

A MODEL CHURCH

**DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF
A REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**

About the author

Boon-Sing Poh was born in Malaysia in 1954. Brought up in a pagan background, he was saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ while studying in the United Kingdom. He returned to Malaysia to become a lecturer in a university for six years, founded the first Reformed Baptist Church in the country in 1983, and was imprisoned for his faith from 1987 to 1988 for a period of 325 days. He is pastor emeritus of Damansara Reformed Baptist Church (DRBC) in Kuala Lumpur, a contented husband, a thankful father of four sons, and a happy grandfather. He earned the PhD degree in Electronics Engineering from the University of Liverpool, UK, the Diploma in Religious Study from Cambridge University, UK, and the PhD degree in Theology from North-West University, SA.

A MODEL CHURCH

**DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF
A REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**

BOON-SING POH



**PUBLISHED BY
GOOD NEWS ENTERPRISE**

A MODEL CHURCH: Distinguishing Characteristics
Of A Reformed Baptist Church

Copyright ©Boon-Sing Poh, 2025

ISBN: 978-983-9180-70-1

First published: August 2025

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are
from the New King James Version, copyright
1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Published by:



GOOD NEWS ENTERPRISE, 52 Jalan SS 21/2,
Damansara Utama, 47400 Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.
www.DamansaraRBC.com; www.gospelhighway.net

Printed by:

Kindle Direct Publishing, an Amazon company,
United States of America.

Limited copies printed by James Aries Printing Sdn.
Bhd., 40 Jalan TPK 2/5, Taman Perindustrian
Kinrara, 47100 Petaling Jaya, Malaysia.

Typeset by the author using TeXworks, the memoir
class.

Contents

Foreword	vii
1 A Biblical Model	1
1.1 The root	3
1.2 The trunk	5
1.3 The crown	7
1.4 Summary	8
2 The Root	11
2.1 The Trinitarian God	12
2.2 Sola scriptura	15
2.3 Justification by faith alone	18
2.4 Summary	21
3 The Trunk	23
3.1 Pre-Reformation (100-1500 AD) . . .	24
3.2 The Reformation (1500-1600 AD) . . .	26

CONTENTS

3.3	The Puritan Age (1600-1700 AD) . . .	30
3.4	Summary	33
4	The Crown	37
4.1	The Prophethood of Christ	38
4.2	The priesthood of Christ	43
4.3	The kingship of Christ	49
4.4	Summary	55
5	For Glory And Beauty	57
5.1	The Age Of Missions (1700-1900) . . .	59
5.2	Evangelical Fragmentation (1900-2000)	61
5.3	Evangelical Realignment (post-2000) .	63
5.4	Assessment	66
5.5	Conclusion	70

Foreword

It is heartening to see Reformed theology being embraced by an increasing number of Christians and churches throughout the world. It is heartening also to see Reformed Baptist churches being planted throughout the world. On closer examination, however, there is cause for concern. Reformed Baptist constituencies in many parts of the world are fragmented over doctrinal, practical, and personal issues. Newer churches claiming to be Reformed Baptist do not seem to show the family characteristics expected of them, apart from holding to the Five Points of Calvinism and practising the immersion of believers. One or more of the following deficiencies are found in these churches – the absence of a written Church Constitution, subscription to the 1689 Confession of Faith, systematic expository preaching, a weekly Bible Study, or a weekly

FOREWORD

Prayer Meeting. One or more of the following defects are found in them – the practice of contemporary worship, favouring native gospel songs over time-tested hymns, over-emphasis on social work at the expense of truth, the appointment of men with questionable gifts and calling to full-time ministry, shallowness in doctrine, ignorance of church history, and lack of appreciation of the Reformation and the Puritans.

This book is written under the burden of such circumstances. It will challenge some long-established churches. It might annoy some veteran pastors and church planters. It is hoped that it will contribute in some small way towards guiding church leaders and church planters back to the old paths, where the good way is (Jer. 6:16).

Boon-Sing Poh,
Kuala Lumpur, August 2025.

One

A Biblical Model

A model is an example to follow or imitate. We wish to consider what doctrine and practice constitute a model church. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 is a command given to the local church to plant other local churches.¹ The Lord anticipated the planting of local churches (Matt. 18:17; John 17:20-21). The epistles of Paul were addressed to churches or individuals connected to local churches. The last book of the Bible is addressed to local churches (Rev. 1:11). From these considerations, we may draw out the principle that *the local church is central and unique in the purposes of God*. Before we plant churches,

1. A BIBLICAL MODEL

we must be clear what type of churches we wish to plant. Before we become a flagship church to lead other churches, we must be a model church.

Various pictures are used in the Scripture to illustrate certain characteristics of the church – including the body, the temple, the family, an army, and the tree. In the picture of the body, the members have their respective roles by which it functions well (1 Cor. 12:12-31; Eph. 4:11-16). There is no place for pride or apathy among the members. In the picture of the temple, the members are living stones who fit together to form the building in which God dwells (1 Cor. 3:6; 1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:20-22). The members must live holy and righteous lives. In the picture of the family, God is the Father and the Husband (Matt. 6:25-27; Mark 3:33; Rom. 8:12-17; Eph. 5:25-26). The members must trust God to provide and protect, while they live holy lives (Matt. 5:43-48), persevere under trials (Heb. 12:7-11), and show brotherly love (Gal. 6:10; Heb. 13:1). As an army, Christ is the Captain who leads His people in the extension of His kingdom (Heb. 2:10; Matt. 28:18-20). Church leaders must endure hardship as good soldiers and be

¹*World Missions Today*, by Boon-Sing Poh.

single-minded in their service to the Lord (2 Tim. 2:3-4), while the meetings of the church must be orderly to give a clear call to battle (1 Cor. 14:8-9), and the members must strive against sin in their lives by putting on the whole armour of God (Eph. 6:10-20).

Among the many images used in the Scripture, the tree seems to provide the most comprehensive understanding regarding the church. We shall use the tree to illustrate the model church that we strive to be.

1.1 The root

God's eternal plan of salvation unfolded in history with the tree of life standing alongside the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8-10). This eternal plan will culminate with the redeemed people dwelling in the bliss of heaven where the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2). In theology, the terms 'natural revelation' and 'special revelation' are used. The former refers to God revealing Himself in creation, reason, and conscience. 'Natural revelation' can bring man to know about God to the point of

1. A BIBLICAL MODEL

being convicted of his guilt (Rom. 2:12-16). We need 'special revelation' which is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to show to us the true nature and full attributes of God, and the way of salvation He has provided, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The nation of Israel in the Old Testament was represented as a vine or a fig tree that became unfruitful by turning to worship false gods (Hosea 9:10). That vine, or fig tree, continued to be unfruitful up to the coming of the Son of God to earth. John the Baptist, who came to prepare the way for the Lord (Matt. 3:3,11), declared that the axe was already laid to the root of the trees (Matt. 3:10). The Lord cursed the fig tree to show that fruitless Israel was being discarded because she had failed to receive the Saviour (Mark 11:12-26; John 1:11). The Lord devoted an entire sermon to the condemnation of the religious leaders of Israel, calling them "hypocrites" (Matt. 23:1-39). The Pharisees blasphemed the Holy Spirit when they attributed the miracles of the Lord to the power of Satan (Mark 3:28-30). To reject the doctrine of the Trinity is to reject the true God.

The apostle Paul uses the olive tree to illustrate the unfolding of God's plan of salvation for His peo-

ple (Rom. 11:16-18). The elect from the Old Testament period are regarded as “the firstfruit”, while the tribes of (natural) Israel are regarded as branches that were broken off. The Gentile (i.e. non-Jewish) believers are from various “branches” of a wild olive tree who are grafted to the cultivated olive tree. All God’s elect – whether Jews or Gentiles – partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree. The elect from all the nations – both Jew and Gentiles – are called into God’s kingdom by the preaching of the gospel (Rom. 10:12-21).

The root of the tree determines whether it remains healthy, strong, and beautiful. The local church is meant to be healthy, strong, and beautiful (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:2, 9-13). For the church to be healthy and, indeed, to stand, it must be firmly rooted in correct doctrine – particularly the doctrines of Scripture, the Holy Trinity, and the gospel.

1.2 The trunk

An overview of God’s plan of salvation of the elect, stretching from eternity past to eternity future, is revealed in Ephesians 1:3-14. The “mystery” of God’s

1. A BIBLICAL MODEL

plan is unfolding in history in the salvation of the elect from all the nations, “according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11). The apostle who wrote this epistle then prays for the Ephesian Christians to be “rooted and grounded in love”, that they might “be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” (Eph. 3:17-19). The church in Ephesus was not only rooted. but also “grounded in the love of Christ”, shown by His atoning death for His people. In the picture of the tree, it is the trunk that is grounded, and connected to the roots. The church is built on Jesus Christ, who is the grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died, thereby producing much grain (John 12:23-24).

The love of Christ for His people, shown by His death and resurrection, must be seen in the life of the church. In the ‘high-priestly prayer’, our Lord prayed that His people “may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:23). He continued, saying, “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which

You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (v. 26). The tree that is “rooted” is also “grounded in love” (cf. Eph. 3:17). For the church to be strong, it must be united in the truth of Christ’s redemptive love.

1.3 The crown

The Lord told His disciples, in John 15:16, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.” The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 requires that the local church be engaged in planting local churches. In the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt. 13:31-32), the seed grows into a tree, “so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.” The branches, the leaves, and the fruit (cf. Rev. 22:2) – which together form the crown of the tree – constitute the blessing of the church to many in the world. To ‘plant churches’ has become a common expression among Christians.

It is common knowledge that the New Testament uses the word ‘church’ (*ekklesia*, ‘called out ones’) in two senses – the universal church (e.g. Eph. 5:22-33; Heb. 12:23), and its manifestation in the world

1. A BIBLICAL MODEL

as visible, local, congregations (Gal. 1:2; Rev. 1:11, 20). In theology, the universal church is regarded as 'invisible' because the number of elect in heaven and on earth is unknown to us. The universal church manifests itself on earth as local churches that may be known. It follows that the invisible and spiritual characteristics of the universal church should be reflected as visible and definable characteristics in the local church. In other words, the doctrine and practice of the church reveal its character, beauty and glory. The church that is defective or deficient in doctrine and practice will be weak and lacking in beauty and glory. Conversely, the church that is correct in doctrine and practice will be strong and full of beauty and glory. Our concern is to determine the distinguishing doctrine and practice of the model church.

1.4 Summary

The tree – regardless of whether it is a fig tree, an olive tree, a mustard tree, or a vine – is a good illustration of the local church. Its three component parts – the root, the trunk, and the crown – must be strong and healthy in order that it may manifest

1.4. Summary

the beauty and glory of the Lord. The root of the church are the doctrines and principles that hold it up and determine its continuing health. The trunk of the tree are the doctrines that unite the church in the redemptive love of Christ. The crown of the tree are the distinguishing doctrine and practice that reveal its character, beauty and glory. We shall examine the model church by considering its root, then its trunk, and finally its crown.

* * * * *

Two

The Root

The root of a tree is mostly underground and, therefore, largely invisible. The existence of the root, however, is never questioned. The importance of the root to the tree is undeniable. When applied to the local church, the doctrines upon which a church is founded are crucial. What are the irreducible doctrines that constitute a true church? We propose three doctrines that a true church cannot do without – viz. the doctrines of the Trinity, of ‘sola scriptura’, and of ‘justification by faith alone’.

2. THE ROOT

2.1 The Trinitarian God

The only true God revealed in Scripture is trinitarian, consisting of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person of the Holy Trinity is fully God but that does not mean there are three gods. The three Persons are distinct, co-existent, and of the same spiritual essence. They are equal in power and glory. They are one God who created all things out of nothing, and continues to sustain all things by His power. The trinitarian God is eternal which means that He has no beginning and will have no end. He is omnipotent, i.e. all-powerful. He is omniscient, i.e. all-knowing. He is immutable, i.e. unchanging. He is perfectly holy, merciful, and just. Many portions of Scripture may be quoted to prove these attributes of God but the following will suffice: Exodus 34:6-7; Isaiah 6:3; 40:28-29; 46:9-10.

Attempts have been made to illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity but they have all failed to convey accurately the true nature and character of God. An illustration may even misrepresent God, which would be tantamount to blasphemy. For example, it has been claimed that water can exist as ice as

2.1. The Trinitarian God

well as vapour. However, we cannot have water completely at the same time that we have ice or vapour. God the Father does not transform Himself to become God the Son, or God the Holy Spirit. They are distinct and co-existent. This illustration is actually a form of the old heresy of Modalism, also known as Sabellianism, which was condemned by the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and the First Council of Constantinople (381 AD).

In the history of the church, various unitarian groups have denied the doctrine of the Trinity – including Arianism in the 4th century, Socinianism in the 16th and 17th centuries, and the Jehovah's Witnesses at the present time. Non-Christian religions, including Zoroastrianism, Islam and Sikhism are monotheistic but their god is not the trinitarian God of the Bible. Judaism claims to be monotheistic, believing in the God revealed in the Old Testament and, therefore, is the true God. However, we would consider the followers of Judaism as having an inadequate understanding of the God of Scripture, who is trinitarian. In Genesis 1:26, the plural “Us” and “Our” are used when God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...” The pre-incarnate Son

2. THE ROOT

of God had appeared as Man in the Old Testament times. In theology, these appearances are known as *theophanies*. In Genesis 18, the Person who spoke to Abraham was the LORD (Jehovah). He met with Joshua as the “Commander of the army of the LORD” in Joshua 5, and with Gideon as the “Angel of the LORD” in Judges 6. The Holy Spirit is referred to in the creation of the universe (Gen. 1:2), and by David in Psalm 51:11, 12. In the New Testament, the three persons of the Godhead are referred to clearly (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; 1 John 5:7; Matt. 3:16-17; John 1:1-3, 14; 9:35-37; 14:26). The God revealed in the Scripture is trinitarian.

We must be extremely careful in teaching the doctrine of the Trinity. Finite man can know God only to the extent that He has revealed Himself in the Scripture. We only need to teach what has been revealed in Scripture about God. More importantly, we must proclaim the gospel so that other people might come to know the true God, through faith in Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

A true church must uphold the doctrine of the Trinity.

2.2 Sola scriptura

The Latin term ‘sola scriptura’ means that Scripture is the only authority in all matters of faith and practice. The prophets of the Old Testament were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write down what God revealed to them. Despite living in different places, and at different times, they revealed the one message of salvation for fallen man, through the atoning death of the Son of God (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 53:1-12; Luke 24:25-27, 46-47; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 9:13-15). The Holy Spirit similarly inspired the apostles, and certain men closely associated with them, to write the Scripture of the New Testament (2 Pet. 3:16). Scripture is now complete, and sufficient, with no new revelation to come after the passing of the apostles (Rev. 22:18-19). The 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament together constitute the word of God. Nothing is to be added or taken away. The Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of God’s word also dwells in those who truly belong to God. He gives them understanding of God’s will as found in Scripture. The sole authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice is declared in 2 Timothy 3:16-17,

2. THE ROOT

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

The Bible of the so-called ‘Catholic Churches’ – including the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Egyptian Coptic Church, and the Mar Thoma Church – has 14 additional books known as the Apocrypha. These books, written during the inter-testamental period, were never accepted as part of Scripture in the early church. Furthermore, these Catholic Churches do not treat the Bible as the only authority in all matters of faith and practice. Instead, they also hold to the authority of the church and the traditions of the church.

The doctrine of ‘sola scriptura’ was recovered during the Reformation of the 16th century. The Reformation spawned many Protestant churches which stood in opposition to the teaching of the Catholic Churches. As more Protestant churches were founded, departure in doctrine and practice began to be seen.

2.2. Sola scriptura

There were churches that settled into dead orthodoxy while others became loose in doctrine despite appearing lively in social actions. The conservative Protestant churches that wanted to maintain mission-mindedness began to call themselves 'evangelical'. One distinguishing mark of an evangelical church is upholding the doctrine of 'sola scriptura'. Sadly, a loosening in this doctrine began to be seen among the Evangelicals in the late 19th century, when Modernism (or Liberalism) arose in Germany and spread to other parts of the world. Today, many churches that claim themselves to be Evangelical only pay lip-service to the doctrine of 'sola scriptura'. Thankfully, there appears to be a growing appreciation of this doctrine in recent times.

When Scripture – consisting of the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament – is not held to be the only authority in all matters of faith and practice, errors are bound to creep in. The church will be weak, and soon go astray.

A true church must uphold the doctrine of 'sola scriptura'.

2. THE ROOT

2.3 Justification by faith alone

Among the doctrines recovered during the Reformation is 'justification by faith alone'. This refers to the biblical doctrine of salvation for sinners. It is also known as the 'gospel' which literally means 'good news' (Rom. 5:1; Gal. 1:6-9). Other common ways of referring to the gospel is 'salvation by grace through faith' (Eph. 2:8-9) and 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified' (1 Cor. 2:2). The good news is that salvation is the free gift of the sovereign God, in Jesus Christ who died on the cross as a substitute for God's chosen people (Eph. 2:8-9). The word 'grace' means the favour of God extended freely to undeserving sinners. Salvation is received through faith in Christ alone, and not based on human works or merit. The Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner as he hears the gospel, giving him repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ. The moment the sinner repents and believes, he is regarded by God as 'justified', i.e. declared no more guilty but treated as righteous. Christ's death on the cross is counted as for his sin, while Christ's righteousness is considered given to him. This is the doctrine of 'imputation' – the imputation of the be-

2.3. Justification by faith alone

liever's sin to Christ, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer (Rom. 4:22-25; 2 Cor. 5:21). Martin Luther regarded 'justification by faith alone' as the doctrine upon which a church stands or falls.

In the history of the church, there have been various perversions of the gospel. The Roman Catholic doctrine of 'justification by faith and works' teaches that the sinner must engage in acts such as getting baptised, doing penance (i.e. confession of his sins to the priest), etc., in order to be saved. There is a confusion between 'justification' and 'sanctification'. Sanctification is the life-long process in which the believer is transformed by the Holy Spirit to become holier and holier. The Roman Catholic understanding of justification amounts to a perversion of the biblical doctrine of 'salvation by grace' to 'salvation by works'.

Another perversion of the gospel comes from Arminianism which teaches that the human will is free from the bondage of sin. The hearers of the gospel must, therefore, be persuaded and helped towards making a decision of faith in Christ. An example of this is the use of a booklet called the 'Four Spiritual Laws' by the Campus Crusade for Christ to lead

2. THE ROOT

the hearer to say ‘the sinner’s prayer’. Another example is the ‘altar call’ practised in some churches in which the hearers are urged to walk to the pulpit (the altar) to show that they wish to ‘accept Christ’ as Saviour. While there have been those who are truly saved through these methods, there are many who are misled into thinking that they are saved because they have contributed something to salvation – by saying ‘the sinner’s prayer’ or by walking to the ‘altar’.

The opposite error of hyper-Calvinism has been encountered in history. The hyper-Calvinists emphasise the sovereignty of God at the expense of human responsibility. It is claimed that God will save His chosen people no matter what they do, or do not do. Christians need only to pray for the salvation of sinners and to declare the gospel message without the need to call upon the hearers to repent and believe. Hyper-Calvinists fail to see that the sovereign God uses the means of preaching the gospel and the effort of outreach to save sinners. They fail to see that sinners have a responsibility to respond to the call of the gospel although they are unable, without the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, to repent and

believe. The correct teaching of the Bible is that human responsibility is subsumed under (some writers say, “held in tension with”) divine sovereignty. The sovereign God uses human effort as a means to accomplish His will.

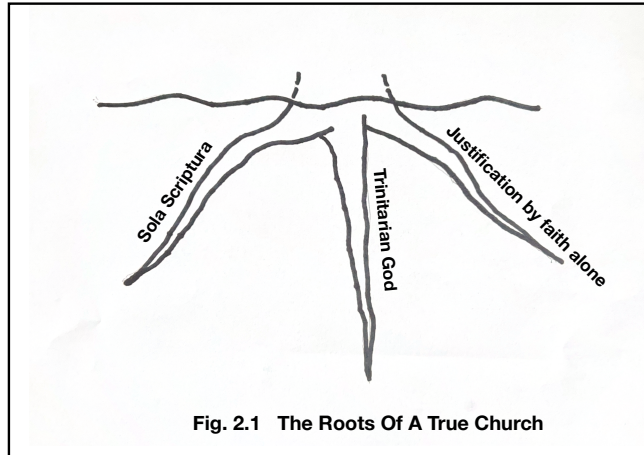
A true church will uphold the doctrine of ‘justification by faith alone’.

2.4 Summary

A tree must have roots in order to stand. The stronger the roots, the stronger the tree will be. A true church must have at least three roots – the doctrines of the Trinity, the sole authority of Scripture, and the gospel of ‘justification by faith alone’ (See Fig. 2.1). Is yours a true church? Is yours a strong church?

* * * * *

2. THE ROOT



Three

The Trunk

The part of the tree that is grounded (stuck to the ground) is the trunk. While the roots are invisible, being buried under the ground, the trunk is visible. The trunk grows thicker and taller with time, until the tree becomes mature and bear fruits. The trunk of our ecclesiastical tree consists of the important truths that have been controverted over, and upheld, through the history of the church. We do not advocate reliance on church traditions but reliance on Scripture. We do not advocate imposing our own system of belief on Scripture but drawing out from Scripture its own system of teaching.

3. THE TRUNK

Next to Pentecost, the Reformation of the 16th century was a watershed in the history of the church. It was truly a revival wrought by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of God's word, by men who suffered much for their faith. The fruit of that revival is felt up to today. Using the Reformation as our reference, three periods in church history are discernible – the Pre-Reformation period, the Reformation, and the Post-Reformation period. The century after the Reformation, known as the Puritan Age, is of particular significance. Each period has its unique contributions to our understanding of the model church.

3.1 Pre-Reformation (100-1500 AD)

In the study of Church History, this period would include the Early Church (from after the apostles to Constantine) and the Medieval Church (from Constantine to the Reformation). The last apostle, John, died around the year 100 AD. Around this time, the church emerged as an entity distinct from Judaism. Persecution against the church occurred sporadically throughout the Roman Empire until the emperor Constantine (306-337) professed faith in Christ and passed

3.1. Pre-Reformation (100-1500 AD)

the Edict of Milan in 313 AD to legalise the Christian faith. When persecution ceased, the church grew in the number of adherents. Problems from within the church increased and became more severe. Once threatened by persecution from without, the church was now threatened by heresies from within. Various ecumenical councils were convened to debate these doctrinal issues.¹ Wrong teachings were condemned while the correct teachings were stated in documents called 'Creeds'. Catechisms, consisting of questions and answers, also were produced as a teaching tool to instruct the believers.

There are three well-known historic Creeds – the Apostles' Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Nicene Creed. The oldest and most well-known is the Apostles' Creed. Many of the later creeds were based on this one. The Roman Catholic Church holds the unfounded view that each of the twelve apostles of Christ contributed a statement to this Creed. The Apostles' Creed existed as early as the middle of the 2nd cen-

¹In the early church, the word 'ecumenical' meant that various churches were represented, with the purpose of clarifying truth. Today, the Ecumenical movement uses the term to mean various churches are included, to show unity, often at the expense of truth.

3. THE TRUNK

tury (around AD 140), when the disciples of the apostles were still alive. Its final, slightly expanded, form may be traced up to the 7th century.²

Of the three historic Creeds, I especially commend the Apostles' Creed. This creed is included in our church hymnal. Occasionally, our church recites together this creed, instead of a Psalm, during our morning worship service. The Apostles' Creed distinguishes the Christian faith from pagan religions. In many parts of the world, paganism still poses a real threat to the church. It is envisaged that a Christian who is deprived of the Bible, say during a persecution, will be helped much in the faith if the Apostles' Creed has been memorised. Even in secular, materialistic, and atheistic society, the Christian will be helped much by knowing the Apostles' Creed as the expression of his faith.

3.2 The Reformation (1500-1600 AD)

The Roman Empire divided into two in 395 AD after the death of Emperor Theodosius I. The Establishment churches (i.e. churches supported by the state)

²See *Thoroughgoing Reformation*, by BS Poh.

3.2. The Reformation (1500-1600 AD)

evolved into the Catholic churches that we know of today – the Roman Catholic Church in the West, and the various Orthodox Churches in the East. All these churches, both in the East and the West, are characterised by a hierarchical form of church government, rituals such as the burning of incense and processions, the wearing of clerical robes, and the use of rosaries and the making of the sign of the cross in prayer. A significant event known as the Great Schism occurred in 1054 when the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches excommunicated each other. This split was the culmination of the theological, cultural, and political differences that had been developing for centuries.

Alongside the Establishment (or Catholic) churches which together constituted what has been called the Magisterial Reformation, there were various groupings that arose throughout Europe known as the Radical churches.³ These churches were opposed to the rituals and traditions of the Catholic churches, with the result that they had to go underground – metaphorically and, in some situations, literally. They had to worship in secret and were severely persecuted by the Catholic churches. Some of these groups held

3. THE TRUNK

to unorthodox teachings while the majority desired to remain faithful to the teaching of Scripture and retained the simplicity of worship. Notable leaders among them included Conrad Grebel (c.1498-1525), Menno Simons (1496-1561) and Pilgram Marpeck (1495-1556). The Reformation consisted of these two wings – the Magisterial Reformation and the Radical Reformation,⁴ which interacted with each other.

Martin Luther (1483-1546), a monk and professor of theology in the Roman Catholic Church, was used by God to trigger off the Reformation in Europe. On October 31 of 1517, Luther nailed his so-called Ninety-five Theses to the doors of the church at Wittenberg, Germany, to protest against the wrong teachings and abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. That act sparked off widespread protest against the church which led to attempts by the church at suppressing the movement. Martin Luther and his followers eventually were excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church. His followers formed the Lutheran Church. Other leaders were raised up by God who founded other streams of Protestant churches, including John

³*Renaissance and Reformation*, by Willaim R. Estep.

⁴‘Radical’ does not mean physical violence but the desire to be thorough in reformation.

3.2. The Reformation (1500-1600 AD)

Calvin (1509-1564) in France, and Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) in Switzerland. Calvin settled in Geneva and was instrumental in systematising the teaching of the Reformation through his *magnum opus*, the 'Institutes of the Christian Religion'. Sadly, later Lutheranism developed into a scholastic system,⁵ lost its vitality and become what it is today – a Protestant denomination that has veered away from its Reformation roots.

While the pre-Reformation period clarified the Christian faith amidst paganism by producing the Creeds, the Reformation steered the Christian faith back to the Scripture by asserting its exclusive authority in all matters of faith and practice. The exclusive authority of Scripture in the Christian life is asserted by the Five Principles of the Reformation (the Five Sola's) – viz. *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola gratia* (grace alone), *solus Christus* (Christ alone, the personal noun requiring *solus* instead of *sola*), and *solī Deo gloria* (glory to God alone). Although not published as a document, nearly all scholars are agreed that these are the distinctive

⁵A scholastic system is theology based on Aristotelian logic and the writings of the early Church Fathers which emphasise on tradition and dogma.

3. THE TRUNK

beliefs of the Reformation. The exclusive authority of Scripture in the worship of God is asserted in the Regulative Principle Of Worship. At the beginning of the Reformation, Martin Luther put forward the Normative Principle which basically states that whatever is not forbidden by Scripture is allowable in worship. John Calvin put forth the Regulative Principle which basically states that only what is commanded in Scripture should be allowed in worship. As the Reformers wrestled with the issue, the Regulative Principle became the prevalent view by the end of the 17th century.

The Five Principles (Sola's) of the Reformation and the Regulative Principle of Worship are the distinct contributions of the Reformation to the church. A local church that appreciates the Reformation will value and adopt these contributions from that period of church history.

3.3 The Puritan Age (1600-1700 AD)

As the Reformation spread throughout Europe, the centre of Christian activities shifted to the British Isles. A band of gospel ministers emerged, known as the

3.3. The Puritan Age (1600-1700 AD)

Puritans, who have been regarded as the second generation of Reformers. The Puritans were found in various denominations – the Church of England (or Anglican Church), the Separatists, the Congregationalists, the Particular Baptists, the General Baptists, the Mennonites, etc. The non-Anglican Puritans were known as Non-Conformists. A significant event occurred in 1662, known as the Great Ejection, when around 2,000 Puritan ministers were ejected from the Church of England for refusing to conform to the demand to use the Book of Common Prayer. The Book required making the sign of the cross in prayer, the wearing of vestments, kneeling to receive the elements during communion, etc. – all of which were regarded as not taught in Scripture and, therefore, contravening the Regulative Principle. The cause of Non-Conformity was greatly strengthened by these ejected ministers joining its rank.

The Puritans in Britain, and those who migrated to America, were well-known for their systematic exposition of Scripture, both in preaching and in print. This was the practical outworking of a principle known as ‘the primacy of Scripture in the Christian life’ – a fact that is seldom noted. The primacy of Scripture in

3. THE TRUNK

the Christian life, and the life of the church, may be regarded as a distinctive characteristic of Puritanism. The rise of Puritanism in Britain corresponded to the Dutch Second Reformation or ‘Nadere Reformatie’ (‘Another Reformation’) in the Netherlands. It was during the Puritan age that a number of great Reformed confessions of faith were produced – including the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) of the Presbyterians, the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order (1658) of the Congregationalists, and the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) of the Particular Baptists. In Continental Europe, the Reformed churches had been using the Belgic Confession (1561), together with the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and the Canons of Dort (1619). The Canons of Dort was published in 1619 in the Netherlands as an expression of the soteriology (i.e. the doctrine of salvation) of the Reformed churches, to counteract Arminianism. Summarised as the Five Points of Calvinism, it has become a distinct contribution to the Reformed cause.

What is a Confession of Faith? The historic Creeds, produced in the Pre-Reformation age, are short statements of faith used by the early church to distinguish itself from those who held to heretical teachings and

3.4. Summary

from other religions. The Confessions of Faith, produced during and after the Reformation, are longer statements of doctrine used by churches to declare their orthodoxy and distinctive characteristics over against the teaching of other churches. Apart from Creeds and Confessions of Faith, many churches through the centuries have used Catechisms which are instructional manuals, couched in questions and answers. Many churches today, including Reformed ones, use Statements of Faith to declare the basic doctrines they hold to, consisting of 10 to 20 statements of doctrine.⁶ A Reformed church, however, would also adhere to one of the historic Confessions of Faith.

The Five Points of Calvinism, the Confessions of Faith, and the principle of ‘the primacy of Scripture’ are the unique contributions of the Puritan Age to the church.

3.4 Summary

The trunk of our ecclesiastical tree consists of three discernible sections which correspond to three peri-

⁶Note that the New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1833) that is adopted by some Calvinistic Baptist churches consists of 18 points of doctrine and is actually a Statement of Faith.

3. THE TRUNK

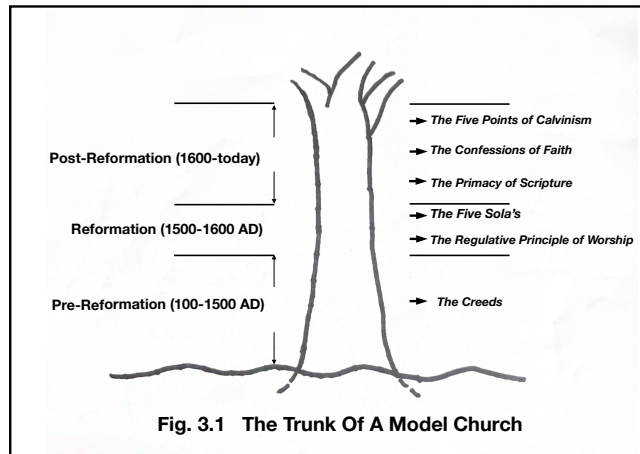
ods of church history. The first section corresponds to the Pre-Reformation period, covering the years 100-1500 AD. This period contributed the Creeds to the church which help to distinguish the Christian faith from pagan religions. The second section corresponds to the period of the Reformation, from 1500-1600 AD. The Reformation contributed the Five Principles (Sola's) of the Reformation and the Regulative Principle of Worship to the church, helping it to uphold the exclusive authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice. The third section corresponds to the Puritan age, from 1600-1700 AD. The unique contributions of the Puritan age to the church are the Five Points of Calvinism, the Confessions of Faith and the Primacy of Scripture.

While Church History is studied by many Christians, there are few who appreciate the unique contributions of these three periods to the welfare of the church and the Christian faith. There are Christians who piously, but mistakenly, think that the Bible alone should be studied and not other documents produced by man. They fail to take into consideration the facts that we all need teachers to guide us in the understanding of God's word, that the Holy Spirit

3.4. Summary

who is with us today also was with the teachers of the past, and that it is impossible for anyone to know all the important teachings of the Bible by ourselves. Instead of ‘reinventing the wheel’, we should learn from the past and be like the Bereans who “received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11).

The church that values and adopts the Creeds, the Five Principles of the Reformation, the Regulative Principle of Worship, the Five Points of Calvinism, the Confessions of Faith, the Primacy of Scripture, and the Primacy of Scripture will be strong and stable (See Fig. 3.1).



Four

The Crown

The type of tree is recognised largely by the the shape of the crown, followed by an examination of its leaves, and confirmed by the fruits. The crown, consisting of the leaves and branches, therefore, plays a crucial role in the identity of the tree. To be more specific, the branches, on which hang the leaves, are what determine the shape and beauty of the crown. The type of local church, and its health and beauty, are similarly recognised by characteristics that correspond to the crown of a tree and, in particular, to the branches. What are the characteristics that make up the branches of our ecclesiastical tree? Jesus Christ,

4. THE CROWN

as Head of the church and Mediator between God and man, occupies the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. It is proposed that the three offices of Christ constitute the main branches of our ecclesiastical tree. Sub-branches arise from these main branches, which are visible expressions of the life of the church.

Prophethood concerns doctrine, priesthood concerns worship, and kingship concerns rule. The prophethood of Christ is manifested by the Confession of Faith it holds to and the teaching given to members. The priesthood of Christ is manifested by the application of the Regulative Principle of Worship in the formal worship services and the auxiliary worship services – which include the administration of the special ordinances (or sacraments) and the corporate prayer meeting. The kingship of Christ is manifested in the system of church government adopted and in the work of missions – which includes local outreach and wider church planting.

4.1 The Prophethood of Christ

The church that submits to Christ's headship would submit to Him as Prophet. The primary task of a

4.1. The Prophethood of Christ

prophet in the Scripture was to reveal God's will. The church that submits to Christ's prophethood would appreciate the importance of doctrine. There are two ways by which this ought to manifest itself in the life of the church – by adherence to a Confession of Faith and by upholding the principle of the Primacy of Scripture.

There is no better way to show forth our appreciation of the importance of doctrine than to adopt one of the historic Confessions of Faith. We have noted that it is insufficient for a church to have a Statement of Faith, consisting of only 10 to 20 points of doctrine. A Statement of Faith is sufficient only to show that we are a true, and evangelical, church. It is not sufficient to distinguish the church from the non-Reformed churches and to guard itself against wrong teaching. We have noted also that it is not wise to 'reinvent the wheel' in so far as a Confession of Faith is concerned. A truly Reformed church would uphold one of the historic Confessions of Faith. A truly Reformed Baptist church would hold to the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 (or its equivalent, such as the Philadelphia Confession of Faith of 1742). The church will subscribe fully to the Confes-

4. THE CROWN

sion of Faith, in contrast to merely agreeing with the system of doctrine taught in it.¹ Subscription to the 1689 Confession of Faith should be declared in the Church Constitution.

A new church is founded by the prospective members swearing an oath to bind themselves together as a church, during a worship service specially held for that purpose. The oath taken by the participants is what has been called the Church Covenant. The Church Constitution is a document that declares the basic belief and practice of the church, in which is attached the Church Covenant. A Reformed Baptist Church should declare clearly in the Church Constitution that it holds to the 1689 Confession of Faith as teaching the system of doctrine found in the Scripture. A church that does not have a written Church Constitution is deficient by biblical standard. In Exodus 24:1-8, the belief and practice of the nation of Israel were put in writing and agreed upon by the people during a covenanting service. In the days of Nehemiah, the Jews who had returned from exile held a covenanting service during which the leaders signed the document containing what they had agreed upon

¹*What Is A Confessional Church?* by Boon-Sing Poh.

4.1. The Prophethood of Christ

(Neh. 9:1-3, 38; 10:1-8). It is a biblical practice to have our belief and practice stated in a document.

The second way by which a church shows its submission to Christ as Prophet is to uphold the Primacy of Scripture. There should be two worship services on the Lord's day in which the Scripture is expounded systematically, and the gospel is preached on a regular basis. The Fourth Commandment requires that the *day* set aside for the Lord be kept holy (Exod. 20:8-11). This was done not only by abstaining from customary activities but also by beginning the day with worship and finishing the day with worship (Num. 28:4, 9). New Testament worship requires us to offer up, not a burnt offering, but our prayer and praise, in response to the word of God that is preached or taught. The model of ministry set by the Lord is that there should be teaching to build up the faith of believers, preaching the gospel to win souls, and doing good works in conjunction with preaching and teaching (Matt. 4:23; 9:35). This may be called the Threefold Ministry of our Lord. This was the model followed by the apostle Paul (Acts 20:20-21, 27, 34-35). We are commanded by the apostle, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

4. THE CROWN

Apart from the formal, public, worship services on the Lord's Day, there should be a mid-week Bible Study during which a topic is studied biblically or a book of the Bible is studied systematically. Studying the Bible on occasions other than the worship services on the Lord's Day has precedent in the Bible. When the Lord was twelve years old, he was found listening to the teachers and asking them questions (Luke 2:46). When the Lord was resurrected from the dead, He expounded the Scriptures to the two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:27). In Ephesus, the apostle Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus daily (Acts 19:9). From Acts 20, we know that he not only preached the gospel to win souls to Christ (vv. 20-21) but also taught the believers "the whole counsel of God" (v. 27). Our church members cannot afford the luxury of attending meetings everyday. It makes good sense to have a mid-week Bible Study. This is another way by which the Primacy of Scripture is shown in the life of the church.

We see, then, that the branch representing the prophethood of Christ has two sub-branches, viz. holding to a Confession of Faith and upholding the Primacy of Scripture through preaching on the Lord's

Day and teaching in the mid-week Bible Study.

4.2 The priesthood of Christ

Priesthood concerns worship. In the Old Testament, the priests were led by Aaron to conduct worship for the nation. In the New Testament, Christ is the High Priest of the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:20-22), while all members of the church are priests (1 Pet. 2:9). Submission to the priesthood of Christ requires that all acts of worship are in accordance to God's word. In other words, the Regulative Principle and the Primacy of Scripture must govern the public, formal, worship services (or meetings) on the Lord's Day and the auxiliary worship services – which include the administration of the special ordinances (or sacraments) and the corporate prayer meeting.

We consider first the main services of the church. We have referred to the two worship services on the Lord's Day in connection with the prophethood of Christ. These are formal, public, meetings of worship which must be governed by Scripture and, therefore, by the Regulative Principle. How we worship God is not left to our whims and fancy, contrary to the

4. THE CROWN

opinion of many misguided Christians. The Scripture alone is our authority in all matters of faith and practice. The Regulative Principle states that in the worship of God, whatever is commanded in Scripture must be obeyed while whatever is not commanded must be rejected, except for those matters connected with the circumstances of worship which should be determined by the general rules of Scripture and common sense.²

The Primacy of Scripture requires that the exposition of God's word constitute the climax of worship. The prayers, singing (including psalms, hymns and spiritual songs), collection, and reading of Scripture should be arranged such that prominence is given to the preaching of God's word. Normally, there would be four hymns that are sung – one in praise of God the Father or the Trinity, another concerning God the Son or the church, the third concerning the Holy Spirit or the word of God, and a final one as response to the preached word. There is an opening prayer, and there is a closing prayer which includes the benediction. The worship is conducted orderly, and in the spirit of reverence towards God. It is led by one man,

²*In Spirit and Truth*, by Boon-Sing Poh.

4.2. The priesthood of Christ

normally by the pastor. Again, there is biblical precedent for this. In the nation of Israel, Aaron led the worship in the tabernacle. In the dedication of the temple, Solomon led the worship service (1 Kings 8:1, 12, 22, 55, 62). In 1 Corinthians 14:27, 29 only two, or at the most three, persons could speak in tongues or prophesy – and that one by one. Today, there is no more prophecy or tongue-speaking.³ The Regulative Principle requires that the elements of worship include only those prescribed in Scripture, viz. prayer, singing, reading of Scripture, preaching, and taking the offering (or collection). Orderliness requires that, under normal circumstances, one person leads.

We consider next the auxiliary services of the church. Traditionally, a visible (local) church is defined as an organised group of believers in which is the preaching of the gospel and the correct administration of the ordinances (or sacraments) of baptism and the Lord's Supper.⁴ There is no mention of the corporate prayer meeting of the church. The special ordinance of baptism is carried out only when there are candidates for it. It is not carried out every week. The frequency of having the Lord's Supper varies from church to

³*Cessationism of Continuationism?* by Boon-Sing Poh.

4. THE CROWN

church. I have argued elsewhere that it should not be carried out too frequently such that it loses its special significance, and it should not be too infrequent such that believers are deprived of this means of grace.⁵ In our church, we have the Lord's Supper once a fortnight. Furthermore, the Lord's Supper is regarded as an appendix to the main service, or conducted as a separate service where only believers may participate, whereas the two main services on the Lord's Day are public, i.e. open to visitors and non-believers (cf. 1 Cor. 14:23, 24). Since baptism and the Lord's Supper are not part of the main services but are nevertheless acts of worship, we consider them to be auxiliary acts of worship. (We would not call these secondary acts of worship as that would imply that they are of lesser importance.)

What about the corporate prayer meeting in the church? It has precedent in the life of the church in apostolic time. The early disciples gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem and "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14). When Peter and John were released by the Jewish author-

⁴See, for example, *Keach's Catechism*, Q. 105.

⁵*The Fundamentals Of Our Faith*, by B. S. Poh, p. 120.

4.2. The priesthood of Christ

ities, they went to their companions and reported what had happened. We are told in Acts 4:31, “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” When Peter was imprisoned by Herod the king, “constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church” (Acts 12:5). When Peter was released miraculously by an angel, “he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying” (v. 12). Through the centuries, churches have been holding weekly prayer meetings. Just as personal praying is expected of believers (Matt. 6:5; Acts 10:9), corporate prayer is expected of churches. The Prayer Meeting is separate from the worship services on the Lord’s Day. It may be held on the Lord’s Day or on another day. The corporate prayer meeting, together with the special ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, constitute the auxiliary worship meetings of the church.

The Regulative Principle and the Primacy of Scripture must also be applied to the auxiliary acts of worship. No foreign elements (i.e. items of worship

4. THE CROWN

not commanded in Scripture) should be introduced, e.g. dancing, solo singing, burning of incense, etc. Since the auxiliary acts of worship are carried out for a specific purpose – either for baptism, the Lord’s Supper, or prayer – the number of hymns may be reduced, and the preaching shortened to an exhortation of about 10 minutes. Most churches would dispense of the collection as that is required only during the main services (cf. 1 Cor. 16:2). The general rules of Scripture apply to both the main services and the auxiliary acts of worship – including male leadership (1 Cor. 11:9-10; 1 Tim. 2:12), praying in turn (1 Cor. 14 :27, 31), and doing all things “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40).

The branch representing the priesthood of Christ leads to the two sub-branches of the formal services of worship on the Lord’s Day and the auxiliary acts of worship (baptism, Lord’s Supper, and corporate prayer meeting), both of which must be regulated by the Regulative Principle and the Primacy of Scripture.

4.3 The kingship of Christ

Jesus Christ is the King in the kingdom of God (Matt. 28:18; John 18:37; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16). He rules over His people in accordance to Scripture. The Holy Spirit makes His people willing to obey and to serve Him (Psalm 110:3; Ezek. 36:27; Acts 4:31; Rom. 8:33; 1 Cor. 12:7-11). On the corporate level, He rules over His church through elders and in accordance to the teaching of Scripture (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 17). In other words, the local church must have a biblical form of church government. Furthermore, in ancient times the kings would lead their armies into battle (1 Chron. 20:1). In the gospel age, the Lord leads His people in the execution of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). God's kingdom is spiritual in nature, and it extends by souls won to Christ (Luke 17:21; John 18:26). The local church, therefore, must be involved in the work of missions which includes local church growth and wider church planting. There are two ways, therefore, by which the local church shows submission to Christ's kingship – viz. by adopting a biblical form of church government and engagement in missions in a biblical way.

4. THE CROWN

We consider first the form of church government. Historically, four forms of church government have come down to us – viz. Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, Independency, and Congregationalism.⁶ In Episcopacy, there is an hierarchy of individuals exercising power over the churches in the denomination. In Presbyterianism, there is an hierarchy of committees of church representatives exercising power over groups of churches – from the General Assembly fanning down to the Assembly, to the Synods, and to the Presbytery (also known as the Session, or Eldership) of the local church. In Independency and Congregationalism, each local church is independent and autonomous, with the power of rule lying in the congregation. The difference between them lies in who execute the power of rule and how decisions are made. In Independency, the power to execute rule lies with the eldership while decisions are made by the elders which are brought to the congregation for consent. In Congregationalism, the power to execute rule lies in the congregation while church officers (the pastor and deacons) merely carry out the decisions of the congregation, which are made by democratic voting.

4.3. The kingship of Christ

Since the 1980s, the Absolute Equality (or Parity) view of eldership has been adopted by many Calvinistic Baptist churches, including quite a number of Reformed Baptist churches.⁷ In this view, all pastors are elders and all elders are pastors. They have equal authority in executing all functions of rule, with each person allocated a function, or functions, according to personal aptitude. An elder is supported financially to be in full-time ministry of the word only by virtue of his ability to teach, and not by virtue of a calling from God to this task. The traditional Reformed doctrine of the call to the ministry of the word is denied or rationalised away. In recent years, the problem of 'heavy shepherding' (i.e. intrusive pastoral care) has been encountered in churches that hold to this view of the eldership. While the problem is not unique to churches that hold to this view of eldership, nor is it found in all such churches, there seems to be a certain proneness in that direction.

⁶*The Keys Of The Kingdom*, by B. S. Poh.

⁷A Calvinistic Baptist church holds to the Five Points of Calvinism but does not subscribe to the 1689 Confession of Faith, or its equivalent. Many Calvinistic Baptist churches are Fundamentalist, rejecting Covenant Theology and holding to dispensational Pre-millennialism, instead.

4. THE CROWN

In the Traditional view of the eldership (also known as the Independent view), held by the early Particular Baptists (who today are called Reformed Baptists), all pastors are elders but not all elders are pastors. An eldership would consist of a pastor and one or more elders who, together, rule the church. The deacons do not rule the church but carry out the mundane affairs of the church under the direction of the elders (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). A church would normally have one pastor who leads the eldership (cf. Rev. 2:1, 8, etc.). The pastor is an elder who has received a calling from God (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 9:16; 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). The extraordinary officers of prophets, apostles, and evangelists (or apostles' representatives) have been withdrawn after the completion of Scripture and the founding of the New Testament church (Eph. 2:19-22; Rev. 1:11; 22:18-19). Pastors are ordinary officers who do not perform signs, wonders and miracles but are called by God to handle His word full-time. The call of God has both a personal and corporate aspects. The personal aspect consists of a conviction or desire for full-time ministry that arises from the influence of God's word, prayer, providential circumstances and pure motives.

4.3. The kingship of Christ

The corporate aspect consists of the church assessing and recognising the person's desire for the ministry of the word and qualifications for office, as given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, with a prominence in the ability to handle God's word and God's people.

The second way by which the kingship of Christ manifests itself in the local church is in missions – encompassing local outreach and wider church planting. There should be organised outreach in which outreach teams, each led by a male member of the church, are sent out every week to proclaim the gospel (cf. Luke 9:1-2; 10:1; Acts 20:20-21). If done in the afternoon of the Lord's Day for two to three hours, about three to five groups of hearers can be covered, to whom a ten-minutes gospel message is proclaimed. The teams will be helped much if the pastor provides the gospel message by summarising one of his Lord's Day messages before they are sent forth. If done on another day of the week, when there is no necessity to return to church for the evening service, more groups can be covered. While spontaneous personal evangelism is taught and encouraged in all evangelical churches, organised outreach is hardly heard of, which is a pity.

4. THE CROWN

Wider church planting should be carried out at the same time as local outreach. We do not have to wait till 'we are ready' before engaging in church planting. Instead, we should do as we are able – doing more when there are more resources and manpower available, and doing less when less are available. This is taught in the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30). When those reached out are nearby, they will naturally be integrated into the church upon conversion. When they are a distance away, say, of 45 minutes' drive or more, it would be appropriate to form them into a new church. Opportunities for overseas missions should also be explored by the pastor, accompanied by his wife or other church members (1 Cor. 9:5-6). Some church members may, in due time, become missionaries in other lands. Native men who are suitably qualified may also be adopted as missionaries to plant churches in their own countries. While the pastor plays a leading role in establishing, and visiting in circuit, the preaching points farther afield, he should ensure that this is not overdone to the neglect of his own church. His primary ministry is to his home church. When missions is carried out in fellowship with like-minded churches, more can be

accomplished.

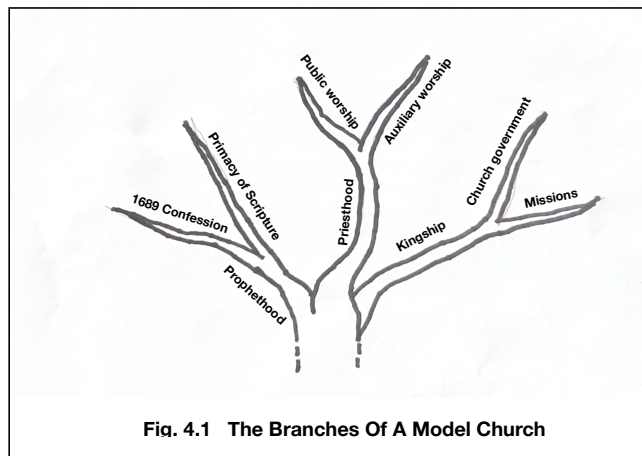
The branch representing the kingship of Christ leads to the two sub-branches of adopting biblical church government and carrying out missions conscientiously in local outreach and wider church planting.

4.4 Summary

The type of tree, and its health and beauty, are determined primarily by its crown. The branches of the tree, on which hang the leaves and fruits, play a crucial role in the life of the tree. The branches of our ecclesiastical tree consist of the three offices of Christ and the ramifications (See Fig. 4.1). The local church that is submitted to Christ's headship will submit to His three offices of Prophet, Priest and King. Submission to Christ's prophethood should be seen in the adoption of the 1689 Confession of Faith and upholding the Primacy of God's Word through preaching on the Lord's Day and teaching in the mid-week Bible Study. Submission to Christ's priesthood should be seen in the application of the Regulative Principle and the Primacy of God's Word to the two formal

4. THE CROWN

worship services on the Lord's Day and the auxiliary acts of worship which includes baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the corporate prayer meeting. Submission to Christ's kingship requires that a biblical form of church government is adopted and a biblical approach to missions is followed, covering local outreach and wider church planting.



Five

For Glory And Beauty

In the Old Testament, Aaron and his sons were dressed appropriately “for glory and beauty” (Exod. 28:2, 40). The New Testament church is made up of redeemed sinners who have been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 13:12). They constitute “a spiritual house, a holy priesthood” and “a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Clothed in the righteousness of Christ, the church must show forth the glory and beauty of her Saviour in the world (2 Cor. 5:21; Isa. 61:10-11; Eph. 3:21). This does not mean that the church is already perfect. Perfection will be achieved only in the new heavens,

5. FOR GLORY AND BEAUTY

on the new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:9-11). While waiting for that day to come, the church on earth is being sanctified (Eph. 5:25-27). Each local church, therefore, must strive to be holy and manifest the righteousness of Christ. Practically, that means God's people must "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). Corporately, the church must strive to show forth the glory and beauty that is in Christ. How is that to be done? We have proposed that the church must show submission to the headship of Christ by submitting to His three offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. This is an ongoing process that is encapsulated in the Latin watchword of the Reformation and the Puritan Age – *semper reformanda*, which means "always being reformed".

Although the watchword *semper reformanda* has been abused in some circles, it remains a correct expression of the spirit of many Reformed churches today.¹ These Reformed churches do not claim to have arrived at perfection but are constantly striving to be conformed to the Scripture, in doctrine and practice. In other words, they are striving to show forth the glory and beauty of Christ. The imperative for this in

5.1. The Age Of Missions (1700-1900)

the present time will be appreciated better by considering briefly Church History in the periods after the Puritan Age.

5.1 The Age Of Missions (1700-1900)

The period from 1700 to 1900 was one of missions, when various denominations formed missionary organisations and sent out missionaries to win souls and establish churches. The Moravians in Germany were active in sending missionaries to various parts of the world in the 18th century. The Particular Baptists sent out William Carey (1761-1834), known as the 'father of modern missions', to India in 1793. Adoniram Judson (1788-1850) laboured in Burma (today's Myanmar). Henry Martyn (1781-1812) laboured in India and Persia (today's Iran). William Chalmers Burns (1815-1868) laboured in China and Mongolia. Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) laboured in China, extending into South East Asia. John Gibson Paton (1824-1907) laboured in the New Hebrides islands (today's Vanuatu) in the South Pacific Ocean. David Livingstone (1813-1873) laboured in South and Central Africa.

¹*Thoroughgoing Reformation*, by B. S. Poh, pp. 99-102.

5. FOR GLORY AND BEAUTY

Missions continued to the subsequent century, and extended to other parts of the world. Notable names include Jim Elliot (1927-1956) and his companions who laboured and died as martyrs in Ecuador, South America, and Robert Kenneth Strachan (1910-1965) who laboured in Central and South America.

Seen from one perspective, the period 1700-1900 was a glorious one for missions. Seen from another perspective, the same period was one of decline in doctrinal clarity and faithfulness to Scripture. The desire to co-operate in missions resulted in less emphasis placed on the distinguishing marks of the various participating churches and missionaries. At the same time, Modernism (i.e. theological Liberalism) arose in Germany in the late 19th century, questioning the traditional understanding of the authority of Scripture, and advocating intellectual engagement with contemporary and scientific ideas. C. H. Spurgeon fought Modernism in Britain in the Downgrade Controversy to no avail. Modernists propagated the social gospel in which emphasis is placed on good works at the expense of gospel preaching. Modernism spread to America, and also to other parts of the world through Modernist missionaries.

5.2 Evangelical Fragmentation (1900-2000)

Around the years 1900 to 1930, the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy (or Evangelical-Liberal Clash) occurred in the West. Key Evangelical leaders got together to published a series of books on various aspects of theology, called the 'Fundamentals', to counter Modernism. When the advance of Modernism was contained, the Evangelicals quarrelled among themselves over differences. They split into three camps, namely the Fundamentalists, the Reformed, and the Neo-Evangelicals. A fourth group arose at that time, called Pentecostalism, which believed in the restoration of the extraordinary gifts of tongue-speaking, healing, and prophecy, and the extraordinary offices of apostle and prophet. Pentecostalism began to affect many denominations, morphing into the Charismatic movement (or Signs and Wonders movement) from the 1960s. Today, many uninformed Christians use the word 'Evangelical' loosely as though it is equivalent to the word 'Protestant'. They wrongly think that there are two main groups of Christians – the Evangelicals and the Catholics. Theologically differ-

5. FOR GLORY AND BEAUTY

entiated, there are these five main groups among the Protestants – the Liberals, the Fundamentalists, the Reformed, the Neo-Evangelicals, and the Charismatics – with others holding to shades of difference between them.

This was the age when Evangelicals were divided over issues such as social actions, ecumenism, mass evangelism, the theories of missions, and charismaticism.² Social actions continued to be pushed by the Modernists into the 20th century, until it was checked by the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy of 1900-1930. This was followed by the mass evangelism of Billy Graham (1918-2018) after World War II (1939-1945). Evangelicals were divided over whether to support the Billy Graham crusades because of the use of the altar call and his practice of sending professing converts back to their churches that were not evangelical. From the 1950s the Modern Church Growth movement appeared, advocating the use of sociological observations, marketing strategies and the 'seeker-sensitive' approach to win numbers at the expense of spiritual depth. In the 1960s the Christian Reconstruction movement caused a stir by advocating the application of Old Testament civil and moral laws to

5.3. Evangelical Realignment (post-2000)

modern society. The Ecumenical movement, which had begun with co-operation in missions in the previous century, received a new impetus when men in the Church of England, sought reunification with the Church of Rome. Their effort was extended to co-operation in missions with other denominations, gaining intellectual acceptance by placing men in academia, and adopting contemporary worship in their meetings. In the 1960s, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) took a stance against ecumenism and called for separation from compromised churches. Reformed theology gained steady recovery through the ministry of Lloyd-Jones.

5.3 Evangelical Realignment (post-2000)

After the Evangelical-Liberal Clash of 1900-1930, a theological realignment began to take place which has continued to today (See Fig. 5.1). Some Fundamentalists have become Reformed, some Reformed men have become Neo-Evangelical, and some Pente-

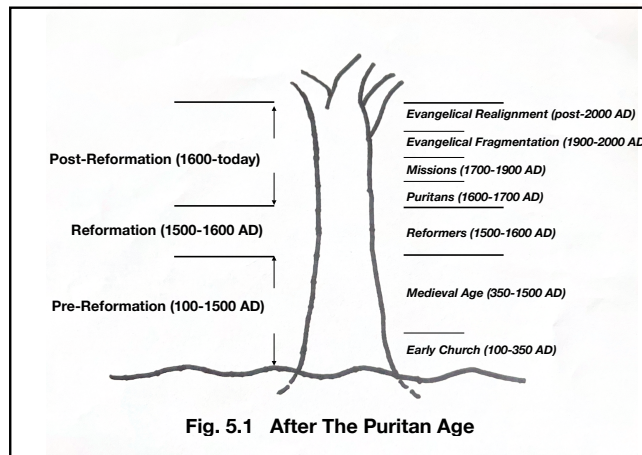
²*Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950-2000*, by Iain H. Murray.

5. FOR GLORY AND BEAUTY

costals have embraced Reformed theology. A number of Neo-Evangelicals who promoted intellectual respectability, ecumenical unity, and social concerns have become Roman Catholics or joined Eastern Orthodox churches. A new generation of Christians who grow up, or are converted, in this fluid situation have become confused or disillusioned with the shallow and subjective teaching offered by the churches. In their search for substance, they have been attracted to the Reformed faith. Sadly, most of them stop short at the Five Points of Calvinism and proceed no farther. The doctrine of God's sovereign grace in salvation grips them but they have not understood the fuller implications of the sole authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice.

While Reformed churches have been planted around the world, the distinctive marks of a Reformed church have not been articulated clearly or convincingly. The adoption of Reformed doctrine and practice by those from other theological backgrounds has been in a piecemeal manner. We are, therefore, confronted by a situation in which there are Christians who claim to be Reformed but are happy to remain in non-Reformed churches, and there are Baptist churches

5.3. Evangelical Realignment (post-2000)



claiming to be Reformed Baptist simply because they have adopted the Five Points of Calvinism in place of Arminianism, or the New Hampshire Confession instead of the 1689 Confession of Faith. At the same time, these churches harbour questionable beliefs and practices while neglecting weightier issues – often pleading congregational liberty and uniqueness of circumstances to justify themselves. While it is within their rights to call themselves ‘Reformed’, they seem not to appreciate the traditional understanding of the word. They also display ignorance of, or disregard for, the spirit of *semper reformanda* – always being reformed.

5.4 Assessment

In this Age of Evangelical Realignment, it is crucial to ask, *What sort of churches do we want to be?* and *What sort of churches do we wish to plant?* We do not want our effort, resources, and opportunities to be wasted in planting wishy-washy churches that are only Reformed in name. I am a convinced Reformed Baptist who desire to establish churches that hold to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. It is my considered opinion that the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith is the most mature of the Confessions of Faith that arose from the Reformation and the Puritan Age. It advocates a regenerate church membership – i.e. only born-again believers are to be admitted into membership, through baptism by immersion. It advocates the Independent form of church government, in which the church is autonomous, ruled by elders who are led by a pastor, with decisions made involving congregational consent. That must not be understood to mean I am parochial in spirit, having fellowship only with Reformed Baptists. The converse is true. We have had meaningful and mutually beneficial fellowship with other Reformed churches and other Evan-

gelical churches over the years.

The imperative of striving to be a model church is clear in an age of confusion and uncertainty. Indeed, we must not stop there. From striving to be a model church we must proceed to become a flagship church, leading the way to plant other churches that are like-minded.³ We do not wait to be perfect before beginning to plant other churches. We do as we are able, or rather, as enabled by our God. We co-operate with the churches we have planted for mutual well-being and in wider church planting. This seems to be the original intent of Article 14, Chapter 26, of the 1689 Confession of Faith: “The churches, when planted by the providence of God, ought to hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification, so as to enjoy the opportunity and benefit of such communion.”⁴ This would be much facilitated if each church adopts the Threefold Ministry of the Lord – in which is systematic teaching to build up the faith of believers, regular preaching of the gospel to win souls, and good works done quietly in conjunction with teaching and preaching (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Acts 20:20-21, 27, 34-35; Tit. 3:8, 14). Furthermore, each church should work towards

5. FOR GLORY AND BEAUTY

achieving ‘three-self independence’ as soon as possible – viz. self-governance, self-propagation, and self-support. Self-support is often the last to be achieved in many missions situation. Unhappily, this is often prolonged indefinitely. There is no glory in serving God under perpetual, external, financial support. A self-supported church, in association with like-minded churches, will be able to support other new church plants.

Is your church, and the churches you have planted, truly Reformed Baptist? How far are you from being a model church? It will be a helpful and enlightening exercise to assess your church(es) with the check-list below:

THE ROOT

The Trinity []

The sole authority of Scripture []

Justification by faith alone []

THE TRUNK

The Apostles’ Creed []

³*World Missions Today*, by Boon-Sing Poh, pp. 265-268.

⁴Modern English version as in *What Is A Confessional Church?* by Boon-Sing Poh.

- The Five Sola's of the Reformation []
- The Regulative Principle of Worship []
- The Five Points of Calvinism []
- The Primacy of God's Word []

THE CROWN

The Prophethood of Christ

- Subscription to the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith []
- Primacy of Scripture in public services and weekly Bible Study []

The Priesthood of Christ

- Public services controlled by Regulative Principle and Primacy of Scripture []
- Auxiliary services controlled by Regulative Principle and Primacy of Scripture []

The Kingship of Christ

- Biblical church government []
- Biblical missions, including local outreach and wider church planting []

5.5 Conclusion

We desire our own church, and the churches we plant, to be healthy, strong, and faithful to the Lord. We desire our churches to reflect the glory and beauty of Christ in the world. For this to happen, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) must be seen in the life of the members, while the church strives to uphold the doctrine and practice delineated by our ecclesiastical tree (See Fig. 5.2). We may not achieve perfection on earth, either in our personal or church life, but God's word is sure: "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chron. 16:9). To God be all the glory!

* * * * *

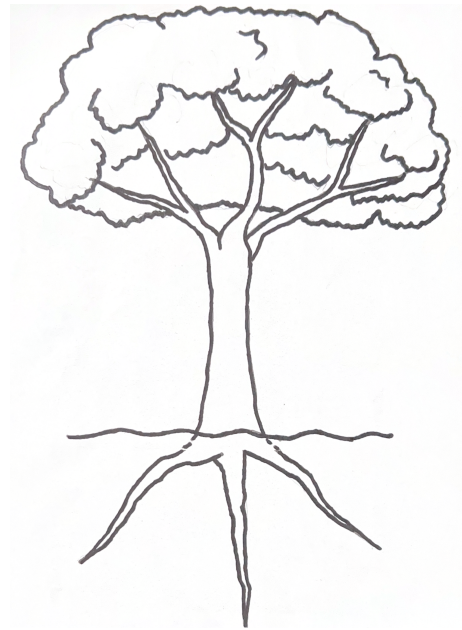


Fig. 5.2 The Complete Tree: For Glory And Beauty

Other Books By The Same Author:

- 1 A BASIC CATECHISM OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH
- 2 A GARDEN ENCLOSED: A Historical Study And Evaluation Of The Form Of Church Government Practised By The Particular Baptists In The 17th And 18th Centuries
- 3 AGAINST PARITY: A Response To The Parity View Of The Church Eldership
- 4 A MULTIFACETED JEWEL: Studies on the Local Church
- 5 BACK TO THE OLD PATH! First Steps To Reformation (booklet)
- 6 BEWARE OF THE ECUMENICAL AGENDA!: A Response To 'More Calvinistic Than Calvin'
- 7 CESSATIONISM OR CONTINUATIONISM?: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Related Passages
- 8 FLEE ALSO YOUTHFUL LUSTS: An Exposition of 2 Timothy 2:22
- 9 GIDEON'S EXPLOITS: Serving God In Challenging Times
- 10 INDEPENDENCY: The Biblical Form Of Church Government
- 11 IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH: A Quest For The Biblical Form Of Worship
- 12 SATAN'S STRATEGY, GOD'S REMEDY (evangelistic booklet)
- 13 TAMING JACOB: How A Restless Soul Found Peace With God
- 14 THE CHRISTIAN IN THE CHINESE CULTURE
- 15 THE FUNDAMENTALS OF OUR FAITH: Studies On The 1689 Baptist Confession Of Faith
- 16 THE HIDDEN LIFE: A Call To Discipleship

-
- 17 THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM: A Study On The Biblical Form
Of Church Government
 - 18 THE NEGLECTED DISCIPLINE OF FASTING (booklet)
 - 19 THE ROSE OF SHARON, THE LILY OF THE VALLEYS: An Ex-
position on the Song of Solomon
 - 20 THOROUGHGOING REFORMATION: What It Means To Be Truly
Reformed
 - 21 WHAT IS A CONFESSIONAL CHURCH?: With the 1689 Con-
fession
 - 22 WHAT IS A REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH?
 - 23 WORLD MISSIONS TODAY: A Theological, Exegetical, and Prac-
tical Perspective Of Missions

* * * * *