

To: All members of the NSW, Queensland and Victorian ACBM Regional Committees.

Dear Brethren

Important Questions For the NSW, Queensland and Victorian Regional Committees

Please find enclosed an updated version of the Taipei Ecclesia Timeline prepared by Bro. Abraham Wang and myself as founding members and representatives of the Taipei ecclesia¹. This timeline details the key events and circumstances which led to the Taipei ecclesia's decision to withdraw fellowship from Bro. Jonathan Burke for his belief in God-directed evolution (GDE), which is fundamentally at odds with the clear teachings of the Bible, at least 9 Clauses of the BASF, and both the ACBM and UK CBM baptism guidelines.

It was good to be able to travel to Australia recently and be present in person at the extraordinary ACBM National Committee meeting held on 3rd September, 2016, in order to clarify the events, as they took place in Taiwan, from the perspective of the brethren and sisters who meet in Taiwan. At this meeting I presented an early draft version of the attached Taipei Ecclesia Timeline. In the spirit of Matthew 18 I am pleased we could provide sufficient information in the timeline and give direct answers during the meeting to satisfy your questions and that you have been able to report back to your ecclesias with a more complete picture of the events which led to the disfellowship of Bro. Jonathan.

However, certain content of the three regional committee submissions, as highlighted in the table on page 3, have raised a number of serious questions in the minds of the founders and members of Taipei ecclesia. As you re-read these specific comments in the table on page 3, let me assure you that Bro. Jonathan Burke has openly admitted that:

- a) He does not agree with a traditional understanding of the BASF:

"the BASF was not written with the aim of accommodating evolution; it was written specifically with the understanding that all humans are descendants of Adam, and that Evolution is false

[Jonathan Burke: November, 2013, Introduction to his side-by-side interpretation of the BASF which contains his own re-interpretation of BASF Clauses 3-6, 8 & 10 in a manner that totally corrupts the original intended meaning of each Clause – see Appendix 3 of attached timeline]

"James' [Paul Chappel's] position on evolution is the same as mine. It would have been rejected by our pioneers and is rejected by most of our community, as I have made very clear to our ecclesia more than once. It's not the same as the position Watford rejected, since brother Lovelock believed Cain married a non-human and I believe he married a human. But Watford would have rejected this position as well. There's no doubt that this is rejected by most of our community, but it is accommodated by some ecclesias in Australia as well as by Michael Newman and Steve Cox I have already explained in explicit detail how the traditional reading of the BASF does not accommodate evolution, and I've been totally open about the fact that I'm prepared for others to withdraw from me. That's their business." [Jonathan Burke: text message to James Larsen dated 27 September, 2015].

¹ By way of background, I first came to Taipei in 2001 to open a branch of my business and I employed Abraham and preached the truth to him. Subsequently over the next few years we were preaching to members of Bro. Abraham's church in Taipei, several of whom became the core members of the Taipei ecclesia which was established in 2005. Bro. Jonathan and Sis. Dianne Burke's arrival in Taipei in 2004 was very timely, as it helped build momentum for the establishment of the ecclesia, and in the early period I assisted Bro. Jonathan with employment and hence his residency status in Taiwan. Although my business activities in Taipei scaled down in 2011, I still manage to spend around three months each year in Taipei with this very precious group of less than 10 brethren and sisters. I have been present at every baptism, am included in and proactively contribute to all ecclesial correspondence and activities. Hence, I know Bro. Jonathan extremely well, and one of the most difficult things I have ever had to do in my whole life was to hand him the Taipei ecclesia's letter of withdrawal in December 2015.

- b) He does not agree with the Australian Unity Agreement, specifically the Cooper-Carter Addendum to Clause 5 and 12

*"I have already made it totally clear that the Cooper-Carter Addendum states truth when it says Adam suffered a defiled conscience as a consequence [sic] sin, but **that the Cooper-Carter Addendum states error when it says Adam suffered mortality as a consequence of sin.**" [Jonathan Burke: email to Bro. James Larsen, 05 December 2013].*

Moreover, as a reminder, Bro Jonathan personally expressed his disagreement with the BASF and the Unity Agreement during the extraordinary meeting, which are tabled in the minutes, as follows:

Supporting Bro James' comments, Bro Jonathan advised the meeting that "James tried to convince me of my error". Bro Jonathan went on to say that he believes in Evolution.

Brother James Larsen continued by stating that Bro Jonathan may not have been teaching his TE views during this time but. had expressed his views extensively online.

*Brother James Larsen then asked Bro Jonathan **if his views that the BASF contains error were still the case. Bro Jonathan confirmed this was the case and continued, saying, he also believed the Unity Agreement contains error.***

It also goes without saying that Bro. Jonathan does not agree with the ACBM's own baptism and fieldworker guidelines on matters relating to creation and that mortality and proneness to sin came as a consequence of sin.

Some relevant excerpts from the **ACBM Baptismal Guidelines** in conflict with GDE are as follows:

Creation

- The order of creation and length of the days. Exodus 31:17
- The error of evolution. Romans 1:22-25

The Formation of Man

- Before the fall man was capable of death but not subject to death. Genesis 1:31

Sin and It's Consequence

- As a result of Adam's sin he, and his descendants are mortal, i.e. they suffer sickness and pain, are tempted and have a nature prone to sin, and grow old and die. Romans 5:12, Romans 8:3

Devil and Satan

- Devil is a false accuser at enmity with the ways of God, and symbolises sin. Titus 2:3, Acts 13:10, Hebrews 2:14, 1 John 3:8.
- Sin comes from the wicked heart of man; we are responsible for our own sins. James 1:14-15, Mark 7:21, Ezekiel 18:20

Relevant excerpts from the **ACBM Fieldworker Guidelines** in conflict with GDE are as follows:

Atonement: That by the first sin in Eden, the Divine sentence came into effect and Adam fell from his very good state both morally and physically, and since that time, as his descendants, we inherit the same mortality which came by sin and its physical consequences, namely a sin biased nature leading inevitably to death.

Jesus also himself likewise shared that nature as a member of the race he came to save. As a representative man, having "obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12) through the things which he suffered, he has opened up the way for the forgiveness of the sins of others who come unto God through him

Selected Comments from Regional Committee Submissions to the ACBM Extraordinary Meeting	
NSW RC	<p>"We believe that the ACBM and its fieldworkers must represent all of its membership in good faith. In the view of some NSW ecclesias, this means respecting the inter-ecclesial basis of fellowship: specifically not withholding baptism from candidates whom some of our ACBM-affiliated ecclesias would baptise, and not dis-fellowshipping brothers or sisters whom some of our ACBM-affiliated ecclesias would willingly have in fellowship."</p> <p>"Some NSW ecclesias, though not all, see the present situation in Taiwan as two small ecclesias. Some feel more affinity with the smaller group on account of the basis of inter-ecclesial fellowship in Australia, and their own decisions regarding fellowship and baptism."</p> <p>"How are both groups in Taiwan to be supported, for as long as they are not reconciled?"</p>
VIC RC	<p>"Do members of the ACBM national committee accept that our worldwide (i.e Central) fellowship basis is the BASF and the basis of fellowship in Australia is the BASF, the Australian Unity agreement and the agreement by the Australian ecclesias that this basis is "without addition or further explanation" (as agreed at the recent Australian Christadelphian conference)?</p> <p>"Are you aware that there are members of ACBM affiliated ecclesias who believe the same as bro Jonathan Burke, and in some cases, have been/are ACBM fieldworkers or ACBM office bearers?"</p> <p>"Did you inform members of the Taipei Ecclesia, that the subject of creation and evolution is a matter which is still generating a great deal of discussion in our worldwide community and that there is NOT an accepted community view concerning the matter?"</p> <p>"The NSW regional committee makes the point that some NSW ecclesias see the situation now as the existence of two ecclesias in Taiwan. What actions are being taken to support both ecclesias and to promote a re- fellowshiping of all concerned in order to re-establish unity?"</p>
QLD RC	<p>"3. Objects. a. To preach in the nations of the Asia–Pacific region the Gospel taught by the Apostles, being "the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ", as detailed in the Bible, (and conveniently summarised in the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith and Addendum).</p> <p>It seems that the behaviour of certain members of the ACBM is not aligned to the Visions and Objects as stated. We are unhappy about the direct involvement by some South Australian brethren, and other brethren, in the affairs of ecclesias in Taipei and Kunming, resulting in the denial of fellowship to three well known brethren, two of whom are in good standing with their own ecclesias.</p>

After careful considering the above comments, **I have five questions I must ask the three regional committees to separately provide answers to:**

- 1) Given that a) the ACBM accepts the BASF and Cooper Carter Addendum as the basis of fellowship; and b) Bro. Jonathan openly rejects both, how is it possible that there have been/are ACBM fieldworkers or ACBM office bearers believing the same or prepared to accommodate Bro. Jonathan Burke's beliefs? I ask each ACBM regional committee to explain how it is possible and what remedial action they are going to take. How is it possible that these field workers and officers are not influencing the preaching work with their beliefs?
- 2) Do the regional ACBM committees believe that GDE beliefs do not conflict with the BASF? If so, please provide your full explanation as to why GDE does not conflict with our BASF, specifically addressing the Foundation Clause and Clauses 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 & 12. Please make reference to the BASF tables (covering all of these Clauses) we have prepared in Appendix 3 of the Taipei Ecclesial Timeline explaining our view of why GDE beliefs conflict, as this reference is crucial, and please provide sufficient detail to make your position clear.

- 3) Do the Regional ACBM committees stand for the doctrines taught in our BASF with particular reference to the clauses above? Are these doctrines the ACBM will defend? Will the ACBM regional committees, as representatives of the Christadelphian community in the mission fields, continue to preach and defend these core doctrines as vital for salvation? Or do they feel that ecclesias in mission areas are free to select what parts of the BASF they like, and reject other parts with which they disagree?
- 4) Do the regional ACBM committees recognise baptisms as legitimate in cases where candidates in actual fact do not accept a traditional reading of the BASF, with particular reference to the abovementioned Clauses? In this regard, do the regional ACBM committees think it permissible for relevant questions to be skipped, for example in the ACBM or UK CBM baptism guidelines, that would reveal these key areas of disbelief with our accepted basis of fellowship?
- 5) Do the regional ACBM committees recognise the existence of a second ecclesia in Taipei, whose members have openly expressed their disagreement with the BASF and the Cooper-Carter Addendum as explained above?

In the spirit of Matthew 18, **I would like your direct and detailed answers to these questions** so that I can accurately report to the Taipei Ecclesia, other ecclesias world-wide, and others that have asked my opinion whether or not, post this extraordinary meeting, the ACBM, or certain ACBM committee members, are prepared to accept into fellowship those who believe in GDE and who cannot agree with a traditional reading of our BASF.

To assist the three regional committees making a response to this, the attached Taipei Ecclesia Timeline contains significantly more detailed information than the draft version I first presented at the extraordinary meeting. This version contains a number of important appendices including all the key ecclesial documents referenced in the timeline including Bro. Jonathan's rejection of a traditional reading of the BASF, his own interpretation of the BASF, our review of why his beliefs are in conflict with at least 9 Clauses of the BASF, and a table illustrating why it is impossible to harmonise GDE beliefs with the UK CBM baptism guidelines.

Another important reason for making available the updated timeline is to provide the regional ACBM committees with sufficient insight as to what is likely to happen all over the mission fields if the ACBM does not focus on this problem and allows the mission field work to be guided by GDE believers. There is no doubt that ignoring this problem will result in similar problems all over the mission fields.

I cannot emphasize enough how the second half of 2015 was a time of great distress and sadness for the small group of fewer than 10 brethren and sisters at the Taipei ecclesia. Unfortunately, their distress continues throughout 2016 as accusations continue to be made to the effect that they did not know what they were doing, and/or were influenced by outsiders who forced them to disfellowship Bro. Jonathan. Undoubtedly this was a very stressful time for Bro. Jonathan and Sis. Dianne as well. However, it is important to keep in mind that the many crises this small ecclesia encountered during 2015 were of Bro. Jonathan's making when he gave the Taipei ecclesia an ultimatum to accept the baptism of one of his contacts, who like him, believes in evolution as God's method of creation. Hence, the timeline attached provides full details on this, as well as highlighting some of the ongoing issues and concerns surrounding the subsequent baptism of Bro. Jonathan's contact which was supported by Bro. Steven Cox.

The answers of the three regional committees to our five questions above are either going to set the vast majority of the ecclesial world adhering to the BASF at rest, or simply explain that the ACBM is not united and that an ecclesia must expect ongoing interference from individuals believing or accommodating GDE that is tacitly supported by ACBM regions.

When answering the questions, please remember that the one central issue that led to the "events in Taiwan", which in turn resulted in this extraordinary meeting being called, was Bro. Jonathan's belief in GDE. He rejects a traditional understanding of the BASF, cannot agree with the Australian

Unity Agreement on Clause 5 & 12, has been proactively promoting GDE since 2009 globally on the internet (using the name of the Taipei ecclesia), and in 2015 he tried to force the acceptance of his false teachings on the Taipei ecclesia by giving them an ultimatum to accept the baptism of James Paul Chappell who, like Bro. Jonathan, believes in GDE. Bro. Jonathan was asking the Taipei ecclesia to set a world-wide precedent, and put itself out of fellowship with the vast majority of Christadelphians, both historically and currently. Specifically, to our knowledge this is the first time in Central Fellowship a candidate for baptism included in his personal statement of faith an open belief in GDE, and declared that he would not be baptized unless his views on this subject were accommodated.

GDE is a doctrine our community has always rejected from the pioneers to today. Our community has in recent years had to make a global stand against this false teaching, which has largely been propelled using the Internet and social media, with Bro. Jonathan being one of the main promoters in this regard. All of the main Christadelphian magazines are united against GDE, and brethren who are prominent scientists in relevant fields have rallied to assure us that the assertions of GDE are false. Our worldwide community views this as a serious doctrinal problem with its roots stemming from ecclesias in Australia, and now there is concern that the ACBM is prepared to accommodate GDE and is promoting it in the mission field.

GDE cannot be read into the BASF, or taught from ACBM baptismal guidelines. If fieldworkers and brethren in mission areas, or anywhere, try to accommodate GDE they are knowingly and significantly changing a raft of established scriptural definitions that are at the core of our faith in God.

Gospel truth, doctrinal truth matter, brethren. There should never be any confusion about this. This issue is a matter of false teaching and divisive behaviour, yet the refusal of your regional committees' letters to acknowledge the broader issue of the false teaching of GDE and the failure to perform basic fact checking as per Matthew 18 has left many in the mission fields deeply disturbed. There is a deep concern that ACBM will be sponsoring field workers and teachers into the mission field believing in GDE, and that this Australian-rooted false doctrine will continue to be promoted internationally with the tacit approval of the ACBM and its sponsoring ecclesias.

It is impossible for someone to preach the Gospel unless they have one faith. Our one faith is defined by the BASF which is our agreed statement of The Faith. **I would be grateful if you could answer my five questions above as individual regions first.** Once we have your answers we can put them out to review to a wider audience, hopefully to put minds at rest regarding this very important issue.

Ephesians 4:2–6 (AV) With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

I look forward to your urgent response.

Your Brother in Christ, James Larsen