

The 2000 VINE

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Greetings to you. May God's peace and Word abide in you as you serve Him. Yesterday I saw on TV News a scorpion invasion of a Mexican town. What truly amazed me were not the number of scorpions but the response of the town people. They set a big statue of Saint George outside a church cathedral and prayed to it for help, because they believe that Saint George is the saint who has power over natural phenomena. This people are Catholics but what they did undoubtedly is unbiblical and downright idolatrous. What about our local context? What also amazed me is that many Christians here can also be superstitious. They believe in Zodiac influence and discussed what zodiac month of year they are born in and about luck and fate. For example they may believe "I am born in the dragon year and it is a good lucky year".

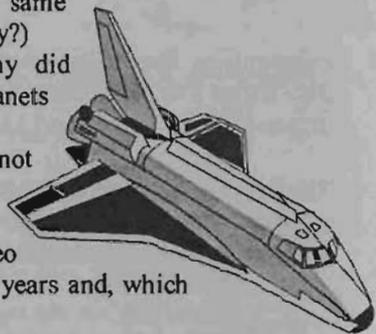
The belief and practice of astrology is prohibited to Christians. There are several Bible passages that speak out against astrology or ridicule those who are involved in it. Examples can be found in

- ✦ *Deuteronomy 4:19 - "And beware, lest you lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven."*
- ✦ *Isaiah 47:13 - "You are wearied with your many counsels; Let now the astrologers, those who prophesy by the stars, those who predict by the new moons, stand up and save you from what will come upon you."*
- ✦ *Job 31:26-28 - If I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon going in splendor, and my heart became secretly enticed, and my hand threw a kiss from my mouth, that too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment, for I would have denied God."*



But there are also logical reasons why one cannot believe in astrology. Those below are some for consideration:

1. What is the likelihood that 1/12 of the world's population is having the same kind of day and therefore same fate/luck?
2. Why is the moment of birth, not conception, crucial for astrology? (Think about it a bit and you can put an astrologer on the spot with this one: one-third of all births happen when the doctor performs a Caesarean section or induces labor).
3. If the mother's womb can keep out astrological forces until the moment of birth, why we cannot do the same with a piece of pork?
4. If astrologers are so good, why aren't they rich?
5. Are all horoscopes done before the discovery of the outermost three planets incorrect?
6. Is astrology a form of discrimination by birth date?
7. Why do different schools of astrology disagree so strongly with each other?
8. If astrological influence is carried by a known force (such as gravity-caused tides), why do the planets dominate over closer objects? (Why does Mars supposedly have more influence than the nearby doctor attending a birth?)
9. If astrological influence is carried by unknown forces, why is it independent of distance? (Why does Mars supposedly have the same influence regardless of its distance, which varies greatly?)
10. If Astrology is based on planetary forces why did astrologers not predict the existence of three of the planets (one-third of the solar system!)?
12. If astrologers can predict the future, why do they not agree on who will win the next election?
13. And if the planets exert unknown forces on little you and me, why they did not act on the Galileo spacecraft after travelling around the solar system for years and, which arrived right on, target?



May Scriptures/God's Word be our guide in life rather than astrology. Amen.

Pastor Martin Yec.



Pray for Pastor Michael Christian and his team as they visit Nias and the neighbouring island of Pulau Pini to minister to the Christians there.

Pray for God's protection and guidance.

Who do you say that Jesus is?

Matt. 16:13-16 :

When Jesus came to the area of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They answered, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them, "And who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

In today's context, who do people say the Jesus Christ is? Here are some answers extracted from Newsweek (March 27, 2000) story entitled "The Other Jesus":

The Muslims recognize Jesus as a great prophet and revere him as the son of Mary.

The Jews see Jesus as an admirable Jew, not the Son of God.

According to Hindu legends, there is a strong tradition in India that Jesus journeyed across Asia as a teenager and learned yogic meditation. He returned home to become a guru to the Jews. Many Hindus see Jesus as a virtuous man. They are drawn to Jesus because of his compassion and his devotion to non-violence. They can accept only a Jesus who passes into peaceful samadhi, a yogi who escapes the degradation of death.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, sees Jesus and Buddha as "brothers" who taught that the highest form of human understanding is "universal love."

Robert Thurman, a Buddhist scholar of Columbia University says that "Buddhists can think of Jesus as an emanation or 'truth body' [dharmakaya] of the Buddha."

For Tibetan Buddhists, Jesus strongly resembles a bodhissattva – a perfectly enlightened being who vows to help others attain enlightenment. The Dalai Lama says, "As a Buddhist, my attitude toward Jesus Christ is that he was either a fully enlightened being, or a bodhissattva of a very high spiritual realization." The Dalai Lama sees "common notes" between Buddhism and Christianity in Transfiguration, Karma, Faith and Empathy.

(In two paintings accompanying the Newsweek story, Jesus appears as a Buddhist monk and as a spiritual source.)

Pope John Paul II has this to say, "Christ is absolutely original and absolutely unique. If He were a prophet like Muhammad, if He were enlightened like the Buddha, without doubt He would not be what He is."

After noting the different answers, who do you say that Jesus is?

For me, the answer is in the Bible. I accept the Jesus as He is made known in the Gospel, as what Simon Peter has answered for all Christians. (Matt. 16:16) I can understand why there are people who cannot accept Jesus as what He really is, but I am perplexed by the "part accept, part reject" logic of some people who contemplate the Gospel message. Still, it is worthy of note that no matter what the major religions believe in, Jesus is highly regarded and there is a sort of consensus about his identity as a real person who walked the earth and performed miracles. He is not a mythical figure or a figment of the imagination. Either we accept or reject Him as Christ, the Son of the living God, our eternal destiny is tied to what we believe or disbelieve. So we are back to the question which anybody ought to contemplate personally:

Who do you say that Jesus is?

John Lee

Below is the speech given by the Youth Fellowship Advisor on the occasion of their first Youth Fellowship meeting on 13 May 2000:

Fellow young brothers and sisters in Christ,

About a year ago, JCC Chinese Youth Fellowship held a musical evangelistic meeting in our church, featuring TCS Channel 8 artistes. My wife and I attended this meeting and found that the program was well planned and had a good turnout, filling the whole church hall.

It made me think about whether the English section Youth can organise a similar function or activity. The main question on my mind was: Do we have the organisation or resources?

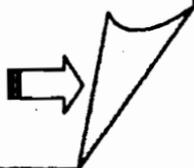
At that time, our youth had started meeting regularly on Fridays as a small care group. This care group then grew to slightly more than a dozen youth at full attendance. When the numbers grew and older guys and girls started attending, it was felt that the size of the group had become too big and the range of ages too wide. Thus, several Secondary 3 and 4 youths were asked to stop attending.

With this kind of progress, we felt that the time was ripe to focus on reviving the Youth Fellowship to provide a larger platform for our youth at JCC. We have so many young people on Sundays whom we need to cater for in both their physical and spiritual development, as well as to bring those not in DTP/BB/GB programs together.

In seeing some of the children of church members leaving or who have stopped coming to church on Sundays, there was a deep burden in my heart.

This YF can be and will be the answer to this and the place for all our youth to mature as JCC members and future leaders. I grew up and was active in the JCC YF in the mid 70s, finding it greatly enjoyable and was richly blessed. (In fact, it was there that I met my wife)

We started planning and making preparations way back in March 2000. Rev. Yee, Pastor Michael and I spent much time in prayer,



deliberating the idea. Eventually the church council was informed of this plan and a protem committee nominated. The committee has had 4 meetings so far and has decided on the premises to conduct the Youth Fellowship programme.

This protem Committee will help organize the twice monthly programmes until you have the first election towards the end of year 2000. At the first General Meeting, the YF office bearers will be elected by the YF members and a YF constitution will be adopted. The Church Council will then appoint an advisor for the YF. I will stay as advisor for this initial period of 6 months to guide the YF in conducting proper meetings. When the office bearers are elected, I will make a recommendation to the Church Council as to who my successor will be.

The motto for the JCC YF is "Giving God our best" and we have adopted 'The Potter's Hand' as the YF theme song. The program will be carefully planned and will include opportunities for you to meet other youth from other Lutheran churches in Singapore through the Inter Combined Fellowship. I encourage the committee members to put in your best in organisation and for other members to support the work of this YF. Finally, I pray that God will bless you as you grow together as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

It is now my pleasure to present to you the protem committee:

1. Saw Peh Ern
2. Varian Cheong
3. Catherine Ng
4. Huang Wei Cai
5. Zheng Mingli
6. Jonathan Tan
7. Timothy Ow
8. Selia Chong

Thank you.

Ronnie Lim (YF Advisor)



YOUTH FELLOWSHIP **on 13th May 2000**



The day we had been eagerly waiting for had finally arrived! It was a special day for all of us as it marked the revival of our Jurong Christian Church Youth Fellowship. We thank God for the attendance of almost 20 youths and for the presence of supportive parents.

We were indeed honoured to have Rev. Soh Guan Keng as our speaker. An eloquent and interesting speaker, he highlighted the need firstly for us to be certain that the God we are giving our best to is a true God. He also stressed the importance of responding by trusting and worshipping God alone, in renewal of self and witnessing to others. He also led us in the recital of the Easter Rededication.

We also had singspiration, ice-breakers, refreshments and most importantly, a good time of fellowship with one another.

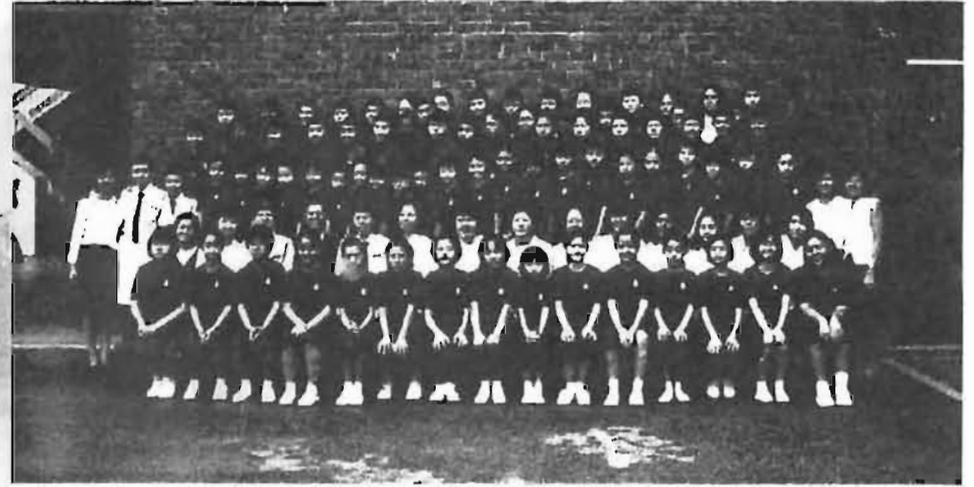
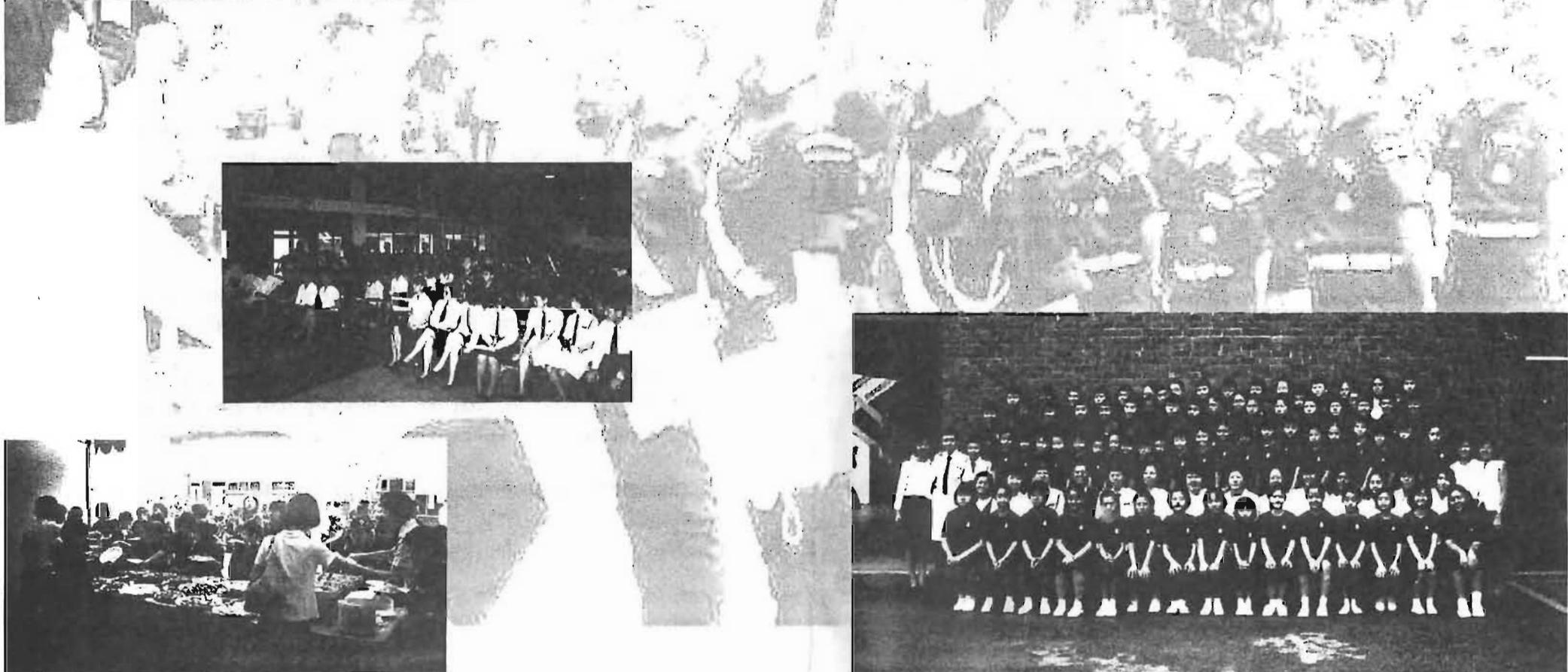
This first meeting was a step in the right direction and we hope that you will pray with us, that the fellowship will grow as we strive to achieve our motto – “Giving God our Best”.

We sincerely invite all the youths in church to join us in our future meetings!

Zheng Mingli



BB/GB Enrolment



LIFE'S LIKE THIS

The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeway, but narrower viewpoints; we spend more, but have less, we buy more but enjoy it less.

We have bigger houses but smaller families; more conveniences, but less time. We have more degrees but less sense; more knowledge but less judgement; more experts but more problems; more medicine but less wellness.



We drink too much, smoke too much, spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get too angry too quickly, stay up too late, get up too tired, read too little, watch TV too much, and pray seldom.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often. We have learned how to make living but not a life; we have added years to life not life to years. We have been all the way to the moon and back but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbor.



We have conquered outer space, but not inner space. We have done larger things, but not better things; we have cleaned up the air but polluted the soul. We have split the atom but not our prejudice. We write more but learn less; we plan more but accomplish less; we have learned to rush but not to wait. We have

higher incomes but lower morals; we have more food but less appeasement.

We build more computers to hold more information to produce more copies than ever, but have less communication; we have become long on quantity but short on quality.



These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion; tall men and short character; steep profits and shallow relationships.

These are the times of world peace but domestic warfare; more leisure but less fund; more kinds of food but less nutrition. These are the days of two incomes but more divorce; of fancier house but broken homes. These are the days of quick trips, disposable diapers, throw away morality, one night stands, overweight bodies and pills that do every thing from cheer to quiet to kill.



It is a time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stockroom; as always, it's your **CHOICE**. Let **YOUR CHOICE** be one that bring **PEACE** to Your Heart..

submitted by Tony Koh



VESAK DAY

VESAK is the name of the lunar month that usually falls in May and is the most sacred day for Buddhists throughout the world for its three significance. On this eventful day, the rich and the poor alike decorate and illuminate their homes according to their means, while more devout followers, both young and old, attired in white, spend their time in temples, observing the eight precepts, listening to the Dhamma and practicing meditation. Some others erect pictures depicting exemplary anecdotes from the life of Buddha. A few others erect temporary refreshment stalls to serve free meals and soft drinks to pilgrims and passers-by.

The first significance, in the year 623 B.C. on a Vesak Full Moon Day, Prince Siddhanta Gotama, was born at Kapilavattu in Nepal, India. Receiving an education be-fitting a royal son, he later married and had a son. Blissfully ignorant of the vicissitudes of life outside the palace gates, he led a luxurious life at home. With the march of time, the truth about life and death dawned upon him. While he led a near-to-perfect royal life, Siddhanta was touched and perplexed by the sufferings of others. Subsequently, when he turned 29, realising the fleeting nature of life and the vanity of material pleasures, he left the palace in search of truth and peace.

Leaving; not deserting his wife and son; he went on a mission of higher purpose in life. Renouncing his princelyhood, he left his worldly pleasures in the prime of manhood, in a quest for divinity. He went through a long and arduous course of training in: Dana (Generosity), Sila (Discipline), Nekkhamma

(Renunciation), Panna (Wisdom), Viriya (Service), Khanti (Patience), Sacca (Truthfulness), Adhittana (Determination), Metta (Loving-kindness) and Upekkha (Equanimity). After six strenuous years in a superhuman struggle, one day, while sitting under the famous Bodhi tree at Buddhagaya, he made a vow to attain enlightened.

On that Vesak Full Moon Day, he purified himself and comprehending the Dhamma, obtained perfect Enlightenment at age 35. Thereafter, he was known as Gotama Buddha. Vesak, therefore, commemorates not only the physical birth but also the spiritual birth of the Supreme Buddha, marking the second significance. Being delivered to enlightenment, he plunged into the world to deliver others by extending an open invitation to all seekers of Truth, with the words, "Open to them are the doors to the Deathless. Let those who have ears repose confidence."

Sending his disciples to preach the Holy Life, the Buddha himself wandered from place to place, expounding Dhamma for another 45 years. As the perfect embodiment of all virtues, he preached, endowed with deep wisdom and his boundless compassion. At times, sleeping for only two hours at night, he incessantly worked for the good and happiness of mankind until his dying moment. Having successfully completed this noble mission, he retired to Ksinara, a hamlet and lying between two sal trees, he passed away peacefully on, what became the third significance, Vesak Full Moon Day 2541 years ago.

As a prince, he was born; as an extraordinary man, he lived; and as a Buddha, he passed away; leaving mankind the way to enlightenment.

Knowing what our Buddhist friends believe in may help us to build bridges to bring them to the truth of Jesus Christ.

The evil of Pokémon cards & games



Japan is a place where everything cute is adored.

It is also a place where “monsters” of the gigantic variety (a.k.a. Godzilla) or miniature version that fits into one’s pockets (a.k.a. pocket monster called “Pokémon”) never seem to run out of steam.

For all the cute or strange creations that from generation to generation entertain or mesmerise receptive minds, I marvel at the creative juices of the creators who, apart from drawing out children in droves and keeping a stranglehold on them, also have a secret formula to entrap adults to loosen their purse strings and let their cash flow freely.



Parents are certainly losing control of their children’s demands. What the children ask for, the parents “have no choice” and “cannot help it” but to give.

Rev. Martin Yee warned in the March issue of *The Vine* about the danger of the Pokémon game with quotations from an article in a Methodist journal. I read it and just put it aside. In a way, I was a passive reader, thinking that it was not going to affect my children since they did not have any Pokémon game or cards to begin with, save for a few T-shirts with the Pokémon character which they had as Chinese New Year gifts.

The danger of the bondage to Pokémon flashed back in my mind when I read in the newspaper only several weeks ago about how a young boy sought to trade off his younger sister for some Pokémon cards. Bizarre! Perhaps it is too far-fetched a case to happen to our own children. However, have anyone thought about how hot and fast young hearts can be heated up by the excitement of the game and the seductiveness of potential trading gains? I presume that skirmishes between friends (putting it mildly), dishonest acts, stealing, distractions from studies and other ugliness of conduct ignited by the Pokémon heat are not incidents that will be considered incredible. Even parents can be tempted to coach their children on the do’s and don’ts of dealing with “valuable” cards lest the little ones get bullied and chewed



off by the wily seniors of the trade. So much for parental participation and encouragement.

It is not my imagination at work. Even before Pokémon and before Tamagotchi, the craze over picture cards had brought ills. Principals had banned the cards, but somehow still surfaced now and then in secret ways. One of my children got into because of the cards a few years back. problems could be nipped in the bud by restrictions and the child came out wiser



about pernicious the cards the schools in some problems. Fortunately, the simple parental for the experience.

In fact, I was glad that just weeks ago when I explained to him why he should not be tempted to desire the Pokémon game or card, he was able to comprehend and accept my explanations readily without the slightest pleading. Surprisingly, he had kept some Pokémon cards given by friends and I did not know about it. He took them out himself for me to throw away right under his nose. I was glad for his receptiveness to reason.

It is not unusual to subconsciously regard the Pokémon game and cards as nothing but playthings like dolls and toy cars. There is nothing wrong if the Pokémon games and cards are indeed just playthings for a season with their proper recreational or educational applications in children's lives. There is something very wrong if an object supposedly for plain fun and recreation has graduated to become a phenomenon of intense desire and mindless obsession that concerned parents, educators and other important people are coming out in numbers to condemn it. (Warnings abound at numerous websites!) Keeping a cool and objective mind, we should see that these concerned people do not come out to condemn just every game or toy that does not catch their fancy. Why, then, do they condemn Pokémon?

To begin with, the Pokémon slogan "Gotta catch 'em all!" is telling. It challenges and excites. As if this is not enough, the true Pokémon master of persuasion (the monster creator) unabashedly goads impressionable young minds with these words in the Player's Guide:



"You are a Pokémon Trainer. You ... must compete with rival Pokémon trainers in battle. You pursue that lofty goal of becoming the number one Pokémon master in the world. You may face many challenges ... but your call to Pokémon Mastery beckons and you must not relent!"

Very clever mind-control tactics to fire up innocent players to go for more and more Pokémon paraphernalia that will enhance their chances of victory for a place in glory as a Master Trainer! Very enterprising approach to a neat pile of cash (multi-billion dollars and still collecting more new Pokémon assets. Once the seed of addictiveness is sown, it is easily imaginable how it will germinate fast with offshoots that entangle the mind in a web. Very soon, the appetite whetted, the hunger increased, the enthusiasts are led on in a subliminal way to seek more and more excitement on Pokémon websites and, lo and behold, an avalanche of hotlinks to occult games or other questionable sites that feed further fantasies is unleashed.



It is simplistic to assume that Pokémon is harmless role-playing fun for children and that they will grow out of it. The problem with Pokémon is its powerful psychological hold on players beguiled by the fantasy of becoming world master trainers, its enticing promise of supernatural power, its trickery for getting you to go the whole hog for endless mutations of ever more powerful Pokémon and its lead-on to other occult role-playing games that possess immense psychic attraction and mind-numbing capacity.

Take a look at this Pokémon rap at the end of each Pokémon programme on American TV:



*"I will travel across the land
Searching far and wide
Each Pokémon to understand
The power that's inside.
Gotta catch them all!"*



Unlike in America where apart from Pokémon games and cards there are also TV shows with the powerful rap above, the full impact of the Pokémon influence is not yet felt in Singapore. However, as more and more children beg their parents for Pokémon this and Pokémon that, with the parents' inability to say "NO" but too eager to please, it is only a matter of time when opportunistic businessmen see the trend of demand and become fired up with ideas.

I have heard of at least one European country (France or Germany) banning Pokémon advertisements on TV. I am not sure what other restrictions or bans this European country and any other country has adopted or will adopt against Pokémon. Instead of wishing for some authority to make the move on controlling

the Pokémon ills, parents should have within them the power to shield their children from potential harm before it is too late to exert any control as the children grow up and become set in their psychological addiction.

Here is a passage from <http://www.execcpc.com/typos/pokemon-lit.html> which I feel of value to share with you:

“In a nation consumed with self-indulgence, self-fulfillment, and self-empowerment, godly self-denial seems strangely out of place. But God commanded it, and Jesus demonstrated it. Dare we refuse to acknowledge it? According to the age of your child, discuss Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:24-26, then allow the Holy Spirit to direct your application.

Far more than earthly parents, God wants His children to be content and full of joy. But He knows better than to give us all the things we want. Instead, He gave us His word as a standard for what brings genuine peace and happiness. The apostle Paul summarized it well:

“Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

After hearing God’s warning and praying for His wisdom, nine-year-old Alan Brannan decided to throw away all his Pokémon cards. “My friend did the same,” said his mother. “Her twelve year old son had been having nightmares. But after a discussion with his parents about the game and its symbols, he was convicted to burn his cards and return his Gameboy game. That night slept well for the first time in a month.”

“It seemed to us that these cards had some sort of power,” continued DiAnna Brannan.” Another nine-year-boy had stolen money from his mother’s purse (\$7.00) to buy more cards. When questioned, he confessed and said he had heard the devil urging him to do it. The family quickly gathered in prayer, then saw God’s answer. Both the boy and his little sister burned their cards, warned their friends, and discovered the joy and freedom that only comes from following their

Shepherd.”

WELCOME

Chua Siew Bee

E C Qwee

We are almost ready to launch this new website. I have found a host called Truepath.com, which gives free web hosting up to 8MB of space. Keep a lookout for launch date....



Ever wondered what the Bible of the next generation would look like? Well here is a sample....

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DIACONATE TRAINING PROGRAMME

Four of us, Thomas Tan, James Tan, Willie Hor and I, attended a 10-lesson Small Group course conducted by Rev William Chang at Queenstown Lutheran Church.

In the beginning, we thought what a strain it would be on our busy schedules but now that it is finally over, we can say that we have persevered, with at least 80% attendance.

We had some delightful insight into the problems faced by the other Lutheran congregations with their Small Groups. We are not alone.

Hopefully, we will be able to apply what we have learnt to strengthen our groups, even to the proper sitting arrangements at group meetings.

In our presentation, we admitted that the various house groups have gone in diverse directions because of lack of a coordinator. Someone asked what is the pastor doing about it. We were silenced. On hindsight, we should have said that the pastor is looking for a replacement.

Who will it be? Do you need to have special training? Do you need to have a lot of free time? I think above all you need to have a willing heart to serve God and your fellowman.

Martin Cheah.