of the seven roots, five of them (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 6th and 7th) are Reformed or Presbyterian roots.

John Calvin

The B-P Church is a Protestant Church. We remain part of the 16th Century Protestant Reformation movement which opposed the tyranny and the errors of the Roman Catholic Church. Although many Protestants and Evangelicals (e.g. Evangelicals and Catholics Together 1994, and Lutheran World Federation in 1999) have capitulated to the ecumenical pressure to reunite with the Roman



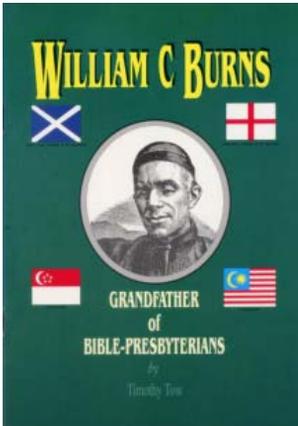
Catholic Church, the B-P Church remains steadfast in proclaiming the five famous slogans of the Protestant Reformation, namely, *Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, Sola Scriptura, Soli Deo Gloria*.

There were two main leaders in the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin. Luther was the evangelist, and Calvin the theologian. When we call ourselves Reformed or Presbyterian we are identifying ourselves with Calvin and his theology as contained in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and the Calvinistic Westminster Confession of Faith. Calvin was a Frenchman, and so our first root is a French root.

English Presbyterian Mission

The second root is the English Root since our Reformed Faith is derived from the missionaries of the English Presbyterian Mission (EPM) who evangelised South China. The English Presbyterians, not wanting to conform to the Anglican Church under an Archbishop, separated themselves to form the Presbyterian Church which is governed by a plurality of spiritually qualified and mature men called Presbyters or Elders, and not by just one man. The B-P Church is a Church governed by a Board of Elders which we believe to be the biblical system of church government.

William Chalmers Burns



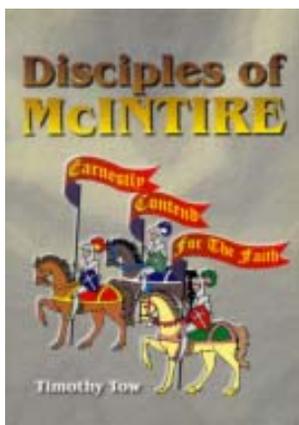
The third root is the Scottish Root. William Chalmers Burns (1815-1868) was a Scotsman and the “Grandfather of Bible-Presbyterians” for it was he who in 1856 visited the Teochew ancestors of the Tow’s and the Heng’s in Swatow, China, and founded the Swatow Presbyterian Church. The first convert in Swatow was Tan Khai Lin, the maternal great-grandfather of the Rev Dr Timothy Tow, who was also the first to be ordained as a pastor. Owing to economic hardships, a number of the Swatow Christians migrated to Singapore and Malaya

in the 1860s and 70s. Noting the migration, the EPM sent the Rev John A B Cook to organise the migrants into four churches, one of which was Life Church, Prinsep Street (1883) or *Say Mia Tng*. Life B-P Church came out of *Say Mia Tng*.

Carl McIntire

The next Reformed root is the sixth which is the American Root. This brings us to Faith Theological Seminary and the Bible Presbyterian Church of USA founded by the Rev Dr Carl McIntire. When Timothy Tow was a student at Faith Seminary training for full-time ministry, he heard Dr McIntire sound a clarion call for a 20th Century Reformation which was organised as the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) in 1948. The call was to defend the faith in the midst of apostasy. The Liberals and Modernists were attacking the historic Christian Faith and the Holy Scriptures left, right and centre. The young Timothy Tow heard the call, found his heart strangely warmed, and joined with his teacher—Dr Carl McIntire—in the spiritual battle for a 20th Century Reformation.

Timothy Tow



The Singapore Root is traced to the Rev Dr Timothy Tow, the founding pastor and first theologian of the B-P movement in Singapore. B-Pism in Singapore is known for its separatist stance against liberalism, ecumenism, charismatism, neo-evangelicalism and every false ‘ism’ that has arisen to undermine the historic Christian Faith. The doctrine of separation is enshrined in our constitution. The Rev Dr Timothy Tow together with the Rev Dr Quek Kiok Chiang (then Elder) and the Rev Hsu Chiang Tai (then Deacon) were known as the “Three

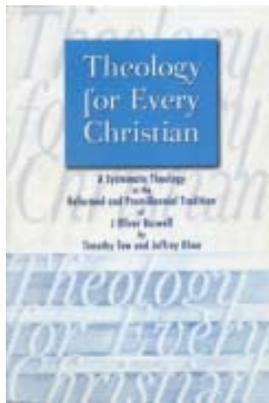
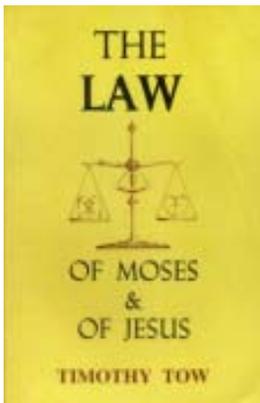
Musketeers” in the early days of the movement, earnestly contending for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3). Dr S H Tow, noting the danger in the ecumenical evangelism of Billy Graham in the 1970s, joined in the fray—the fourth Musketeer. Read all about it in Timothy Tow’s book—*Disciples of McIntire*.

It is tragic today to see the B-P movement being destroyed from within. The whole denomination is now fractured into three or four camps since the dissolution of the B-P Synod in 1988 due to incipient charismatism and neo-evangelicalism (read about it in Timothy Tow’s *The Singapore B-P Church Story*). The falling away is seen more and

more clearly as the years go by. The divide is even more pronounced today with certain B-P churches not wanting to defend the Authorised or King James Version of the Bible which is the Bible of the 16th Century Protestant Reformation, which is the Bible of the B-P Church from the beginning. Some have already replaced the KJV with the NIV or one of the modern versions. They refuse to take a separatist stance against the liberal and ecumenical modern versions which are based upon corrupt texts. They even go so far as to malign as “heresy” the biblical doctrine of the verbal and plenary preservation (VPP) of the Holy Scriptures. We pray for their repentance. The truth is Psalm 12:6-7 which says, “*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.*” Matthew 5:18, “*For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*” Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33, “*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*” God promised to preserve His inspired words and we believe He kept His promise. The Westminster Divines, our Calvinistic forefathers believed this; Dr Carl McIntire, the father of Bible Presbyterianism himself believed this. We cannot but defend the truth, “*For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth*” (2 Cor 13:8).

Theology

Covenant Theology



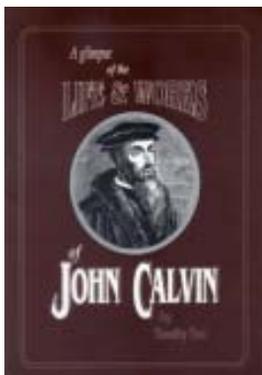
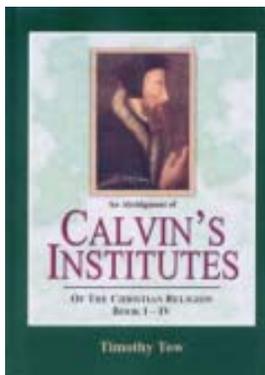
As a Calvinistic Church, the B-P Church is unashamedly Covenantal as opposed to Dispensational in its theology. You may ask, “What is dispensationalism or dispensational theology”? You will

get your answers from the Rev Dr Timothy Tow’s scholarly book—*The Law of Moses and of Jesus*—which is a critique of dispensationalism in

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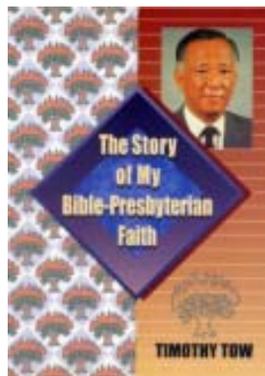
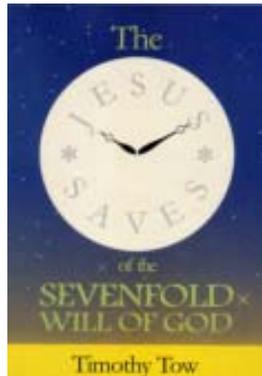
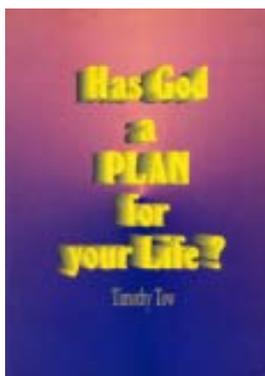
general and its view of the Moral Law in particular. If you want to know what is Covenant Theology, please read *Theology for Every Christian: A Systematic Theology in the Reformed and Premillennial Tradition of J Oliver Buswell* published by the Far Eastern Bible College. Briefly and simply, Covenant Theology is all about the unity of the Bible and the unity of God’s plan of salvation in Christ. It emphasises the sovereignty of God in all that happens in this world, and the faithfulness of God in keeping His promises to His people.

“Calvinism is Paulinism Systematised”



Now when we study Calvin, we are not actually studying Calvin but the Apostle Paul. “Calvinism is Paulinism systematised” said the Rev Dr Timothy Tow. Rev Tow was an expert on Calvin. He had abridged Calvin’s

Institutes and written many books expounding Calvinism. You will want to begin with *A Glimpse of the Life and Works of John Calvin*, and then move on to *Has God a Plan for Your Life?* which is really a practical application of his more doctrinal book—*The Sevenfold Will of God*. If you wish to feel the Calvinistic heartbeat of Rev Tow, you will want to read his book, *The Story of My Bible-Presbyterian Faith*, and many other



books he had written on preaching and counselling, missions and evangelism, and commentaries on the different books of the Bible.

TULIP



We also hold to the Five Points of Calvinism commonly known as TULIP—an acronym for the Five Points, viz, (1) Total Depravity, (2) Unconditional Election, (3) Limited Atonement, (4) Irresistible Grace, (5) Perseverance of the Saints. We are true blue, Five-Point Calvinists. We are not Four-Pointers or TUIPs who deny the Third Point which is Limited Atonement nor Six-Pointers or TULLIPs who distort the Third Point by denying God’s Common Grace and His Desiderative Will. For elaboration, read my tract, “Hyper-Calvinism in the Light of Calvin.” Many

of the books and articles mentioned are downloadable for free at the Far Eastern Bible College website (www.febc.edu.sg).

Conclusion

The B-P Faith which demands a separation from all forms of worldliness and unbelief, and a polemic defence of the inspired and preserved Words of God will not be appreciated by many but by the faithful remnant. Calvin himself was greatly persecuted for preaching and writing in defence of the faith, and exposing error. But despite the dangers he faced, he often encouraged himself and his hearers by quoting Romans 8:31, “*If God be for us, who can be against us?*”

Let us therefore make sure we are first of all for God, and if we are for Him in accordance and obedience to His forever infallible and inerrant Words, then we can be sure He is also for us and will keep us in these perilous days. Who is more powerful than God? None!

The Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo is Principal of the Far Eastern Bible College, and an Elder of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church.

REPENTANCE IN SALVATION

Ko Linggang

Introduction

The preaching of repentance as a doctrine is as old as the Bible itself. One can clearly see throughout the Scriptures that for any sinner to be saved, he must repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the clear teaching of Christ and His Apostles.

However, over the years, even this simple teaching of repentance and faith has come into question. There have been some who claim that belief or faith in Christ does not require any repentance from sin. They assert that repentance from sin is something that is optional. According to Kenneth Gentry, such a teaching has been propounded by theologians in the past such as classical dispensationalist author Lewis Sperry Chafer who was founder, president and professor of systematic theology of Dallas Theological Seminary.¹ This same issue also came into contention during the “Lordship Salvation” debate in the 1970s-80s, when the foremost proponents of non-Lordship salvation, Zane Hodges² and Charles Ryrie,³ described repentance as simply a changing of one’s mind about Jesus Christ, and not the turning away from sin as evangelical repentance is often described.⁴

More recently, there have been those who take a Ruckmanite view of the King James Bible,⁵ who preach “Easy Believism,” that *repentance of sin has no part in the gospel*, but should only be taught to those who are already saved,⁶ who with their faulty Bibliology view anyone who preaches that repentance is necessary in salvation to be heretical, that such a doctrine is “rank heresy of the worst form”.⁷

What then is the biblical response to such a view of repentance and the gospel? The purpose of this paper is to refute the view that repentance is not necessary in salvation. It will do so by first defining what biblical repentance is, and then proceed to study the teachings of Christ and His

Apostles concerning the relation of repentance to the gospel and salvation.

Biblical Definition of Repentance

In order to better understand repentance, it must first be necessary to define what repentance is in light of the Holy Scriptures.

Old Testament

In the Old Testament, there are two main Hebrew words that are translated as “repent” in the English Bible. The first word is *nacham* which is often used to convey the idea of simply regretting or changing one’s mind. Of the close to 40 times when it is translated as “repent”, “repented”, “repenteth” etc., it is often applied to God, who “repents” of the judgement which He threatened to bring upon wicked men. Examples of such would be verses like Genesis 6:6 “And it *repented* the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart”, and Jonah 3:10 “And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God *repented* of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not”. In the context of such verses, it is clear that God was not repenting from sin or from any evil that He had done, but was simply using *anthropomorphism* to express His grief and sorrow over the evil and wickedness of men, and His withholding of judgement on condition of man’s repentance.⁸ It ought to be noted that “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent (*nacham*)” (Num 23:19). Thus, depending on the context, this Hebrew word has a range of meanings, even in the various instances in which it is translated as “repent”, what is repented of is also different, and whenever used of God it is anthropomorphic.

There are instances in which the word *nacham* is applied to man to mean a regretting of a decision made or a changing of mind about a certain thing, for example Exodus 13:17, “And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people *repent* when they see war, and they return to Egypt”. Here, God was explaining His reason for not leading the Israelites through the way of the Philistines lest they should change their minds, or regret leaving Egypt and desire to return.

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The other word that is sometimes translated “repent” would be the Hebrew word *shub*, which is commonly translated as “turn” or “return”. It is a very common word with over a thousand occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. In a few instances, it is rendered as “repent” in the KJV. This would be in verses such as 1 Kings 8:47, “Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and *repent*, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness”, Ezekiel 14:6, “Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; *Repent*, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations”, and Ezekiel 18:30, “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. *Repent*, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin.” It is very clear from the context that in these instances the repentance being described by this word is the repentance from sin, wickedness, idolatry, transgressions and iniquity. Thus inherent in this word used is the idea that God is calling men to repent, meaning to turn from their sins and towards the Lord their God.

Thus from the Old Testament, it is clear that repentance when applied to God is anthropomorphic, conveying either His grief and sorrow over man’s sinful disobedience or rebellion against Him or His compassion and mercy in withholding judgement when sinners confess their sins and seek His mercy. When repentance is applied to man, depending on the context, it can mean either the changing of the mind or the turning away from sin and wickedness.

New Testament

In the New Testament, there are also two different Greek words commonly translated as “repent”, having two slightly different meanings themselves.

The first and more common word used in the New Testament to express the idea of repentance would be the verb *metanoeo* and its related noun *metanoia*. Etymologically, they come from two words, *meta* (“after”) and *noeo* (“to think” or “to perceive”), and speaks of a change of mind or perception after a certain thing is known. This is the word that is always used when sin is rebuked or when the gospel is preached. For example in Luke 13:3 where it is declared, “I tell you, Nay: but, except

ye *repent*, ye shall all likewise perish”, and Acts 8:22, “*Repent* therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.”

The second and less commonly used word is *metamellomai* which comes from *meta* (“after”) and *mello* (“to feel”, “to care”). This word has the emotional sense of being sorry or regretful after a certain event. This word is never used in any of the gospel verses, and occurs only eight times in the New Testament. One instance where the meaning of the word is clearly seen is the “repentance” of Judas Iscariot as described in Matthew 27:3-4: “Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, *repented* himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” It is clear that Judas did not show any true gospel repentance, for right after his treacherous deed he killed himself in despair instead of turning to Christ for salvation. That is clearly seen in the Greek as well, for the verb *metamellomai* is used here, expressing the idea that Judas only felt sorry for what he had done, but had no inclination to turn to Christ.

The subtle difference in meaning between *metanoia* and *metamellomai* can be seen clearly in 2 Corinthians 7:8-10 where they appear together, “For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent (*metamelomai*), though I did repent (*metemelomen*): for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance (*metanoian*): for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance (*metanoian*) to salvation not to be repented of (*ametameleton*): but the sorrow of the world worketh death”. Upon careful examination of this passage even in the English, one would realise that the repentance that Paul described in verse 8 is different from the repentance expressed in verses 9 and 10. The reason behind this is that there is a play on words in the original language here where different Greek words are used. In verse 8, Paul used the word *metamellomai* in both instances to express the fact that he did not regret sending them the earlier letter, though he did at that time feel rather bad about it. In verses 9 and 10, he went on to say that he did rejoice because the letter had convicted their hearts and caused them to sorrow unto repentance, for this kind of godly sorrow for sins committed was a repentance that would

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lead to salvation. In these two instances, it is the noun *metanoia* that is used, referring to gospel repentance that leads to salvation. In the last occurrence of the word “repent” in verse 10, it is the noun form of *metamelomai* with the negative particle, *ametameletos*, where Paul said that such godly sorrow which leads to salvation is not something to feel sorry about or to regret at all.

Therefore from this brief study, it is clearly seen that repentance as described in the New Testament falls into two distinct categories based on the use of two different Greek words. There is the repentance to salvation which begins with godly sorrow for sin. This is the repentance that is often found in the evangelistic preaching of Christ and the Apostles. This repentance here is more than simply a change of mind or turning from unbelief, but a complete change of perception with regard to sin, self and God’s righteousness, as will be proven later. There is also the less commonly described repentance that simply expresses regret over something. This is the sorrow of Judas that does not lead to salvation.

Historical View of Repentance

A quick perusal through the annals of Church history would reveal that evangelical Christianity has always had a clear and consistent definition of repentance that is clearly contrary to that which is propounded by preachers of “Easy Believism”. Also, repentance has always been an integral part of gospel preaching, and without which there can be no salvation. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin described it as such:

Repentance may be not inappropriately defined thus: A real conversion of our life unto God, proceeding from sincere and serious fear of God; and consisting in the mortification of our flesh and the old man, and the quickening of the Spirit. In this sense are to be understood all those addresses in which the prophets first, and the apostles afterwards, exhorted the people of their time to repentance. The great object for which they labored was, to fill them with confusion for their sins and dread of the divine judgment, that they might fall down and humble themselves before him whom they had offended, and, with true repentance, retake themselves to the right path.⁹

About a hundred years later, the Westminster Divines, when drafting the Westminster Confession of Faith, wrote concerning repentance:

Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace (Zec 12:10; Act 11:18), the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the Gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ (Mark 1:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 20:21).

By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God (Pss 51:4, 119:128; Isa 30:22; Jer 31:18, 31:19; Ezek 18:30, 18:31, 36:31; Joel 2:12, 2:13; Amos 5:15; 2 Cor 7:11), purposing and endeavouring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments (2 Kgs 23:25; Pss 119:6, 119:59, 106; Luke 1:6).

Although repentance be not to be rested in, as any satisfaction for sin, or any cause of the pardon thereof (Ezek 16:61-63, 36:31, 36:32), which is the act of God's free grace in Christ (Hos 14:2, 14:4; Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7); yet it is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it (Luke 13:3, 13:5; Acts 17:30, 17:31).¹⁰

Likewise, it is clearly stated in the Constitution of the Bible-Presbyterian Church:

4.2.5: We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died a propitiatory and expiatory death as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice, and that all who *repent of their sins* and believe in Him are justified before God on the ground of His shed blood;

4.2.8: We believe that salvation is by grace through faith, not by works, and that all who *repent and receive the Lord Jesus Christ* as their personal Saviour are born again by the Holy Spirit and thereby become the children of God;¹¹

Concerning the biblical teaching of faith and repentance, Thomas Watson in 1668 wrote:

The two great graces essential to a saint in this life are faith and repentance. These are the two wings by which he flies to heaven. Faith and repentance preserve the spiritual life as heat and radical moisture do the natural.¹²

More recently, Richard Roberts wrote,

Repentance and faith are different sides of the same turning. In repentance we turn from sin and self; in faith we turn to Jesus Christ our Righteousness. Neither repentance nor faith are meritorious: repentance is the fulfilment of negative duty, faith is the fulfilment of positive duty; the merit is in Jesus Christ and His death, burial and resurrection.¹³

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It is clear that the Church in times past did teach that repentance and faith must be evident in a man's salvation, that repentance and faith go hand in hand.

Repentance in the Preaching of the Gospel

What is the place of repentance in the proclamation of the gospel? A few things will be noted about repentance from a brief study of its occurrences in the gospel preaching of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Apostles.

Preaching of John the Baptist

A survey of the Gospels and the book of Acts will show that the idea of repentance is one that is central to the preaching of the gospel. When John the Baptist began his ministry, his clarion call to all was, "*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt 3:2, Mark 1:4). It is clear that the call is for repentance from sin, for he rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees and called them a "generation of vipers", and because of their sins, they were in danger of the "wrath to come" (Matt 3:7). Therefore what he exhorted them to do was to show forth true repentance by bringing forth "fruits meet for *repentance*" (Matt 3:8), for those who did not show forth such fruits would be cut down and cast into the fire. Only after this message did he in verse 11 bring forth the message of Jesus Christ, of the one who "is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matt 3:11).

Preaching of Christ

When Christ began His public ministry of preaching, the first word that He preached was also clearly the message of repentance. In Matthew 4:17, after He had been baptised, and suffered the temptations of the devil in the wilderness, He "began to preach, and to say, *Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Again it is clear that the emphasis of Christ was for all men to come to repentance, for "except ye *repent*, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3). This was the same message that He desired His disciples to preach, for in Mark 6:12, it is seen of the disciples, that "they went out, and preached that men should repent." Not only was it the first, but repentance was also what Christ called for after His resurrection in His closing address to His disciples before leaving the earth: "And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ

to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that *repentance* and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:46-49).

Preaching of the Apostles

In the preaching of the Apostles, it is again clear that repentance was central in their message. The first message that Peter preached after Pentecost, was again, a clarion call for repentance. In Acts 2, Peter, being filled with the Holy Ghost, stood up and preached unto them, and through his preaching, he brought forth the message of Christ, of how they had rejected and crucified Him, the Anointed One, who was their Messiah. In response, they were “pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter’s response was simple. When they were convicted of their sin, and realised their need for the Saviour, he called upon them to “*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” (Acts 2:38). Based on their response, Peter knew that they had received his preaching, and believed that Jesus was indeed the Christ. What they then had to do was to repent of their sins, and turn to God, and be baptised as a clear indication of their repentance and obedience to God.

This gospel of repentance was preached by Peter and later by Paul himself in passages such as Acts 3:19, 5:31, 8:22, 11:18, 17:30, 20:21 and 26:20. In each instance, the call for repentance was definitely central in the Apostles’ preaching of the gospel.

Repentance from Sin and Not Just Unbelief

If one were to ask, what is it that man must repent of—the thing that will prevent him from entering the kingdom of heaven and that will cause him to perish? The clear answer is sin, for that is what separates man from God, “for the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). It is clear that God is not simply calling for a turning from unbelief towards belief, for the two ideas of repentance and belief are linked in His proclamation in Mark 1:15 which states, “repent ye, and believe the gospel.” It is clear from this verse that the two verbs are used to describe the single conversion

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experience which comprises two aspects—repentance from sin and belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Christ affirmed that it was a repentance that sinners specifically had to have, in Luke 5:32 when He explained that “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” It was specifically with regard to sinners that repentance was called for. Again repentance is clearly linked to forgiveness of sin in Christ’s commission to His disciples in Luke 24:47, where He commanded, “and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” It is clear from Luke 24:46 that one must preach Christ’s death and resurrection, and from verse 47, the repentance and remission of sin. Perhaps the clearest example of the repentance Christ preached about is found in Luke 11:29-32, where He brought up the example of Jonah. In this passage, Christ was rebuking them for not responding to His preaching and His deeds, and their persistent demand for more signs. He then compared them with the Ninevites, for all they had was the preaching of Jonah as a sign to them, and in response to that they repented. What repentance was Christ describing here? It was that the king commanded, “let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands” (Jon 3:8). Evident in their conversion was a sincere mourning for their sins, and a turning from their evil way and violence. In comparison to the Ninevites, the Jews now had Jesus Christ Himself, who was greater than Jonah, yet they refused to repent.

In Acts 3, we find Peter preaching to a crowd who had gathered after he healed a lame man. Again he convinced them of the fact that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah whom they had killed. He told them, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). It is interesting that the word “converted” is described as the subsequent event that would happen after repentance. The word “converted” carries with it an idea of not just a change in one’s mind towards belief of God, but a change in a person’s whole direction and purpose; whereby he was once a servant to sin and an enemy of God, and now he understands the depravity of himself, and how that is an offence to God, and turns away from his sin and turns to God for salvation through Jesus Christ. He is now a new person, converted, having a

completely new direction in life. It is on account of this that forgiveness of sin is promised.

Another clear example can be taken from Acts 8, the example of Simon Magus. Here, Philip was the evangelist preaching to the people in Samaria, where there was also a sorcerer named Simon. In response to his preaching, it was said that “when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptised, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” (Act 8:12-13). Thus it seems as though they had all received salvation because of their belief. However, when Peter came, it was clear that Simon was not truly a believer, for Peter rebuked him, declaring that his heart was “not right in the sight of God”, and that he was still “in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:21, 23). This is clearly not the description of a regenerate man. Peter had to tell Simon, “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22). The only prayer that God will hear from an unbeliever is the prayer of repentance and the plea for the forgiveness of sin through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance Is Linked to Faith

What then is the role of belief, or faith in salvation? How then does one explain the verses that do not mention repentance, but only faith? Concerning this, Richard Roberts says,

Some have reasoned that, because a call for faith sometimes appears in the New Testament without any mention of repentance, it is faith alone that is necessary for salvation. But it can also be said that there are occasional Scriptures in which repentance is demanded with no mention of faith. Are we about to insist, then, that it is repentance alone that is necessary for salvation? Certainly not.¹⁴

Instead, one would then clearly understand that faith and repentance come together as essential graces in receiving the gospel. To this, Homer Kent gives a good explanation:

Repentance is very closely tied, therefore, to faith and conversion. Numerous times these terms are used together. When this happens, repentance is always put first. They are not, however, three separate acts of the soul, or three steps to salvation. They are three aspects of one act of the

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soul whereby the believer responds positively to the offer of Christ in the gospel. It is for this reason that the Bible does not always use the three terms to describe persons who receive salvation.¹⁵

One can clearly see the relationship of faith and repentance in the teachings of Paul, for in Acts 19:4 we read, “Then said Paul, John verily baptised with the baptism of *repentance*, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus”. He fully explained that John preached the message of repentance and belief on Christ together, and that was what would save them. Likewise he recounted to the Ephesian elders how in his ministry at Ephesus he was “testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, *repentance* toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). One must realise here that Paul clearly regarded repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ as two distinct aspects of the single act of genuine conversion. Therefore one can only conclude, as Thomas Watson did, that “the two great graces essential to a saint in this life are faith and repentance. These are the two wings by which he flies to heaven”.¹⁶

Thus in summing up this section, we see that desiring to come to Christ and having faith in Him, it is imperative that one also repents, and turns from his wicked ways. As Kenneth Gentry observes,

A person cannot truly trust and receive Christ as Saviour while consciously clinging to sin, which militates against Christ’s nature. Certainly more sin will be discovered in one’s life as he spiritually matures, but deliberately stowing away sin is an act of defiance and cannot coexist with saving faith. Christ, the Lord of glory, detests sin and will have no one come to Him while remaining in love with his sin. In fact, love of sin is the very thing that keeps people from coming to Christ (John 3:19).¹⁷

Practical Implications of Repentance

How Does One Repent?

The simple answer to this question would be, the same way that one has faith. It is by the pure grace of God, through the working of the Holy Spirit that one can be saved. It is definitely not the response of the will of man, for by himself, he is thoroughly sinful and corrupted, and can by no means save himself. A man without God is described as being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). It is clear that it is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved

us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Tit 3:5). Because man is so utterly depraved, he has absolutely no part even in his own salvation. It is only through the Holy Spirit that he can have the faith to believe, and the desire to repent from his sins.

Thus when the gospel is preached to an unbeliever, the unbeliever can do nothing but oppose it, “because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7), and “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). It is only when man is quickened is he made spiritually alive, and can comprehend the truth of the gospel, be convicted of his sin, and know that it is such a great offence to God. Such godly repentance would cause him to confess his sin before God, have a hatred for sin and a desire to turn away from sin by turning to Christ in faith, believing that the forgiveness of sin can only be had through the finished work of Christ for him. Note that this desire to repent comes from God Himself and not from man (Acts 11:18). Thus man is justified by faith alone, declared righteous by God, and begins his new life in Christ. The repentant sinner who has believed in Christ becomes “a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17).

However, there is a need to realise also that at the point of salvation, one does not become sinlessly perfect. The believer must grow in holiness through sanctification. He must grow in his knowledge of God’s Word. Thus, whilst we have repented from sin at the point of regeneration, we must continue to repent of sin in our lives, that we might be further sanctified and increasingly Christlike.

Repentance Will Bear Fruit

True repentance would definitely bring about the fruits of a transformed life (Matt 3:8). There is absolutely no scriptural warrant for one who has been converted, regenerated, and filled with the Holy Spirit to continue living a life no different from his past life as an unbeliever. Joseph Alleine, in describing the nature of true conversion, stressed that a man truly regenerated would most definitely turn away from sin and produce the fruits of righteousness:

When a man is converted he is forever at enmity with sin; yes, with all sin, but most of all with his own sins, and especially with his bosom sin. Sin is

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now the objects of his indignation. His sin swells his sorrows. It is a sin that pierces him and wounds him; he feels it like a thorn in his side, like a prick in his eyes ... When a man is savingly changed, he is deeply convinced not only of the danger but the defilement of sin; and O, how earnest he is with God to be purified! He loathes himself for his sins. He runs to Christ, and casts himself into the fountain set open for him and for uncleanness.¹⁸

With such an attitude towards sin, there will definitely be a marked change in the life of the new believer. He would be like the one described in Christ's parable of the seed. For "he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matt 13:23). Likewise, James challenged the one who claimed to have faith but showed no fruit, for "faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (Jas 2:17). Indeed, in the subsequent verse, James rebuked such a man, and disputed his claim to salvation. Here is another clear indication that a claim of belief in Christ without the corresponding desire to repent of sin which leads to a changed life is false belief for such a belief is no different from that of demons, "thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jas 2:19). The evidence of true faith is a life characterised by good works—the fruits worthy of repentance, for "yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works" (Jas 2:18). Thus true faith is not simply an intellectual belief in Christ, but a heartfelt repentance from sin, and a turning towards God in Christ Jesus who alone can save us from sin.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that the teaching that repentance from sin is not an essential message of the gospel and should not be preached is clearly a false and dangerous doctrine, and should be condemned for it misleads individuals about the true nature of conversion and leaves unrepentant sinners with a false sense of security about their salvation; thinking that they are saved when they are not, seeing they have no desire to repent of their sins, and showing no spiritual change in their lives. Indeed, Richard Roberts rightly describes this teaching as "a pernicious doctrine" and is a "grievously erroneous viewpoint", and is "the height of theological nonsense", that is "responsible for incredible damage throughout major portions of the church".¹⁹

Repentance is indeed an important doctrine to be proclaimed to every soul, believers and unbelievers alike, for even after salvation, one must continue to repent from his sinful deeds, and return to God. This, in commenting on Jeremiah 23:21-22, Roberts declares, “Any prophet, priest or preacher who claims to speak for God and says little or nothing about repentance in these desperately wicked days is certainly no spokesman for God, nor ought he to be trusted in other matters”.²⁰

Notes

¹ Kenneth L Gentry Jr, *Lord of the Saved: Getting to the Heart of the Lordship Debate* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), 34.

² Zane C Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989).

³ Charles C Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor, 1989).

⁴ The Westminster Larger Catechism defines repentance unto life as “a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and Word of God, whereby, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, and upon the apprehension of God’s mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, he so grieves for and hates his sins, as that he turns from them all to God, purposing and endeavoring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience.” (Question 76).

⁵ Ruckmanism: The spurious notion that the KJV is an advanced revelation, the infallible translation that was inspired by God and should be referred to above the original Hebrew and Greek words of the Bible. As such, the King James Bible in the English is the preserved Word of God and the only point of reference that one should have in any doctrinal matter, and knowledge of the original languages is absolutely unnecessary to any interpretation of God’s Word. See David Cloud, *What about Peter Ruckman?* <http://www.wayoflife.org/database/ruckman.html>.

⁶ Steve Anderson, “Easy-Believism Defended,” <http://www.faithfulwordbaptist.org/easybelievism.html>.

⁷ Watch “Pastor RA Smith Rips on Repentance,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FiVSAXNkrA&feature=player_embedded#t=259.

⁸ Theological term used to describe the personification of God as a man with human attributes, emotions, characteristics or physical qualities. This is often used in the Bible to help man understand the actions of God.

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (E-Sword) Book 3, Chapter 3, Paragraph 5.

¹⁰ Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 15, paragraphs 1-3.

¹¹ See <http://www.bpcwa.com/doctrine.html>. Emphasis added.

¹² Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1668), 7.

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¹³ Richard Owen Roberts, *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel* (Illinois: Crossway, 2002), 69.

¹⁴ Roberts, *Repentance*, 68.

¹⁵ Homer A Kent Jr, “*The Gospel According to Jesus: A Review Article*”, *Grace Theological Journal* 10:1 (1989): 74.

¹⁶ Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, 7.

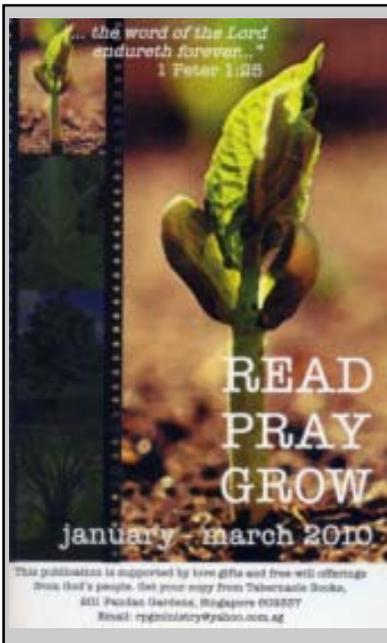
¹⁷ Gentry Jr, *Lord of the Saved*, 47.

¹⁸ Joseph Alleine, *A Sure Guide to Heaven* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1671), 38.

¹⁹ Roberts, *Repentance*, 17.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 54.

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THE BATTLE OVER PRESUPPOSITIONS ON THE TEXTUAL ISSUE

Paul Ferguson

Introduction

The Bible makes it clear that its every Word is essential. All of our doctrines, standards, convictions, and our practices are derived from the Scriptures. The doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture enables us to confidently appeal to these Words to determine all of our theological and doctrinal boundaries. God's revelation is authoritative, sufficient and clear, and ultimately necessary for our existence (Job 23:12; Prov 29:18; Isa 46:10; Amos 8:11; Matt 5:17-18; 16:1-4; John 10:35; Rom 1; 2 Tim 3:15; Tit 1:2; Heb 6:13).

The whole system of God's truth is set forth in the Holy Bible as God's inerrant, infallible and plenary Word. Christians today have accommodated themselves to rationalistic modernism to the point that they no longer hold absolute positions, save perhaps for religious pluralism and the Golden Rule. However, the advent of relativism especially in the textual issue is an insidious adversary, for it rejects the real possibility of absolute truth, even if it promotes infinite forms of meaning. Since the Word of God is our only effective offensive weapon, it would be wholly inconsistent with the character of God to send us out into battle with a sword that is undependable and uncertain. All of Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit to set forth God's unique system of truth and thus the system of truth is self-attesting.

Presuppositions

Reformed believers are mandated to presuppose the Scriptures in all of their thinking and practice as the ultimate criterion of truth, whereas unbelievers resist this obligation in every aspect of thought and life. Francis Schaeffer defines a presupposition as "a belief or theory which is assumed before the next step in logic is developed. Such a prior postulate

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often consciously or unconsciously affects the way a person subsequently reasons.”¹

Hence, presuppositions are the central pillars, which support the foundation from which we can begin any independent interpretation of data, determining possibilities. When we examine the textual issue we find two basic positions. One starts with Scripture and finds God’s instruction about the preservation of Scripture. The other position concerns itself more with man’s opinions, questions, philosophies, and speculations.

However, our presuppositional faith is the evidence and substance we have in what God has spoken (Heb 11)! Everything we need to make us perfect or mature as a believer is found in the Scripture (2 Tim 3:15-17). Such a believer studies to show “himself approved unto God” (2 Tim 2:15). We must interpret evidence in light of faith through special and then general revelation, not vice versa. Reason cannot produce truth in and of itself, as reason needs prior knowledge by which to reason. Behind all human reason is God’s reason, and the only place we can objectively encounter God’s reason is in Scripture. Every use of reason therefore presupposes the Infinite, Eternal and Unchangeable as everything in the world is in constant change and needs an unchanging point of reference to validate it. Too many professing believers have adopted the worldview of Platonist English Provost of King’s College, Cambridge, Benjamin Whichcote who boasted that “reason is the Divine Governor of Man’s Life; it is the very voice of God.”²

When clear biblical truth is found, as A W Tozer would say, “never do we dare to stand in judgment of that truth; rather, that truth always stands in judgment of us!”³ The absolute rule for theory selection is that we should prefer those textual or scientific theories that do not conflict with the biblical data. This is why theology was once ubiquitously understood as the “queen of the sciences.” The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6) concurs,

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

Now, either this credal statement is true or it is not. There simply is no higher authority than the Word of God. Naturally, this confessional

position can only work when one can particularise his starting point of where this self-authenticating revelation of God is perfectly found. Richard Muller insightfully observes,

The orthodox definition of the truth of Scripture—like the orthodox definitions of infallibility and authority—treads a very narrow line. Scriptural truth is never allowed to rest upon empirical proof: truth depends upon divine authorship and can be defined as a “truth of promise” or as an intentional fidelity or veracity upon the part of God as author.⁴

We must presuppose the primacy of Scripture alone as providing the foundation for all proof. Scripture itself teaches us the priority of Scripture in theological matters. Although many decry this as circular and unacceptable, it should be noted that one either starts with God or with man. Greg Bahnsen summarises the need to argue biblically and presuppositionally,

The Believer must defend *God’s word* as the ultimate starting point, the unquestionable authority, the self-attesting foundation of all thought and commitment. ... The fact that the apologist presupposes the word of God in order to carry on a discussion or debate about the veracity of that word does not *nullify* his argument, but rather *illustrates* it.⁵

The book of Ecclesiastes is the autobiography of the wisest sinner to have ever lived and his conclusion is given in 12:13-14 is that a proper worldview must always begin with the fear of God. The Apostle warned us, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col 2:8). The etymology of the word “philosophy” (*philosophia*) shows that it means “the love of wisdom” and Paul warns us here that our knowledge or philosophy must always be “after Christ.” Jesus Christ is Wisdom personified and in Him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3; cf. Prov 8:22-36; John 1:1-3, 14; 1 Cor 1:24, 30), so what He says on this subject must be received absolutely. Fallen man does not fear God and so cannot reason with true wisdom and knowledge (Prov 1:7; 9:10) as he has lost the true source (Isa 59:1-2; Col 2:2-3). There can be no compromise between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of this world. The Church Father, Irenaeus, a disciple of the godly Polycarp makes clear, “The Scriptures are perfect. In the Scriptures let God always teach and man always learn!”

A Christian epistemology begins with the Bible as the Word of God; this is the indemonstrable axiom, from which all true theories are to be

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deduced. As a consequence of it being an axiom, it cannot be proved. Although, many ridicule perfect preservationists for believing what the Bible says, the Apostle Paul declared in Acts 24:14,

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets.

The great Apostle was willing to stake his faith and die for it on what was written. He made the ultimate ground of Christian authority to be the Word of God and clearly he would be “judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers” (Acts 26:6). Paul refused to preach anything but, “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22; cf. Acts 28:23). The only “evidence” Paul accepted as certain was God’s Revelation. It is true that Paul would cite facts and evidences of the resurrection in his reasoning, but only in accordance with the presuppositions of a biblical epistemology.

No observation or experience can be greater than a promise from God, “because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself.” The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, also makes clear that “The authority of the holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is Truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God.” In the biblical view, a proposition is true because an omniscient God thinks it to be true. In an interview with *Christianity Today* (December 30, 1977) Cornelius Van Til explained, “There are two ways of defending the faith. One of these begins from man as self-sufficient and works up to God, while the other begins from the triune God of the Scriptures and relates all things to Him.”⁶

The Roman Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), sought unsuccessfully to synthesise the rationalist axiom of sense experience of Aristotle and the Scriptural axiom of revelation by arguing persuasively for human intellectual autonomy. However, true Reformed believers reject Rome’s soteriology and bibliology because they are both predicated on this synthesis which is doomed to failure. This is because objective knowledge of truth cannot be known outside the Revelation of God. As New Testament believers, Christ must be the ultimate authority over our theories of epistemology as we must “sanctify the Lord God in

your hearts” (1 Pet 3:15). Paul also warns us that we must be, “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God,” and then “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:5). Thus all of our methodologies and conclusions as to the textual questions must be controlled by the explicit revelation of Scripture. The Scriptures make clear that God’s providential actions answers to no one, “He giveth not account of any of his matters” (Job 33:13; cf. Deut 29:29). We need to adopt the same spirit as the Virgin Mary and say, “Be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). As Thomas Strouse shows, the application of biblical presuppositions will guide us to the true Words of God,

The Lord Jesus Christ started the “received Bible” movement after which its preserved Greek text was named in 1633. God the Father gave words to the Son who “received” them and then gave these words to His disciples who “received” them (Jn. 17:8, 20). His Apostles preached and then inscripturated these words so that Jews (Acts 2:41), Samaritans (Acts 8:14), and Gentiles (Acts 11:1; 17:11) received these words as the “received Bible” movement began in the first century. Paul epitomized the Thessalonians as an example of a NT church with the “received Bible” mentality stating, “*For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe*” (1 Thess. 2:13). The fruit of this “received Bible” movement is any accurate translation built upon the received Hebrew and Greek texts, including the KJV.⁷

Presuppositions and Textual Questions

A textual position that rejects the *a priori* presupposition that “The Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice” must be rejected. A Biblicist derives his ontology and epistemology from biblical theology rather than his own experience filtered through his own reason. It is an insult to God to argue that the only infallible written revelation of Himself so lacks clarity that man has to step in to determine the process. This inevitably leads to very different ideas about what is scientifically possible, morally just, or rationally plausible. We still have a rational account for holding a textual presupposition, but not for *arriving* at it, because by definition we must *start* with it. For if we declare the need to *prove* it true before we *believe* it to be true, we have simply admitted beforehand our lack of faith in it.

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This is vital in the textual debate as the autographs seemingly do not exist and we have no direct link to them. The oldest extant manuscripts are conflicting, contradictory, and emanating from an era that all accept was a period of intense corrupting of Scripture. Therefore, we have no “neutral scientific” bridge that guarantees we have an entire tradition going back to the originals outside the promises of Scripture. All a Critical Text (CT) advocate can be certain about, at best, is that his reconstruction of a text can replicate the majority opinion of a group of third century manuscript copies. Beyond that he is as uncertain and lost as anyone else, as there is no definite way to determine the antiquity of the text which lies behind the extant manuscripts. Most CT advocates believe that the key doctrines or the original text are preserved somewhere among the variants, but they have no logical or scientific reason to believe so. Their belief is predicated more on sentimentality as they have rejected any biblical exegetical basis for assuming perfect preservation.

Textual critical evidential arguments presuppose that man can approach the knowledge of God’s Words, as if man is morally neutral. It is predicated on the idea that man has an unaided intrinsic ability to reach knowledge of God’s Words in making textual choices and conjectural emendations. However, any attempt to separate faith and reason is doomed to failure, as this construction violates Romans 1:18 and 1 Corinthians 10:31. Hebrews 11:1-3 makes clear that biblical faith must precede historical or rationalistic evidence, whereas modern textual critics demand that faith in the biblical promises of perfect preservation be subordinate to the opinions of apostate scholarship about the historical evidence of the manuscripts. Since no one is viewpoint neutral and everyone has presuppositions, why do the CT advocates want to exclude biblical presuppositions on the issue of the text? Do they really believe in the myth of a “secular, academic, religiously-neutral hermeneutic” in criticism? As one philosopher once observed, “absurdity is always a serious art.”

Warfield and Textual Criticism

Benjamin B Warfield is a prominent example of those who turn to reason first over the propositional revelation of Scripture. In an introductory note to Francis R Beattie’s *Apologetics*, he writes,

Before we draw it from Scripture, we must assure ourselves that there is a knowledge of God in the Scriptures. And, *before we do that*, we must assure ourselves that there is a knowledge of God in the world. And, *before we do that*, we must assure ourselves that a knowledge of God is possible for man. And, *before we do that*, we must assure ourselves that there is a God to know.⁸

Cornelius Van Til rightly saw this inconsistency in the old Princeton school of Warfield,

Deciding, therefore, to follow the Reformers in theology, it was natural that I attempt also to do so in apologetics. I turned to such Reformed apologists as Warfield, Greene, and others. What did I find? I found the theologians of the “self-attesting Christ,” defending their faith with a method which denied precisely that point.⁹

Reymond also observes,

Here Warfield calls for a very complete natural theology to be erected by human reason. It would be very interesting to learn from him how he intended to prove, without presupposing the truthfulness of all that the Scriptures affirm about such matters, that the one living and true God exists, that man is natively able to know him, that there is a knowledge of God in the world, and that this God has made himself uniquely known propositionally at the point of the Hebrew/Christian Scriptures, and to prove all of this before he draws any of it from the Scriptures. Frankly, if men could assure themselves of all this on their own, and assure themselves of all this before they draw any of it from Scripture, it may be legitimately asked, would they need Scripture revelation at all? And would not their “religion” be grounded in their labors, a monument to their own intelligence?¹⁰

Ironically, Warfield once warned,

Science, philosophy, scholarship, represent not stable but constantly changing entities. And nothing is more certain than that the theology which is in close harmony with the science, philosophy, and scholarship of today will be much out of harmony with the science, philosophy, and scholarship of tomorrow.¹¹

It is tragic that he never followed his own advice.

Those who adopt this Warfieldian worldview consistently must believe that their faith is built upon nothing but the word of man. This worldview also assumes that man is alone in the universe and is capable of making independent, autonomous judgments about the world around him, with no reference to God. Such a view is to build an epistemological

house on sand. It assumes that we cannot be certain as to God's Words, but we can have faith in our own supposed objectivity in determining those. Hence, someone who believes in perfect preservation by God of His Words and those who reject this look at the same extant textual data and come to radically different conclusions. However, what drives textual critics to their conclusions is not the evidence, but their presuppositions. They are trying to reinterpret the biblical text relating to preservation (or simply ignoring it) in the hope that it can be brought into conformity with present non-biblical, historical models. Essentially, they are attempting to compartmentalise their faith and their scholarship into separate worlds. By carefully questioning the presuppositional framework being used in the background, the spiritually sensitive scholar will avoid being led astray by the numerous details and technical jargon of the CT advocates. Theodore Letis puts it well in a reply to D A Carson,

Both schools interpret the data of NT textual criticism and modern translations differently, and both groups fill in the gaps in the data with assumptions which favor their given position. I hope some are beginning to see that this is not an argument between scholarship (the established school represented by Carson) and non-scholarship (the challenging school which has traditionally been treated as non-scholarly and completely uncritical). To the contrary, the best representatives of both schools display genuine scholarship. Why is it, then, that these two schools co-exist on this all-important issue of the very wording of the NT text? Some will fault me for not answering every objection of Carson's, but it was only our intention to raise the old issue of presuppositions and to underscore the fact that this debate is not one between experts with data and non-experts with dogma, but rather one between experts with the same data, but different dogma—the dogma of neutrality versus the dogma of providence.¹²

In the uncertainty of postmodern textual criticism with its fluid textual tradition, the only genuine alternative is a biblical presuppositional approach. The universe is only correctly viewed through the lens of Scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. All we must do is study to find out how God describes His Words and how He will preserve them and then find the texts that match that description. As God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and His Words within it, then it is not a naturalistic purposeless machine and “in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). God executes His sovereign Will through the works of creation (Rev 4:11) and providence (Dan 4:35). As stated in the Confession (5:1): “God, the great Creator of all things,

does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will.” David Norris observes,

The Word of God is the meaning of meanings, the fulcrum upon which the whole system of truth moves, it is the Sign around which all others revolve and which they reflect. For this to be so, the Word of God must have pre-existed all other words.¹³

Richard Bacon argues,

When we study the preservation of Scripture — when we study textual criticism — we must do it from a believing mindset. We must begin with the fact that God has spoken in his Word, and that he has preserved his Word for his people by his people. *God has not preserved his Word in a jug in a cave near the Dead Sea.* God did not preserve his Word by setting it on a shelf unattended and forgotten. God preserved his Word by his people *loving it so much that they made copies of it!*¹⁴

Textual critics boast that they have constructed their own worldview autonomously and independent of Scripture. They utilise inductive arguments appealing to any consideration that might be thought relevant to the probability of the truth of the conclusion such as statistical data, generalisations from past experience, appeals to signs, evidence or authority, and causal relationships. We are called to approach Scripture with deductive arguments in which the truth of the conclusion is thought to be completely *guaranteed* and not just *made probable* by the truth of the premises. Believers who adhere to a biblical worldview do not rely upon their own arbitrary assumptions as a tool to judge the truth-claims recorded in the Bible and to construct their own explanations for the extant textual evidence. Our fideistic worldview is not bereft of rationale or logic.

If we understand that faith precedes reason then we must approach the textual debates with consistent faith presuppositions and then use them to reason. Indeed, to approach the textual questions of the extant manuscripts with a supposed neutral scientific approach and affirming the idea that it must be free from theological presuppositions is clearly a contradiction. As one evangelical put it, “For every critic—the liberal just as much as the evangelical—establishing limits is a matter of faith, either in one’s own internal competence, or in another’s (Christ’s) external authority.”¹⁵ Those who hold to non-biblical presuppositions have

constructed it upon some set of non-negotiable assumptions and therefore must embrace an authority other than the Bible by faith. These competing worldviews need to be truth-tested and the only objective standard for this is Scripture alone. Ironically, CT advocates cannot show Scripture or evidence to prove their view, yet we are supposed to believe their positions by *faith in their reasoning*.

The Presuppositional Battle

We are today in a battle over words—it is a battle for the very words of God. The contemporary view amongst even Fundamentalists is the basic premise that the Words of God are *separate* from the meaning. A typical example of this was the translation by J B Phillips' *The New Testament in Modern English* (1947) who wrote concerning 1 Corinthians 14:22a, “[I] felt bound to conclude, from the sense of the next three verses, that we have here either a slip of the pen on the part of Paul, or, more probably, a copyist’s error.”¹⁶ Phillips had no hesitation in claiming that the words or their consistency did not matter to the Apostle Paul—just the general message,

Paul, for instance, writing in haste and urgency to some of his wayward and difficult Christians, was not tremendously concerned about dotting the “i’s” and crossing the “t’s” of his message. I doubt very much whether he was even concerned about being completely consistent with what he had already written.¹⁷

Such presuppositional arrogance allowed Phillips to simply amend the words to conform with the message he wants to portray to his unsuspecting reader. Furthermore, it typifies the hubris of the modern textual critic who sets his reason above the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring these very Words in the first instance. Such an unbiblical view is not limited to liberals only. In the Spring/Fall 1996 issue of the *Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary Journal* of the supposedly fundamentalist Calvary Baptist Seminary in Lansdale, a professor of Old Testament opined, “Is communication achieved by the *words* that are spoken (or written) or by the *meaning* that words convey? ... *The message is in the meaning.*” However, 1 Corinthians 2:13 (cf. Ps 12:6-7; Prov 30:5-6; Matt 4:4; John 3:34; Rev 17:17) makes clear the Words matter as Paul said, “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” J D Watson correctly comments,

This sounds very much like the neo-orthodox doctrine of “Concept Inspiration,” which basically teaches that only the concept the author is writing about is inspired, not the actual words he is writing. The obvious fallacy here is how is a concept communicated? Words. Change the words and you’ve change the concept. ... Did you get it? We can’t be sure of the *words*, but we can be sure of the *message*. And how pray tell can we do that? How can we be sure of what God *means* if we don’t know what God *said*? Or to put it theologically, how can we have an inspired message if we don’t have inspired words?¹⁸

God’s Words were to control, create and define the true Church, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:23). If all the Scriptures were “written,” for the purpose of instructing New Testament saints (2 Tim 3:16), this purpose for the inspired writings must invariably demand their perfect preservation. It does not make any theological or even logical sense to argue that God inspired the Words because He wanted us to have His Words and then for most of the Church Age we have not had them and have no hope of recovering them. Logically, outside the doctrine of special providential preservation, we have no way of being certain which words are inspired if we do not know which words are originally in the Bible. CT advocates have no reasonable or theologically good answers for this. In his recent debate with CT advocate James White, Bart Ehrman cleverly pointed out the fallacy of the CT approach,

Despite the fact that scholars have been working diligently at these tasks for 300 years, there continues to be heated differences of opinion. There are some passages where serious and very smart scholars disagree about what the original text said, and there are some places where we will probably never know. If James wants to insist that we have the original text, then I want to know: How does he know? In any given place, and I can cite dozens of them, he will have differences of opinion not only with me, who is an expert in this field, but with every other expert in the field. If God preserved the original text intact, where is it? Why don’t we have it, and doesn’t he know where it is? I don’t know the answer to that.¹⁹

God also sealed the Canon in history, the sign gifts ceased, and the apostolic office passed away as man would now live solely by His Words alone. If God promised to preserve all of His Words, He will not alter His course because of mankind, Satan, or anything in all of creation. A Sovereign God controls history precisely just as He has always planned

and ordained and nothing can thwart His perfect will (Dan 4:35; Eph 1:11). Douglas Wilson explains why we need to have this authority,

If I believe the Bible in my hands is the absolute and objective Word of God, then when I read it, then obedience, among other things, will tend to be on my mind. But if I do not believe this, then either the Scripture can be set aside as a guide to good works, as it pleases me, or the Bible can become a nose of wax, to be molded into whatever *my* idea of good works might be.²⁰

Dr Ian Paisley comes straight to the point,

There is no middle ground. We either have a reliable Bible in our mother tongue or we have not. What is the use of God verbally inspiring the Bible if He did not preserve it verbally for all generations?²¹

Ralph Earle writing in “The Rationale for an Eclectic New Testament Text” in *The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation* admits their uncertainty,

... with thousands of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament at our disposal, we can reach a higher degree of certainty with regard to the probability of the best text. It should be added that comparative statistical studies indicate that all Greek manuscripts are in essential agreement on at least 95 percent of the New Testament text. Significant differences exist, then, in less than 5 percent of the total text. And it must be said emphatically that none of these variant readings pose any problem as to basic doctrines of the Bible. They are intact! We should like to add that all the members of the Committee on the Bible translation are devout Evangelicals, believing in the infallibility of the Bible as God’s Word. We have all sought earnestly to represent as accurately as possible what seems to be, as nearly as we can determine, the original text of the New Testament.²²

Such a loaded admission raises a multitude of unanswered questions. For instance, surely the only reliable scholar who asserts that God did not perfectly preserve His Word in one place is the scholar who knows for certain that he is using an errant edition, can objectively prove to what extent it is errant, and knows that there is an edition that corrects the flaw. The range of possible errors is virtually unbounded, for who can say at what point an “errant” Providence stopped permitting corruptions? Also, who could presume to know how to set God’s imperfect providential preservation in order? Textual critics ultimately base their view on subjective criteria in determining whether or not a textual variant is important. Like Lucifer, the Adamic nature cries, “I will be like the

most High” and refuses to recognise the authority of God, but is very comfortable with the authority of man. Like the charismatics with their man-centred pseudo-gospel message of self-esteem, textual critics have embraced a low view of Scripture and lofty view of man.

Although many conservative CT advocates attempt to create at least a dichotomy between higher and lower criticism, most textual critics alternate between both systems with ease. This is because both are predicated on the same premises and utilise the same rationalistic methodology. They just change the label on the bottle when moving between both systems of application. Believers should also note that those supporting the CT and modern versions do not seem to be concerned about any other text but the *Textus Receptus* (TR). It is surely suggestive that the devil and his kingdom are only concerned to rid the Body of Christ of that text. The character and beliefs of the CT scholars and adherents should be enough to warn even the naive of its insidious character. As Strouse comments,

why do liberals, apostates, Roman Catholics and cultists prefer the critical text and its translations instead of the TR and the KJV—could the answer be the weak, anemic, and ambiguous theology espoused in the CT and modern versions? Why do neo-evangelicals use the *UBSGNT* that has Carlos Martini as one of the editors. After all, Martini was too liberal for the RCC to place as a candidate for the recently vacated office of Pope.²³

Fruits of Textual Critical Presuppositions

When we survey the last 150 years of Church history, it is clear that since the decline of biblical certainty with the 1881 Revision we have seen the rise of the older, more established cults from evangelical roots adding their new interpretation on orthodox doctrine by pointing to textual variants. Heretical theologies are mutating out of the postmodern marketplace of ideas, with repackaging of old heresies. Ironically, although record numbers embrace scientific rationalism, multitudes embrace the New Age existentialism, read the astrology charts, and watch for UFOs. The Charismatic Movement which revived the Montanist obsession with subjective experiences in contradistinction to biblical absolutism also has some of its roots in a reaction to rationalism, naturalism, and textual criticism.

Like the Athenians, the *zeitgeist* of our contemporary apostate age lives to spend their time telling or hearing something new, especially in

religious philosophy. From the modern church's truncated view of morality and rejection of biblical separation has now emerged a generation who are more interested in environmentalism than moral absolutes. A quick survey around the average Christian bookstore reveals something of the contours of spiritual confusion on these issues of absolute authority. Most sermons in evangelical churches are so anaemic and anecdotal they could easily have been preached by 19th century liberal moralists such as Harry Emerson Fosdick. However, we would never have gotten the cotton candy theological preaching of men like Joel Olsteen unless we had first had a cotton candy Bible version! Even the New Atheists recognise that a faith based on revelation is the only faith worth *rejecting*. This is why Reformed writer, R J Rushdoony, boldly observed that "the issue of the Received Text is ... no small matter, nor one of academic concern only. The faith is at stake."²⁴ Certainly, "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Ps 11:3). Bishop D A Thompson pointed out,

To them it is significant that loyalty to the Traditional Text and its translation into many other tongues in Europe and further afield has been accompanied by many manifestations of faith, whereas the discarding of this text and the issuing of the modern versions to which reference has been made, has many associations with the rejection of the historic Christian Faith and of positive unbelief.²⁵

The divergence between the CT and the TR are so great that they produce two different Bibles. The implicit argument of the CT proponents is that the Bible did not exist in its pure form until 1881, and most would accept that it is not even pure today. Such a presupposition explicitly contradicts what Christ and His Apostles taught on the matter (Matt 24:35; 2 Pet 1:19). As Paisley rightly observed,

Paul exhorted "the holding fast of sound words," and in the doctrinal realm the Authorized Version is pre-eminent in doing just that. The Holy Word itself poses the question—If the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do?—Psalm 11:3. The blunt answer is they cannot do at all, they are undone. ... Let us get the matter right. The Bible is not the production of man but the product of God. It is the Word of God. It was not delivered unto the scholars—Greek, Hebrew or otherwise, but to the saints. "*The faith which was once delivered to the saint*" Jude 3. God has delivered His Book to the custody, not of the scholars, the universities, colleges or seats of learning, but only to His saints.

Can any ordinary saint who has no knowledge whatever of the original languages know what is a proper version of God's Word or which is absolutely reliable? The answer is "yes" or else Jude verse 3 is error. Jude verse 3 is not error but divinely revealed truth. The attempt to bamboozle the ordinary saints of God with irrelevant controversy must be demonstrated. The ploy to take from the saints their divinely appointed role of custody of the Book and place it in the hands of scholars must be exposed for what it is, a device of the devil himself. Thank God for the simplicity which is in Christ which devastates the duplicity which is in Satan.²⁶

God places supreme importance upon His written Word and its exaltation is a theme which runs throughout the Bible. The Lord also gave us three grave warnings (Prov 30:5-6; Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18-19) to those who would corrupt the Scriptures and even concluded the final revelation with a fearsome final reminder in the last verses of Revelation. We cannot look to scientific proof to establish the doctrine or preservation any more than we can for inspiration or canonicity. God's Word says that His revelation to man was preserved for all time, to each and every generation, in every single Word, and through His people. Those biblical presuppositions should be the entire frame of reference within which the facts are to be understood when we come to this issue. The "facts of textual history" cannot be neutrally interpreted autonomously to establish the veracity of the Christian faith but require the starting-point of faith from which to interpret them. This is because all knowledge of the Words of God are rooted in God as, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7). That does not mean that the fear of the Lord can be safely set aside in order to conduct our textual critical investigations.

We are told to, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov 3:5), not to denigrate our intellect per se but to make us know that our minds were never meant to be objects in which to put our trust. When something in the Bible does not appear to make sense, the reader should assume that he is failing to understand something. Fundamentalists, such as Paul Downey, foolishly congratulated himself on his rational wisdom to determine revelation by claiming, "The Christian faith has never been a blind fideism, but has always relied on both the revelation of God and empirical evidence."²⁷ Historically and biblically (as far back as Genesis 3) we should have concluded that we should be sceptical about our unguided natural

abilities, but certain about the truth of revelation. However, this has been now exactly reversed. Modern fundamentalism has embraced the triumph of reason over revelation in textual issues and now in other historic doctrines. Stephen M Davis, an adjunct professor at the supposed fundamentalist Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary, writes recently of the six literal twenty-four-hour days of creation,

Raising the question of the “days” in Genesis 1 might seem unthinkable for many believers. Yet we cannot ignore the fact that “the doctrine of creation has proved vulnerable because it works in territory where the rights of Christian theology to operate have been subject to sustained challenge, first by natural philosophy and more recently by natural science (McGrath 1993, 95). Most Fundamentalists appear to hold to the view of six literal twenty-four-hour days of creation. Closely aligned with the literal view is the young earth theory. Divergent views are often associated with either liberal views of Scripture, which deny inerrancy, or with atheistic, Darwinian evolution. ... According to Hebrews 11:3, we affirm that “we understand that the universe was created by the word of God.” There can be no question as to what God did. There may be no resolution among Christians about the “how” and “when.”²⁸

The rejection of biblical fideism has left men like Davis entirely agnostic about how and when God created! Biblical presuppositionalists and fideists, on the other hand, would assert dogmatically by the authority of Scripture alone that the world was created recently *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) by divine fiat in six literal 24-hour days.

Are Doctrines Affected?

It is true that it is a logical fallacy to argue that if one point in a book is mistaken, then all points in it are likewise mistaken. The problem is when the authority and reliability of the book in question is self-attesting based on the position that it is completely true. The pernicious argument for the existence of only an imperfect Bible is compounded by the fact that you do not know with any objective certainty what the mistakes are. This was cleverly illustrated by the agnostic Bart Ehrman when he pointed out, in his 2009 debate with James White, that arguing that no doctrine is affected because we have essential purity in percentages of agreement between manuscripts is fallacious as one could have 99 words out of 100 that were the same but this would be irrelevant if the missing word was “not.” In an earlier interview, Ehrman states of the textual differences, “some of the differences are very significant and can change

the meaning of a passage or even of an entire book. Is there any textual critic who can say that these are not facts?"²⁹ Textual critic, Daniel Wallace, admits examples of doctrine that he is uncertain over because of variants,

I do think that there are many textual variants that need to be wrestled with so that we can know how to live and how to act. Should we fast as well as pray when performing exorcisms? Should women be silent in the churches or not? Is eternal security something that Christians have or not? Are we still under the OT law? How should church discipline be conducted—viz., should I address someone who has not sinned against me or am I allowed to confront only those who have sinned directly against me? These are issues that are directly affected by the textual variants and they require some serious thinking and wrestling with the data. So, I would say that to the extent that these variants do not represent the original text, to the same extent they are not what God intended.³⁰

However, the more damning indictment of this new textual tradition comes from the very authors. Many argue that theology is not affected in the modern versions, but Revision Committee of 1881 candidly confessed to having a distinct agenda as regards affecting the theology of the text. On the Revision Committee was a Unitarian, G Vance Smith (1816-1902), minister of St Saviour's Gate Unitarian Chapel, York. Smith said this of the Revision Committee, "nor is there anything improbable in the supposition that they may have been influenced by the bias of their own theological opinions. It was at least natural, perhaps it was inevitable, that they should have been so."³¹ Smith boasted of some of these examples with the most devastating admission to those who promote the Westcott and Hort doctrine,

Since the publication of the revised New Testament, it has been frequently said that the changes of translation which the work contains are of little importance from a doctrinal point of view; — in other words, that the great doctrines of popular theology remain unaffected, untouched by the results of the revision. How far this assertion is correct, the careful reader of the foregoing pages will be able to judge for himself. To the writer any such statement appears to be in the most substantial sense contrary to the facts of the case, for the following reasons:

- (1) The only passage in the New Testament which seemed like a statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, has been removed by the revisers as spurious.
- (2) The sole Deity of the Father has been re-affirmed in a remarkable case in which the authorised version had singularly misrepresented the original

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words. ‘The only God’ of John v. 44, affords evidence equally strong and clear with that of John xvii. 3, that the writer of this Gospel could not have intended to represent Jesus, the Christ, or Messiah, or even the Logos in him, as God in the same high sense of Infinite and Eternal Being in which He is so.

(3) The character of the baptismal formula is greatly altered by the simple substitution of the word ‘into’ for ‘in’ shewing us that there could never have been, as people have commonly supposed, any ecclesiastical magic in the phrase ‘In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,’ seeing that this phrase is not to be found in the New Testament at all, and that the words simply express a change of mind, on the part of the convert, from disbelief or denial to the profession of the allegiance which constituted discipleship.

(4) One remarkable instance in which the epithet ‘God ‘ was given to Christ (1 Tim. iii. 16) has been excluded from the text, and others of similar kind are admitted by the Revision to be uncertain.

(5) The only instance in the New Testament in which the religious worship or adoration of Christ was apparently implied, has been altered by the Revision: ‘At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,’ [Philippians 2:10] is now to be read ‘in the name.’ Moreover, no alteration of text or of translation will be found anywhere to make up for this loss; as indeed it is well understood that the New Testament contains neither precept nor example which really sanctions the religious worship of Jesus Christ.

(6) The word ‘Atonement’ disappears from the New Testament, and so do the connected phrases, ‘faith in his blood,’ and ‘for Christ’s sake.’ These so commonly used expressions are shewn to be misrepresentations of the force of the original words, such alterations evidently throwing the most serious doubt upon the important popular doctrine of which they have hitherto been a main or indispensable support.³²

Often anti-TR critics argue that we have all the doctrines, but we are just guessing in an “educated way” about what some of the Words are. However, all of the doctrines are based on Words. If every Bible suddenly were missing Mark, Galatians, and 1 Peter, no essential doctrines would be altered, but it would still be a significant event. Significance does not depend solely on whether or not a fundamental doctrine is affected.

The Bible does not just say that fundamental doctrines are sufficient to live for God but every Word (Matt 4:4; John 12:48). Indeed, if Matthew 4:4 refers to the Canonical Scriptures, what God has written and preserved for us, then we can live in a manner pleasing to the Lord.

However, if it refers to everything God has ever said (which would be completely absurd cf. John 20:30 and 21:25), then we are all in trouble! All textual beliefs ultimately reason from self-attesting presuppositional systems, which is unavoidable when ultimate truths are being debated. The only major difference is that the perfect preservation approach has theological explanatory power in that it accounts for the fulfillment of man's purpose on earth, whereas all other beliefs throw the believer into a whirl of inconsistencies and self-contradictions. Just as Immanuel Kant's epistemology led to the logical nonexistence of his objective *noumenal* world because it is unknowable and therefore cannot be shown to be objective, so do the CT advocate who appeal to the lost originals as their authority.

This circumstance is not unique even to Christianity as every epistemological claim, including that of the textual critic, to know whether something is true or not is tested by some kind of assumed standard within the existing belief system. For instance, rationalists point to human reason tested by logic as the ultimate standard for knowledge, whereas empiricists believe knowledge as derived from the experiences of the physical senses or mind. All approaches to determining the biblical text assumes an ultimate standard in order to prove that self-same standard. Our bibliography must be clear and consistent. God said that He preserved His Word, and that should settle it. God does not promise man a comprehensive answer to every question we have concerning preservation but He does provide a meaningful answer within the context of the scriptural framework for man's existence and needs. Van Til succinctly points out that the non-Christian's position is also circular: "... all reasoning is, in the nature of the case, *circular reasoning*. The starting-point, the method, and the conclusion are always involved in one another."³³

Conclusion

Perfect preservation advocates readily admit that they do not have all the answers as to how God preserved His Words in every generation. By presuppositional faith in the promises of what God said He would do rather than what men speculate might have happened, we can be sure that He has preserved His Words and that is enough. The truth is they do not have the autographs, the first copies of the original manuscripts, and even many of the actual copies from which the KJV translators worked. There

were periods in church history, in which Rome destroyed the records and texts of believers, such as the Albigensians and the Waldensians.

Despite the verbal smokescreens of CT advocates, the best that most textual historians can do today is essentially speculate on what is the history of the transmission of the text throughout this period. The evidence is fragmentary and inconclusive. Since no one can prove what happened in the first two centuries, we must trust in the Scripture as our objective guide to the evidence. TR advocates cannot prove everything that they believe historically happened with tangible evidence, but enough to satisfy someone who is willing to believe Scripture. After all, none of us have seen creation, a worldwide flood or the ark, but we accept the Genesis account of this. The great fundamentalist leader T T Shields makes clear,

The Book is to be our Teacher; the Book is to judge us—we are not to judge the Book. There is a world of difference between these two attitudes of approach. Nowadays it has become common for men to attempt to teach the Book. ... Poor blind souls they are, how little do they know that the Bible was written for our learning! It was intended to be our Teacher, and no man will ever get the wealth of wisdom and of grace here laid up for the believing soul who approaches it in that critical attitude.... It is equally true of the Word of God, that if you would get out of It that which God has put into It for you, you must come to It as to the Word of God: you must surrender your will to It; you must yield your intellect to It; you must let It search your heart; you must sit at Its feet as at the feet of a teacher!³⁴

What we simply cannot do is assert that God has revealed Himself in the pages of a book without at the same time implying that such a revelation is necessary to us. Archbishop Whately once observed that we are not obliged to clear away every difficulty about a doctrine in order to believe it, provided that the biblical presuppositions on which it rests are clear. This is even more so where the rejection of a doctrine involves greater difficulties than its belief, as it does with preservation here. The value of having the scriptural presuppositions is infinitely greater than the subjective opinions of those who fail to distinguish between *difficulties* and *proved errors*.

The Bible must never be interpreted simply by the facts of general revelation. If our interpretation of the textual evidence conflicts with what Scripture says, then we simply submit to God's Word and reject our view of evidence and our own reasoning. Any of the standard arguments

for scribal errors from a standard textbook for Textual Criticism to explain textual corruptions could be easily applied to the autographs. Did Paul's poor eyesight make him misspell a word? We must believe in God's power to both inspire and preserve His Words. Harriet A Harris in *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* acknowledges the common approach of higher and lower criticism,

Fundamentalism in fact accords with evangelicalism which, according to McGrath, "accepts the principle of biblical criticism (although insisting that it be applied responsibly)." The difference between the two positions becomes a matter of what sorts of biblical criticism are accepted, and how its responsible application is defined. Here we will discover no hard-and-fast distinctions between fundamentalism and evangelicalism, but varying degrees of acceptance of different forms of criticism.³⁵

Modern textual critics prefer to attribute these to "scribal errors" and correct the Bible according to their subjective interpretations based on diverse and contradictory opinions. They demand that we place our faith in a hypothetical original that does not exist now, and never did exist in a single Book, as well as apostate textual critics to help us iron out some of the "corruptions" in our texts. Naturally, each critic's findings and conclusions differ to the point that we witness the textual Babel of the modern conflicting, multiple-choice versions. Thomas Strouse shows that these critics have other difficulties to surpass,

They must defend the unenviable position that the discipline of textual criticism *in toto* is the one discipline of Biblical Criticism which was unadulterated by anti-supernatural rationalism. And when they do "restore" God's Words, how will anyone know it since this "truth" was determined by extra-biblical means rather than the NT pattern whereby NT church members receive God's preserved Words (Mt. 28:19-20; I Tim. 3:15), which reception is to be confirmed by the same believers hearing His voice (Jn. 10:27)?³⁶

There are indeed difficult passages in the Bible that require us to approach by faith. Doubtless, a Sovereign God has placed these to sift out those who would tamper with His words. No doubt also the lack of 2nd century extant Byzantine manuscripts are a test of the heart to see whether believers will embrace the promises of Scripture over the competing theories of evidential textual critics. We are nowhere instructed in Scripture to restore what God presumably has not perfectly preserved.

THE BATTLE OVER PRESUPPOSITIONS ON THE TEXTUAL ISSUE

It is noteworthy that the Lord never explained the reasons for Job's providential suffering, but simply pointing him to God's Sovereign power in creation by a tour of the universe. Job wisely did not argue with the works of God but simply bowed his head and admitted, "know that thou canst do every *thing*, and *that* no thought can be withholden from thee" (Job 42:2). Through this perspective, Job understood that if God could make all things by Divine Fiat, He could easily govern all things in providence. Unlike Job, many stagger in disbelief at God's works of providence as they fail to trust His promises. As Thomas Watson noted, "Men murmur at God's providences, because they distrust His promises."³⁷

Sadly, many professing believers seem to find difficulty believing in the perfect providential works of God in practical application. When we also understand that God is Sovereign in providential preservation then we will have no difficulty in saying with Moses, "Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect" (Deut 32:3-4).

The facts are that the Reformed churches from the days of the Reformation until the end of the 19th century used no other text for their translations based upon their presuppositions concerning the text. The true Church recognised, received and settled on the Words just as the scriptural model described and as history has corroborated. The *Textus Receptus* and the Masoretic Hebrew Text and the foremost English translation from them—the King James Bible—are the result of God's special providential preservation of all the words. *C'est un fait accompli*.

Notes

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³ A W Tozer cited in "A Simple, Face Value Understanding of Prophetic Scriptures," from *The Revelation about Jesus Christ: A Dynamic Commentary*, online at <http://www.revelationcommentary.org/hermeneutic.html>, accessed 4 January 2009.

⁴ Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 323.

⁵ Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1996), 72.

⁶ Eric H Sigward, "Obituary: Dr. Cornelius Van Til," online at <http://www.vantil.info/articles/obituary.html>, accessed 16 March 2009.

⁷ Thomas Strouse, "Refutation of Dr Daniel Wallace's Rejection of the KJV as the Best Translation," online at http://www.emmanuel-newington.org/seminary/resources/Refutation_of_Wallace.pdf, accessed 6 November 2009.

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⁹ Cornelius Van Til, "My Credo," in *Jerusalem and Athens*, online at <http://www.reformed.org/apologetics/index.html>, accessed 15 April 2009.

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¹³ David W Norris, *The Big Picture: The Authority and Integrity of the Authentic Word of God* (Cannock: Authentic Word, 2004), 239.

¹⁴ Richard Bacon, "The Testimony of God through Preservation and Miracles," online at http://www.fpcr.org/blue_banner_articles/wlc4f.htm, accessed 16 March 2009.

¹⁵ J Barton Payne, "Higher Criticism And Biblical Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed Norman L Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 93.

¹⁶ J B Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 552.

¹⁷ Ibid, foreword.

¹⁸ J D Watson, "Defending the WORDS of God," online at www.thescripturealone.com/JDW.html, accessed 20 April 2009.

¹⁹ Rebuttal by Bart Ehrman in debate with James White on "Can the New Testament Be Inspired in Light of Textual Variation?" on January 21, 2009. The debate transcript is online at <http://mp3.aomin.org/805Transcript.pdf>, accessed 20 April 2009.

²⁰ Douglas Wilson, "That Good Old Narrative Trajectory," online at <http://www.dougwils.com/index.asp?Action=Anchor&CategoryID=1&BlogID=1752>, accessed 20 April 2009.

²¹ Ian R K Paisley, *My Plea for the Old Sword: The English Authorised Version (KJV)* (Belfast: Ambassador, 1997), 17.

²² Kenneth L Barker ed, *The NIV: The Making Of A Translation Contemporary* (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1991), 58-59

²³ Strouse, "Refutation of Dr. Daniel Wallace's Rejection of the KJV as the Best Translation," 5.

THE BATTLE OVER PRESUPPOSITIONS ON THE TEXTUAL ISSUE

²⁴ Rousas John Rushdoony, "The Problem of the Received Text," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, 12 (1989): 9.

²⁵ D A Thompson, "The New Testament Text and Early Church History," *The Bible League Quarterly* (April 1968).

²⁶ Paisley, *My Plea for the Old Sword*, 73-75.

²⁷ James B Williams ed, *God's Word in Our Hands: The Bible Preserved for Us* (Greenville: Ambassador Emerald, 2003), 393.

²⁸ Stephen M Davis, "Creation "Days" in Genesis: Twenty-Four Hours or Not?," online at <http://sharperiron.org/creation-days-genesis>, accessed 4 March 2009.

²⁹ Evangelical Textual Criticism, "Interview with Bart Ehrman," online at <http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2006/09/interview-with-bart-ehрман.html>, accessed 4 February 2009.

³⁰ Daniel Wallace, "Has God Preserved the Scriptures?," online at <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/2007/08/has-god-preserved-the-scriptures-it-depends-part-2/#more-354>, accessed 4 February 2009.

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³² *Ibid*, 45-47.

³³ Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967), 101.

³⁴ T T Shields, "The Comfort of the Scriptures," a sermon delivered on July 10, 1921.

³⁵ Harriet A Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8.

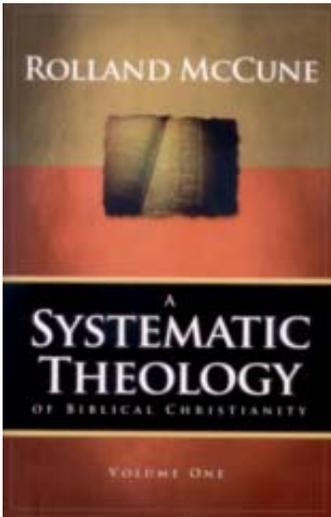
³⁶ Thomas Strouse, "Should Fundamentalists Use The NASV?" *Sound Words from New England* (June-August 2001): 4, online at <http://www.emmanuel-newington.org/seminary/resources/NASV.pdf>, accessed 7 November 2009.

³⁷ Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962), 167.

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A CRITIQUE OF ROLLAND MCCUNE'S TEACHING ON BIBLE PRESERVATION IN HIS SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY OF BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY

Paul Ferguson



Dr Rolland D McCune is Professor of Systematic Theology at the Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary (DBTS) in Allen Park, Michigan. In 2009, DBTS released the first of four volumes of *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* by McCune.¹ Dr McCune had also previously written a well received book entitled *Promise Unfulfilled: The Failed Strategy of Modern Evangelicalism*, released in October 2004.²

This first volume on Systematic Theology deals particularly with three main areas: the doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of God, and Angelology. Like DBTS, McCune holds to a traditional dispensationalist Baptist perspective on theology and this is apparent throughout. However, he does have a somewhat distinctive approach as he seeks to weave his dispensationalism with a Calvinist soteriology, pretribulational premillennialism in eschatology, a single source (Scripture) as the only rule for theology, cessationism of miraculous gifts, and a decidedly Van Tilian presuppositional approach to Christian philosophy and apologetics.

In general, this is a well written and a helpful addition to the volumes on Systematic Theology. McCune is gifted in setting forth many doctrinal themes in profound yet clear language. He utilises different

definitions by a diverse range of other theologians in different categories with hundreds of footnotes saturating this work. There are many aspects of this first volume that are particularly illuminating such as McCune's defence of inspiration and inerrancy. However, there is one section that causes concern to those of the historic Reformed Faith—Bible preservation.

Given the longstanding DBTS hostility to the KJV and the Received Text, it is no surprise to note McCune's position on this issue. Throughout this book, he cites uncritically many corrupted versions including the NIV and the *New Living Bible*. It should be noted and welcomed that he does break ranks with his former colleague Edward Glenny in at least accepting that there are "explicit" scriptural promises for perfect preservation of the "written" Words of God such as Psalm 119:152 and Psalm 119:160. He also accepts that there are "implicit" promises such as Matthew 5:17-18. McCune additionally argues that in passages such as Proverbs 30:5-6, Daniel 12:4, Revelation 22:18-19 "there is an assumption of a preserved message, which itself requires some sort of vehicle for preservation, namely a text" (53). Whilst, discussing the possibility of a lost canon, the author correctly observes, "texts on preservation must be explained in a manner compatible with the mutual and reciprocal dependence of inspiration, canonicity and preservation" (54-55). However, although he claims to believe in canonicity, McCune notably fails throughout this volume to set forth a theological framework for the doctrine of canonicity.

Despite his inchoate, but commendable, biblical presuppositional approach to theism and inspiration, McCune inexplicably switches to an evidential and rationalistic approach to the doctrine of preservation. He asserts that "preservation does not necessarily mean availability in written form" (53) and "most scholars recognize that not every word of the original has been preserved" (54). McCune offers superficial and theologically reckless arguments that willfully ignore the wide range of Bible promises that God would make His Words generally available to every generation of believers (Deut 30:11-14; Ps 147:19, 20; Isa 34:16, 59:21; Matt 4:4; 2 Pet 3:2; Jude 1:17). He also ignores the Biblical precedents which show that God keeps and protects His Words (Deut 10:2; Jer 36:28). In the Neo-fundamentalist worldview, to question the rationalistic evidential approach is tantamount to scientific heresy. The

postulates of modern scientific textual criticism are antithetical to faith in the perfect word of God being available today.

McCune goes on to attack the Received Text position by trying to stack the deck by arguing that “it is based on proof texts allegedly teaching miraculous preservation and, also, because there is no empirical evidence of such preservation in the totality of extant manuscripts” (54). This is because he intones,

It is important to note, too, that no one copy or translation perfectly reflects the message (much less the words) of the original documents. This is the case simply because the original documents do not presently exist, and the extant manuscripts which do are, in each case, unique, no two fully agreeing in every detail. Therefore, without infallible criteria for determining original readings, infallible determinations of original readings are impossible. In sum, copies and translations are authoritative insofar as they faithfully reflect the message of the original text. And, insofar as they do, they may be called the Word of God (97-98).

This is a nonsensical position as we do not have the autographs, so it is impossible for the integrity of any text to be judged by the autographs. It is intellectually dishonest to say that they can ever be regarded as “authoritative insofar as they faithfully reflect the message of the original text.” How does McCune prove his claim that, “no one copy or translation perfectly reflects the message (much less the words) of the original documents?” By a hunch or a vision? Clearly, he does not even believe his “Creed of Unbelief” for how can the Critical Text or the *Textus Receptus* be judged by an autograph that does not exist? No doubt McCune would argue that there are apostate scholars who can determine which manuscripts are closest. However, as the logical conclusions of guilty man on spiritual matters *will always be in error* he needs to explain what makes a modernist an expert on something that does not exist? Statements such as this of McCune only delineate the depths into the sea of absurdity that those who reject the Biblical presuppositional approach will go rather than face up to the biblically obvious.

One should note, paradoxically, that those who proclaim to speak for the Bible seldom seem to allow the Bible to speak. The Bible does explicitly promise that God will preserve every one of His Words forever down to the very jot and tittle of the smallest letter (Pss 12:6, 7, 33:11, 119:152, 160; Isa 30:8; 40:8; 1 Pet 1:23-25; Matt 5:18; 24:35). In Matthew 5:18, Christ did not say “one concept” or “one doctrine” would

not pass only, but spoke of the preservation of the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. God's work cannot be imperfect as "*He is the Rock, his work is perfect*" (Deut 32:4). The Bible promises there will be certainty as to the Words of God (2 Pet 1:19; Luke 1:4; Prov 1:23, 22:20-21; Dan 12:9-10; 2 Tim 2:18-19). The Bible promises that God would lead His saints into all truth, that the Word, all of His Words, are truth (John 16:13, 17:8, 17; 1 John 2:20). The Bible shows that the true Church of Christ would receive these Words (Matt 28:19-20; John 17:8; Acts 8:14, 11:1, 17:11; 1 Thess 2:13; 1 Cor 15:3). The Bible implies that believers would receive these Words from other believers (Deut 17:18; 1 Kgs 2:3; Prov 25:1; Acts 7:38; Heb 7:11; 1 Thess 1:6; Phil 4:9).

It is also regrettable that McCune's speculations should now implicitly reject the sufficiency of Scripture to guide him on the question of how God preserves His Words. It is also wholly inconsistent with his previous assertion that the Bible "need not be supplemented by reason, experience, tradition, other religions, or anything else" (61). Clearly, the seat of faith in Scripture is to him for those of a restricted intellect, whereas rationalistic textual criticism is the privileged evolutionary path of scholarly understanding. His abdicating of the task of receiving the Words of God from the true remnant church to apostate textual critical scholars such as Bruce Metzger and Carlo Martini is about as reliable as a chocolate teapot! For what can be argued by "neutral" scientific studies by apostates into the Christian faith today can be argued out of the Christian faith tomorrow. God does give us good reasons to believe in His preservation of His Words. However, for those reasons to be cogent we must believe both that He is and that He is a rewarder of those truly seeking after Him. This excludes the efforts of apostate critics. So once again we are thrown back on the presuppositional nature of faith. Textual criticism is simply a dish of autonomous rationalism cleverly served up as biblically palatable to the gullible.

McCune lacks transparency in stating the implications of his premises here. He accepts that there is no "neutral scientific" bridge that guarantees we have an entire tradition going back to the originals outside the promises of Scripture. McCune's view of God is as if He inspired the Words and then walked off to play an eternal celestial golf game only to return when He gets to the eighteenth hole to settle scores. His bald assertions do not stand up biblically or scientifically. However, this approach simply introduces other problems. We could not be certain that

God did not inspire other books not in the Protestant Canon if we accept the premise that all God did was inspire the Words, leaving the rest to humanity to determine autonomously from God. With this presuppositional approach, we lose any ability to determine what is inspired and what is not. Indeed, if we believe God was involved how do we determine how much He was involved and if He stopped being involved or was only imperfectly preserving, when did He stop being fully involved? The Scriptures teach that God sovereignly works in time to control revelation (Gal 4:4; Eph 1:10). The God of history and Scripture is not an absentee landlord. He alone gets the glory for preservation and no liberal scholar.

With respect to an evidential approach, all McCune, at best, can be certain about is that his reconstruction of a text replicates the majority opinion of a group of third century manuscript copies. Beyond that he is as uncertain and lost as anyone else. His supposed objective scientific approach represents a serious mischaracterisation of reality. Neither the CT advocates, nor the TR advocates, have extant manuscripts that bridge the first three to four hundred years of the Church. Unless McCune and his colleagues at DBTS have dug up the originals in Michigan, they are also left to adopt a faith-based presuppositional approach. The essential difference is that they base their bridging presuppositions on rationalistic ones; independent of biblical promises. As Reformed writer, Douglas Wilson opines,

But when we consider the facts carefully, nothing is more apparent than that this is actually a battle of the paradigms. In some respects, this is very much like the reconstruction of the evolutionary fossil tree, 98 percent of which is missing. When we consider all the manuscripts we possess, we must still compare them to the number of all the manuscripts ever written—which we do not have. *This is a scholarly task outside the competence of science*, and any attempt to submit the task to scientific canons will only result in increasing confusion. A process of scholarly reconstruction here makes sense only when undergirded with *faith in the living God who controls the flow of all historical events*. If, in order to be “scientific,” we eliminate this God from our considerations, the end of the road will be no text at all, or radical confusion about the text. The autonomous text critic is someone who believes that this problem of the original text is one which admits of a scientific solution. But the real solution to this problem is faith in God, and in His providential care for His Word.³

Most CT advocates, like McCune, believe that the key doctrines or the original text are preserved somewhere among the variants, but they have no logical or scientific reason to believe so. No matter how they finesse it, their belief is predicated more on sentimentality as they have rejected any Biblical exegetical basis for assuming perfect preservation. No accumulation of sardonic putdowns or intellectual gymnastics can conceal this fact from the discerning reader. Textual critical arguments presuppose that man can approach the knowledge of God's Words as if man is morally neutral. It is predicated on the idea that man has an unaided intrinsic ability to reach knowledge of God's Words in making textual choices and conjectural emendations. However, any attempt to separate faith and reason is doomed to failure, as this construction violates Scripture (Rom 1:18; 1 Cor 10:31).

Since no one is viewpoint neutral and everyone has presuppositions, why does McCune want to exclude Biblical presuppositions on the issue of the preservation of the text? Does he really believe in the myth of a "secular, academic, religiously-neutral hermeneutic" in criticism? Unbelief in the promises of Scripture is a sin and even believers can be guilty of it by being "fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24:25-27). The devil managed to persuade Eve that God's Word was not to be trusted over our autonomous reason. It should be noted he came professing to offer a way to "real" truth and happiness. All attempts to be wise outside of God's Word has shipwrecked many seminaries and churches. McCune (and DBTS) need to return to the biblical presupposition that the Church, as the pillar and ground of the truth, is entrusted with the New Testament Words, as the Jews were with the Old Testament oracles of God. We must hold the Biblical worldview without reservation or we are doomed to perpetual uncertainty. McCune has sought to blunt the Sword of the Spirit by his non-acceptance of its sufficiency for all truth. Instead, we should follow the approach of men like A W Pink who commented,

Man craves for certainty. Speculations and hypotheses are insufficient where eternal issues are at stake. When I come to lay my head upon my dying pillow, I want something surer than a "perhaps" to rest it upon. And thank God I have it. Where? In the Holy Scriptures. I know that my Redeemer liveth. I know that I have passed from death unto life. I know that I shall be made like Christ and dwell with Him in glory throughout the

endless ages of eternity. How do I know? Because *God's* Word says so, and I want nothing more.⁴

It would be the height of folly to surrender the Received Text that changed nations, sparked a Reformation, and three Great Awakenings for the evolving manuscript based on the subjective views of apostate textual critics. The truth is that Miss Pragmatism is a seductive mistress for those seeking the approval of the Neo-Evangelical scholarship but unfortunately she produces some very ugly offsprings. We see the Athaliah's of the Jehoshaphat compromise with apostate textual criticism now flooding the collapsing dyke of modern Fundamentalism as seen in institutions such as Bob Jones University (BJU), Central Baptist Theological Seminary (CBTS) and DBTS. Speaking of this decline of Fundamentalism, the Rev Ivan Foster of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster in a message delivered on October 11, 2009 states,

The first evidence of change was Fundamentalism's turning against the Authorised Version of Holy Scriptures. That which had been kept on the fringes of Fundamentalism crept nearer the centre. Suddenly, it was learned and scholarly to agitate for a replacing of the Authorised Version. The Authorised Version has been replaced within some circles of Fundamentalism and new versions have made their appearance. I do not believe that any new version is free of compromise with and contamination by the camp of liberalism. The emergence of new versions amongst Fundamentalism is evidence of the adopting of a new scholarship and the moving away from the Bible of the Reformation; the Bible of every revival since the seventeenth century in the English speaking world.

He went on to say,

I believe that God has set His stamp upon the Authorised Version and I do not believe that any degree of scholarship gives a man or any group of men the right to replace that which God has set His seal upon for whatever reason with a new version. That might sound naïve to the learned; it will certainly sound very unscholarly. I don't really care. I am prepared to take the risk of being wrong by relying on the book that God has changed nations with rather than launch out in that frail vessel of scholarship that those who today have gained some standing within Fundamentalism would have us all embark in. I reject the NKJV and I reject every other version as flawed in comparison to the purity of the Authorised Version. I just cannot see the reason for changing.⁵

It is not that we do not understand McCune's arguments for change from the historical Reformed position on preservation, we do, but we

don't agree. We see the tunnel he wants to go down, but we don't see the light. Despite many other commendable features, McCune's volume will only aid this decline.

Notes

¹ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, Vol 1: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Scripture, God, and Angels* (Allen Park: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 443pp.

² Rolland McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled: The Failed Strategy of Modern Evangelicalism* (Greenville: Ambassador International, 2004).

³ Douglas Wilson, *Mother Kirk* (Moscow: Canon Press, 2001), 56.

⁴ A W Pink, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), 65.

⁵ Ivan Foster, "The Present Crisis in Northern Ireland (2 Timothy 3:10-17)," a sermon preached at the Congress of Fundamentalists at Foundations Theological Seminary, Dunn, North Carolina, on October 11, 2009, accessible from http://www-foundations.edu/online_material/online_audio/sermondetails.php?SermonID=8496.

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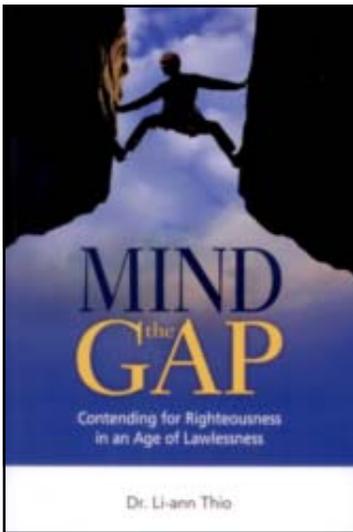
Continued from page 64

As part of the College curriculum, the Principal—Rev Dr Jeffrey Khoo—led FEBC's **14th Holy Land Pilgrimage** from the 15th to the 29th of November 2009. There were a total of 48 pilgrims from 10 churches this time. Pilgrims who submit a research paper or project after the trip will earn two credits.

The **6th Bachelor of Ministry Graduation Service** of FEBC/BCEA, 27 June 2009, saw the following receive their BMin degree: Alice Githingi, Degu Genffe Guyola, Faith Ndunge, Henry Ngige Daniel, James Muvea Mwangangi, Joseph Amos Mbise, Josphat Kyalo Musili, Josphat Nzau Wambua, Joyce Chepkoech Kikwai, Kipruto Mutai Ali, Nathan Kiteme Mwangangi, Paul Onderi Nyaronge, and Tabitha Maiyo.

A REVIEW OF THIO LI-ANN'S *MIND THE GAP: CONTENDING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS IN AN AGE OF LAWLESSNESS*

Paul Ferguson



Dr Thio Li-ann is Professor of law at the National University of Singapore. She was educated at the University of Oxford, Harvard Law School and the University of Cambridge. In January 2007, she was appointed a Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) in Singapore stepping down in 2009. In *The Straits Times* of 2 November 2007, she claims to have had “a life-changing experience with Jesus Christ” from being a “very, very arrogant” atheist in 1987.

Thio’s book—*Mind the Gap*¹—is written as a hard hitting polemic to catalyse Christians to take an active role in Singapore society by “contending for righteousness.” Thio’s basic premise is that believers should “serve as responsible citizens and watchful stewards in seeking to beneficially influence public life to serve the common good” (28). She believes God is giving Christians, “the privilege of contending for righteousness, in an age of lawlessness” (356).

The author divides the book into four main parts: “Destiny Lost or Found?”; “The Call to Stand in the Gap”; “Identifying the Gap and Knowing How to Stand in It”; and “The Divine Assignment and Final Examination”. From an overall perspective, the book is a challenging academic genre, but most readers should be able to follow the line of

reasoning. The audiences who will enjoy this book most are likely those who appreciate logical analysis and lengthy quotations from a variety of authors. It probably suffers from trying to accomplish too many purposes and at times can appear unfocused. Notwithstanding this, Thio draws from a wide diversity of sources and has clearly thought through the issues from a Christian perspective and in application.

In the first section, Thio gives a useful theological presentation of the need to live a holy and pure life as a believer. She is to be commended for taking a clear biblical stand against sexual immorality, particularly that of homosexuality. The author warns that those who take such a stand need to be prepared for persecution, mocking, hatred, ostracism, and even threats to life. Thio's argumentation is significant, as she speaks throughout with personal experience of taking unpopular public stances on these issues. She clearly applies her unique perspective as a law professor and former parliamentarian in formulating practical suggestions in responding to the threat of moral relativism.

Part Two is probably one of the best sections in the book, as Thio discusses the "moral barometer" of a nation and the corruption of sin. She maintains that the Bible teaches from examples such as Sodom and Gomorrah that there is a "threshold or spiritual tipping point" that once crossed inevitably brings divine judgment to any nation. It is pleasing that Thio unequivocally denounces false ministers by stating, "the attempt by some clergy to campaign for the recognition of the perversion of 'same-sex marriage' is evidence of a degenerating priesthood" (104).

In Part Three, Thio delineates how the spirit of lawlessness manifests in the "philosophy, morality and politics that shape our laws, systems and mindsets." She traces the genesis of lawlessness from the confrontation in Eden to the contemporary relativism that belligerently opposes Judeo-Christian morality in what she calls "the public square." The author boldly identifies the traits and agents of lawlessness. Particularly useful is Thio's incisive dissection of the semantic gyrations and rhetorical tricks of relativists in distorting the truth and propagation of liberal agendas. For instance, she delineates how it is not hypocritical to support social norms as everyone draws a fixed line of morality at some point. No one supports the idea of society recognising any and all forms of social organisation. Thio cleverly shows how relativists simply draw a line at another place and shout "bigot" or "homophobe" at anyone who would draw a line at any other location on the floor. The book

concludes in the final part by urging us to consider the differing responses by believers to the challenge of the spirit of lawlessness.

Despite its many worthwhile points, there were a number of theological areas that manifest concern. The author it should be recognised is a self-taught layperson rather than a professionally trained exegete. Thio appears to have embraced a form of the Charismatic “Kingdom Now” Theology. She advocates that believers be like Joshua and “possess the land promised to us” and to “facilitate the advancing kingdom of God” (356). In Thio’s view, Christians are “called to minister to their communities by promoting social welfare and the just ordering or relationships” (293). However, the Church is not responsible to usher in the Kingdom of God through political involvement, but to testify to God’s Kingdom by proclamation and a radically different life. Scripture nowhere teaches a believer to find common ground with an unbeliever. The work of legislative societal reformation is not the Church’s but Christ’s when He returns. Indeed, it is impossible to legislate righteousness. If we truly desire moral change in our society, we must give ourselves to the only biblically prescribed method for New Testament saints to facilitate this—the preaching of the gospel.

An equally problematic trend in the book was the tacit approval of charismatic gifts. Thio claims that speaking in tongues is a “very useful tool in intercession” as she argues, “it bypasses the mind because when one speaks in tongue, the mind (which can be prejudiced and filled with soulish thoughts) lies fallow” (359-360). This position she premised from passages such as Acts 2:4 and 1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:12. However, the speakers and listeners fully understand the tongues in Acts 2:4, which were an incidental convenience, albeit a miraculous one of 16 *known* languages, to the real purpose of leading three thousand to salvation. If genuine tongues speaking were truly existent today, it would be supernatural manifestations of other *known* languages. Another difficulty is that if tongues do not involve the mind, how can they ever be edifying to the speaker? Also, charismatics need to explain how if ecstatic utterances are non-cognitive why did the Apostle urge them to seek a translator? The tongues of 1 Corinthians 14 are presupposed by Paul as equivalent to those of Acts 2 for as Gordon Clark explained, “the word *glossa* can mean a tongue of land or a leathern thong, or the organ in one’s mouth; but it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find an instance in Greek where it means *gibberish*.”²²

Biblical tongues were not a prayer language and Paul cites Isaiah 28:11-15 to explain that “tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not” (1 Cor 14:22), namely apostate Jews who had made a covenant with death by rebelliously rejecting the Word of God. It should be noted that when Paul cites Old Testament precedent here he appeals both in the actual Old Testament context and by his choice of words, he is referring to *human languages*. There is no indication that they did not engage their minds, as bypassing of the mind is thoroughly unbiblical (Mark 12:30; John 4:23; 1 Cor 14:10). Such an existential leap might cause one to surrender one’s faculties to dangerous and evil influences. Thio undermines this position in another passage when she correctly posited “we must avoid thinking with our feelings and emotions” (42). Our mind, will, and emotions must always be connected to biblical truth and used together in worship to glorify God in doctrine, action, and affection. This is *inter alia* a salient reason for believers to reject worship that bypasses the mind such as contemporary Christian music and charismatic tongues. Such worship champions feeling, experience, and immediate gratification.

Despite the reservations I have expressed above, it is encouraging to note that such a book has been published by a leading Singaporean academic and former Parliamentarian. Prof Thio writes with a refreshing urgency and passion to see society rescued from immorality. She is to be commended for her courage and steadfastness in seeking to honour God’s Word against the accepted secular world views on vital moral issues facing her nation. All Singaporeans would benefit from reading this book.

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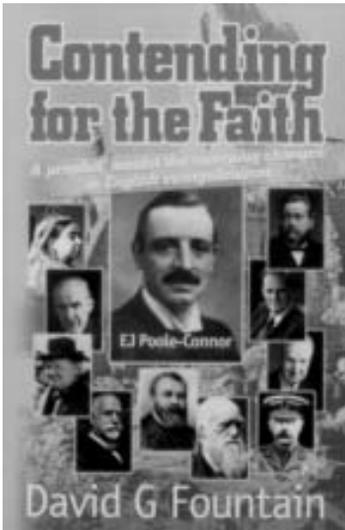
Notes

¹ Thio Li-ann, *Mind the Gap: Contending for Righteousness in an Age of Lawlessness* (Singapore: Armour Publishing, 2009), 416pp.

² Gordon H Clark, *First Corinthians* (Jefferson: The Trinity Foundation, 1975), 219.

**A REVIEW OF DAVID FOUNTAIN'S
*CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH: E J POOLE-
CONNOR, A "PROPHET" AMIDST THE SWEEPING
CHANGES IN ENGLISH EVANGELICALISM***

Joseph Poon



David G Fountain in his book, *Contending for the Faith*,¹ sets out to present some of the events, prevailing mindsets and reasons for the fall of main Nonconformist denominations of England into modernism, as seen through the eyes and writings of E J Poole-Connor (1872-1962). While the author quotes also from various other men, his focus is more on the discerning convictions and reactions of Poole-Connor whom he considers to be the role model both in his defence of the faith and pastoral life. The author cleverly interlaces the autobiography of Poole-Connor with his own astute analysis of the history and events of the time. He described this time as “a period in human history, during which the church was devastated by error of every kind, when Nonconformity lost its power, and once full chapels were found desolate and deserted ...”.

Fountain strives to show a distinctive trait of Poole-Connor. This man, while a serious and unflinching contender for the faith, was not just a fighter but one who was rich in thoughtfulness, graciousness and kindness even when provoked and tried. In addition, Fountain traces the progression of Poole-Connor’s theological pursuits that led him to being an industrious scholar who had a spiritual gift of penetrating exposition

of Scriptures. Poole-Connor would address hundreds by the week at Talbot Tabernacle in London, while also organising a massive Sunday school for thousands of youngsters. Evidences of Poole-Connor's pastoral wisdom are also supported through anecdotal quotes from his flock. But it was his focus on consistently addressing and warning of the spiritual decline in the United Kingdom amidst his pastoral life, while tending to the spiritual diet of his flock that Fountain finds most commendable. Fountain believes that God indeed raised Poole-Connor as a watchman, a calling to which he was faithful to the end. Fountain also traces Poole-Connor's great admiration of C H Spurgeon's conduct during the Down-Grade Controversy. On this, Fountain provided stirring abstracts from Poole-Connor's passionate writings in support and defence of Spurgeon. Poole-Connor organised the "Spurgeon Centenary Mission" to break the ominous "conspiracy of silence" after Spurgeon's death.

While Fountain covers Poole-Connor's focus on evangelical unity, he highlights Poole-Connor's loyalty to the inerrant Scriptures in combating Higher Criticism. Poole-Connor attacked the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Revised Standard Version (RSV) as he served on the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC). He also was a strong defender of the King James Version (KJV) as his article, "Why I prefer the Authorised Version of the English Bible" in *Truth Unchanged Unchanging* (1984) illustrates. Here Poole-Connor states on page 287, "we have in the Authorised a truly Protestant Version without the least unfaithfulness to the original Scriptures." Fountain often quotes from Poole-Connor's works to show how the latter was prophetic in his insight. Poole-Connor accurately foretold of the sure fall of evangelicalism because of tolerating Higher Criticism. Moreover, he warned the people of his time without mincing words or toning down the message. Poole-Connor simply and bravely pronounced it as from the Word of God without apology.

A noteworthy contribution mentioned was his involvement in the founding of the Evangelical Library, one of the first new agencies for promoting Puritan literature in 20th century Britain. Fountain highlights Poole-Connor's active aim to strengthen and unite faithful evangelicals that remained true in their doctrines and to strengthen their hands to separate from and combat against the compromisers. On this, he traces Poole-Connor's efforts in setting up "The Fellowship of Udenominational and Unattached Churches and Missions" in 1922

which later became “The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches” (FIEC). Fountain explains Poole-Connor’s reason for doing so was because the latter believed that professing loyalty to a “secondary” issue as practised in a denomination has hastened doctrinal decline. Instead, joining arms to fight against modernism was the greater need instead.

Several noteworthy highlights of this book are firstly, Fountain’s spiritual discernment that the connection between defence of the Word of God and the blessing of the Holy Spirit was ignored during this period. People were seeking for revival of the dead church but yet were attacking God’s Word at the same time. Secondly, Fountain’s keen perception that the rapid momentum of the decline was largely due to “silence of good men” who were not speaking up against the deceptions of false brethren. This enabled the poison to spread because of the neutrality and tolerance of many. On this, Fountain shows Poole-Connor’s discerning view and reaction against teachers of Higher Criticism, modernism and friendliness to Rome. Thirdly, Fountain pointed out that the rapid decline was also due to the fact that many respected preachers, who were outwardly evangelical in their speeches, were really tolerant compromisers in their practices. He quotes Poole-Connor writing, “But let it be emphatically repeated—words are not enough. It is action that is demanded. ... Their leniency is eloquent advocacy; ...”. Indeed many of such characters are still living today. And finally, his astute insight on how the pervading focus on evangelism, with little attention paid to doctrinal issues of those days (particularly biblical inerrancy and authority), was also a key problem. He named those who unwittingly helped promote this mindset, listing D L Moody, Ira Sankey, and R A Torrey among such and to some extent Andrew Murray.

Poole-Connor was unique in that he was careful not to blindly embrace even those evangelicals who were greatly used by God in his age. He would diligently examine their practices against the light of God’s Word, no matter the outward “achievements”. Towards the end, Fountain gives a stirring account of Poole-Connor’s life in his final years. Poole-Connor never wavered nor faltered in his brave attacks on false trends. And he continued to do so even though it led him to loneliness because of the severe criticisms that were directed at him for his evaluation of the situation.

The warnings this book ring relevantly true in our times. It would have, however, lent even greater weight to itself if it included more Scripture passages to substantiate its views. Notably, it is the Postscript chapter by Dr Peter Masters that truly makes this book complete and updated for our day. This chapter was wisely requested for by Fountain through foresight. It honestly points out that while the idea of “unity on basis of essentials, laying aside non-essentials” was relevant and adequate in Poole-Connor’s day, it is not sufficient today. This is so based on the very point that Poole-Connor who did himself forewarn emphatically about; that at the end of the day, actions and practices are what count, not just stated beliefs. Creeds have little meaning when compromise continues to be present. Dr Masters rightly warns that the practices, not just the statements of their evangelical beliefs, that must be the yardstick of cooperation today. The common practices and experiences, resulting from contemporary Christian worship, charismatic practices and other unbiblical practices, continue to lead the way back to Rome.

This book has achieved what it has set out to do in giving the reader a picture of the events surrounding the period of spiritual disaster in England. It traced the causes and effects of compromise which Poole-Connor faithfully battled against. These are days when many Christians have succumbed to compromise and have tolerated errors. Many do so to please others and to promote self. Hence, this book has truly been an encouragement to this writer’s heart that God had raised and sustained Poole-Connor to remain true and faithful to his Master till his last breath.

May the above be an example and inspiration to all. For we must never falter in raising the banner of Truth, sword in one hand and trowel in the other, as we march faithfully on the Lord’s side.

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Note

¹ David Guy Fountain, *Earnestly Contending for the Faith: E J Poole-Connor, a “Prophet” Amidst the Sweeping Changes in English Evangelicalism* (London: Wakeman Trust, 2005), 174pp.

College News

FEBC commenced its **new academic term** with a day of prayer and registration on 20 July 2009 at the Shalom Chapel of Calvary Tengah Bible-Presbyterian Church in Choa Chu Kang. Dr Paul Ferguson who was recently conferred the Doctor of Religious Education (DRE) degree by the Graduate School of Foundations Bible College (USA) was the Lord's messenger. He spoke from 2 Timothy 3 on how as Christians we need to believe in the absolute certainty and perfection of God's inspired and preserved words in order to face a world full of temptations and uncertainties. Dr Ferguson will teach Biblical Apologetics this semester which is part of his pedagogical requirements for his Doctor of Theology (ThD) degree at FEBC.

The Day of Prayer on July 20th was exactly three months since FEBC's **Founding Principal**—the Rev Dr Timothy Tow—went home to be with the Lord. Testimonies by the faculty were given in memory of him, especially by his wife, the Matron—Mrs Ivy Tow—who shared about the hardships the Rev Timothy Tow had to go through in the founding years of the College; how the College had nothing when it started, only three stools for three students with the Principal as the only teacher, and no food and no beds. But the Rev Tow had faith in the Lord and encouraged his students with these words from Psalm 34:10, "*The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.*" The Lord was faithful to provide in double quick time! Food came from Dr Tow Siew Ai and beds from Chin Lien Seminary. Today, FEBC is being tried and tested like never before. There are people who are keen to see FEBC put down because of her belief in a 100% perfect Bible without any mistake in keeping with the Dean Burgon Oath. Mrs Tow encouraged the FEBC family with this verse from the Lord, "*Ye shall not fear them: for the LORD your God he shall fight for you*" (Deut 3:22). Indeed, "*He being dead yet speaketh*" (Heb 11:4).

The new semester saw the **matriculation** of 12 new full-time students from 10 countries: Panuwat Chalongkuamdee (Thailand), Kenny Cheong (Australia), Douglas Ho (Singapore), Ibrahim Njuguna Kiarie (Kenya), Eric Lufungi Kambale (Congo), Anya Kera (Nagaland), Trinipilo Garsuta Lagapa (Philippines), Lin Yang (China), Peter Mutua Maurice (Kenya), Marilyn Nanta (Sarawak), Charles Kipyegon Sang (Kenya), and Song Sun Taek (Korea). We thank the Lord for each one of them.

FEBC has a **total enrolment** of 304 students in the July-November 2009 semester, comprising 98 day-time students (53 full-time, 45 part-time), and 206 night-time students. The full-time students come from 16 countries: Australia, Cambodia, China, Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Tanzania, Thailand, United Kingdom, and Vietnam.

For students who cannot come to FEBC, FEBC goes to them. The **distance learning** online programme replaces the off-campus correspondence programme offered by FEBC since 1995. The correspondence programme had no strict schedule; students could work on the faculty-directed courses at their own time and pace. The online programme, on the other hand, follows the academic timetable of the College, and begins and ends at the same time as the residential courses of the College semester by semester. Such a controlled and disciplined approach gives students the impetus to complete their studies on time. The courses and syllabi are taught and designed by the faculty, and Mr Murray Ong, our IT Specialist, administers the whole programme via the internet. The College offered three online courses last semester—“Knowing Man,” “Knowing Bible-Presbyterianism,” and “The Perfect Preservation of the Holy Scriptures.” Besides our residential students, we have three from Calvary Jaya BPC in KL taking the courses for credit and working towards a Certificate.

We thank the Lord that the **Basic Theology for Everyone (BTFE)** night classes on Daniel and Isaiah are well attended. The over 200 BTFE students come from 34 different local churches: *Baptist Fellowship Church, Berean Bible-Presbyterian Church, Berith Bible-Presbyterian Church, Calvary Assembly of God, Calvary Baptist Church, Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church, Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church, Calvary Tengah Bible-Presbyterian Church, Christ Methodist Church, Evangelize China Fellowship, Faith Community Baptist Church, Fisherman of Christ Fellowship, Galilee Bible-Presbyterian Church, Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church, Gospel Light Bible-Presbyterian Church, Grace Bible Church, Hebron Bible-Presbyterian Church, Hope Church, Hope of God Church, Jesus Saves Mission, Jireh Bible-Presbyterian Church, Leng Kwang Baptist Church, Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, Maranatha Bible-Presbyterian Church, Moriah Bible-Presbyterian Church, New Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, Orchard Road Presbyterian Church, Pasir Panjang Christ Church,*

Praise Evangelical Church, Sharon Bible-Presbyterian Church, Tabernacle Bible-Presbyterian Church, True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, Truth Bible-Presbyterian Church, Zion Bible-Presbyterian Church.



The **Rev Gordon Ferguson** preached to the FEBC students on 17 August 2009 at the morning chapel hour. He spoke from Ecclesiastes 11:1-6 and encouraged the faculty and students to be industrious in sowing the gospel seed and teaching the whole counsel of God. Rev Ferguson is the pastor of the Free

Presbyterian Church in London, and an officer of the General Committee of the Trinitarian Bible Society.

The **Rev and Mrs An Yo Han (John)** visited FEBC on 2 November 2009. Rev An is the blind Korean pastor well known through the award-winning and soul-stirring film about his life—"Come Low Unto Us". He spoke at the FEBC's Morning Chapel from Ephesians 3:5-9 and exhorted all to humble themselves before God if they want to be used by Him. Rev An also preached at True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church on 1 November 2009. Rev Park Seung Kyu, the pastor of the Korean service of True Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, was the interpreter.



Rev and Mrs An Yo Han standing beside Matron Ivy Tow
(front, 3rd from left)

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**FEBC's 34th Graduation Service
Class of 2009**

**Far Eastern Bible College and Bible College of East Africa
Sixth Bachelor of Ministry Graduation Service**

