

Remembering the
SINGAPORE
B-P STORY



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FOREWORD

“Remembering the Singapore B-P Story” is the theme adopted for this year’s 16th century Reformation emphasis. To forget the origin is to forget the source from which our spiritual life is sustained. It is true that our beginning begins with God in Christ and it continues with God in Christ until we arrive home in glory. However, God also uses people especially His servants to do His work to bring His blessings to His people. This was true when God brought Israel out of Egypt, the land of bondage and into the Promised Land. It is still true today.

Through the obedience of Rev Timothy Tow, coupled with his life of godliness, holiness, courage and perseverance, the Singapore B-P church was born. It is like a mustard seed born of humble beginnings and grew into a tree that thousands have come and found shelter and blessings in Christ. It is not about remembering the man Rev Timothy Tow but remembering what the LORD did in his life as the Psalmist David says in **Psalm 143:5** “I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse

on the work of thy hands.” This was exactly what Rev Tow wanted during his life of devoted service. Christ must increase and he must decrease. Rev Tow said, *“If you are willing to give up everything for Christ, then from the lowest rung of the ladder, you will climb to the top. It’s God’s ladder, not yours!”* Rev Tow lived to elevate and promote Christ and he did that through the founding of the B-P movement in Singapore and the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC).

Like every story there are ups and downs within the B-P movement. This is to be expected as the god of this world, the devil himself, will not leave the B-P movement and FEBC alone. He sent enemies from within and without to destroy the B-P movement and FEBC. The Singapore B-P movement is now fragmented to a “do what is right in your own eyes” entity after the termination of the B-P synod in October 1988. Very few B-P churches hold onto to the same fundamentals of the faith upon which the B-P movement was founded upon. One of these doctrines is the key distinctive doctrine of biblical

separation which separates itself from the modern isms of the 20th and 21st centuries such as Charismaticism, neo-evangelicalism, Roman Catholicism, etc. This doctrine is so important that it is clearly stated as a separate section in all the B-P church's constitution. Yet what is biblically stated on paper when not obeyed is vanity! This is proven true in many B-P churches in Singapore that have crossed the line of fundamentalism to neo-evangelicalism to ecumenism. This is seen in their contemporary worship, supporting para-church groups, seminaries and Bible Colleges that are liberal and modernists, and lack of church discipline when sin is permitted to remain and teach that the Bible with mistakes is God honoring and those who believe that the Bible is perfect are heretics. Biblical Truths are called lies and lies are called truths! Like in the days of Jeremiah before the destruction of Judah by the Babylonians, the Singapore B-P movement has been infiltrated and undermined. **Jeremiah 9:3-6** "And they bend their tongues *like* their bow *for* lies:

but they are not valiant for the truth upon upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD. Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. 5 And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity. Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the LORD."

The need to remember the B-P story is urgent. Fundamental B-P churches are falling away. God says, "Be Ye holy for I am Holy" must grip the heart and soul of God's children. Be holy in life and doctrine. This clarion call from God most High must be obeyed for the B-P movement to remain in the path of holiness and righteousness. Our founding fathers obeyed and gave their lives for the cause of Christ; we can do no less for Christ's sake in these last days. Amen.

THE HISTORY OF THE BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN MOVEMENT

IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING THE HISTORY OF THE BP MOVEMENT

Since the 16th Century Reformation when the Protestant church was formed following its separation from the Roman Catholic Church, many denominations have arisen, one of which is Presbyterianism. Within Presbyterianism, there are many sub-groups, like the Free Presbyterians, Evangelical Presbyterians, Orthodox Presbyterians, Reformed Presbyterians, United Presbyterians, and Bible-Presbyterians (B-Ps). Why then are we Bible-Presbyterians? What is our history and our heritage? How did Bible-Presbyterianism come about? How did it spread to Singapore? How did it grow in Singapore? These are questions we seek to answer in this article.

We stand in history today as the legacy of the founding fathers of BP-ism, as the good fruit that God has so graciously caused to be borne as a result of loyal adherence to God and His truth. Will we be the generation that continues on the good work, or will we be the generation that fails to pass on the torch, that fails to keep ablaze the spirit of BP-ism that God had so wondrously lit in its time? Already, the light of BP-ism is dimming, with the introduction and acceptance of falsehood into BP churches. Will BP-ism find in us a solid bulwark against those that would darken or obliterate its holy witness? May

we be true to our godly lineage. But how can we do so, unless we first know our history, and from there imbibe the true spirit of BP-ism? Therefore, we need to look back to how BP-ism began, trace our history to its roots, and understand its origins.

TRACING THE HISTORY OF THE BP MOVEMENT TO ITS SEVEN ROOTS

According to Rev Timothy Tow, the founding father of the BP Church in South East Asia, the B-P Singapore Tree has seven roots. They are 1) French, through John Calvin, the Reformer; 2) English, through the English Presbyterian Mission (EPM); 3) Scottish, through Rev William Chalmers Burns, an EPM missionary; 4) German, through Dr Rudolph Lechler, of the Basel Missionary Society; 5) Chinese, through Dr John Sung, the revivalist; 6) American, through Dr Carl McIntire; and 7) Singaporean, through Rev Dr Timothy Tow.

Before Singapore – The First Four Roots

We start from the first root – **French**, through John Calvin (1509-1564) the Reformer. The B-P Church is a Protestant church of the Reformed faith. Martin Luther was the one who nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Castle Church door, which sparked off the 16th Century Protestant Reformation in 1517, fighting for and causing a return to the Bible against the traditions and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, but it was John Calvin the

French theologian who, building upon the foundation laid by Luther, later expounded on and systematized the Biblical doctrines that Protestants should return to. He made more concrete the doctrines of the Reformed faith, especially in his “Institutes of the Christian Religion.” Calvin crystallised Reformed theology, helping Protestants and us B-Ps to know what exactly it is we believe, according to Holy Scriptures. As Rev Tow says, “Calvinism is Paulinism systematized.”

After the departure from the Roman Catholic Church, further reforms within the Church of England led to the rise of English Presbyterianism. The Puritans, English Reformed Protestants, stood against the Church of England (the Anglicans) in the matter of church government, the former being Presbyterian and the latter Episcopalian. Their battle culminated in the removal from office and expulsion of 2,000 ministers who refused to conform to the Act of Uniformity of 1662, which required Episcopal ordination for all ministers. Over the next few years, English Presbyterianism became more disorganized and declined in power and number.

Years later, a revival among the English Presbyterians led to an increased interest in foreign missions work. This where our second root – **English**, through the English Presbyterian Missions – comes into the picture. It was the EPM that sent its missionaries to China, which led to the preaching of the Gospel in certain parts of South China, namely Iam Tsau and Swatow. In 1856, Rev William Chalmers Burns (1815-1868), a missionary of the EPM, first came to Swatow. There our **Scottish** third root is identified. Through this Scottish man’s and his successor Rev George Smith’s ministry, Tan Khai Lin (maternal great grandfather of Rev Tow) was converted in

1859. Tan Khai Lin was the first convert in Swatow. He went on to be ordained (1882) and to pastor Iam Tsau church, which had earlier been founded by Dr Rudolph Lechler, our **German** fourth root, in 1849. In that year, Lechler first came to Iam Tsau village, being sent by the Basel Missionary Society to China. That led to the founding of the Iam Tsau church (1849-1995). Later, Lechler would also go to Swatow, where he founded the Basel church. In the 1860s, members of the Iam Tsau church began to migrate to Singapore and the Malay States. The EPM continued to minister to those in Singapore through Rev John A B Cook, who sorted them into four congregations. They were the churches at Bukit Timah (1881), Prinsep Street, Tanjong Pagar and Upper Serangoon (1883). The church (Life Church) at Prinsep Street would play a more prominent role in the BP movement in Singapore.

In Southeast Asia – The Fifth Root

The BP movement scene now moves to Singapore, where we will encounter our fifth root – **Chinese**, through Dr John Sung. God used Dr John Sung mightily from 1928-1949 as His mouthpiece in China and Southeast Asia, bringing about the Asian Awakening. In 1935, Dr John Sung visited Singapore. By this time, the Tow clan had already moved to Singapore (this happened in 1926) and had been worshipping in Life Church Prinsep Street. During the two week Revival Campaign in Singapore, Rev Timothy Tow was saved. It was also then that he first wanted to serve God full-time. However, he soon was distracted by other business of life and forgot his full-time service calling. It was only in 1946, after the death of his mother and 7 month old daughter five weeks later, that he would renew his consecration to serve the Lord full time. He first went to Nanking and studied under Dr Chia Yu Ming in the

Spiritual Training Theological Seminary, and after one semester, he continued his studies in America, at Faith Theological Seminary, where he first came into contact with Dr Carl McIntire.

In America – The Sixth Root

At this point, we note that it was from the sixth root – the **American** root – that we find our Bible-Presbyterian heritage. Without going further back, the origin of B-P movement in America can be traced back to the Fundamentalist-Modernists controversy in the early 1900s. In May 1922, Harry Emerson Fosdick, a modernist and liberal, preached a sermon “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?” which proved pivotal in the controversy. This was followed up with the signing of the Auburn Affirmation in 1923 by 1274 Presbyterian ministers. This Affirmation denied the Five Fundamentals of the Christian faith (formulated in the 1910 General Assembly against modernists), but yet was accepted by the Presbyterian Church in United States of America (PCUSA), and at Princeton Theological Seminary its signers were tolerated and still allowed to teach. This showed that the raging war between the Fundamentalists and the Modernists had swung in favour of the latter, and that the PCUSA would soon turn apostate. Because of this, Dr J Gresham Machen, after years of fighting, finally left Princeton in 1929 and founded Westminster Theological Seminary. One of the students who left Princeton with him was Carl McIntire. Later, problems regarding the International Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM) and the liberalism and ecumenism of the PCUSA resulted in Machen leaving the PCUSA in 1936 and the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). However, in 1937, another split occurred. Due to differences in doctrine

(premillennialism versus amillennialism), morality (forbidding of alcohol, smoking or not) and missions (cooperation with other fundamentalists or only Presbyterians), Dr Carl McIntire, along with Dr J O Buswell and Dr Allan A McRae, led a group of people out of the OPC to found the Bible Presbyterian Church and Faith Theological Seminary. Herein we find our Bible-Presbyterianism. In 1948, Dr Carl McIntire also founded the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC), in opposition to the apostate World Council of Churches (WCC).

Dr Carl McIntire’s influence on Rev Tow was very significant. On one occasion, in January 1948, during the Seminary’s chapel hour, Rev Tow heard Dr Carl McIntire speaking on “20th Century Reformation”. It was then on that cold winter morning that a burning fire emerged in Rev Tow’s heart. He had heard God’s call too for the church today to separate from the Ecumenical Movement and from associating with modernists and liberals. Rev Tow would go on to spread the spirit of the 20th Century Reformation and defend the Faith, till the day the Lord took him home on 20 April 2009.

In Singapore – The Seventh Root

After finishing his studies in Faith Theological Seminary, in 1950, Rev Tow was ordained in Geneva by the Philadelphia Presbytery, where Dr J O Buswell Jr was the Moderator. He then returned to Singapore, to Life Church at Prinsep Street, which at that time was mainly a Teochew speaking church. On October 20, 1950, Rev Tow, as their pastor, inaugurated the Life Church English Service. In January 1955, Life Church withdrew from the Synod of the Chinese Presbyterian Church because of its affiliations with the World Council of Churches. She was renamed Life Bible-

Presbyterian Church. Life BPC is affiliated with the ICCC and the Far Eastern Council of Christian Churches (FECCC). From this church, more than 100 BP Churches would sprout forth in Singapore and other parts of South East Asia by 2010. Not only that, recognizing the need for trained ministers of the Word, and how “the trend is towards the trained”, Rev Tow founded the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC). The college opened her doors officially on September 17, 1962, and has since then been faithfully serving the Lord. Rev Tow, together with other men like Rev Quek Kiok Chiang, Dn Hsu Chiang Tai and Dr Tow Siang Hwa, led the way in the development and propagation of the BP movement in Singapore and in other parts of South East Asia. Rev Tow called the Great Commission “the first commandment to the church”. With that in mind, he and faithful men endeavoured to bring the Gospel to as many people in as many places as possible. Tremendous growth in the B-P Church led her to be considered the fastest growing church in Singapore in the 1970s. The **Singaporean** root, through Rev Timothy Tow, is the last and final of the seven roots of the B-P Singapore Tree.

CONTINUING THE HISTORY OF THE BP MOVEMENT IN OUR GENERATION

With such a powerful growing witness for Christ, the B-P Church in Singapore was a prime target of Satan. Not many years

passed before falsehood began to make inroads into the BP Church of Singapore. In 1968, there was the Billy Graham issue regarding Neo-evangelicalism and biblical separation. In the following years, there were also disagreements regarding using solely the KJV versus modern versions, Biblical inerrancy, Charismaticism and Ecumenism. The B-P Church leaders were divided in their doctrines and practices. This culminated in the voluntary dissolution of the Singapore B-P Synod on 30 October 1988. In 2002, another major issue arose regarding the doctrine of the verbal plenary preservation of Scripture (VPP), resulting in Rev Tow having to resign from Life BPC to found True-Life BPC, and also a lawsuit against the FEBC, because of their defence of VPP.

The BP scene today in Singapore is very different from what it was when it first started. How we progress in the years to come will depend on how much we stay true to our godly heritage and to the Bible-adhering and Bible-defending spirit of our founding fathers. They were fundamentalists who took an unyielding stand for the truth and were intolerant of any falsehood. They were greatly concerned with preaching the Gospel far and wide, without compromising on the truth and true unity in cooperation. As part of the BP church, we ought to know our beginnings and learn from our history. Otherwise, we will surely lose the heart of the BP Movement, which is so essential in keeping us faithful to God.

THE HISTORY OF THE FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FAR EASTERN BIBLE COLLEGE

The Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC) is the flagship theological institution of the Bible-Presbyterians in Singapore. She is the fourth oldest after Chin Lien Bible Seminary (1937), Trinity Theological College (1948) and Singapore Bible College (1952). FEBC was born to stand against the tide of many false “-isms” that were beginning to sweep across this sunny island of Singapore. It is best to hear the exciting story of FEBC from our very first B-P Church historian, and also her founding principal, the Rev Timothy Tow.

1) THE BEGINNING

Vision of a Bible College

The idea to found a Bible College was first conceived in 1954, at the first Bible Camp of Life BPC at Telok Paku Primary School in Changi. Rev Timothy Tow recounted: *“This proposed College was not only to train pastors, teachers and missionaries for our church, but also for the far-flung harvest fields of the Far East”*. As the college was also easily accessible to prospective students from all parts of the Far East, the name Far Eastern was chosen (suggested by Dr Tow Siang Hwa). At the same time, a strong and unwavering Bible Institution must rise up to confront forces from modernist theological schools. From the beginning,

the purpose for such a Bible College was clear in the mind of Rev Timothy Tow: *“A College that is called a Bible College is called to defend the Bible”*.

In preparation for the greater teaching ministry, Rev Tow furthered his theological studies for one year at Faith Seminary. He earned a Masters in Sacred Theology at the end of May 1959. With an ever-increasing burden upon his heart for the theological training of consecrated young people, he wrote in an issue of *Malaysia Christian* on September 6, 1959, an article entitled: *“The Trend is Toward the Trained”*:

“The strategy of Christian Missions in this day of social change is not so much in western missionaries (though we heartily welcome them) as in the sending forth of our own. But how can they be sent except they be called - and be trained?”

Hitherto we have sent some of our young people to the West for theological training. But if the Lord will call another half-dozen, how can we afford to send them all? The solution to training future ministers of the Gospel, I believe, is in the founding of a Bible College in Singapore. Yes, a Bible College, a college that reverently teaches the Bible to be the infallible, inerrant Word of God, that seeks to obey all its commands, that will make no compromise whatsoever with the subtle forces of Satan that are

so actively undermining theological institutions everywhere today.

We need to found a Bible College that will nurture future leaders of our Churches who will be able to stand in the gap in an evil day, and pursue the Word of the Lord by opening more and more preaching centres that the Kingdom of God might be extended to the uttermost part of Malaysia.”

In God’s good time, Rev Philip Clark, General Secretary of the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (IBPFM), USA came to Singapore on September 13, 1960. Acknowledging the pressing need for a Bible College in this part of the world, he promised to send qualified missionary teachers to help establish the work.

Expectation of Bible College Students

FEBC is interested in the vigorous training of genuinely-called Christians to the ministry, for the ministry is sheer hard work. Right from the outset, Rev Tow reminded his students:

“never to consider pay or prospects, because Jesus offered none. Jesus said, ‘If you are willing to die, come.’ That’s all. That’s why I offer my students no prospects.

I say instead, ‘If you are willing to give up everything for Christ, then from the lowest rung of the ladder, you will climb to the top. It’s God’s ladder, not yours!’

The ministry is a call, not a profession. It is one you are in because God has called and you can’t help it. And it is the love of Christ that constrains you to the work. His love is the power of God from above sustaining us here below. So the secret is God’s grace. If He has not called us and

we try to do His work for selfish ends, we will be crushed. The cross will be too heavy to carry.”

Construction of a Bible College Building

It was agreed that a College be built in the same vicinity as the Church. Life Church was willing to give up her planned one-storey kindergarten for a two-storey Bible College L-Annex that would serve as dormitories for 40 students. Rev Timothy Tow recounted:

“The property - land, Church and Bible College annex - has been acquired at a total cost of \$300,000. The decision to build was taken seven years ago as a step in faith, without any endowment or substantial financial backing. The Lord has since proved Himself faithful in supplying every need. Funds have come in from members of the Bible-Presbyterian Churches and friends, with only minimal help from overseas.”

In seven years, FEBC was becoming the theological school of choice in Asia. She had to expand in order to accommodate future prospective students. A new \$130,000 three-storey extension to the FEBC annex was built and dedicated, adding 12,000 square feet, on April 26, 1969.

Two decades later, and the Church and College had multiplied exponentially. The congestion issue had to be resolved quickly. Lo and behold, the former Eye Clinic across Gilstead Road offered to sell their freehold property of 29,025 square feet for \$6.95 million. It was a large sum of money but in a matter of six months, the target sum was reached as God’s people gave heartily. The newly-named Beulah House became the College’s married quarters, and doubled up as a hostel for missionaries who were passing through, Christian workers, and

anyone who needed a temporary roof over their head.

Provision of Bible College's Needs

Even though the missionary teachers did not arrive on time, school still opened at 8am, September 17, 1962. In an empty hall, three fresh-faced students sat on picnic chairs and faced their Principal. One was from Singapore and the other two from Batu Pahat. The supply of light and water was not connected yet. With construction noise in the background, the students learnt an important lesson from Psalm 34:10 that morning.

The school had no kitchen and the Principal asked his brother Dr Tow Siang Hwa to get his cook to give the students fried noodles. At noon, the principal went with the male student to Chin Lien Seminary to collect six army beds so that the three students might have a place to sleep that night. The principal wrote:

“Those who could not teach, but loved the College, gave liberally to the Building Fund, while others offered furniture, refrigerators, crockery and other useful household utensils. While it is true that God is our only source of supply, it is also true that He chooses His children as channels of His bounties.”

To this day, the College trusts the Lord solely to meet her daily needs. Since her founding in 1962, she has never sent out appeal letters for donations even though the school fees cover just 25% of her running expenses. God is her faithful Provider.

2) THE STRUGGLES

Depression in the College's Early Years

It is tough to start a Bible College, and even tougher to run it. Rev Tow testified that he

had to teach 13 hours a week. He was like a half-back running over every part of the field.

“At the end of the first academic year the first two (of the three) left us. A member of the faculty added to my hurt by advising Ivy also to leave, saying when a ship is sinking, even the rats will jump out. But Ivy stayed. I remember how I burst into tears when climbing the steps to my parsonage.”

As if that was not enough, many church leaders continuously questioned the need of the Bible College, pestering Rev Tow to close her down.

The FEBC Anthem was thus written in tears, as the Principal rode in the train from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur on the eve of the First Graduation Service, July 1966. *“The early years of the College were difficult years... our resources in manpower and finance were taxed to the limit... There was no one to turn to but Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts.”* Not only does this anthem call upon the Triune God to bless the College at her first graduation in July 1966, it also expresses the Principal's sole trust in the Lord for every need, spiritual or material.

Dissension Spread to the College

From 1968-1970, evangelical top-gun Billy Graham was joining hands with apostate ecclesiastical powers for the sake of “cooperative evangelism”. Rev Tow spoke up against this relationship but found two session members disagreeing with him. When Rev Tow went on to publish two news reports on this issue in the Far Eastern Beacon (Nov-Dec 1968), more dissenters arose and sought to halt the building of the new extension of both Church-and-College. However, this opposition was to

no avail, for God's good hand was upon His own work. A sister's gift of \$50,000 to this \$120,000 project was a sign of the Lord's approval.

Yet even a year on, a cloud of bitterness overshadowed the entire Presbytery. Rev Tow wrote of the dissension: *"The brotherly love that once so sweetly prevailed over the Life Church tree like the sparkling dew of morning all but evaporated."* This spirit of dissension began to spread from Church to College, and the Principal found himself deserted. Rev Tow's relationship with the church leaders was strained. Then an invitation came from the Independent Board For Presbyterian Foreign Missions, asking Rev Tow to serve as a short-term missionary in Bethlehem, Israel for five months, which he took as a sign of deliverance from the Lord. The assistant pastor and president of FEBC Board helped to take care of church and college respectively in Rev Tow's absence.

Opposition began to die down slowly. Rev Tow commented: *"From the news columns of the Bible-Presbyterian Weekly, a new spirit of cooperation among Session members seemed to manifest itself under the guidance of the Assistant Pastor. More Session members came to pray on Tuesday nights."*

To prevent situations in the future when the church and college might be at administrative loggerheads again, an agreement was drawn up in 1970 to acknowledge that "the L-Annex and the Extension were built partly for the purpose of FEBC; and that substantial funds were raised by friends of FEBC on this understanding..."

Oppression of the College

The College faced her biggest trial from

2002 – 2011. The Session of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church (LBPC) began to challenge FEBC on her position of the KJV. Below are the key events: -

2002 – Rev Colin Wong and Rev Charles Seet resigned from the faculty as they could no longer stand with FEBC. Rev Prabhudas Koshy, Rev Quek Suan Yew, and Rev Jeffrey Khoo were banned from speaking in all fellowship meetings of LBPC. Dr Jeffrey Khoo and Rev Timothy Tow were also publicly accused of adopting a "heretical" and "untenable and extreme position".

2003 – Rev Timothy Tow was lambasted by the LBPC Session on a number of issues relating to his church administration, but especially for allowing Dr Jeffrey Khoo to publish his booklet "KJV Q&A". Under tremendous pressure and great duress, Pastor Tow announced his resignation. FEBC also applied to be registered as a charity, as LBPC urged repeatedly that they did not want to be accountable for the actions of FEBC.

2004 – Commissioner of Charities approved FEBC's application to be registered as a charity.

2005 – The LBPC Weekly published a statement against the doctrine that God has preserved the Bible perfectly also called the doctrine of Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP), calling it a "theory" and "schismatic", signed by 11 pastors from seven B-P churches. The Singapore Council of Christian Churches (SCCC) also passed a resolution against VPP.

2007 – As FEBC has been registered as a charity, the Church informed the College that it is "no longer able to extend to the College the continued use of the Premises

under the previous arrangements.” It called for the College to “relocate to some other premises”. In another letter, FEBC was told not to promote VPP in the night classes, failing which the College would be prohibited to use the church sanctuary from Jan 2008. Letters went back and forth between the two parties - FEBC asking for grace, and LBPC denying grace.

2008 – FEBC was given an ultimatum to vacate by June 30. But without advance notice, on June 25, contractors from LBPC knocked out the old handles and locks of the doors to FEBC hall. Because FEBC did not budge, she was deemed as a trespasser. In the midst of this dispute, Rev Timothy Tow went home to be with the Lord in 2009 and Dr Jeffrey Khoo succeeded him.

2010 – The case was eventually heard in the High Court. Though the honourable Judith Prakash ruled in favour of LBPC, it was God’s higher hand to have this case brought to the Highest Court of the land, i.e. the Court of Appeal.

2011 – The Court of Appeal allowed the Appeal and dismissed the claims of LBPC. FEBC was safe!

3) THE THANKSGIVING

A Double Celebration

In 2012 the College celebrated its 50th Anniversary. A special retreat was held in Mersing where God’s people gathered to praise and thank the Lord for fifty good years, and for His powerful deliverance of the College. Special commemorative services were held to recount the Lord’s blessings. Alumni from all over the world who still remembered Rev Tow and their alma mater wrote in to express their great joy and thanksgiving.

Finally, in 2014, a “Scheme for the Shared Usage of Nos 9, 9A and 10 Gilstead Road, Singapore” was issued by Justice Judith Prakash. FEBC has equal share to the use of the premises. Thank God for He takes care of His own college.

Pressing Onwards

As sons and daughters of the East who have learnt God’s word within the halls of FEBC, we are bound to Christ to preserve the good heritage of this College. May our Almighty God be pleased to bless us with His increase as we step into possibly the final pages of the College’s history.

WHAT IS “BIBLE-PRESBYTERIANISM”?

ITS BEGINNINGS – THE 20TH CENTURY REFORMATION

Bible-Presbyterianism is part of the Reformed tradition within Protestantism that traces its origins to the United States of America. The history of the inception of the Bible-Presbyterian Church goes back to the 1930s, a tumultuous period where battle lines were drawn between fundamentalism and modernism. As a consequence of fundamentalist-modernist controversies, the Bible-Presbyterian Church in America was formed in 1937 as a breakaway faction from the mainline Presbyterian Church. Its founders, Carl McIntire, Allan McRae and J. Oliver Buswell Jr., took a firm stand against liberal theology which had begun to influence the mainline Presbyterian Church. Notably, the word “Bible” was placed in front of the name “Presbyterian” because the great fundamentalist-modernist controversy was centered on the Bible.¹ In 1948, Carl McIntire issued the clarion call for the “Twentieth Century Reformation” against the rising tide of modernism, ecumenism and neo-evangelicalism. Having heard the cause of the “Twentieth Century Reformation” promoted by Carl McIntire, Rev Timothy Tow founded the first Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore, the Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, in 1950, after secession from the Presbyterian Synod.²

This was followed by the establishment of many other Bible-Presbyterian churches. Bible-Presbyterianism thus became one of the denominations amongst the many Protestant denominations in Singapore.

ITS BASIS – THE BIBLE

The word “Bible-Presbyterianism” is made up of two words, “Bible” and “Presbyterianism”. The word “Bible” precedes the word “Presbyterianism” which means Bible-Presbyterians are Bible first, then Presbyterians. In other words, Bible-Presbyterianism is a form of Presbyterianism that is Bible-based. Bible-Presbyterianism maintains a firm stance on the perfect Word of God.

Bible-Presbyterianism affirms that the Bible alone is the sole and supreme authority for all matters of faith and practice (*Sola Scriptura*). It is only through the Bible that man may understand who God is, how they can serve Him, and know His will in their lives. Bible-Presbyterians thus strive to ensure all things done in the church as well as its ministries are Bible-based. This includes every aspect of doctrine and theology, the teaching and preaching of God’s Word, worship, personal lifestyle, and testimony.

The Word of God, fully inspired and fully

¹ Timothy Tow, *McIntire Maxims*, (Singapore: FEBC Press, 1999), p. 29

² Timothy Tow, *Disciples of McIntire*, (Singapore: FEBC Press, 2002), p. 12

preserved, is the very foundation of the Christian faith. Bible-Presbyterianism affirms the twin doctrines of Verbal Plenary Inspiration (VPI) and Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) of Scriptures. Bible-Presbyterianism thus holds that the Word of God was divinely inspired in the past and is perfectly preserved down to every last jot and tittle as taught in the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is replete with verses testifying of the Verbal Plenary Preservation of Scriptures. In Psalm 12:6-7, for instance, the Bible 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.”* In Matthew 24:35, *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.”* And in 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.”* God has supernaturally preserved His words throughout the ages so that we have in our hands the very Word of God, which is inerrant and infallible. By its inerrancy, the Word of God is wholly without mistake, and by its infallibility, the Word of God is incapable of any error whatsoever. By the logic of faith, Bible-Presbyterianism identifies the divinely inspired and preserved words to be the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words in the texts underlying the King James Version. The Bible of Bible-Presbyterianism is therefore found in the texts underlying the King James Version. These texts are identified and recognized as the Hebrew Masoretic Text of the Old Testament and the Greek Textus Receptus of the New Testament. Bible-Presbyterians also use and uphold the King James Version to be the Word of God because it is the most accurate, most faithful and most excellent English translation of the Holy Scriptures. Bible-Presbyterians use

the King James Bible alone as the primary scriptural text for private and public use.

ITS BELIEFS

Reformed

Bible-Presbyterianism is Protestant and Presbyterian in its beliefs. It is Protestant because it goes against errors of Roman Catholicism. Being Presbyterian in its beliefs, Bible-Presbyterianism holds firmly to a system of teachings known as the “Reformed Theology” which arose out of the 16th Century Reformation. By the grace of God, the 16th Century Reformation led by Martin Luther and other Reformers broke away from the legalistic and erroneous teachings of Roman Catholicism to return to the true faith taught by the Apostles.

Reformed theology affirms the five Solas, which are Latin slogans that encapsulate the theology of the Reformers put up against the erroneous teachings of Roman Catholic doctrines. The five Solas are (i) *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), (ii) *Sola Gratia* (Grace alone), (iii) *Sola Fide* (Faith alone), (iv) *Solus Christus* (Christ alone), and (v) *Soli Deo Gloria* (Glory to God alone). The five Solas are scripturally-based and embody the truths of the Gospel as described in the Bible.

Sola Scriptura contends that the Christian Faith should be based on Scriptures alone. It is thus contrary to Roman Catholic belief that human traditions must be added to the Scriptures. *Sola Scriptura* affirms that the Bible alone is our supreme authority in all matters of faith and practice. In 2 Peter 1:3-4, the Bible says, *“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that*

by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

Sola Gratia contends that salvation is purely through God's grace alone contrary to Roman Catholic belief that salvation is through grace plus works. The Bible says in Ephesians 2:4-5, *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"*

Sola Fide states that justification comes by faith alone and not by faith and works as the Roman Catholic Church believes. The grace of God is received not by works but by faith, and faith alone. This is taught in Romans 1:17, *"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."* Ephesians 2:8-9, further clearly states, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."*

Solus Christus proclaims the Lord Jesus Christ to be the sole Mediator and Saviour of man. Contrary to *Solus Christus*, the Roman Catholic Church believes Mary to be the *"Co-Mediatrix"*. But the Bible affirms in 1 Timothy 2:5, *"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."* The Lord Jesus Christ also said of Himself, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6).

Soli Deo Gloria states that all glory is to be given to God alone, and not angel, man or church. The chief end or purpose of man is therefore to glorify God. The Roman Catholic Church's addition of works to the grace of God for salvation, veneration of saints and of the Pope, etc., takes glory away

from God. Psalm 115:1 says, *"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake."*

Calvinist

Reformed Theology is also Calvinistic. In other words, it follows the teachings of John Calvin, a sixteenth century Reformer who propounded the biblical theory of salvation. The teachings of Calvin, often called "Calvinism", embody the true Gospel of salvation and presents its elements in a systematic manner. Key to Calvinism are the five points represented by the acronym TULIP.

"T" denotes Total Depravity, which means the whole of mankind is fallen into sin; being totally depraved, man is unable to save himself from sin, death and hell. Romans 3:23 says, *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."*

"U" denotes Unconditional Election, which means that the salvation of man cannot be achieved by his own will, choice or merits. Salvation is also not conditioned upon God's prior knowledge of faith or repentance of a person, but upon His grace and love. The salvation of man is the prerogative of God; He chooses who to save. 2 Timothy 1:9 says, *"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."*

"L" denotes Limited Atonement, which means actual salvation is only for the elect even though the gospel is offered to all. Christ's redemptive work is sufficient to atone for all the sins of the world, however only the elect will be saved. Matthew 1:21 says, *"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."* Ephesians

1:3-6 *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”*

“I” denotes Irresistible Grace, which means God’s call to the elect is effectual and they will surely be saved. Romans 8:30 says, *“Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”*

“P” denotes Perseverance of the Saints, which means the elect will never lose their salvation because God preserves them to the very end. Hebrews 7:25 says, *“Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”*

The Westminster Standards

Being Presbyterian in origin, Bible-Presbyterianism also upholds the Westminster Standards, which include the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and which represent the doctrine and church polity of 17th century English and Scottish Presbyterianism. The Westminster Standards were painstakingly drafted by 121 divines at Westminster Abbey in 1643 over a period of five years and has been a blessing to many reformed churches till this day. In it, Calvinistic theological tradition is systematically explicated, covering a complete repertoire of doctrines including doctrines on the Holy Scriptures, creation,

salvation, sanctification, covenant theology, and the end times.

Presbyterian Form of Church Government

In terms of church polity, Bible-Presbyterianism upholds the Presbyterian system of church government. The word “Presbyterian” comes from the Greek word found in the Bible, *presbuteros* which means “elder”. The Presbyterian form of church government therefore emphasizes church rule by the plurality of elders. In other words, the most spiritual men within the church are chosen and elected into office, thus forming the Board of Elders. The Board of Elders will include the pastor(s) who will serve as the moderator(s) of the board, and a group of elders elected from the congregation. Together, they have an important role of leading the church and are responsible for the spiritual well-being of the congregation. The role of the Board of Elders is to feed, nurture and protect the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3). Deacons are elected office-bearers who have an administrative role in the church. Deacons together with the Board of Elders form the Session of the church. The Session of the church ensures that all things are run smoothly and biblically in the church. At a higher level of Presbyterian government, there is also the Synod which oversees all Presbyterian churches in a region or country. In Singapore, however, since the dissolution of the Bible-Presbyterian Synod in 1988, the Bible-Presbyterian churches operate autonomously.³

IN SUMMARY

Bible-Presbyterianism is Bible-centric, Protestant and Presbyterian in its beliefs. It upholds the absolute and final authority of Scriptures. In church polity, it follows the Presbyterian form of government.

³ Timothy Tow, *Story of my Bible-Presbyterian Faith*, (Singapore: FEBC Press, 1999), p. 78

THE DOCTRINAL DISTINCTIVES OF THE B-P MOVEMENT

In 1937, Dr Carl McIntire broke away from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and founded the Bible-Presbyterian (B-P) movement in America because there were several issues he could not agree with. The OPC held to an Amillennial view of the return of Christ, and allowed moderate smoking and drinking. The OPC would also only support missionaries who were Presbyterians. In contrast, the B-P Church holds on to total abstinence, the Premillennial view of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the support of missionaries who hold to the fundamentals of the Christian faith regardless of their denominational background.

As the B-P movement in Singapore traces its roots to the B-P movement in America, it likewise holds on to these distinctives.

Apart from the doctrinal distinctives mentioned above, the doctrine of Biblical Separation is another doctrine the B-P Church firmly holds on to.

In this article, we will elaborate especially on two of these distinctives: 1) Biblical Separation, and 2) The Pre-millennial return of Christ.

BIBLICAL SEPARATION

One of the most significant events in the history of the B-P movement in Singapore was the dissolution of the synod in 1988. There were two main issues which resulted in the dissolution of the synod. One of the issues was that of “tongues.” The Zion-Carmel combination of B-P churches held that tongues-speaking had not ceased but are “meaningful ecstatic utterances.”¹ Rev Timothy Tow has written a book, *Wang Ming Dao and Charismatism* to refute tongues speaking.²

Another key issue which resulted in the dissolution of the synod was on the interpretation and the application of the doctrine of Biblical Separation.

In his book, *The Singapore B-P Story*, Rev Timothy Tow quoted Dr Bobby Sng and noted that the dissolution of the synod “...centred mainly on strong differences in interpreting the Doctrine of Biblical Separation, Fundamentalism, and Neo-Evangelicalism.”³

It is the doctrine of Biblical Separation we would like to better understand in this article.

The Bible in 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, “Be

¹ Timothy Tow, *The Singapore B-P Story*, (Singapore: Life Book Center, 1995), 217

² Please look at the book to understand the arguments to why we believe that tongues speaking has ceased

³ Tow, *The Singapore B-P Story*, 215

ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

It also continues to say in verse 17 of the same chapter – *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,"* This is a command to separate from unbelievers, sin, and falsehood. By declaring *"come out from among them,"* the Bible has made it clear that the Church is to be a witness and testimony for Christ by separating itself and keeping itself distinct from the world. Infiltration as a means of evangelism finds no mandate in the Scriptures.

This is a very clear call unto separation. The doctrine of Biblical Separation involves two aspects:

- 1) Personal Separation: It is not physical but spiritual separation. Sometimes a physical separation might help in maintaining holiness but the basis is always spiritual. Christians have been called to live a holy life, separated from sin and the corruption of the world. This call to purity and to live a holy life is based on the holiness of God (1 Pet 1:16 – *"Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."*). Personal separation has to be practiced so that we can be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ to the people around us. The doctrine of biblical separation exercised on a personal level is to be applied in marriage as well as business partnerships because these aspects of the believer's life involve spiritual relationships.
- 2) Ecclesiastical Separation: This aspect describes how separation is to be exercised on a church level. The doctrine of separation is based on truth. The

church must not compromise its stand on God's truth. Where a professing believer or a local church or a movement has departed from God's truth, the church must be ready to separate itself from these falsehoods. There is not to be any ecclesiastical association or dialogue where they exchange pulpits or pray together. The false movements that we must guard ourselves against include the ecumenical, charismatic, neo-evangelical, neo-fundamental, neo-Calvinist movements, and other false movements that contradict the Holy Scriptures and the historic Christian Faith. It is also a church that must practice church discipline and preach against sin vigorously. All ministries must follow the Bible in its existence and adherence. It is not a spirituality that is on paper only where the fundamentals of the faith are written on paper i.e. the church constitution but not practiced.

The principles and practices of Biblical Separation are described in article 6 of the B-P constitution. Here are some relevant excerpts:

6.1 The doctrine of separation from sin unto God is a fundamental principle of the Bible, one grievously ignored in the church today.

6.5 It is the duty all true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ to make a clear testimony of their faith in Him, especially in these darkening days of apostasy in many professing churches, by which apostasy whole denominations in their official capacity, as well as individual churches, have been swept into a paganising stream of modernism under various names and in varying degrees.

6.9 We are opposed to all efforts to

obscure or wipe out the clear line of separation between these absolutes: truth and error, light and darkness. (See Jer 5:20, 2 Cor 6:14-18). We refer to such efforts by New Evangelicals, Charismatic Christians, and promoters of ecumenical co-operative evangelism and of the social gospel, and all churches and other movements and organisations that are aligned with or sympathetic to the Ecumenical Movement.

In the 1980s, the B-P movement contended with the infiltration of these false movements into the church. Rev Tow noted:

“A true B-P is opposed to all efforts to obscure or wipe out the clear line of separation between B-Ps and New Evangelicals, Charismatics, promoters of ecumenical cooperative evangelism, promoters of the liberal-modernist social gospel, and all links with the Ecumenical Movement.

As the B-P Movement grew, and younger men went overseas and imbibed liberal and New Evangelical theology, a deviant spirit began to creep into the B-P Church. While wearing the B-P name these were playing the New Evangelical game.

Reasonings and persuasions fell on deaf ears. The situation became worse and worse. At every Synod meeting there was a tussle... it was a tussle between Fundamentalism and New Evangelicalism.

In October 1988 it was breaking point: the B-P Synod was dissolved, bringing to a close a chapter of the B-P Movement.⁴”

From 1988 onward, every B-P church is now open to doing whatever is right in their own eyes like the days of the Judges. Thank God some did not. They still desire to hold on to the biblical principles of their founding fathers and be holy because their God is holy! The battle rages on - with the increase of falsehood and false teachers in Christendom, the doctrine of Biblical Separation is needed more than ever before to be the indispensable pillar to safeguard and protect the church from becoming apostate.

THE PRE-MILLENNIAL RETURN OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

As noted earlier, one of the reasons why Dr Carl McIntire came out from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) was because of the disagreement over the doctrine of the Pre-millennial return of Christ. Whereas the OPC holds to an Amillennial view of the return Christ, the B-P Church subscribes to the Dispensational Pre-millennial view of the return of Christ.

The word “millennium” means one thousand years. The doctrine of the millennium essentially concerns how one understands the events surrounding the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are three main views concerning the millennium – 1) Amillennial view, 2) Post-millennial view and 3) the Pre-millennial view of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Amillennial view teaches that there is no literal 1000-year rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. It simply refers to a long period of time. Proponents of this view holds that the 1000 years taught in the Bible simply figuratively describes a long period of time

⁴ Ibid. 226

as they interpret the book of Revelation allegorically. Before the Lord's return the persecution of Christians will increase exponentially.

The Post-millennial view essentially teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ will return after a figurative 1000 years have passed. They believe that the world will get better and better and then Christ will return. This is the view of many in the ecumenical movement.

The Pre-millennial view teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ will return before the 1000 years to establish His kingdom on earth. The 1000 years is understood as a literal 1000 years.

These differing views have very serious implications as it affects how one understands prophecies and many other important passages of Scripture. Amillennialists and postmillennialists will often not interpret Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel literally. They will instead teach that Israel has been replaced by the Church and that prophecies regarding Israel are to be understood as being spiritually fulfilled in the Church. In contrast, Premillennialists will interpret these prophecies concerning Israel literally, leading to the conclusion and belief that Christ will return, literally and physically, before the millennium to restore the nation of Israel, from where He will reign. All the prophecies that God promised Israel in the Old Testament will finally be fulfilled in the millennium.

The view the B-P Church holds on to is the dispensational Pre-millennial view. The basis for this view is found in the literal understanding of Revelation 20:1-10. Six times the expression "thousand years" is found in Rev 20:1-10. There is no

indication in the context of this passage that the expression "thousand years" is to be understood in any other sense than in the literal sense. It is also noted that in the book of Revelation and the whole Bible that whenever numerical adjectives are used, it is always used in the literal sense. Examples of numerical adjectives are first day, 40 days or 1,000 years.

The Pre-millennial view of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ holds that as the world increases in ungodliness and in wickedness, the Lord Jesus Christ will suddenly return. When Christ returns, He will first catch up all saints to be with Him in an event known as the rapture. This is also when the "first resurrection" will take place. All the Old Testament and New Testament saints who have died in Christ will rise first, and then those who are alive will be caught up (i.e. rapture) to be with Christ (1 Thess. 4:16-17). During the rapture, saints will be caught up to the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

After the rapture, the Antichrist who will deceive the world will be revealed. Then seven years of Great Tribulation will begin (Dan 9:25-27).

At the end of the seven-year great tribulation, the Lord Jesus Christ will return in the clouds with glory (Mark 13:26) with His angelic beings and myriads of His saints, riding upon a white horse. He will defeat the Antichrist and his army with a mighty word that will go forth as a sharp sword (Rev 19:15). This is known as the battle of Armageddon because it will take place in the valley of Megiddo in Israel. The Antichrist and the false prophet will then be cast alive into the Lake of Fire and Satan will be bound and will be cast into the Bottomless Pit for 1000 years.

The Lord Jesus Christ will then usher in the Millennium. During the Millennium there will be no more war on the earth. It will be a time of peace. The nation of Israel will be re-gathered and restored. They will possess the full extent of the land promised to them, described in the Covenant that God established with Abraham in Genesis 15. The Lord Jesus Christ will establish His throne in Jerusalem, which will be the capital of the world (Isa 65:17-25).

At the end of the millennium, Satan will be loosed from the Bottomless Pit, and he will deceive the world one last time and gather the wicked in rebellion against the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan will be defeated together with all unbelievers (born in the millennium as only believers were allowed to enter the millennium), and will be cast into the Lake of Fire. The Lord Jesus Christ will then usher in eternity after the destruction of the old heaven and old earth (cf. Revelation 20).

In this regard, the B-P Church is unique.

While the B-P Church is Reformed in her system of theology, she embraces the premillennial system of eschatology which sees a distinction between Israel and the church. At the same time, she also recognises God's special plan for the nation of Israel during the millennium based on His Covenant promises. This position is expressed in FEBC's statement of faith: "We believe in the personal, visible and premillennial return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to judge this world, restore His chosen nation Israel to greatness, and bring peace to the nations as King of kings and Lord of lords."⁵

CONCLUSION

Since the inception of the B-P Church in Singapore, these doctrines have always been the doctrines which distinguish the B-P movement from other denominations. These doctrines are important, not only because they give us our identity, but because they are key doctrines taught in God's Word.

⁵ Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo, *Theology for Every Christian: A Systematic Theology in the Reformed and Premillennial Tradition of J. Oliver Buswell* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2007), 658.

A 21ST CENTURY REFORMATION

THE B-P MOVEMENT AND VPP

INTRODUCTION

A true believer is one who earnestly and sincerely loves Scripture. His desire is always to magnify the Word of God with his life, and he would never dream of criticising or blaspheming the perfect Word of God that saved him. He approaches God's Word with full assurance of faith, confident that these are the very words of God. He would never entertain the possibility that there could be mistakes in the Bible, but simply reads it with the eyes of faith and believes it.

That was the belief that the founding fathers of the Bible-Presbyterian (B-P) movement in Singapore had as they established this witness for the Lord nearly 70 years ago. Although the term Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) of Scripture had not been coined yet, the implicit belief was that the Bible they held in their hands was most certainly perfect (cf. WCF. Chapter 1.VIII).

From its inception, the Bible Presbyterian movement has always had a strong emphasis on the Bible. This is evidenced in how the word "Bible" is prefixed at the very front of its name. The consistent stand of the B-P Movement has always been to

hold forth the word of life, and to earnestly contend for the truth of God's Word.

OUR HISTORIC POSITION

In 1979, at the 11th graduation service of the Far Eastern Bible College (FEBC), Rev. Timothy Tow required every member of both the Board of Directors and Faculty to take the Dean Burgon Oath¹ annually. In so doing, they would demonstrate their subscription to "the absolute belief in the doctrine of the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, inerrant and infallible, to the exclusion of the latest leaven of 'limited inerrancy' and so-called textual and grammatical errors in the autographs"². This was an important step towards safeguarding the strong allegiance that the FEBC, and subsequently the pastors that would be trained by it, would have no doubt that the Word of God they hold in their hands is perfect to the very jot and tittle.

KJV AND MODERN VERSIONS OF THE BIBLE

It is only natural, then, that the B-Ps have always held on to the time-tested King

¹ I swear in the Name of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit that I believe "the Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word of God, not some part of it more, some part of it less; but all alike the utterance of Him that sitteth upon the throne, faultless, unerring, supreme. So help me God. Amen".

² Bob Phee, ed., *Training Labourers Together with God: Far Eastern Bible College Silver Jubilee Magazine (1962-1987)* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, 1987), 45.

James Bible, and were resistant to the various new versions of the Bible that were being promoted. As early as in the 1980s, translations such as the Revised Standard Version (RSV) in 1952 and the New English Bible (NEB) in 1970 were reviewed and rejected as having 'liberal inaccuracies'. However, perhaps due to the popularity and seeming usability of the New International Version (NIV), the B-P church initially allowed the NIV to be used for 'private Bible Study', whilst the KJV was the only officially approved Bible for public reading.³

However, further research and vigilant study into the matter revealed the truth of the corruption of not just the NIV, but of every modern translation that follows the principles of textual criticism. By the late 80s and early 90s, the theological journal of the FEBC, the *Burning Bush*, had begun to carry articles such as "Why Do We Use the King James Version" (Jul 1988) and "The KJV: God's Word Kept Intact in English" (1993).⁴ By then, many of the non-fundamental B-P churches such as Mount Carmel B-P Church that had fallen away after the split of the synod in 1988 had switched over to the NIV and were promoting the use of other modern versions (cf. Daniel Chua, "On Bible Versions and Form of Worship," **Mount Carmel B-P Church, 1967-1992, Silver Jubilee Magazine**, 1992).

By the year 2000, in *Life B-P Church's 50th Anniversary Magazine*, a clear doctrinal positional statement with regard to the issue of preservation and the use of the KJV was published: "We do believe that the Hebrew and Greek texts that were used for the King James Version of the English Bible (KJV) were providentially preserved by God and are therefore closest to the original autographs of the Bible".⁵ That same magazine also published a sermon preached by Rev. Timothy Tow, in which he clearly stated: "The God who inspires to write an infallible and inerrant Bible also preserves an intact replica, so that we have in the Received Text the same infallible Word... As Providence follows Creation, so Preservation of Scripture follows Inspiration. Yes, God who has given an infallible and inerrant Bible follows up to preserve it intact through the ages, even to eternity". It was in that same message that Rev. Tow declared that "Reformation is an ever on-going battle for the Faith. Reformation into the 21st Century is the battle of the KJB vs. the NIV and the hordes of 'perversions based on W&H (Westcott and Hort)".⁶ Those were indeed prophetic words, for within the next few years, a controversy would break out within the faculty of FEBC, and eventually between and among various B-P churches, over the issue of the preservation of Scripture and Bible versions.

³ "Our Church believes that the Authorised Version or King James Translation is faithful to the original text. Therefore the KJV is our officially approved Bible for public reading. However for private Bible study, the New International Version can be used. We reject the New English Bible and the Revised Standard Version as they contain liberal inaccuracies." Kim Chwee Chia, ed., *The Life Bible-Presbyterian Church Vision* (Singapore: Life Bible Presbyterian Church, 1987), 19.

⁴ Jeffrey Khoo, ed., *To Magnify His Word: Golden Jubilee Yearbook of Far Eastern Bible College (1962-2012)* (Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, 2012), 113.

⁵ Timothy Tow, ed., *50 Years Building His Kingdom: Golden Jubilee Magazine (1950-2000)* (Singapore: Life Bible Presbyterian Church, 2000), 64.

⁶ Tow, *50 Years Building His Kingdom: Golden Jubilee Magazine (1950-2000)*, 85.

⁷ Following events summarized from Jeffrey Khoo, "The Battle for the Bible Between Far Eastern Bible College and Life Bible-Presbyterian Church: Chronology of Events" in *The Burning Bush Vol. 18 No. 2*

THE BATTLE FOR THE BIBLE RAGES ON

In 2002, a dissension arose within the faculty of the Far Eastern Bible College, as two lecturers began to question whether the Bible in their hands is indeed perfect or not.⁷ There were differing views concerning the divine preservation of the Scriptures. The Revs Charles Seet and Colin Wong, both lecturers and assistant pastors of Life BPC, together with some of the leaders of Life BPC, challenged Dr Jeffrey Khoo and the rest of the faculty of FEBC with regard to the doctrine of the Verbal Plenary Preservation (VPP) of the Scriptures. What ensued was a back-and-forth debate on this issue. Various papers and emails were written, sermons were preached, and statements were issued.

This led to the resignation of Charles Seet and Colin Wong from the FEBC faculty at the end of 2002. However, the problem did not stop there, for the dissension soon spread to the session of Life BPC. The members of the session were soon polarized into two main camps: those who were for, and those who were against the doctrine of VPP. Probably the saddest outcome of this conflict was the eventual resignation of Rev. Timothy Tow on 20th August 2003 from the session of Life B-P Church, the church that he had founded, established, and served faithfully in for more than 53 years. He explains:

“For nearly a year a controversy has raged in Far Eastern Bible College between younger lecturers and those who stand with the Principal on the question whether the Bible has some mistakes or without and absolutely perfect. As

I take the view of a 100% perfect Bible and stand with Dr Jeffrey Khoo, more squabble developed on August 20 at Life Church Session meeting which drove me to my resignation.”⁸

Upon his resignation, he and some 200 members of Life BPC left to found True Life BPC (initially called the FEBC Lord’s Day Service). In time to come, this controversy affected many other B-P Churches in Singapore, as they either took a stand for or against VPP. Those who believed in VPP were lambasted by those against VPP as heretics, and many papers were written to establish the positions of both sides. In their attempt to refute the teachings of VPP, some of the pastors and preachers of Life BPC even went so far as to allege mistakes in the Bible, as proof that God did not perfectly preserve His Word, but that some words had been lost or changed, and therefore needed correction.

In Calvary Pandan, the bulk of the session of the mandarin congregation and a few of the elders left because they rejected the teachings of VPP. When the session of Calvary (Jurong) took a non-VPP position, a group from that church left to start Truth BPC in 2006. The matter would even result in a lawsuit being taken up by the session of Life BPC against FEBC in an attempt to evict the Bible College from the premises that were shared by the two parties because they did not want FEBC to teach and promote VPP. However, when all the evidence was presented before the court of law, even the secular judges who were not believers were able to acknowledge that the VPP position is not inconsistent with the Westminster Confession of Faith and the historic positions of the B-P Church.⁹

⁸ True Life B-P Church weekly Vol 1. No. 1 5 Oct 2003

⁹ For an account and full texts of the rulings of the lawsuit, read *The Burning Bush Vol. 18 No .1*, 14-62.

THE VERBAL PLENARY PRESERVATION OF THE BIBLE

What then is the teaching of VPP? Why is it an important doctrine to contend for, and why is it so polarizing?

What does VPP mean? “Verbal” means “every word to the jot and tittle” (Ps 12:6-7, Matt 5:18). “Plenary” means “the Scripture as a whole with all the words intact” (Matt 24:35, 1 Pet 1:25). So VPP means the whole of Scripture with all its words even to the jot and tittle is perfectly preserved by God without any loss of the original words, prophecies, promises, commandments, doctrines and truths, not only in the words of salvation, but also the words of history, geography and science. Every book, every chapter, every verse, every word, every syllable, every letter is infallibly preserved by the Lord Himself to the last iota.

What and where are the preserved words of God today? They are the inspired Old Testament Hebrew/Aramaic words and the New Testament Greek words the prophets, the apostles, the church fathers, the reformers used which are

today found in the long and continuously abiding and preserved words underlying the reformation Bibles best represented by the time-tested and time-honoured Authorised or King James Version, and NOT in the corrupt Alexandrian manuscripts (e.g. Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus) and critical Westcott-Hort Text (1881) underlying the liberal, ecumenical, and neo-evangelical modern English versions.¹⁰

It is a position that is founded upon the clear teachings of Scripture and confirmed by God’s providential guidance through history. It is an entirely reasonable position to take, and certainly not one that can ever be described as heresy. It is one that seeks to promote the glory of God and His Word, and to have the highest view of the present perfection of God’s Word. Those who reject this position do so because they claim that the evidence does not seem to support the teachings of a 100% perfect Bible in our hands today. Yet this is what God has clearly promised in His word. Every true believer would do well to take God at His Word, and by faith believe it, cherish it, and obey it.

¹⁰ Khoo, *To Magnify His Word: Golden Jubilee Yearbook of Far Eastern Bible College (1962-2012)*,

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A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR FURTHER READING

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

Timothy Tow, *Son of a Mother's Vow*. Singapore: FEBC Bookroom, 2001

60th Anniversary of the B-P Movement: 1950-2010

50 Years Building His Kingdom: Life B-P Church Golden Jubilee Magazine (1950-2000)

To Magnify His Word: Golden Jubilee Yearbook of Far Eastern Bible College (1962-2012). Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, 2012

Training Labourers Together with God: Far Eastern Bible College Silver Jubilee Magazine (1962-1987). Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College, 1987

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