

The Vine

The Vine Committee

Editors:

Martin Cheah mart5003@yahoo.com ;

John Lee jpbislee@starhub.net.sg

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Nick Wong

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Editor's Word

On Wednesday, 24 May, it happened again, another serious accident to my new colleague who joined us only 3 days ago. He broke his left

arm while driving a reach truck (a type of forklift). As he lay on the ground with blood oozing out onto the floor, I held his right hand for a while and prayed silently, while staring at the open wound, with flesh and blood exposed. I really don't know where this is leading me but certainly, I was left a little shaken after looking at the gruesome sight.

I recall that some days earlier, I was discussing with my lady boss about fate and God's will. She was saying that the earlier accident to my other colleague was fated. There was no way he could have avoided it because it was his fate. Although I cannot really draw a fine line to separate the two, I told her that Christians believe in God's will and that if we prayed, God may change his will and the event may not happen. Anyway, she did not accept my explanation.

Now with this latest accident, fear gripped many of my colleagues. My lady boss remembered that the Chinese believe that accidents happen in groups of threes. She asked me when my accident occurred and I told her it was on Wednesday, 1 February. She noticed the coincidence of events, all three accidents happened on Wednesdays. Of course, she also realized that mine, despite my whining, was the lightest damage. Hopefully, she realizes that God has indeed been good to me.

She quickly arranged for a Taoist priest to come to the brewery to offer prayers of protection. Apparently it costs about \$5,000 to invite a Taoist priest to perform such a ceremony. As I write this, it occurs to me that I should remind her about her theology about Fate and its unchangeable nature and point out that if Fate cannot be changed, then the ceremony by the Taoist priest would be a waste of money. However, if Fate could be changed, then it should be called God's will.

May God be merciful and grant healing to both of my colleagues. May He also grant me the wisdom and grace to share His will with my boss so that she may know Him.

Martin Cheah

THE SECRET RAPTURE CODE DEBUNKED

Pastor Martin Yee

Recently, while riding on a SMRT Bus back from work, I was very intrigued to see a young Malay boy engrossed in reading one of Tim LaHaye's End Times Series fiction books. It brought back memories of how as a teenager I was equally engrossed mapping out End Time Events on a blank sheet of paper with color pencils, drawing charts trying to lay out all the end time events neatly and schematically like **Rapture, Millennium, Tribulation and Daniel's Seventy Weeks** into the wee of night, based on one of Tim LaHaye's books. So what I saw on the bus was nothing new. Sad to note that this series of fictions is in our JCC library...*sigh*.



Tim LaHaye and Hal Lindsey also have a knack (like Dan Brown), as pop writers, to produce bestselling fast-paced fictions which make fertile “prophetic imaginations” come across as facts that gullible folks who love sensational prophecies and speculations gulp down with delight. I remember that there was even a movie called “A Thief in the Night” based on all these. It has this catchy theme song with lines like “life was filled with guns and wars...I wish we’d all been ready...”

But as Dan Brown probably may have noted on the quiet – “Who cares about fact or fiction, as long as people want to read my books and it is a money spinner to boot?” No wonder Saint Paul was on the dot, when he noted, “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their *itching ears* want to hear.” (Italics mine) 2 Timothy 4:3.

Secret Rapture – Fact or fiction?

First of all it is important to note that the Mainline Churches DO NOT believe in the doctrine of the “Secret Rapture”. Hope this is not a surprise to you, but I am not too surprised if it is! The Roman Catholic,

Presbyterian, Anglican, and Lutheran Churches traditionally do not subscribe to this doctrine since they started! Neither did the Early Church!

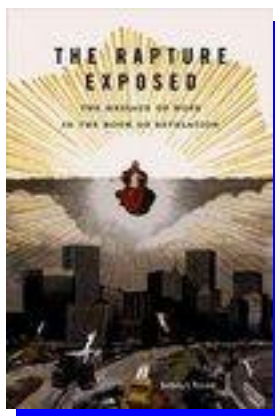
Secondly, the Secret Rapture theory is based on flimsy and questionable interpretations of just a few Bible verses; mainly, Matthew 24:36-42. But note the context in verses 37-38, “As it was in the days of Noah ...,” when you contemplate who were “taken” by the flood and who were “left” – Were they the righteous or unrighteous? (Go figure!) The Secret Rapture theory is essentially saying the reverse of the context. This passage is trying to symbolically warn Christians to be always ready for Christ’s Second Coming. It is not meant to describe the details of how the resurrection of believers takes place. Of course another key and much-hyped passage used is 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. But on careful scrutiny, would the “rapture” be at all secret when it is preceded by a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God? One must be deaf if this is a secret!

Thirdly, if one were to embrace the Secret Rapture theory, one has to envisage 2 “comings” of Christ – one in the mid-air Rapture and one after the so called Great Tribulation - instead of one like in our traditional belief. This is ludicrous to me. The Bible has consistently mentioned One Coming.

Fourthly, the Secret Rapture theory is part and parcel of taking all these End Times prophecies literally instead of symbolically. This will result in endless speculations and computations of dates of Christ’s second coming. William Miller, the founder of the Seventh Day Adventist Church predicted Christ’s 2nd Coming to be in 1844 but it did not materialize. One NUS Singapore Christian professor also predicted Christ’s 2nd Coming in the late 1990s and even wrote a book on it which he sent a copy to Rev. Michael Shen, Singapore Bible College’s principal at that time. Again it did not materialize. A Korean Church pastor predicted Christ’s 2nd Coming recently giving a specific date. A large crowd and some reporters gathered at his church. But by midnight, the wait was over; it again did not materialize and the pastor decided to offer kopi to the reporters who wasted time and sleep to report on that event. He should have bought them breakfast!

I have read tons and tons of stuff on both sides of the arguments. Premillennial vs Amillennial views, etc. Enough said. My view is that the Secret Rapture theory is not tenable. I am willing to stand my ground on the time-tested traditional Amillennial Christian view – although it may not be so sensational, schematic, neat; and I may not be able to laugh my way to the bank writing on it. If you strongly disagree, I would like to hear from you. Do write to the Editor of the Vine and I will try to respond. Just read the End Times Series as pulp fictions and have a good time! It may be better for your soul than the Da Vinci Code though.

By the way, a Lutheran Professor, Barbara Rossing has written a whole book, published by WestView Press, 2004 to debunk this Secret Rapture theory or myth systematically. It is entitled “The Rapture Exposed”. You can buy a copy online from Christianbooks.com



Lastly may I quote a statement of belief of The Lutheran Churches of Calvary Grace (LCCG), as published on the website <http://thelutheran.net/about/rapture.htm>. I think it represents the Lutheran View on the “Secret Rapture” pretty well. (In the context of this shared belief, I have adopted the name “Lutheran Church” in place of the original LCCG in the following quoted statement):

The [Lutheran Church] does not believe that the prevalent teachings about the "rapture" are based on a proper understanding of Scripture. We believe that scripture teaches all Christians will endure varying degrees of "tribulation" until the last day, that Christ will return only once (visibly) to "catch up" ("rapture") all believers, living and dead, into heaven, and that all believers will reign forever with him in heaven. The Lutheran Church understand the "1000 years" of Rev. 20:11-15 to be a figurative reference to Christ's reign here and now in the hearts and lives of believers, which will culminate in our

reigning with Christ forever in heaven following his return on the last day.

The word "rapture" comes from the Latin translation of 1 Thessalonians 4.16-17, where, in relating the resurrection and return of the Christ, Paul says that "we who are alive, who are left, will be to drag off (Latin: rapio / raptum) in the clouds together with them [the dead in Christ] to meet the Lord in the air." This is the only mention of such a concept in the entire Bible. The immediate transformation described in 1 Corinthians 15.51-52 is also sometimes mentioned as describing a "rapture" as well as the description of some people being taken and some being left behind in Matthew 24.40-41 and Luke 17.34-35.

The concept of a rapture is not to be found in Revelation, and many Christians (Lutherans in general among them) do not believe in a rapture as an event marked by saints mysteriously vanishing from earth. The act of being "caught up" is merely one way to describe what happens to Christians who are alive when the final resurrection and judgment occurs.

Even for those who read the book of Revelation using a Dispensationalist point of view and I might add who also think it to be a single event, there is considerable debate about when the rapture occurs in respect to their interpretation of the events in Revelation. There are some who hold a "Pre-Tribulation" view, using Revelation 4.1 as an indication of the rapture prior to the seven years of tribulations. Others point to Revelation 11.12 and 12.14 as a suggestion that the rapture occurs "Mid-Tribulation." Then there are those who use the sequence described in 1 Corinthians 15.51-52 as a basis, point to texts like Revelation 11.15-19 and 14.14-16 to claim a "Post-Tribulation" rapture.

Besides the Lutheran Churches, many of the Protestant churches in the United States including the Presbyterians, Episcopal (Anglican), Disciples of Christ and many of the other major denominations do not believe in the rapture. We have found that the theology is found in primarily in the fundamental and Pentecostal churches as a rule.

For the [Lutheran Church], the false teachings on the rapture require more than one return of Christ, more than one bodily resurrection, and more than one judgment in the future (and an additional one in the case of pretribulationist thought). We find this to be divergent to what is set out in John 5:28-29, Matthew 25:31ff., and many other places where these events are identified as happening onetime, not multiple times.

The [Lutheran Church] believes that these rapture theories ultimately make the Last Day known to one and all, which is again a concept contrary to Scripture (Mt. 24:36ff.) We find that depending on the favored position of the rapture in relation to a seven-year period of great tribulation, the Last Day would follow 1,007, 1,003.5 or 1,000 after the rapture.

The [Lutheran Church] believes that the ideas of this incorrect theory, particularly that of premillennialism, are inseparable from forms of dispensationalism. We hold that this maintains incorrect distinctions between "Israel" and "the Church" regarding how God desires to work among them for salvation purposes.

The [Lutheran Church] finds that these rapture ideas require a secret or unrecognized coming or return of Christ, which is also a concept that is divergent to Acts 1:11 and parallel verses that describe his return as visible and obvious to all mankind. Even 1 Thessalonians 4, from which (through the Vulgate) the term "rapture" is derived (1 Th. 4:17) says the event is accompanied by loud command, voice of archangel, and trumpet (v. 16).

The [Lutheran Church] believes that "Millennialism" in general and other false rapture ideas share the weakness of leading people to become preoccupied with literalistic (as opposed to literal) views of Bible texts. We believe that all too often people are led to an obsession with "end times" at the expense of gospel work here and now. We believe that this theory provides a tendency to try to scare people into God's kingdom with a law-oriented warning rather than to convince them through the gospel.

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Pastor Samuel shares his views

Dear Pastor Martin and John Lee,

Thank you for your interaction on this biblical subject of Prophecy [John's article is in the previous issue]. I must take my hat off to both of you. My interest in the coming of Christ is not "rapture-oriented". I am more interested in the fact that we live with the awareness of the end. In Christian terminology, the eschatological mindset is to be in our theology.

Living with the end in mind means that we are not short-term in our thinking of what the church is and should be. It means that daily we are aware of the implication of the coming of Christ for our lives and this world. One of the implications is that there will be an answer to injustice, suffering and pain. God will judge the world fairly. We can leave it up to him all our unanswered questions as well.

Secondly, there will be an accounting for Christians and non-Christians as to why they do not have faith in Christ. If we are to believe, do we stop at justification? What about sanctification? Do we continue to have faith that Christ will also make us holy as he had done already and through the Spirit is doing it again and again in our life?

Thirdly, I will have to answer to God for those who he placed around me but had yet to hear the Gospel from me. On judgment day, these people may turn around and accuse me of not loving them enough to tell them to repent and turn to Jesus!

Rapture or not, secret or open, I don't know what is the implication of those things. But there will be serious implication of what I know for sure, THERE WILL BE A DAY OF JUDGMENT. And I need Jesus for that very hour.

Pastor Sam

Ranking the Church

How many stars would you award?



Which port is World No. 1? (If you think Singapore, you are wrong. Shanghai surpassed Singapore last year. Should we be concerned?)

Which secondary school ranks the highest (5★) that I would like to enroll my child in?

“A well-known school announced that 20 pupils scored 10 distinctions. Following this, the newspaper reported that there were still pupils who scored 11 distinctions. A few days later, the news was that in a neighbouring country, one pupil scored 16 distinctions. Another few days passed and the newspaper carried yet another report that a pupil in another state achieved an excellent result with 17 distinctions ...” (translated, extract from the book 心灵耳语 by Mdm Ho Shoo Mei, JCC member)

Ranking can be by any favoured yardstick; so if I have my preference, then the No. 1 school is the one in the neighbourhood which raised 10 times 20 pupils from the doldrums of failure to become self-confident young men and women who are able to hold their heads high in their own talent spheres. Contrast this with a school, if such a school exists, that is ranked high by a different parameter, yet sends some of its pupils the other direction, from high confidence to despair, because they are found “not good enough” in their performance, being unable to meet high expectations, and so have to be “recommended” to leave the school for another “for their own good.”

The ranking fad drives people to heights of dizziness and self-centredness, and never will it come to an end. Now, a recommendation to introduce a rating system for charities and non-profit organizations has been floated by an Inter-Ministry Committee. What will be the next ranking idea?

Not surprisingly, the church is not spared by people who are rank-conscious. According to an article “7 Ways to Rate Your Church” that came to me via email:

“Money magazine annually rates the 300 best places in America to live. The ratings are based on climate, affordability, amenities, crime rate, public transportation, medical care, and other factors. **A similar approach has been taken with churches.** Several major metropolitan newspapers regularly review churches. A religion writer makes an unannounced Sunday visit and analyzes everything from the sign on the outside to the sermon on the inside. Like restaurant and theater reviewers, **some writers even use ratings, from one star (poor) to five stars (excellent).**” –
*Leith Anderson**

**Pastor of Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie,
Minnesota, at the time he wrote the article.*

In the end, does the rank always match the reality of goodness that one enjoys by association with it? Frequently, a ranking gives a false impression because the real situation is either blown up or subdued. Alas! A high rank begets high and unrealistic expectations that finally fall flat, while a low rank bears down on the spirit or hides some real good value that escapes the notice of the hard-to-please church hunter. Nothing practically good comes out of it the way it is argued for in theory.

The idea of ranking basically promotes the quest for gains over others in a ceaseless contest. If it does not breed anxiety, then it infects with immediate gratification in the endeavour for the high point; like Jack climbing his beanstalk, higher and higher he goes with absorption, the ending being a sobering retreat to realize that the person he loves (his mother) has been suffering for his adventure. How often do people in their pursuit of a climax end up with an anti-climax to realize that the greatest gain is still to have their feet firmly on the ground, without the misery that the gratuitous challenge can bring to people around them? In the case of Christians, satisfyingly engaging in loving fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ in the church where we worship together should be our concern, and we can accomplish much in building up this church (body) for God’s glory without diverting our energy to needless preoccupations with rank-seeking. A church that is not motivated by

ranking may still be the best that can be by being inspired in a different way sans status-consciousness.

So, I am not enthused if anybody were to be obsessed to weigh JCC up. Not that I am interested to play the ranking game but just to make a point, let me simply say that it is fair for JCC to take 2½ stars, not more. Why not? – So that we have no temptation to swell our heads for no good end. It is quite good in making clear to all who are interested for JCC to score high that we have a lot of room for improvement. Let us be unassuming in true Christian spirit and acknowledge that we can learn much from our brothers and sisters in Christ in other churches who are better in ranking. Instead of having our heads stuck high up, we humbly satisfy ourselves with a lower place so that we stand a chance to move up when it is right rather than face the potential embarrassment of having to move down for over-exalting ourselves. (See Prov. 25:6-7 & Luke 14:1, 7-11)

Why not fewer than 2½ stars? – We recognize that we have gone some distance from the time of our birth. We thank God for having moved us halfway on a long and tough journey of faith. We are in the middle, poorer than some from whom we learn and better than others with whom we have opportunities to share our blessedness. With thankfulness in our heart, we seek, in all that we endeavour, to give support to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are poorer than us, such as in some developing churches that we encounter in our outreach efforts.

Let me hear your opinion. What do you think about any value (or non-value) of ranking? You may agree or disagree with me on the following reasons I have for not being in favour of ranking:

1. Criteria are subjective. (The ways suggested by Leith Anderson are: *Sensing the presence of God, Healthy problem handling, etc.*)
2. If rated high by one set of criteria, gives false sense of comfort and may breed complacency. If rated low by another set of criteria, may have the opposite negative effect.
3. Encourages church shopping and church hopping.
4. Creates temptation for vainglory.
5. Distracts us from our important mission.

6. It does not serve any good that we cannot have without ranking.

If you disagree with me, let me be accommodating a little by supporting "personal & private rating" – i.e., each Christian rates the church according to his own criteria without publishing the result. Let the rating result be for his own private consumption and sharing with God, and personal contemplation as follows:

1. If the rating is high, be thankful for God's blessings upon the workers. Be grateful and challenged to support them further to bring the rating to the next higher level.
2. If the rating is low, be thankful to God for the alert and take positive personal steps to enhance one's effort in His humble service to lift the situation.

The emphasis on the "personal" applies whether the individual doing the private rating holds the vocation of a shepherd or a sheep.

Consider this illustration:

Secondary School A comes out top in the GCE examinations. Is it the credit of the Principal or the pupils who were all stars-holders in the PSLE?

Christian Church B does very well in the rating by Leith Anderson. Is it the credit of the Pastor or the church members who are all faithful and dutiful servants in contrast to Christian Church C?

It is simplistic in the above illustrations to give or deny credit by basing decisions on how the School or Church has been ranked. The reason is simply because not all the causes (of good or bad) are attributable clearly and specifically to anyone. Ultimately:

1. There is God's will and purpose in any situation no matter how humans reckon it.
2. No individual is capable of judging and laying blame or giving praise without personal bias.

In rating JCC, remember that a church is a body of Christians. So how a church is generally reflects on the individual members who make up the whole body. When the church is rated high, this is fine with everybody.

On the other hand, when the church is rated low, the sheep may be tempted to turn around and blame the shepherds for their poor shepherding. It is just like in rating academic performance; a student who fares badly blames his teacher for not teaching well and the teacher faults the student for lack of diligence. This blame game wouldn't be pleasing to God. Certainly, it would be ideal to have good (read: faultless) sheep and good shepherds. I would be very happy if anyone can recommend me a church with a 5-star rating on account of having impeccable sheep and shepherds. I would be very happy to go and join that church and forsake JCC. (Sorry, Pastors and all beloved bros. & sis. in JCC. I am just being very humanly pragmatic.)

On second thoughts after recovering from my whimsy, will I (a not-so-good sheep full of blemish on the coat at my back that I can't see) end up pulling down my new church's perfect rating if the church fails to feed me adequately to nourish my wool to a perfect grade (not for lack of effort on my part)? Better for me to stay put in JCC and do the best I can here (even if it doesn't mean much), and not risk earning God's displeasure for attempting any frivolous reason to church hop. So, Pastors and all beloved bros. & sis. in JCC, it is my contentment to do what little I can here in co-labouring with you for Kingdom's gain through thick and thin. May God accept us – warts and all – and bless us all by His grace!

I see a lot of good points about JCC, with areas for improvement definitely. If I were to worship in another church, I would see positives and negatives too. Which are more and which less would depend on which I choose to focus my eyes on. Ultimately, whether I am shepherd or sheep, God is the judge on my accountability where He places me for a mission.

Let us be humble and dedicated servants for Kingdom's glory without the temptation of a ranking to swell our head or sink our spirit. What man does not know, God knows. Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 14:11)

Soli Deo Gloria!

John Lee

My Father-in-law

When I first met my father-in-law more than 20 years ago, he was still selling coffee powder for a living. He rode a motorcycle to deliver his goods to the coffeeshops. He was a quite man who spent most of his time at home writing his Chinese calligraphy or poems. Thus it was possible for me to come courting his daughter without having to “meet the parents”, if you have seen the movie.

If he had been the gregarious type I would be in trouble because over all these years, my mastery of the Chinese language has not grown much. I hardly exchanged a few pleasantries with him over the years I have been his son-in-law. We have much in common, he like photography and he enjoyed being by himself. Yet because of my language disability, we have never shared our common interest in photography. I wonder if even Peter Cheong could handle photographic terminology in Hokkien.

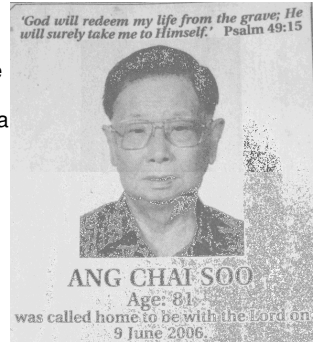
When we first brought my in-laws to Christian Evangelistic meals, he would be very reluctant but Joo See would not give up and we kept bringing him. Eventually, one day he did come to accept the Lord through the ministry of Rev. Oh Beng Kee.

His was a simple faith and although he was 81 when he went home to the Lord, he must have been just a babe in Christ.

On one occasion during his last few days, as the maid and the mother-in-law was trying to shift him in his bed, he looked straight at me and he gave me a smile. Maybe he was saying you are a good son-in-law even though we did not get to talk much.

So the lesson to learn from all this sharing is that we should not give up bringing our parents to Evangelistic outreach because one day they will be touched. Secondly, you do not need to be able to handle the language because there are more capable people around but you just need to provide the transport to bring your parents there.

Finally, I want to thank you for your support during our recent time of bereavement. I believe that God had worked through this time to bring my brother-in-law's mother-in-law to a point that she is willing to believe in Christ. We hope to be able to bring her to our next dialect ministry service.



Martin Cheah

JCC Kindergarten Family Day

27 May 2006

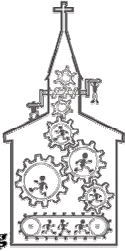
The aim was to raise funds for subsidizing school fees for children who come from families with financial difficulties.

Many including youths and Chinese section members came together to make this an occasion to remember.

The church for half a day was turned into some sort of "Pasar Malam" with the many food and games stalls manned by JCC members and JCCK teachers.



LCS Retreat 2006



Building
**a House that bears
the Name of the LORD**
2 Samuel 7:13

15th-18th June 2006
Riviera Bay Resort, Malacca

I started out with some misgivings about this retreat because the committee tried very hard but could not get a good response to this retreat. In total there were only 42 people from JCC English section (including youths, children and senior

citizens) who finally made the trip to Malacca together

with about 500 other participants from all the LCS congregations.

But now that I have completed that over 500 kilometer drive and experienced a good time of fellowship and recreation with good messages, I do not regret spending those few days with our brothers and sisters from all over.

It was a great experience.





Sea, sand, fun,
food, games,
fellowship and
the sacraments.



Many were concerned about the logistics and crowd control during meal times. However thanks to the great supply chain management, there was ample food with only small queues. Everyone had sufficient to eat and I must admit that I ate too much during this retreat.

There was also no problem with the members of the various congregations mixing together in fun and games.

Martin Cheah