

The Vine

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Editor's Word

After 15 years of nurturing The Vine, it seems that it is about ready to take root in another direction. With the addition of two very enthusiastic young web experts, I am looking forward to bringing The Vine into the Internet and maybe into a different era of publishing. Please pray for God to reveal his plan and provide his leading.

While we still welcome writers to put pen to paper, paper may be passé in the near future, similar to film cameras, diaries and walkmans. All these features can be found in some of the latest handphones.

However even as the world rushes head on into the future, one Biblical prediction is starting to make sense.

"He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name." (Revelations 13:16-17)

*Did this verse make sense to you a few years back? It may make sense to you if you have heard of RFID (**R**adio **F**requency **I**Dentification). In the papers recently, it was mentioned that a RFID chip can be implanted on a person's arm for less than \$300 and to remove it is like removing a splinter from your finger. So far, a pub has implemented this form of credit for its customers whose arms get scanned when they buy their drinks. You may think that no one is forcing you to have the RFID implanted on your body. Maybe not yet but I read that the RFID on arowana serves as an identity and security device for the highly-prized (and priced) fish. Without the tagging technology, all trade in the arowana would be illegal.*

We do not know when the end will come but certainly some pieces of the jigsaw are starting to fall into place. What is the Biblical advice for this? This calls for wisdom. (Revelations 13:18) Be wise my friends.

Martin Cheah

Testimonies shared in Nan

Testimony by Min

Min, a council member in Baan Den once believed in spirits. One day, his chickens and pigs suddenly died for no reasons. He consulted the mediums but they were of no help. His mother asked him to go and worship the spirits and offer whatever it took. When he realized that it did not help, he stopped worshipping the spirits. He recalled hearing about Jesus Christ somewhere and he decided to follow and know Him more.



He had a brother who was possessed by a spirit which caused him to fall sick frequently. His brother sought the help of mediums in vain. Min decided to bring him to the evangelist who started the ministry in that area. The evangelist prayed and the spirit left his brother. After he became Christian, he went back to his village to evangelize to his fellow village folk.

The people did not accept. Instead they said to him, "You continue to believe your God, if you are still alive after 3 years, we'll believe."

After 3 years, they accepted Christ. Despite the little knowledge he had about God, he reached out to one of the villagers. However, there was a spirit in that person and Min felt the spirit coming into him. At that moment, he had wanted to seek out the medium but he remembered he was already a child of God, so he went to a believer's house to ask for prayers. That person was afraid of praying for him. Instead, he gave Min a bible passage on faith to read. Immediately, he felt dizzy and the spirit left him.

His faith grew after all these experiences and he will go wherever and whenever he has the opportunity.

Testimony by Ah Chan thawan

Ah Chan Thawan is one who loves to learn more about other religions. He used to be a Buddhist and he felt that the religion he believed in was good. Hence, he continued with his Buddhist worship because it made him feel good.

During his stay in Singapore, he visited Thai Good News Center. The pastor asked him every week if he wanted to receive Christ but he wasn't ready. The pastor told him that if one day his god couldn't help, he could call upon Jesus.

One night, he was sleeping and when he opened his eyes, he saw an old lady carrying weapons and wanting to kill him. He could not breathe. He tried calling on his gods and all the spirits he knew of but none of them helped him. He recalled what the pastor had told him and he called upon Jesus. Immediately, the spirit left him and he was able to breathe.

There were many other occasions when he saw images of 'things' going after him. Whenever he called upon his gods and spirits he knew, it did not help but whenever he called upon the name of Jesus, the 'things' left him.

He told all these to the pastor and the pastor told him that it was time for him to receive Christ. He received Christ before he returned to Thailand.

His Marvelous work

Not only did we feel encouraged by the works that God had done in the lives of the people there, we also experienced God's protection and His marvelous work on this trip.

There were 2 occasions when we risked tragedies. One was during the first night while traveling to Nonghan. I was sitting at the right side of our van when I saw the whole event happening. There was a barrier between the two traffic directions and our van was travelling at the right-most lane of the road that was close to the barrier. A high-speed vehicle from the opposite direction cut through the lane and went past the barrier and nearly knocked onto our van. Both the high-speed vehicle and our van did not stop. Boon Sia (our driver) went to check our van for damages when the sun rose. There was a little scratch on the side of the van. According to Boon Sia, if either of the vehicle stopped, it would be a disastrous.

On the other occasion, we were on our way to Nan on a bright afternoon. I was looking out of the van and enjoying the scenery. All of a sudden, I heard a loud explosive sound. Initially I thought it was the tyre that went flat, but later I realized that there were 2 planks of softwood that 'flew' off a pick-up truck in front the van and hit our windscreen. One of the planks broke into pieces. Thank God that no one was injured and there was only a slight scratch on the windscreen. Boon Sia got his compensation too.

One evening, we were leaving Nan for Bangkok. According to Boon Sia, from his experience, there was not enough petrol for the van to go down the mountain. There wasn't any petrol station on the mountain. We went to the nearest village to see whether we could get any supply but the village had only diesel. By faith Boon Sia drove on and we managed to reach the petrol station at the foothill.

Boon Sia was with us throughout the trip. He drove and followed us in the things we did. When we went to churches, he followed. When we went visiting the homes of the church members and doing some sharing, he followed and he listened. When we were playing with the kids, he played together with us. I remember that during the visitation to some homes, Boon Sia tried to sing with us and when we were praying, he just closed his eyes and put his palms together. I believe the seed had been planted into him. Though we did not ask if he wanted to receive Christ, I know God will work in time. Moreover, Rosanna, our LCS missionary and our

translator, will be having him as the driver whenever there are teams going over for mission trips. There will be more opportunities for him to hear the Gospel.

Thanksgiving

- Thank God for the opportunity that I could go for this trip. Thank God for His protection from accidents & illnesses and His guidance throughout the trip.
- Thank God for Rosanna for her guidance. Thank God for Boon Sia, for his great driving skill and stamina for long-distance journeys.
- Thank God for all the people in Thailand who have shown us their kindness and hospitality.
- Thank God for the team I'm in. The days we spent together, the supports & prayers and bonding have helped us know one another better.
- All Praises & Glory be unto our Lord God Almighty! =>



Angeline You

Peter's CNY Visits



Peter Cheong and company visited a number of the senior citizens on the 3rd day of Chinese New Year, inviting them to come for the CNY high tea at JCC.



They even managed to squeeze in time during the visits to drop in on caretaker, Mr Lim at Alexandra Hospital.

it's a blessing to be chosen for the mission trip.

This is my story



Unlike many people who yearn to go on a mission trip, the idea of mission never crossed my mind. However the calling of God to go on one began with an SMS invitation. Initially I was strongly reluctant to go for it. Like many youths I was unwilling to give up my time for the preparation and the trip. God spoke to me after a week, and it was then I made the choice to respond positively to the challenge of going to Thailand as a missionary.

Though I made my decision, deep in me were lots of uncertainties. As the youngest member of the team, inadequacy was the first thing I felt. My team members however suppressed this feeling in me, entrusting me with manageable tasks, constantly giving their support and advices. Within weeks into preparation, I felt the bonds within the team developing. The support of my family and the church both in funding and prayer gave me the encouragement to carry out my duties.

On 23rd November 2005, we set foot on Thailand. The country was not foreign to me, but somehow my feeling was different from other trips I had before. I felt a special sense of happiness which, unknown to me then, would grow to a peak in due course.

Nonghan

We visited a village church. This was exciting – the first village church I had ever seen. To my surprise the church is beyond my expectation. It has strong concrete walls, nice tiled floors, a stage and even big speakers! Sounds like any church here in Singapore?

The only difference is in the people. Yes, the people who make the church – village folks. From the instance you step into the church, the warmth of the people can be felt. The members of the church partake their daily meals together, something that we hardly do in our church. Though the meal was really simple, Isan style, it was certainly a special treat for us to be invited to be part of this big family of theirs. After the meal, Angeline, Jonathan, Meryvn and I tried to communicate with some children who sat at the back of a pickup. We wanted to interact with them but we did not know how to do so.



Meryvn started reading some questions written on the guidebook, things like “ What is your name? What is your age?” and the rest of us followed suit. The children responded with small smiles, followed by laughter. The children then tried to correct our pronunciation of their language. We too taught them the English terms for simple Thai words. The ice was broken. Soon we were playing simple hand games with them and were invited for a walk around their village. Along the way the children plucked flowers of all kinds and presented them to us.



It was nice to be showered with gifts given from the hearts of the children. It reminded me how beautiful the simplest things in life can be. Now I still remember vividly the megawatt smiles on the faces of the children and the love and hospitality showered upon us. From this first experience with the Thai children, I understood there and then that God is able to break down any barriers between people. I was confident that



this would include the communication barriers that we were to face throughout the trip. All we had to do was to go forward and do his will.

After the meal, Angeline, Jonathan, Meryvn and I tried to communicate with some children who sat at the back of a pickup. We wanted to interact with them but we did. The next day the church had a dedication service. All the members of the church were excited. Church leaders from different parts of Thailand were invited. There was a big celebration, with dances and a delicious five-course lunch. I felt proud of the growing Christian community and was very encouraged by the villagers' faith. May the Lord bless the church

Phibun



We arrived at Immanuel Youth Hostel to see the youths returning from a church. They were there to help the "spring clean" the church. They did this every Saturday. We had our dinner, also in Isan style, consisting of a simple meat dish, a vegetable soup and sticky rice. Putting away our cutlery, we decided to follow their way of partaking the food with the hands.



After dinner, we had a time of fellowship with the teenagers, many whom were about my age. I could see that they were also one big family. We had a time of sharing, games and presentations, and closed with a time of worship led by the older teenagers of the hostel.

Talking to Kal, the person in charge of the hostel, I was glad to hear that since the year before, the Christians in the hostel grew in number from 2 to 10. Kal would give Bible classes weekly; many are at the moment still shy to go for it though eager to know Christ. Pray that they will be able to open up to receive the Lord.



The following day, we visited the neighbouring church that the children attended. It was nice to see the members coming forth to dance during the worship. It really depicted what the bible wrote as singing, dancing and praising God. Would it be nice if our church did the same? After the service in which Anthony preached, we sat down on the floor for a simple meal of



fried fish, soup and rice. It was especially meaningful that the fish were reared by members of the church. Though the meal was simple, it was delicious and the interaction between the leaders and members of the church made it fantastic.

Next, we visited the Ubon Good News Church in which we learnt about the Christian ministries carried out. We were told that the members there were mainly from the villages far from the church, many having to go through long hours of travel to attend services weekly. The period in which we were there, the attendance of the members was at its lowest as many, who are farmers, were busy harvesting their crops. In a recent project, the church ministered to the people in the nearby town centre, many of whom are office workers. The pastor of the church said that he wanted to share with the people especially during the Christmas season, as they would be keener to know more about the meaning of Christmas then. The church also needs financial help to sustain itself and carry out its ministry work, as the members, mainly villagers, do not have enough to contribute to the church.

The following day, we were off to the Palanchai School where an English camp was held for its students. The Thai government has allowed Christian organizations to organize programmes for them provided that there should be no evangelism. So throughout this camp, we shared our faith in action without openly extending invitations to the students to accept Christ. We invited them to go to the Thai pastor if they wanted to know more.

The camp began with an official opening by the Chief of Education for that area. We then had activities organized into several stations. We worked with some Norwegian undergrads who were in Thailand on a 6-month mission work attachment. They taught the children English lessons at their stations while we taught them English through games and Christian children songs. During workshop time we taught the children the Pulse dance. It was a wonderful experience trying to interact with the children. It took lots of patience and understanding for the children and us to communicate with one another. Still, with enthusiasm and smiles, we managed to teach them the steps of the dance.

Soon it was games time. We merged with the pastor and Norwegians as a team and competed in volleyball and soccer with the children. The children were really good with those sports and we had a fun time with them. Over dinner we had a time of sharing with the Norwegians about their ministry in Thailand. They had 3 months of learning the Thai language before ministering to the people in the slums of Bangkok. A concert was held in the evening. The students performed singing, a comedy act and several dances. We screened a Singapore video, sang songs and did a skit. The children had so much fun that the school wanted us to make a promise of returning for another English camp next year.



Naan

The Journey to the village was long and tiring, taking more than 2/3 of a day. Throughout the journey, we got lost many times and met with an accident, but luckily no one was injured. By the time we reached the foot of Naan, it was dark and we had to wait till the next morning before continuing our travel to the village. The journey to the village up in the mountains was an experience for me. The scenery during the journey up was amazing; I was reminded constantly of the beauty of God's creation. Soon the van came to a stop and we had to travel the rest of the journey by foot. As it was the first time I had gone trekking of any form in the wild, it was exciting. We had to cross rivers, climb steep slopes and I even had a mini slug bite, but the whole thought of going to stay in a village for the first time without electricity thrilled my mind and made me oblivious to the "hardship". Upon reaching our destination, we had a simple meal of fish and meat, cooked over firewood. It was good.



We were to stay at a church without walls. There I finally appreciated the cleanliness of the toilets, the availability of clean water, and the availability of lights and fans back at home. Nearing evening, we travelled to another village to visit another church. The church was on another

side of the mountain. The journey took an hour by foot, and this made me appreciate the public transport system back home. At the church, we sat down with the villagers on a ground sheet to have a simple dinner. It was the first time I shared my testimony with anyone. Soon we had to return to the first village with the help of our torchlights to see through the pitch darkness. I was really afraid during the night walk, thinking of the snake I saw earlier during the day. But God was faithful and he showed me his love by comforting me and protecting me all the way back.



The night sky was beautiful, and I agreed totally when one of our members told me that God's majestic works could never be captured by camera. It was really cold that night, and I was glad to be kept warm by a campfire.



The next morning was spent encouraging the villagers in their faith, through the time of sharing at their homes. I thank God for the opportunity to do so. It is really a blessing to be chosen to be one sharing the Good News with the people.

Before departing the mountains, we had some time for a nice and refreshing swim at a nearby waterfall. I was so attached to the place that I did not want to leave it. However, there's always another opportunity to go there if God wants me to.

The rest of the trip was spent in Bangkok, for a retreat.

I was more than glad that God had called me for this trip. Through it I felt that I had grown a lot more, especially spiritually. God willing, Mission might be a field for me to pursue in future, with Rosanna our translator as my role model. I really admire the mission work she has done for many years regionally. As a person who is hardly ever open about my faith to others, this is a life-changing experience. I am now more than willing to share my faith with all my friends. I have learnt to trust God totally and, because I did, this trip to me was exciting, every moment of it, because God took away all my worries. Despite the long hours of travelling and late nights, he never failed to give me the energy to go through each and every day. His love was manifested throughout the trip and I will never forget his grace.



I thank my team members for their love shown to me throughout the trip. I thank my family and brothers and sisters-in-Christ who prayed and supported us financially, and the Lord for carrying me and guiding me through it all.

Sabrina Yee

MISSION TRIP TO CAMBODIA

7-12 Dec 2005

Trip Members: Jim Lee (Team leader), Tay Kah Huat, Daniel Chan, Michelle Goh, and Vanna

Destination: Resource Development International (RDI)

Address: Royal Brick Road, Kean Svay, Kandal, Cambodia

Objective: To learn the construction of the Earth Tank, the materials required and water filtration

We departed Singapore on 7 December at 8:40am and arrived in Phnom Penh, Cambodia at 9:40am. We were met by Brenda, the financial administrator of RDI. We visited Phnom Penh Bible School (where Vanna & Sokhieng were previously working in) and then proceeded to RDI where we were to be staying.

We spent 7 days (7 to 13 December) in RDI. We were first given an orientation of the projects that RDI are involved in by Mickey Sampson Anderson, the country director coordinator of RDI.

RDI-Cambodia is a U.S.-registered, private, non-profit organization working internationally. RDI has combined technology, education, and heart in order to help the people of Cambodia through its numerous projects, such as:

- Ceramic Filter
- Earth Tank
- Farming (Odourless pig farming, goat, fish)
- Water Testing (Arsenic, absence and presence test for bacteria, and other tests)
- Water pump (Hand-driven)
- Medicated soap
- Health education through music, video and puppet story
- Production of Karaoke videos for sharing bible stories (Ruth and Boaz, Samson and Delilah, and other stories)
- Pottery (Vases, plates, mugs, nativity set, and others)



Spending the few days in RDI, we were exposed to the various projects. The process of making the earth tank is briefly as follows:

- First, a frame is created and filled with mud. This mud has some clay in it. As it's moistened and packed in, it begins to take form. A shaping tool is used to create the mud sphere, which becomes the mould for the Earth Tank hemispheres. After the mud sphere is shaped, it is left to dry for a day. This mould is able to last for at least a year or when the mud dries and breaks up. Used cement bags are fitted over the dirt sphere and held in place by nail pins.
- Chicken wire is cut and wrapped over the sphere, so it fits snugly to the mould. Standard cement mix is continually applied in several coats until it reaches the base edges of the metal frame. A shaping tool is used to measure the correct thickness of the cement.
- To make the cover for the earth tank, a shaping tool of the cover's radius is marked out and excess cement is scraped out. After a day when the rest of the sphere is dried, the used cement bags is laid over and fresh cement is poured in to make the cover.
- The base is made in a similar way. Steel rods are curved into quarters to form the reinforcement to the earth tank's base. A big hole is dug to be used as the inspection hole and also for the PVC pipe where the water comes out.

- The spheres are transported to the location for assembly. The two halves and a concave base are put together and final sealing is accomplished. Spigots and pipes are fitted and a filtration device, if so desired, can be added.
- Finally, the earth tank can be put in use.



We spent ½ day (14 December) in Hagar Ministry learning about the Bio-sand Filter and the process of making one. Hagar Ministry ministers to the desolate women in the streets. The way they involve the

locals in the making of the filter is commendable.

Each of them who want a filter set up in their homes pays US\$2 and has to work for it. Each session is instructed by Hagar's staff. The water filter in the picture is a working model which has been tested for its flow rate before certified for use. Water is filtered through three layers of granite stones.



Jim's Team

Hello everyone!

Prayer Requests from Thailand

Would appreciate your prayers on these points:

1. There's going to be coworkers meeting for the Dist. 1 church at Chantaburi (Dist 1 church consists of 4 Lutheran churches). Some impt issues need discussing. Pray for God's guidance. Apparently, on that day, I must attend an LMT audit meeting (I'm one of them) to prepare for our Joint Board Thailand (made of the various Lutheran mission agencies) meeting. Pray something can be done.
2. I'll start teaching 1 Corinthians beg. Feb for 3 months. Pray for wisdom and clear teaching to the LP church members.
3. Pray for Mai's baptism this 5th Feb. Pray for God's blessings and sustenance for her. Also pray for her mom, Thoi. Thoi believes in Jesus but comes short of wanting to be baptized. Reason: She still keeps her mother's ashes in her house. She would like to throw the ashes in the sea/river with all her relatives present. It's been 3 years now as all the relatives are busy working, unable to come together for this ceremony. Please pray that God will make a way for them to come together so that the ashes can be thrown away.
4. Pray for LPAGM on 12 Feb. I have presented our 5-year plan, 2007 budget and 2005 report to LP church council and they have accepted it. Pray the meeting will be smooth.

Dogmatism vs. Tolerance

A Christian in the world is often confronted by “contradictions”. Why does a good God permit the tsunami? How can we exercise our free will while being subjected to the will of God? This are just two examples of many issues beyond listing that Christians are often called to grapple with. Logic vs. illogic. Harmony vs. disharmony. In the May 2005 issue of the Vine, I quoted Revd. Dr Shroeder who came from America to visit us in JCC and here I would like to re-state a part of what he said to kick off my present discourse:

“...I need to talk to more people and have them tell me what’s Good and New about Jesus for folks hooked on “harmony” as the way of salvation. Diagnostically, of course, disharmony is the malady but, as I learned from my class that evening, there is no God-factor in the mix. Instead, the cosmic reality is bi-polar. Opposites abound throughout the universe and within each human being.”

The fact is that as Christians, we have to be humble to admit that our brainpower is of limited help to us. Whatever that seems to be irreconcilable in our experiences or discernments is always reconcilable with the truth embodied in the Word. Disharmony as we perceive, or “confusion” as we endure, is all part and parcel of our spiritual growth into maturity and personal accountability to God. By our faith in Him, we can trust His Holy Spirit to be constantly with us guiding us as we struggle along to find our own anchor upon the truth. Within the body of Christ, there ought to be the unity in the embrace of the truth, yet a truth is that the body is made up of individuals with a range of spiritual standpoints put through corrections and improvements as we all meander along our spiritual journey. Do you see the harmony of *Unity* within the disharmony of *Diversity* as views clash yet coalesce within the universal circle of truth divine? (Just as the triune, or trinity in unity, as the Godhead.) All roads lead to Rome, and spiritually so too, as long as we do not depart from honestly seeking, knocking and asking by faith – and are willing to humbly accept corrections along the way.

We are now in the season of Epiphany. Jesus is revealed to us as no ordinary child, yet he is in every way human, son of Joseph and Mary. Where does his obedience lie? Is there any conflict situation arising out of his obligation to honour his parents according to the 4th Commandment and his duty to do his heavenly Father’s will? Besides, for all that Joseph and Mary had to do to provide for their divine son his ordinary human needs for shelter, food, discipline and education, there was nothing that the Messiah could not have provided for himself. Yes, if we take a dogmatic approach to explaining Scripture for our own satisfaction, we are going to have a whole lot of problems to stave off confusion.

The title of this piece of writing is “Dogmatism vs. Tolerance” rather than “Dogmatism vs. Existentialism” or “Dogma vs. Supernaturalisticism”. This is because it is not my intention to go into a technical discourse on different approaches to Scriptural interpretation. Surely, a long and tedious theological discussion is not what I am capable of. Instead, I am using the word “dogmatic” in the sense ordinary Christians (not the theological experts) embrace – *rigid, inflexible, assertive*, etc. In my mind, my late brother-in-law was like that. Although he wasn’t an articulate person, he tended to be unrelenting about what the Bible says about this and that on controversial issues – often ramblingly and incoherently – so much so that even if others wanted to slip in a view sideways, they would find no space to do so. It was a good thing that he was fervent in his faith, but his lack of tolerance of different viewpoints pushed people (both Christians and non-Christians) off from engaging in exchange of opinions with him, and this surely affected his effectiveness in winning souls for Christ.

We are all too familiar with Christians who are overbearing in presenting their dogmatic positions. This is as unacceptable as any Christian being liberal to the opposite extreme in subscribing to “*anything also can lah*”. In the Christian faith, there are basic tenets that cannot be compromised. These include the trinity, sin and redemption, the goodness of God, and so forth. However, for many issues we face in our mortal existence, it has to be recognized that we are all human with varying strengths of mental and spiritual faculties. Therefore, we are sometimes right and sometimes wrong because of perspectives and the depth of our knowledge. For example, is it alright for Christians to consume blood or food offered to idols?

Those who say NO to the above question quote Lev. 3:17 and Ac 15:29. Those who say YES quote Jesus in Mk 7:18-20. Let the arguments spring forth, but instead of dogmatically swearing “I am damned right, you are damned wrong,” (not quite Christian-like, isn’t it?) why not let the contending parties cool down and search the Word of God humbly to find out where the truth really lies in between the opposite viewpoints. It may surprise that both can be right, noting what Revd Dr Shroeder said about there being harmony within the cosmic reality that is bipolar. It is one thing to present a dogmatic position (“I can’t be wrong – see what Scripture says”) and another to offer a humble, constructive and considered opinion (“I think I am right, according to what the Scripture says here, but noting our different views, let us agree to disagree without offence. Maybe we can study the Scripture further and prayerfully ask God for help.”) In the latter accommodating approach, there is no surrendering of the truth according to one’s understanding or conviction at the moment. Instead, there is a positive invitation for humble research and reflection on Scripture and an opportunity for future engagement in discussion upon a more developed understanding of the issue. This approach is also founded on the spirit of love, not offence; on humility, not arrogance of knowledge. Paul couldn’t have been more direct in 1 Cor. 8:1-3:

“Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.”

Frequently, we think that we know something, yet there is more hidden in the knowledge vault (the Bible). To dig deep into the vault requires time, patience and perseverance. Nobody says that Biblical exegesis is as straightforward as reading the sentences of a book and understanding them. There are nuances, contexts, correlations of different portions of Scripture – to name just a few things to deal with in reading Scripture for what God wants us to know and apply. That is why we have hermeneutics experts who are specially equipped by God to exegete Scripture beyond the level that many of us less equipped can handle comfortably. Nevertheless, God will reveal knowledge in his time to any degree as He sees fit for us to know and apply at any time. When a Christian, before fuller understanding of an issue, takes a dogmatic position assuming he is all right and others all wrong, he would have pre-conceived his infallibility in his ‘knowledge’, and he would tend to bend Scripture to suit his defence (subconsciously or unconsciously), and God’s intended meaning becomes lost to him. The use of Scripture in this way is illegitimate!

In the Chinese New Year season, apart from the question of eating, another example ‘problem’ that can be cited is about the ancestral altar. To the question “Is it alright for a Christian to worship at the ancestral altar?” the answer is a definite NO. I think there is no argument about this, and of the related question, “Is it alright for a Christian to hold out a joss-stick or offer incense to the departed?” If we do something wrong (according to clear-cut biblical injunction) for a ‘good’ reason (“to save/spare someone from . . .), the ‘good’ doesn’t right the wrong. If you kill someone in Singapore, euphemistically justifying your murder as euthanasia, you have done wrong according to the law. Yet, as fellow mortal, I have no standing to condemn you for your action. The law of the land has the authority to deal with you appropriately, and the President has the powers to pardon you. However, whether or not you ought to be granted a Presidential pardon is a separate issue from whether or not you ought to have done what you did. In the same vein, our Christian testimony has to be right at all times regardless of circumstances. If in weakness we succumb to ungodly temptations or pressure, I would not like to see brothers and sisters in Christ quick with judgment or condemnation. Let them who are without sin throw the first stone. However, they may help to counsel the right Christian way of conduct and it is up to the Lord in His mercy to dispense forgiveness.

The right Christian way requires us to be firm in our stand on what is as it should be, yet tender in our communication with those who are in the wrong. By our correct example, we can be a light that shines into the darkness, succumbing to neither pressure nor fear, even if the darkness does not comprehend the light. When we see our Christian friends eat with the sinners, or share a standing space with people of superstitious or other religious persuasions, do we act like the Pharisees, teachers who were self-professedly ‘perfect’ in understanding of the law, who condemned Jesus for eating with tax collectors and ‘sinners’? Anyway, Jesus did no wrong to eat or have contact with sinners because in doing so he did not succumb to the influence of others’ transgressions.

In Mk 2:17, we learn that Jesus had a purpose to be with sinners without conforming to their ways. In our present context, when a Christian is urged (by love) to show consideration for the feelings of relatives by keeping a moment of silence according to the traditional way of showing respect in front of an ancestral altar, the act and the intention do not combine to suggest a spiritual wrongdoing that ought to be censured. It is like the fact that the act of wearing a cross around my neck is no sin, but if I intend the physical object to offer protection or be an object of worship, then it becomes an offence to God.

Admittedly, there is oftentimes a very fine line separating right and wrong behaviours. We may be placed in a position to make a very difficult judgment call. If we do right, thank God. If we do wrong, may brothers and sisters in Christ be more understanding. In the legal language of human laws, a culpable offence must have both *actus rea* (act) and *mens rea* (intention).

It is not possible for Christians to follow all the wishes of unbelieving elders just to please or “in order not to cause misunderstandings” or “to safeguard the weak faith of a fellow brother”. To do so would be trading in spiritual circumspection for expediency, with the intended good testimony of humility in deference to elders becoming a bad testimony of spinelessness in Christian faith. It may become the thin end of a wedge in pushing the envelope of permissiveness. It is also inadvisable for Christians to go about with a hundred and one “*Thou Shalt Not’s*” in a dogmatic rebuff of unbelievers’ suggestions or reproof of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ for not seeing eye to eye. Yet, it is possible and encourageable for Christians to “give way” in matters that involve no sin if it serves a good purpose. For example, I would like to draw on 1 Cor.8:9-12:

“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.”

In the verses quoted, I have underlined some words for attention. As Christians, we may have some freedom, but that doesn’t mean that we ought to exercise it without regard to conscience. Even if we opine our own conscience as strong enough to do what we want, our knowledge as superior to satisfy ourselves that we are in no wrong to do so, the fact that we have the knowledge and the conscience yet we fail to act responsibly to our brother of weaker knowledge and conscience makes us guilty of doing a great wrong against Christ. Is it complicated? Simply put, that which is right to do yet wrong to do involves opposites and relativity between circumstances. Borrowing the words of Revd. Dr Shroeder, there is God-factor in the mix.

Paul advises us to be circumspect of stumbling a weaker brother. We are advised to be ‘sacrificial’ of what we can give up (eating the food offered to idols) without committing sin in the process of giving way to the interest of someone else (a weaker brother) – giving way for a good reason without sinning. This is not to be interpreted as an advice for us to give way to the wishes of anybody “for any good reason” without being bothered about committing sin in the process.

The above thoughts are not meant for readers to swallow lock, stock and barrel. After all, there may be points of controversy or you may just have your knowledge base to proffer some contention. I don’t wish to be dogmatic in claiming, “I am surely right” and “you are definitely wrong”. Let arguments spring forth, and let us benefit from friendly exchange with mutual tolerance. (No swords and spears, please! J) Frankly, many people say that I am a person who likes to argue. In years of experience of arguing, I realize that I often stand to gain a lot (in new perspectives) even though I lose the argument. I believe that the process of arguing, not for its sake but for the opportunity of sinking our faculties into the depths of God’s knowledge vault and for the chance of affirmation or correction, is often spiritually nourishing. Feel free to email me or speak to me face to face any point that you disagree. For sure, I will lend you my ears. The truth will always prevail.

John Lee

The Seasons

February brings spring. From the renewal standpoint, this is a great season, although I am more of an autumn person.

Autumn presents me with ambivalence and an awe of uncertainty. If you live by the lakes, it's a beautiful mix of the gold from the leaves and chills from the winds.

Don't give up a forest for the tree. It may sound so cliché. I have lived in the woods and near the woods. Windy autumns have fascinated me with the solidarity of the tall trees that sway in unison. It's an even more majestic view than the snow-capped forests in winter. In autumn, I can literally sit by the window sill for the whole afternoon and watch the swaying trees. It's only an awesome view when the trees sway together. On its own, the lone tree remains no more than just a tree.

Have you ever felt lonely as a Christian? I have. Our cell has started talking about the varied views of each of our worldly calling, or *vocation*. Each of us could be the lone or rare

Christian at work, or the Christian worker bestowed with a lot of trust and critical judgment. I have said the worst people I have worked with are the so-called practicing Christians. Whatever it is, Christianity should not be a mere religion, regardless of how the world views it, or how Dan Brown satisfies the world with the mythical perspective of Christ.

Over the years, I have not been regular with my attendance at the cell. I don't agree with everything the members say, but I sure know they accept me for my aggression, absent-mindedness, tardiness and all. It has only dawned on me at the beginning of this year that while I'm like the lone autumn tree at work; being part of the cell fellowship renews that sense of solidarity with the other tall (and short and skinny and fat) trees. That is indeed awesome. The cell is a source of support and pillar of strength. Together, its members enjoy the renewal spring brings, and the cleansing autumn gives with the shedding of leaves.

Charlotte

Sam

2 of 2

My friend, if you are not already in a cell, join one.

If you are like me, irregular lone tree, (try and) be regular and fill up the space that remains open for you. Mind you, the sweeter wine comes with aged fruit from aged trees. Long live you cell, my cell then!

□□□□

Storm heaven's door, man!

*"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. " - **Matthew 7:7-8***

Indeed. When the days become too quiet for me, I wonder if I have become complacent and not listening to God enough. Although it has been said, *"Be still, and know that I am God"* - **Psalm 46:10**, I am always restless and feel more comfortable being in action. I also become more aware of God when I am in action. Being in action brings upon many occasions of uncertainty, conflict, strive and of course, stress. However, these also present opportunities to keep thanking the Lord, and calling upon Him for greater wisdom and refrain from temptation. It is akin to viewing the cup as half-empty or half-full. Being in despair can drive you into elusion or lead you to hold

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

- **Hebrews 11:1**

□□□□

The not-quite-final word on my views about vocation: If you are a woman called to any vocation (home-maker included – it's my lifelong ambition, you know?!), here's a transcript of a series of radio broadcasts that may speak to you. I found this by chance, talk about unearthing treasures!

<http://www.christianworkingwoman.org/Daily/1-5-04.html>

•□□ •□□

I gotta go.

Thanks for reading :)

Charlotte Sam

Thai Mission Hi-Tea

12 Feb 2006

About 20 people attended the Thai Mission Trip Hi-Tea organized by the missionaries who visited Thailand recently.

They were shown photos of the trip and a series of personal testimonies were shared by the missionaries.

The highlight of the event seems to be the Thai desserts which were served at the end of the sharings.



Why Do I Need Church Retreats?

- Why can't I worship God in the comfort of my home, enjoying the best preaching and music TV has to offer?
- Why can't I just enjoy being alone out in the woods—just God and I and the pine trees?
- Why can't I meet God at the water's edge, wiggling my toes in the warm sand?
- Why do I really need to go for Church Retreat?

Do you see your family every day? If you are like me you probably get to see your family every day between the hours of 6pm to 7am. The remainder of the time you are seeing your colleagues where ever you are working. Do you and you family need to take a holiday together? What about your church family? Do you need to take a holiday together?

Every time the church retreat comes along, we have to remind ourselves why we should part with our money, our striving and be part of each other's lives for a few days.

We are a family—rejoicing with one another, crying with one another, helping each other. We need each other's support.

I need church retreat because it's a classroom. I'm preparing for a mission; I'm on an extended course of study. For the rest of my life I'm enrolled in a course of Christian discipleship.

I need church retreat because it's a refuge. It is a place to get away from the busyness of the world. It's a place to focus my thoughts on things above, to worship.

I need church retreat because I'm a part of a family, I have lots to learn. I know what my priorities are. I respect Christ's death and am overjoyed by His resurrection. I want to spend time with my Father and other believers.

That's why I need church retreat!

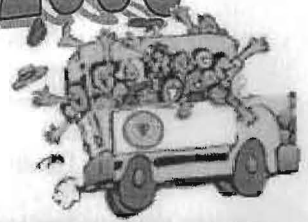
So if you can set aside 15 – 18 June to join the first LCS Retreat at Riviera Bay Resort in Malacca, sign up by 5 March 2006. Don't say you can't stand to spend four days with this crowd because it is very likely that you will spend an eternity with them.

Martin Cheah

15 - 18 June 2006 (Thurs - Sun)

LCS Retreat 2006

Involving all 7 LCS congregations for
the very first time



YISHUN

QUEENSTOWN

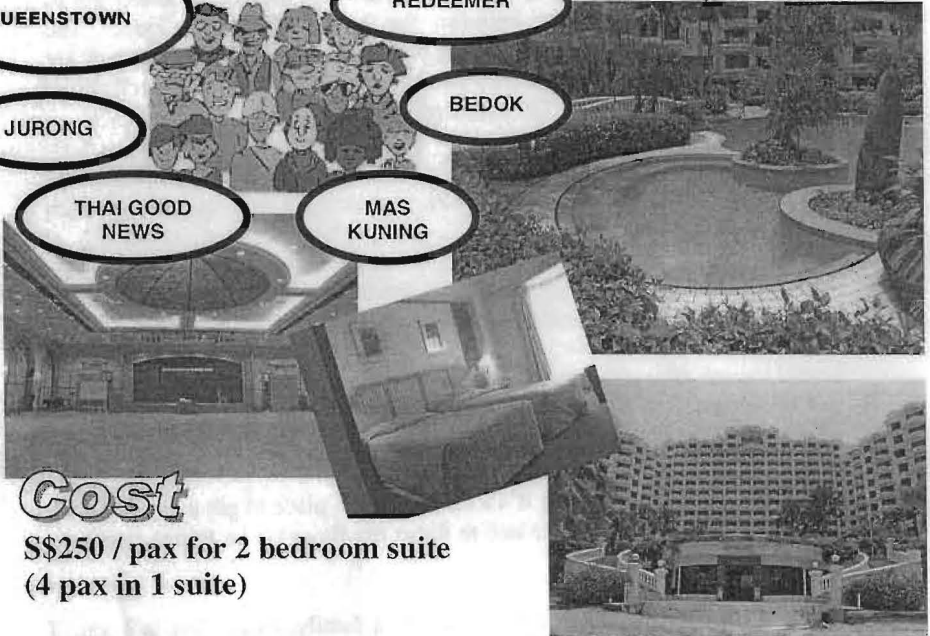
REDEEMER

JURONG

BEDOK

THAI GOOD
NEWS

MAS
KUNING



Cost

**S\$250 / pax for 2 bedroom suite
(4 pax in 1 suite)**

**S\$ 270 / pax for 1 bedroom suite
(2 pax in 1 suite)**

- 4 days & 3 nights stay
- All meals
(3 breakfast + 3 lunch + 3 dinner)
- Return bus transport

*Building a House
that bears the Name
of the Lord*



Retreat Speaker :

Bishop Robert Solomon

Register Now....

Please support our missionaries

GEN 12 II



Lydia \$1,200

I know it will not be easy but am assured that God will guide me through



Chih Chiang \$1,200

I want to use the spiritual gift that God has given to me to serve and minister to the people and the lost in Thailand through music.

Wen Bing \$350

I believe I can relate to young children.



Roger \$2,000

I told God that I will follow his will.



Josel \$2,000

I felt peace after the prayer

Australia

Why is there suffering?

by Frank Harber

Many hold that pain is evidence against God's concern for humankind. However, pain can be used for good and bad purposes. Not all pain is bad. Pain is an essential mechanism for survival. Without pain, the body is stripped of vital protection. Pain is an important signal to warn of even greater danger.

Suffering is a signal. It also can be a spiritual signal that reminds us of the fragile balance of life and our mortality. In The Problem of Pain, Christian apologist C.S. Lewis writes, "God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pain; it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Some suffering actually helps to bring greater good. This is best seen in Jesus' own suffering. Jesus traveled down the road of pain, loneliness, and death—a road that led to the cross. Jesus isn't just a Savior, he's our *suffering* Savior. The cross is the ultimate example of innocent suffering.

At the heart of this issue is the underlying challenge that God isn't fair. The problem is society holds pleasure as its chief goal in life. This philosophy is known as *hedonism*, and those who live by this philosophy find any form of suffering offensive. To say God isn't fair is an extremely dangerous charge.

If God gave us what we deserve, we'd be in trouble. It would be foolish to ask God for justice; what we need is mercy. God's mercy and grace are so taken for granted that suffering and pain shock us.

End of the Spear

The true story of a group of Christian missionaries in Ecuador who set out to reach the Wadani tribe. When the 5 men from this group are speared to death by Mincayani and others in the tribe, the wives and children of those men move into the Wadani tribe to teach them about God. *End of the Spear* is an amazing story of Truth, Love, and Forgiveness.

This is the story of Jim Elliot and his 4 friends who were killed while on a mission trip in Ecuador. Currently showing in the US, if you have a chance, try to catch it if you can.

