

The ²⁰⁰¹ Vine

Millennium



Grace to you
and peace from God
our Father!

The year 2000 passed and
we are moving into the new
millennium officially.
Beginning a new year 2001
perhaps we could ask
ourselves a few questions.

1. *Do I have a single goal in life that stimulates and motivates me daily in everything that I do?*
2. *If I reduce my life to one primary goal, what would it be?*

Goals are important because they are determinative of what we do with the life God has given us. Without goals one accomplish very little in life. There is a saying: "Some people make things happen, some watch what happens and some wondered what happened?" In which category are you?



The Choir and guest singers gave a presentation of Christmas carols at the Singapore Philatelic Museum on 15th December 2000 and another presentation on 17th December 2000 at Suntec City.

However it is not just a matter of having goals but having the right goals.

Question: But why are our lives so busy these days but lacking in a well defined biblical purpose?

The famous Westminster Shorter Catechism states that, "Man's chief purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." The Apostle Paul stressed that the main goals in the Christian's life are: (1) Knowing Christ experientially; (2) Christian maturity – to be like Christ in attitude and conduct; (3) Obtaining Future blessings promised by God. (see Philippians 3:7-14).

The world has a subtle way of intruding into our lives and stealing what should be the major focus or goal of our life as Christian. God's promise to us in Isaiah 26:3 is this: "God will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in God." This probably means that God is not oblivious to our problems and needs in life but when our focus is in the Lord, something wonderful begins to happen in us – God begins to change us and make us like His Son Jesus Christ, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame." (Hebrews 12:2). Let us be on guard and run the race that we can obtain the prize of the upward call of Christ.
Amen.

Pastor Martin Yee

Mission to Cambodia



Anthony, Meiling and Karen

In December 2000, Anthony and family spent 12 days in Cambodia doing outreach work in 4 universities there.

The result: thousands of people got to hear the message of salvation and hundreds committed themselves to Christ.

Your mission: to continue to pray for the seed that had been sown, that God will cause it to grow into a big tree, and that the enemy will not snatch it away from these new believers.

A Parable of Love & Obedience

A long time ago, a girl named Li-Li got married and went to live with her husband and mother-in-law. In a very short time, Li-Li found that she couldn't get along with her mother-in-law at all. Their personalities were very different, and Li-Li was angered by many of her mother-in-law's habits. In addition, she criticized Li-Li constantly. Days passed days, and weeks passed weeks. Li-Li and her mother-in-law never stopped arguing and fighting. But what made the situation even worse was that, according to ancient Chinese tradition, Li-Li had to bow to her mother-in-law and obey her every wish. All the anger and unhappiness in the house was causing the poor husband great distress.

Finally, Li-Li could not stand her mother-in-law's bad temper and dictatorship any longer, and she decided to do something about it. Li-Li went to see her father's good friend, Mr. Huang, who sold herbs. She told him the situation and asked if he would give her some poison so that she could solve the problem once and for all.

Mr. Huang thought for awhile, and finally said, Li-Li, I will help you solve your problem, but you must listen to me and obey what I tell you. Li-Li said, "Yes, Mr. Huang, I will do whatever you tell me to do." Mr. Huang went into the back room, and returned in a few minutes with a package of herbs. He told Li-Li, "You can't use a quick-acting poison to get rid of your mother-in-law, because that would cause people to become suspicious. Therefore, I have given you a number of herbs that will slowly build up poison in her body. Every other day prepare some pork or chicken and put a little of these herbs in her serving. Now, in order to make sure that nobody suspects you when she dies, you must be very careful to act very friendly towards her. Don't argue with her, obey her every wish, and treat her like a queen. Li-Li was so happy. She thanked Mr. Huang and hurried home to start her plot of murdering her mother-in-law.

Weeks went by, and months went by, and every other day, Li-Li served the specially treated food to her mother-in-law. She remembered what Mr. Huang had said about avoiding suspicion, so she controlled her temper, obeyed her mother-in-law, and treated her like her own mother.

After six months had passed, the whole household had changed. Li-Li had practiced controlling her temper so much that she found that she almost never got mad or upset. She hadn't had an argument in six months with her mother-in-law, who now seemed much kinder and easier to get along with.

The mother-in-law's attitude toward Li-Li changed, and she began to love Li-Li like her own daughter. She kept telling friends and relatives that Li-Li was the best daughter-in-law one could ever find. Li-Li and her mother-in-law were now treating each other like a real mother and daughter. Li-Li's husband was very happy to see what was happening.

One day, Li-Li came to see Mr. Huang and asked for his help again. She said, "Dear Mr. Huang, please help me to keep the poison from killing my mother-in-law! She's changed into such a nice woman, and I love her like my own mother. I do not want her to die because of the poison I gave her."

Mr. Huang smiled and nodded his head. "Li-Li, there's nothing to worry about. I never gave you any poison. The herbs I gave you were vitamins to improve her health. The only poison was in your mind and your attitude toward her, but that has been all washed away by the love which you gave to her."

source : e-mail from a friend.

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8 January 2001

Dear faithful friends,

The new millenium has started before we could get an update out. After our July 2000 update, we have been busy with the Doulos line up team in Kuching, sending off a family to N.Africa and following up a few enquiries besides the usual administration.



On 23 Oct, we left for Bintulu. Our expected one-week trip turned up to be 3 1/2 weeks. We ended up assisting with the advance preparation for the ship in Bintulu. With God's help we were able to do that in 8 days! With Edward, we worked non-stop, overtime to get everything from legal, publicity and teams to churches. Jedidiah and Jeswyn were looked after by a child-care centre from morning to evening to enable Jenny to assist full-time. Praise God for this Christian sister who accepted them at the last minute for one week. When the ship arrived in Bintulu we moved onboard and became the link between the ship's company and the churches, besides being the host country office representative, not always easy when we still have two active kids to take care.

A highlight of the DOULOS' ministry in **Bintulu** was visiting the long houses of the tribal people. One local fellowship leader had gained a vision to visit long houses when the DOULOS was here in 1999. Through these visits a total of 66 people indicated that they would like to stay in touch with the local fellowship leader, who is more than happy to continue to visit them.

Four Action Teams were sent out to Marudi, Bintangor, Miri and a neighbouring country. God used these teams to speak into the lives of many individuals. Among the various conferences onboard was a combined churches prayer meeting. Eleven teams went out to fellowship on the 2 Sundays emphasised the need for people to become involved in meeting the needs in the world. Despite the short notice of the ship's arrival, the on board volunteer programme was attended by eight people and all of them acknowledged how working on the DOULOS changed their attitude towards menial work and valuing the people who do that kind of work day in day out. All honour to HIM who enables the ship to have a full programme in Bintulu and 4 A-Teams out.

On the morning of 15 Nov, we drove from Bintulu to Kuching as Doulos sailed from Bintulu to Kuching. We arrived late in that evening while the ship sailed in the next

morning. We stayed at home for the first part of the Doulos in Kuching as our co-workers stayed onboard. We again stayed onboard during the last week of the ship in town. We were again busy with hosting partners and handling enquiries.

In **Kuching**, the ship was berthed at Kuching's newest port, a 45 minutes drive out of town, almost 58,000 people visited the ship during the 17 days it was open to the public. The purpose of this fourth visit of the DOULOS to Kuching was to partner with the local church, focusing on the youth, blessing the community and challenging them into the world.

A fellowship invited their friends and neighbours for an evening programme on DOULOS. Because of the unusual venue, about 350 people came and learned more about the DOULOS and the true meaning of Christmas. The event was a great encouragement for the members of that fellowship as they saw people open up and respond positively to the programme.

A highlight of the Kuching's visit was the "Hello World" programme at the indoor stadium in Kuching. This cultural extravaganza was organised by Habitat for Humanity to show that Christians are not locked up in their churches, but that we want to build relationships and show care and concern for our community." The event raised US\$25,000 for four charity organisations in Sarawak.

On 4th Dec, Doulos sailed out of Kuching with many port volunteers waving goodbye at the quayside. We praise God for what He did in Kuching and beyond through the conferences, meetings taken by the ship's teams, and the lives of the port volunteers!

Pray with us that labourers from Sarawak will be sent out as a result of their interactions with the ship's company.

Jenny is still having asthma attacks but had very good consultations with the ship's doctor and now has been recommended an asthma prevention action plan. But the busy few days before Christmas had its toil. Jerry is busy as usual and gets relaxation resurrecting broken down electrical gadgets! Not a bad hobby given that we have quite a few useful items, which are "keep it if you can fix it"!

We thank God for His blessings and for friends like you who have been our support through your prayers and partnership. Have a meaningful & bountiful year in the Lord Jesus.

*Forward by HIS grace & strength,
Jerry, Jenny, Jedidiah & Jeswyn*

Let's Love Without Hypocrisy

(A Commentary on Romans 12:9 as well as the Great Commandment)

The NKJV says, "Let love be without hypocrisy."

In interpreting Romans 12:9, I have previously limited the verse as an aspect of man's relationship to man. The thought occurred to me that this scripture may also be applicable to the situation that Abraham faced when God told him to take Isaac to the Mountain to be slain. Abraham loved Isaac very much and God was testing Abraham to see if his love toward Him was imperfect, whether he loved Isaac more than He loved God. The great commandment of Matt. 22:37 would seem to be an absolute, no shades of grey. This command involves priorities, commitment, and no dissimulation. Anything less is imperfect love of God as well as some measure of idolatry. Today it is commonly recognized that idolatry involves exulting any created thing above God; i.e., exulting other people, material things, our accomplishments, etc. (See Deut. 5:8-9; Matt. 22:36-40)

The Greek word for the phrase "without hypocrisy" (*anupokritos*) is translated "without dissimulation" in the KJV, which is not a commonly used word but maybe not archaic. Dissimulation includes ideas such as pretense, hypocrisy, and deception.

NIV states "Love must be sincere."
RSV: "Let love be genuine..."
NEB: "Love in all sincerity..."
NAS: "Let love be without hypocrisy."

The Greek word *agape* or its derivatives are the kind of love that is being here discussed. It has unique meaning in the Christian context.

Agape described a unique type of supreme love involving a conscious and deliberate choice to do good for another, a commitment based on the willful choice of the lover, not the qualities of the person receiving the love. *Agape*-love is perhaps best seen in God's love for the world (John 3:16) and in the love that God calls believers to display (1 Cor. 13: 1-13)

When Jesus recalled the greatest of the commandments, both of which had to do with love (Matt. 22:34-40), He was calling for *agape*-love, a sustained and conscious choice to graciously serve God, neighbor, and self, expecting nothing in return. Followers of Christ learn this kind of love as God loves them first. He then commands us to live in the same way toward others (1 John 3:11-24). God's love empowers us to love by choice rather than just emotion or senses, and to sustain our love even in the face of hostility or rejection.

Contrary to popular understanding, the significance of *agape* is not that it is an unconditional love, but that it is primarily a love of the will rather than the emotions. The New Testament never speaks of God loving unbelieving human beings with emotional love or a love that expects something in return. But He loves with His will (John 3:16; Rom.

5:8) (Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary)

Obviously, love with hypocrisy is not God's kind of love. Looking at the passages that follow in Matthew 5 and Luke 6, I cannot discount the unconditional love or love that does not expect reciprocation. Love with hypocrisy is at best limited love. At worst, hypocritical love seems to be a contradiction; i.e., not love at all. Hypocritical love discriminates whether it be racial, age, sex, economic, beauty, size, social, ethnic, etc.

Consider, what Jesus said in Matt. 5:46: "For if you love (*agape*) those who love (*agape*) you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" The taxpayer in this sense implies the unrepentant as well as the idea that the unrepentant can love (*agape*) those that love (*agape*) them. Verse 48 goes on to say, "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Consider further Luke 6:27-37:

This love is going to show up in actions, i.e., do good to sinners without expecting back the same (vs. 34). Yet there is a promise of future reward (vs. 35).

In context of Romans 12, "let us love without hypocrisy" is an admonition for the renewing of our minds and for us to put the Word into practice. In Jesus prayer (John 17:26), His desire was that the love of the Father would also be in us in order that the world knows that the Father had sent Him to fulfill the plan of salvation.

The world mindset accepts some notion of "the self being capable enough." This is a viewpoint of the unregenerated or of the Christian still carnally minded. In order for the people of God to move beyond this kind of mindset, they need to put the "macho man" behind them and put on the new man. The Christian needs to be spiritually receptive to move to a deeper relationship with God. If you have children or grandchildren, you have probably heard the 2 to 3-year-old say, "I will do it myself." Isn't this just the basis for works-based religion? No, we do not reach the point where we love God without hypocrisy by doing it ourselves. We must be teachable, we must listen, and we must change the natural man's attitude. Nevertheless, Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. His example is our way. The attitude shift involved is to quit trying to take God's place. Nothing will restore order till our hearts make the decision: God shall be exalted above all.

In 1 Sam. 2, a messenger came to Eli. 1 Sam. 2:29 'Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?' 30 "Therefore the Lord God of Israel says: 'I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.' But now the Lord says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. (New KJV)

Because of his imperfect love, placing the created (his sons) above God, Eli and his house lost their place in the priesthood.

THE NEW ECONOMY EXPRESS PART II

By John Lee

Looks like the New Economy Express is now chugging along, having lost speed at such a rate as bewildering as the way it originally



hustled with passengers raring for a ride. It was only six months ago (June Vine) when I wrote about passengers abandoning themselves to the rush for a precious seat! Is it because the train is losing diesel? More likely, the realisation has dawned that the prospective gold mine in the distance was but an illusion and now a negative kind of anxiety rules with mines of a

different (explosive) sort lying in wait along the track, threatening derailment if not to blow the train up altogether – the DOTBOMB SCARE!

From a promising dotcom to a sobering dotbomb, how much longer will it be before the New Economy Choo-Choo Train (Downgraded from an Express) is blown asunder and everything becomes dot-gone?

Fear not, those who still have faith in the bright prospect of the New Economy and all entrepreneurs who are still searching for the elusive dotcom fortune that probably belongs only to a few privileged individuals. However, to be such fortunate individuals, certain qualities are indispensable: a very strong vertebral column (not one made of pseudoskeleton) and a highly sophisticated taste for bomb risks.

The risk element was not unknown, yet many still got caught with their pants down when the dotcom bubble burst. "It was no accident. It was a time bomb," said Minister of State Lim Swee Say.

Yes, if those fire-charred entrepreneurs still have their backbones intact and have learnt their painful lessons on risk calculations, they still have a second chance to go after more than \$10 billion of venture funds. They should be greatly challenged by the promise of an explosive growth potential in IT applications in gigantic markets like India and China.

Baptism



Keith Loke Karen Siew Alan Soh



Baby
Moses
Lim

on 25 Dec 2000

John 12:25 "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor."

When one follows Jesus, surely He is the Way. This is not to say that one has to be perfect because there are numerous examples in the Bible of men that were not perfect, yet God gave them honour because they tried to glorify God in their earthly walk. God accepted their intention as fact and acted accordingly. Not necessarily practical perfection, but holy intention made the difference. To us Jesus is the pattern.

John 8:54 Jesus answered, "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. 55 "Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word."

In order to have relationship with the Father, we must be like Jesus. We must know Him, not just know about Him. If we love Him we will obey His commandments. There can be an intimacy and progression toward perfection. No, it is not too tough to say, "Let us love God without hypocrisy."

Therefore a prayer to the corporate Church, "Let love be without hypocrisy" and apply it to both God and man. In Jesus name, Amen.

Condensed from
<http://angelfire.com/md/fwrhp/love>

Despite the word "dot-gone" being coined in prediction of the inevitable collapse of many an enterprising dotcom venture in a fierce war of technological and financial attrition, many are still singing songs of hope that the dotcom slump suggests nothing but just initial problems of an evolving Internet. Some ask that the Internet be given more time for innovative ideas to take root!

Singaporeans are not alien to the rapid pace of change in the IT world. It took only one year for broadband to become the catchword in Internet talk. You cannot win in a game of catch-up with newer and newer models of mobile phones with greater and greater functionalities. The M1 migration of CDMA to GSM is being planned just as new-fangled WAP-enabled mobiles are making your ordinary GSMs obsolescent. In the New Economy marketplace, there is really no shortage of innovation. The problem is not the lack of it, but the swiftness of change.

Even SM Lee Kuan Yew is caught up with the dizzy demands for surfing the Net that he has no time for books, by his own admission in an interview with International Herald Tribune. He commented, "In the end, you will have a generation that has information (from the Internet) but does not have the wisdom and the understanding of what sense to make out of the information because they haven't read."

Isn't it true that the 2**R**'s of **R**eading and **wR**iting now slip off people's tongues less readily as the 2**R**'s of **sUR**fering and **R**isk-taking? (No wonder there is a dearth of borrowers for books in the Church library and of writers for the Vine. ☹)

I feel that there isn't really too much information on the Internet. "Information", by definition, informs and therefore is capable of edifying our minds. However, so-called "information" on the Net is by a conservative estimate half-junk. The other half may have some intrinsic value but when you are on the Net being bombarded left and right by that "useful" half of the traffic on the Information Highway, and you are perpetually unable to resist the need to dart in and out from hotlinks to hotlinks to absorb meaningful contents, your mind would be swirling before you can even begin to be informed. Ha ... so perhaps we may call 90% of the Internet contents junks and pseudo-information.

No doubt the Internet is a powerful human creation. Alas, man may be clever but not smart! He might want to entertain himself with some fireworks or help himself with quarry-blasting, so he was clever enough to invent gunpowder; unfortunately, he was not smart when he decided to put the gunpowder to "better" use in firearms for decimation of human lives. Man is facing a shortage of fuel for his industries, so he is clever enough to learn the processing of nuclear energy; unfortunately, he has "much better" application of his nuclear power to display his potential for foolishness in decimating the human race. Imagine that in IT, there are countless experts around the world in top-notch governmental agencies as well as high-flying international conglomerates – the foolishness of the illuminati to be felled in one swoop by an imaginary Y2K bug! In a way, the Y2K fear was like a mini-Frankenstein – something man created and succumbed to.

All the hypes about Internet and Dotcoms may just be another testimony of man's foolishness that time will confirm. The hypes of the past have vaporised and new hypes are now being bandied about to revive hopes and assuage those who are bitterly in despair over failed Internet businesses. Subscriptions to tech-stocks and IPOs might perhaps offer some solace to recoup losses in personal ventures. Too bad – in the Internet era, everything forms a chain like dominos; when one falls, the others follow in line. So tech-stocks move south and IPOs thought of as high-powered freeze before even seeing the light of day. What luck – for those who believe in luck! Even existing giants like Microsoft, Amazon, Yahoo, Intel Corp, etc. are not immune to the vagaries of the frenetic marketplace.

It is one thing for individuals to suffer pain of loss; it is another when whole nations are plunged into the depths by shifts of the ground beyond their control. (Call it "Acts of God".) Now, everybody is looking at the US with trepidation. There is something I don't quite understand, and I have no confidence in seeking the help of any economist because economists themselves are struggling to understand economic phenomena vis-à-vis the irrationality of people that never fits rational theories. For years, the US has been enjoying robust economic growth; yet we were not spared a painful recession. Now shortly after that recession was declared over and growths in our economy were proudly announced, we now hear of a waning US economy which is going to bring us another recession. To an ordinary folk like me, a strong US brought us no cheer as we suffered job losses and now a weakening US is going to affect us badly. Looks like we are born-losers. Furthermore, last year Singapore posted a greater than 10%

growth against a prediction of 4 to 6 %. Now, we are staring at a projection of 5 to 7% growth in the coming year with a caution thrown in for good measure that the figures are not guaranteed. Certainly, whatever figures and hopes humans predict are not like prophecies in the Bible.

Our emotions are being played with and kicked around. Dire warnings of potential adversities from drop in US spending (E.g. reports in newspapers) alternate with assurances that all will be well (E.g. "US slowdown? Asia is ready" - Streets Jan 15). Are we fed information, disinformation or misinformation in this Internet age?

The world is indeed lopsided and humans are confused. And the world is but made up of people who rule with their intellect instead of wisdom. So humans are confused by themselves. "How wonderful it is to be wise, to understand things, to be able to analyze them and interpret them. Wisdom lights up a man's face, softening its hardness." (Ecclesiastes 8:1) Unfortunately, there are fools aplenty in the world who worship men's philosophies and ideas (For warning, see Colossians 2:8), despising wisdom and discipline instead of fearing the Lord. (Prov. 1:7)

There are lessons to be learnt from the dotcom failures at the current "evolving stage" of the Internet. If you build a house to two storeys and it collapses, it is a disaster. If you rebuild the house further up to ten storeys, what greater disaster it will bring if its foundation is weak! So it is with the Internet economy – How far will it rise beyond the "evolving stage" before it collapses like a pack of cards? I am not being a wet blanket to those who have high hopes in the Internet economy. The latter have their reasons; I have mine. In fact, at the height of the exuberance with dotcoms, I stated in the March 2000 issue of the Vine ("All About Money"):

"The so-called "New Economy" is not a guarantee of survival, especially for over-confident entrepreneurs who embrace the Internet as a wonder-tool for profitable trade opportunities ... "

"The Internet Economy is not sustainable if it only encourages people to play with money ..."

With the dotbomb jolt, 'prophets' of the world are predicting again that dotcoms can grow again. Yes, I agree. Nevertheless, be cautioned that

after climbing to the sky, dotcoms can fall again. The acceleration of descent will definitely be much more stupendous than the speed of ascent. The reason is half IT-factor and half human-factor; the twain being just strange bedfellows who cannot dwell in harmony. It is like the relationship between your latest Pentium super-Mhz computer and your Deskjet printer. The Pentium provides you with the exhilaration and challenge to surf with the wind, but you don't live by it alone, you need a printer for very down-to-earth reasons. (So much for all the excitement with 'well-supported' predictions in the past about paperless office – another example of human wishful thinking having fallen flat!) When you make use of the two at the same time, how nimble can the printer satisfy the impatience of the computer even if we do not consider the ever-present nuisance of bugs and system glitches? For all the media hard sell about not being left behind in the Internet race, the reality is that you cannot jump on the dotcom wagon with your hands tied behind your back. Consider yourself inexorably linked to the steering of the wagon. You want to steer the wagon, but you realise to your consternation that it has its own momentum far exceeding your power to match. You want to catch up with the momentum of IT growth, but you realise that you are just human flesh and blood with an appallingly low threshold for keeping pace just like the printer can never hope to catch up with the Pentium machine. And you know that the printer is commanded by the Pentium brain and not the other way round! Either the Internet Economy is to be sustained by its own momentum detached from your control (Frightening?) or it collapses on top of you because, although intelligent man is supposed to be in control of brainless machine or technology, you seem to be losing control and it is adding too many storeys to the point where the human prop cannot hold up. We will then not see a dotcom explosion, but a dotcom implosion!

Another reason for the unsustainability of the Internet Economy is that globally, the idea of survival and prosperity through dotcom innovations envisages monies transferring in huge parcels rather than small packages, which means that you either win big or lose big – there is no in-between. No thanks to the part played by human greed, the balance between the haves and have-nots in terms of technological competence as well as wealth will tilt wildly in terms of miniscule time differences between swings as well as the force of each tipping. Science students may visualise the flow of wealth as following the principle of osmosis (in the direction from lower concentration to higher concentration) instead of diffusion. This means that the rich get richer and the poor are sucked dry.

The economic disequilibrium between nations and between peoples within nations will give rise to such huge problems that I dare not contemplate, hoping only that if the world is extricated from the stranglehold of the Internet Economy, human sanity will return.

Lest it be misunderstood that I am railing against IT, it is now time for me to set the records straight that I am not against IT, but against the way foolish man manipulates it with only selfish gain in mind, thinking only of dotcoms and an inexhaustible gold mine. (By common sense, there is only a finite amount of gold in existence.) In fact, if people want to be rich enough without selling their souls to filthy wealth, there are countless avenues outside of the dotcom empire. Rash mining of available gold will only lead to inflation, recession or depression but not produce any additional real wealth for distribution among nations and peoples.

Remember Pastor Michael's sermon on 14th January in which he touched upon the need to be the salt and light of the world? Here, I quote the Gospel passage: **"You are the world's seasoning, to make it tolerable. If you lose your flavor, what will happen to the world? And you yourselves will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. You are the world's light – a city on a hill, glowing for all to see."** (Matt. 5:13-14 TLB)

In a nutshell, the Gospel passage just quoted tells us our Christian role as a positive influence on the world rather than a follower of the world. The world may now be wild about founding survival and prosperity on IT and dotcoms, but we share the message: "Yes, promote IT and dotcoms, and in quantity if you will, but do not tell me to build my life and riches on them. Teach me, if you will, how to avail myself of IT as a useful tool for effective work, but do not tempt me to be enslaved by it in case I become as a person interred in the sands of Silicon Valley subject to the mercy of a major shift in the tectonic plates beneath."

I am one of countless Christians who make use of IT. I am not enamoured by it, but I do not avoid it. As I produce this article to share my humble opinions with the immense help of my Pentium machine, I am demonstrating one good way I put technology to use. Other ways to which IT has been put to good use by Christians would be the sprouting of Christian websites in cyberspace providing edifying resources, interactions and prayer requests via email (as I have from time to time received from

fellow brothers and sisters in Christ), the conduct of Internet-based interactive Bible Study ... (You may wish to add more innovative ideas to the list to compete with the innovations of dotcom entrepreneurs.)

Christians can embrace IT with a difference. We do not imitate the trendy craze of people who are always driven by profit instead of need. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Rom. 12:2 NIV)

If you are on the New Economy Choo-Choo Train, do not just take a ride, looking out of the windows to decide impromptu where you will alight; but make up your mind in advance what your need is (to be on the train) and once your destination is reached, get off without tarrying lest you get really lost as the train picks up Express speed again into exotic territory and your insatiable desires get the better of you. Curiosity kills the cat. Unquestioning boldness to journey beyond your real necessity just to see what enchanted mines with gold or explosives lie ahead may lead you on a trip of no return.

In a "Brave New World" (with reference to a book of this title which has been hailed as a classic like George Orwell's "Animal Farm"), technological advancement and social engineering make people completely depersonalised. Their lives are charted out, the population is controlled and only those belonging to two privileged levels (Alpha and Beta) of a rigid social hierarchy live as individuals. One member of this Brave New World brought in someone by the name of John who had been living freely in a Savage Reservation. It turned out to be a horrendous mistake.

If you care to read the "Brave" book (first published 1931, by Aldous Huxley, complete online text at <http://www.huxley.net/bnw/>), you may share with me whether the story has a grain of realism as "Animal Farm" was made-up as a satire on human society. You may also share with me the relative merits and demerits for John to live "primitively" in the Savage Reservation and courageously in the "modernity" of a Brave New World. You may come to realise that it is not all white or all grey in either habitat, and great wisdom is called for even in making an informed choice. What greater tragedy it will be for people who make blind choices!

Wisdom is not beyond our reach.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt ... That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position. ..."
(James 1:5-10)

How often do we doubt when we ask God? How often do we rate ourselves lowly in comparison with our well-heeled neighbours? Instead of coveting, why not have contentment with humility and trust in God? It will do us fine to read the following to ourselves:

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:12-13)

"My heart is not proud, O Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me." (Psalm 131:1)

Complaints are common that life is getting very complicated. Before, everything must have a "Number One" tag for self-assurance of survivability. Maybe you were subconsciously aiming for "Number One" place to grab all the C's of prosperity. Among other things, you were craving to be "Number One" in Cash savings. So you hoarded your wealth (on justification of providing for a rainy day) and ended up depriving yourself the current positive utility of your wealth while nurturing extremely fat accounts for an unseen future. The economics of choice between 'saving and saving' (recessive?) and 'spending and spending' (inflationary?) is a complicated balancing problem peculiar to us who are more intelligent than "the birds of the air". (Matt. 6:26) Now, the "Number One" tag seems to be gradually fading. Relieved? No, the "Most" tag is in fashion – "Most Globalised", "Most IT-driven", "Most competitive", ... What is the difference between "Number One Traveller" and "Most Travelled Commuter" on the New Economy Express? Don't go for either title without being aware that it is not cost-free!