

The Vine

For internal circulation only

Volume 7/2006

EDITOR'S WORD

North Korea captured the attention of the world recently when they test fired several missiles into

the Sea of Japan. According to some statistics, the living conditions in North Korea are horrific. Prices are high and people are starving. An estimated 2 to 3 million people have died over the past 10 years due to a food shortage. Also, 15 percent of all children under 5 years old are malnourished. Besides that, North Korea is ranked as the top persecutor of Christians for four straight years. Christianity is observed as a dangerous foreign influence which stimulated the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and therefore poses one of the greatest threats. As a result, the North Korean authorities are making harsh efforts to root out Christianity. It is believed that tens of thousands of Christians are currently suffering in North Korean prison camps where they face cruel abuses.

Certainly, we must be thankful for the blessing of living in Singapore where we are given freedom although within certain boundaries, and more people die from overweight rather than starvation. However, most Christians in Singapore do not realize that there are poor people in Singapore, much less that there is persecution of Christians in some parts of the world. We live like gold fishes in a bowl, oblivious of everything except our own stomachs. There is danger to being oblivious because the Bible in Ezekiel 3:18 warns that we will be held accountable. Can we continue to live our comfortable lives and ignore the plight of the people around us? Philippians 3:19 warns: "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things."

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Italy has won the World Cup 2006. Do not be like England with all its sound and fury who went back without winning like they have failed to do for the last 40 years. So let us wake up from our slumber, be ready to share the Good News, to pray for the persecuted church, let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. May God grant us the wisdom and power to complete the task before He comes back.

Martin Cheah



Is life fated?

– A Christian Perspective

Brother Martin Cheah in his recent editorial comment in JCC's Vine related how his lady boss believed that his colleague's forklift accident which resulted in a broken arm injury was fated, especially since this and the past two accidents in the company also occurred on a Wednesday. Hong Kong Cantopop star, Samuel Hui, used to sing, "If your life has it you do, if your life does not have it, you don't" The concept of fatedness is very prevalent in Asian Chinese culture. When a chain of disastrous events happens in our life – which perplexes us – we tend to assign it to fate. The foreman died in the Nicoll Highway collapse disaster because it was fated? The Singaporeans who died in the tsunami killer waves while holidaying in Phuket were also fated?

So is life fated? I must say that this question is a very tricky one. Many Chinese Christians are stumped by this question. The answer depends on what is meant by fate to the person. The reason is that a Chinese Christian may confuse the Chinese concept of fate with the Christian concept of predestination as they are both part of the concept of determinism. But they are actually different – just like the papaya and the durian are both fruits, but they are different!

Christian View of Predestination

Christians believe that God is omniscient or all-knowing and that God is eternal, so naturally we believe God can see the past, present and future. In other words, since God knows ahead of time what will happen, then current events on earth are effectively known by him in advance. In Lutheran theology, this is 'foreknowledge', which is different from predestination or the eternal election of God. ***Predestination "is concerned only with the pious children of God in whom he is well pleased. This is the cause of their salvation, for he alone brings it about and ordains everything that belongs to it."***³ Related to this are the concepts of God's will, God's sovereignty and human free will. Adding further to the Chinese Christian's confusion probably is that the doctrine of election/predestination is debated among Christians. Teachings on predestination vary because of various considerations such as:

- ❑ Is God's predestinating decision based on a knowledge of His own will, or does it arise from a knowledge of whatever will happen?

- ❑ How particular is God's prior decision: is it concerned with particular persons and events, or is it limited to broad categories of people and things?
- ❑ How free is God in effecting His part in the eventual outcome?
- ❑ The role and priority of human free will versus God's sovereignty
- ❑ Is the predestination for salvation only or includes damnation?
- ❑ Different interpretations of Bible verses such as Eph. 1:3-5, Rom. 8:28-30 and many others.

The Lutheran view admits and upholds the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility in predestination to salvation. There is a certain mystery to it and so Lutherans do not seek to resolve it cleanly. Respecting God's sovereignty:

“We are not to investigate this predestination in the secret counsel of God, but it is to be looked for in his Word, where he has revealed it. The word of God, however, leads us to Christ. This Christ calls all sinners to himself and promises them refreshment. Therefore we should not judge this election of ours to eternal life on the basis of reason or of God's law.”³

We believe Christ died for all and his atonement is for all. Election of the saved is seen in retrospective. Respecting human responsibility, we have no reason to be smug in thinking that since we are predestined to salvation, we can just do what we like. “We must learn about Christ from the holy Gospel ... that everyone should repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:6; 1 Jn 2:2)”³

Salvation is by grace through faith alone. Faith is a gift of God.

Chinese View of Predestination

I would discourage any Chinese Christian from believing in “fate” or say that life is fated. The reason is that there is a whole Buddhist religious philosophy lying behind this word in Chinese. It is not as simple as we think. As Christians we cannot buy into this philosophy. The most common Chinese term for “fate” or “destiny” is 命運 (*mingyun*), literally

"the turn of events in life"¹. Closely related to "fate" is 缘 (*yuan*) or 缘份 (*yuanfen*) which is a Buddhist-related Chinese concept that means the predetermined principle that dictates a person's relationships and encounters². The driving forces and causes behind *yuanfen* are the actions done in the previous reincarnations. This idea is therefore similar to *karma* of Buddhism. However, while *karma* often refers to the consequences of an individual's actions on oneself, "*yuan*" is always used in conjunction with two persons.

So there are key differences between the Chinese idea of "fate" and Christian idea of God's Will, Predestination and Sovereignty. For the Chinese, "fate" does not involve the idea that things happen by the will of a transcendent and immanent God. It is quite different. The Chinese "fate" carries with it a suggestion of *karma*. In Confucianism it may carry the idea of heaven's mandate (天命 *tian ming*). Disasters happen in life because we are not in harmony with this mandate, causing a disturbance in the balance between *Yin* and *Yang*. The "heaven" is viewed as an impersonal ultimate reality. A personal creator God is not in the picture!

Conclusion:

So if we are inclined to say "life is fated" as our non-Christian Chinese colleagues, friends or relatives, let us think again. What are we actually saying? Are we just being swallowed up by a non-Christian worldview? Beware of the underlying concepts of *karma* and *Yin Yang* behind "fate".

Another reason why we should not say or think "life is fated" when disasters happen is that God revealed to us in the Bible that God does NOT desire or cause evil to happen. Evil happens because of the evil ones and sin, not because of God. God has NO desire that any should perish! (1 Peter 3:8)

While fate casts a pall of despondency, the doctrine of election is "a comforting doctrine, for it mightily substantiates that we are justified and saved without our works and merit, purely by grace and solely for Christ's sake. Before the foundation of the world was laid (Eph 1:4) ...

¹ Wikipedia article on "*Yuanfen*".

² Ibid

³ Lutheran Formula of Concord

God elected us to salvation according to his purpose by grace in Christ (Rom 9:11; II Tim 1:9)³

Finally, the concept of fatedness goes against our Lutheran Theology of the Cross. We believe God reveals Himself to us in joy and sufferings, in happy and sad events, in success and also in disasters. Let us trust the Gospel promises of salvation and eternal life available in Christ's suffering, death and resurrection on our behalf. Let us not say, when we face sufferings, that "Life is fated" but say "... in all things God works for the good of those who loved Him." Romans 8:28. To God be the glory.

Rev. Martin Yee

JCC 39th Anniversary Photos



Noodles, Laksa, Chicken Rice, Sushi and lots of fellowship as JCC celebrates its 39th Anniversary on 2nd July 2006.

Jurong Christian Church

a small & healthy church
celebrating her 39th anniversary

This month we celebrate the 39th anniversary of Jurong Christian Church. If you are 39 years old, you may reflect on what you have done in your foregoing 3.9 decades of life that contribute to what you are today. Thinking positively, you may celebrate with satisfaction your achievements, triumphs, etc. Unfortunately, as a matter of fact in life, a large number of people would reminisce with regrets whatever they see as their present state of non-achievements as they measure themselves against higher goals. It does not matter whether the goals are realistic for them. Even if they have actually attained a level higher than some others, they still want to measure themselves against those who are higher up.

For example, if one is already a doctor gifted by God to do lots of good for patients under his care, he looks at his colleague who is a specialist and thereby sets a higher aim even if he would on hindsight later come to realize that he is capable of being a greater and more accomplished GP than as a consultant in a narrower field. Even if he does succeed in climbing the ladder to specialist status, he sees someone else as superior in devotion to a sub-specialty, with better rewards, and so he pursues his ascent again, regardless of whether he ends up more stressed but less functional because the target aimed at is simply not suited to his persona.

Can you honestly say that you can be someone you secretly admire or that that person can be like you? Surely not. We are simply what we are. Therefore, we should feel satisfied to be ourselves the best that we can be as we push forward and upward commensurate with our own forte. This is more worthy than striving on the basis of a feeling of resentment at ourselves and envy towards others. Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple. (Job 5:2)

The church as a body is the sum of the individual Christians, and her unique character is a reflection of the assorted personas that merge together. **A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. (Prov. 14:30)** In JCC, as we celebrate 39 years of our life as a body in Christ, we have the composite heart that is at peace, which gives us the effervescent life to press ahead. We do not labour out of envy of others, but we work hard by recognising God's distinctive plan for us. We faithfully appropriate the gifts that exist within the body, instead of gazing at the gifts that exist elsewhere (beyond our reach) and doing little because we despise our own gifts. **Ecclesiastes 4:4 tells us that all labour and all achievement that spring from man's envy of his neighbour is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.**

Often, Christians can do the right thing with the wrong motivation, just like some who preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. (Philippians 1:15) I would rather see that we do the wrong things (honest mistakes) with the right motivation. Along the way, we will learn from our mistakes, as we are humble enough to attend to God's correction, and grow wiser and more stable in small steps.

In last month's issue of the Vine, I wrote about "Ranking the Church". I hope that what I shared is relevant for the consumption of anyone who is predisposed to making comparisons between churches, to chase after the wind. I did not mention size as a factor for ranking, but I knew that many immature Christians do use size as a measure of the attractiveness of a church. I was not surprised when I later received another emailed article on the matter of church comparison: "The Strong Little Church. – Small churches can be healthy" by Christian Schwarz, author of Natural Church Development and Paradigm Shift in the Church, published by ChurchSmart Resources.

The following are some of the points culled from the email:

- ✧ *"Smaller churches do as well as larger churches in all key areas but one, according to analyst Christian A. Schwarz. Surveying 1,000 churches in 32 countries, he found eight principles of health in churches around the world, regardless of size, culture, or denomination."*
- ✧ *"Turned off by what he calls "technocratic thinking" in the church, Schwarz is bullish on smaller congregations. His research tells him that's where the action is. But Schwarz spies signs of reformation among churches of all sizes."*
- ✧ *"How do small churches outperform large churches? One example is the percentage of people who practice their spiritual gifts to help their church grow. In churches with less than 100 in attendance, it's 31 percent. You can say that's not much. But if you compare that with churches of over 1,000 in attendance, which average only 17 percent, you see there is a decline in quality. In all areas except one, the quality decreases with the size of the church."*
- ✧ *"What's the one exception? Larger churches do better than smaller churches only in creating more inspiring worship services. This makes sense. In a crowd of 5000, to sing worship songs and to have higher quality music is more inspiring than being together with eight other*

people and a guitarist who can play only three chords.”

- ✧ *“The importance of celebrating small churches and aiming to multiply small churches is strategic. And it will increase.”*

Without undermining the valuable place of mega churches in God’s plan, I must say that God in His wisdom knows when and where to raise up a mega church. In spite of that, from human pragmatic considerations of geography and population spreads, we can understand easily how small churches may still be better-equipped overall in reaching out to more peoples in the whole world with the welcoming spiritual fellowship of believers. We can just have so many (or “so few” depending on how you look at it) mega churches, and these mega churches themselves have to depend on the facilities of small churches (bodies of believers) to reach every nook and corner of the world.

Basically, a church has two dimensions – the spiritual dimension and the administrative (human) dimension. Managing a church has similarity with managing any other human organisation – we need manpower resource. The basic economic problem applies to the church organization – resource is scarce against unlimited wants. In the application of resource, for maximum productivity out of every single unit, it is good for the organisation to grow in order to tap the economic advantage of scale. However, there is a limit to it. Beyond a certain limit, the Law of Diminishing Returns sets in and the organisation becomes administratively clumsy, inefficient, less adroit in managing happenings (e.g., leadership transition) and diminishing in productivity per unit of resource input even though the total output for all resource input may be greater compared with a smaller organisation.

Above, I mentioned "resource is scarce against unlimited wants." Wants are to be distinguished from needs. Admittedly we are all sinners with unlimited wants – better air conditioning (“if not, I move to another church that offers better physical comfort”), better preachers (in the sense that they are more enjoyable to listen to, never mind the depth of the preaching content), better people around who take initiatives to make us feel warm (“never mind whether I take my initiatives to interact and be engaged in co-labour to make my presence known” even if the “I” has grown beyond feeding on milk), etc. The list of wants is simply endless. Ultimately, the way a church is to human sight (whether it is a kampong church with rudimentary facilities or one housed in a grand monumental building in a metropolis) is never the way it will be in God’s sight.

Church administrators are always facing a Catch-22 situation. If they pander to the wants of the church attendees, the advancement of the spirit will tend to decline. If they press down spiritedly with the uncompromising truth of God's Word that we ought not to be troubled with wants unfulfilled but continue to be faithful in little to depend on Jehovah to supply our needs, you will see in a short time how the church attendance thins out. Is this about people not being attentive to the capstone (Ps 118:22; 1 Pet 2:6-8) when their minds are engrossed with less important things?

It is never easy to tell ourselves as Christians to look for a church with a narrow gate that looks uninviting (looks can be deceptive) instead of being swept up easily by the sight of a wide entrance with beauty to behold within. I am talking metaphorically.

Mega-churches do have their positive points. However, just as their minor counterparts, they have unlikely situations too. So on balancing the desirable and the adverse conditions related to size, it would be more helpful to the Great Commission if the world accommodates churches of a wide range of sizes. It is splendid for churches to grow and grow, but once a certain size is reached to cause it to become administratively heavy, it may be economically efficient (with spiritual spin-offs) for such huge churches to split into smaller autonomous units spread out geographically. As the units continue to grow (thanks be to God), they can be further reorganised into smaller units that will take in the advantages of scale yet not suffer from the Law of Diminishing Returns. This is consistent with what Christian Schwarz says, *“The importance of celebrating small churches and aiming to multiply small churches is strategic.”* Herein is the advantage of having growth as well as spreading across the land.

Imagine all the Lutheran churches in USA coming together to form one super mega church. Something must give. Administration will be more cumbersome and less flexible with a single management and a single shared cluster of amenities for a huge body. There will also be trade-offs in the degree of differentiation to suit acceptable but diverse preferences of church members from different backgrounds. It is good to have churches of different sizes and characters (rather than have all churches bunch together as a mammoth body) so long as they function adequately in delivering healthy spiritual manna and making more church goers (of diverse personalities) spiritually fulfilled.

We can see JCC as a church that is of good size to fit into the whole picture of God's blueprint, with faith as our primary resource and the beating heart of a

small church as our driving force for kingdom's expansion. We may not have the competence to run a mega church, but we have the savoir faire for raising servants to send off to new centres of Christian service. We can raise pastors like we have done (e.g. Pastor Michael) to be released to bear fruit in another land. We can raise workers from spiritual babes, like we did in nurturing Sis. Ting Ching from the time she accepted Christ at the Billy Graham Crusade to become a parish worker and thereafter to become an independent go-getting member of God's Kingdom on Earth. We can also, as we have done, raise up ordinary men and women of the laity who develop their gifts here with us and then they respond to the Lord's leading to settle down in faithful service where they perform best for His glory. Of course, we do not encourage the departure of sheep to wander from pasture to pasture aimlessly at risk of being swallowed up by wolves in wild grasslands.

It is distressing to see fellow brothers or sisters leave the church unwisely and find themselves lost. On the other hand, it cheers me to ponder the large number of humble men and women we have played some roles in the church's 39 years of existence to develop into fruit-bearing unassuming faithful servants of the Lord hither and thither – including faithful shepherds, and brethren who have run the race before us, kept the faith and gone home to be with the Lord. It also cheers me that we can continue to develop collaborative outreach ministries with co-workers in the field (such as the TGNC, the seafarers, GMB, mission teams of LCS congregations, etc.). So, according to my vision, JCC will for a long time remain cosy, small to medium in size, while we retain our 'big-ness' of spiritual heart in playing a role together with all believers to build the mega church that matters – the Universal Church of Christ that is not constrained by walls. This is the spirit of servanthood. **Our Master is behind us and He calls the shots. We just do what the Master empowers us – and surely there is something each and every one of us can do, unless, for some lamentable reason, any one is not given any useful gift by the Master.**

It is good for JCC to remain small (or medium), cosy and easily manageable without the pitfalls of some mega churches, notwithstanding some advantages such mega churches may enjoy that are beyond our reach. (Unless God in His will intends for the LCS to become a jumbo church, of which JCC is a part.)

Whenever we congregate for worship and fellowship, let us heed the living Stone (1 Pet 2:4-8) in our midst and not stumble for chasing after the wind.

John Lee

Overview of the Bible

A summary of what's in the greatest book of all time.

by Jim Townsend

Wouldn't you love to be able to grasp what the entire Bible contains in just a few minutes? This compilation of the themes of the Bible will allow you to do just that. The following is a summary of what each book of the Bible contains. Keep it handy to refer to as you study and read.

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis

God is creator (1)
God communicates with human beings (1,2)
Sin is a present reality (3)
Sin messes up relationships (3)
God seeks out those who have sinned (3)
Start-over opportunities are available to those who've sinned (3)
Sin is the cause of death (3)
Sin erupts in violence (4)
Sin spirals and invades all of life (6)
God can't let sin go on forever (6-9)
Sometimes nearly everything must be destroyed to start over
Heritage trees are important (10)
Humans challenge God's primacy (11)
God calls people for specific purposes (12)
God wants people to respond to His words in faith (15:6)
Faithful obedience is a hallmark of faith
God seeks out covenant relationships with people (9, 12, 15, 17)
God uses flawed people (25, 27)
God tests our trust (22)
God's plans demand patience
Children often have the same flaws as their parents (20, 26)
Peacemaking is a valuable trait (26)
Taking matters into our own hands has consequences (30)
Responsible people don't let setbacks stall

In *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*, Kathleen Norris recounts the story of a South Dakota rancher and his bride who received an expensive Bible as a wedding gift from his grandfather. They wrote a thank-you note and stowed the Bible away on a closet shelf.

As time passed, the grandfather repeatedly asked the couple how they liked the Bible. The rancher was confused as to how to respond. Hadn't he already expressed his appreciation? But the grandfather persisted. Eventually, the young man dug out the gift. As he leafed through it, \$20 bills fluttered out, 66 in all—one at the beginning of Genesis and in each succeeding book.

While the rancher had left a monetary treasure waiting to be discovered, he had also left something even more valuable untouched between those pages: spiritual riches. All because he had not opened the Book.

"Americans revere the Bible," says pollster George Gallup, Jr., "but, by and large, they don't read it."

Why not?

them (Joseph)
Eventually responsibility and
excellence are rewarded
(Joseph)

Exodus

Slavery is a human predicament
(1-4)

God raises key people for
specific needs (2-4)

God is known through his
names (3)

Often people endure long
hardship before God bails them
out

God's super drama is behind the
scenes of life

Better get used to waiting

Things may get worse before
they get better

Salvation comes through God
God is the true liberator

Commemorative celebration is
appropriate for our deliverance
(12)

Eating is a form of celebration
(12)

National triumphs can be
memorialized.

God's majesty breaks through at
times (3, 19, 32)

Divine drama is spectacular
(19).

For some issues God has an
absolute agenda (20)

God gives us guidance through
his laws (20)

God's law covers a wide range
of subjects

Don't expect deliverance to
come without struggles (14, 16)

Leaders need support (17)

Here are seven excuses that prevent us from
cracking the Book—and how to overcome them.

1. "I don't have time to read."

But we do have time—if we read in spurts.

Unleashing Connection reports that in one year,
the average American reads 3,000 forms or
notices, 100 newspapers, and 36 magazines—but
only three books. These trends suggest why the
USA Today format is so popular. We like to get
our information in short doses that are easy to
digest.

"Half the books of the Bible can be read in 10 to
45 minutes each, and many of them can be read
in less than 20," says Nashville-based pastor and
author Robert Morgan. "The entire Old and New
Testaments can be read aloud slowly and with
expression in less than 71 hours."

Read just one chapter of the Bible each day, and
in a month you will have completed the book of
Proverbs (31 chapters) once or the epistle of
James (five chapters) six times.

2. "I don't know where to begin."

If starting "In the beginning" with Genesis seems
too daunting, flip to the Psalms or Proverbs and
start there. Or begin your journey in the New
Testament with Matthew. You can also poll
Bible-reading friends and ask them what their
favorite book is—then try reading it. Or use a
Bible with a built-in reading plan, such as *The
One-Year Bible* (Tyndale House) or *The Daily
Bible* (Harvest House). These devotional Bibles
present Scripture in manageable portions and
work through it in logical sequences.

3. "I just don't get it."

Many of us think of the Bible as a technical
manual written in Christian-ese. But there are
"biblical help" buttons a reader can push to get
some quick guidance:

- **Translations.** Choose an easy-to-read

God has some distinct ideas about worship (25-40)
God expects to be approached in specific and solemn ways (25-40)
God develops heroes (4, 32-33)
Seeing God's face means having a personal relationship with him (33)
You can't approach God in any old way
Through the sacrificial death of another we may approach God
God's presence resides among his people (40)

Leviticus

How to approach God is vital (1-7)
Cleanliness can depict godliness (11-15)
Holiness is a chief concern to God
God is interested in what people eat (11)
God is concerned with all of life (11-15)
Celebrating is a wholesome experience (23)
Sin must be removed from our fellowship

Numbers

Get organized for maximum efficiency
Life wandering can result from sinful choices
God has to discipline his people at times
There's a place for the gung-ho (6)
God gets sick of people

translation, like the *New International Reader's Version* (NIRV; written at a third-grade level) or a paraphrase, like *The New Living Translation* (NLT).

4. "The Bible is so dull."

Not if you enjoy romance (Ruth), adventure (Jonah, Acts), or conflict (Judges). There are tales of conquest and war (Joshua), scandal and suspense (David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel), and deceit and corruption (Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5).

God stocked his library with a variety of genres: narrative, letters, poetry, history, and prophecy. If you naturally gravitate to the biography section in a bookstore, start with the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). If you love poetry, spend some time exploring Psalms or Song of Solomon.

5. "I don't see how the Bible applies to my life."

The Bible offers practical advice on issues we face every day: love (1 Corinthians 13), leadership (Nehemiah), marital bliss (Song of Solomon), courage (Esther), and investments (Matthew 25). It has how-to articles (Proverbs 31) and time-management models (Matthew 6:33).

Get a topical Bible (a Bible arranged according to subject) and read every passage about an issue that challenges you. Take notes as you read. Become an expert on what the Scriptures say about that particular subject.

6. "I hear Bible readings in church every Sunday. Isn't that enough?"

"The Bible," says Billy Graham, "is the road map for life." When I examine a map, an expert like my pastor can show me the most effective route to take. But I become more familiar with how to navigate the road—life—when I read the map and follow it myself.

7. "The Bible makes me feel uncomfortable."

Many of us associate the Bible with negative experiences. Instead of examining Scripture on its own merits, we plop it onto a "discard pile" along

complaining (11).
We must resist the mob mentality (13-14)
Rebellion can be serious (16)
God provides (20-21)
Don't make an ass of yourself (22)
Beware of prophets for profit (23-25)
All God's people should have their share (34)

Deuteronomy

New adaptations have to be made for new generations (5)
Life must be governed by God's truth
God gives guidelines about teaching children wisely (6)
God takes covenant relationship seriously
Don't have idols (9)
God has something to say on the subject of war (20)
Evading the truth has consequences (28)

with dry worship, hypocritical congregations, and insensitive Christians from our past. We'd rather label it and put it in a box than face up to what it might be telling us about ourselves.

But conviction is an important and necessary function of Scripture. "For the word of God is living and active," says the writer of Hebrews. "Sharper than any double-edged sword ... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (4:12, NIV).

Statistics say that 92 percent of all Americans have at least three Bibles in their homes. Perhaps like the South Dakota rancher, yours is secreted away in a closet. And like him, you don't suspect that there's a fortune hidden within its pages.

There's a priceless treasure within your reach right now. Get it off the shelf and read it today.

by **Kathy Widenhouse**

WORLD CUP

AND PRAYER

On 9th July 2006, the finals were played and Italy emerged the winner. Finally, many Singaporeans can take a break and sleep peacefully without having to get up at 3.00 am in the mornings to catch a glimpse of the beautiful game. Some were even able to stay awake the whole night to wait for the games to be shown.

So let me get to the point of this short sharing. On **8th August 2006**, JCC will be organizing an overnight prayer meeting. For those of you who were able to stay awake the whole night to watch the World Cup matches, this is just another chance for you to stay up the whole night.

By the way, did you notice that some players were thankful to God for the goals they scored while others assumed that it was their own skills that got the goals? So too when we succeed in our plans, do we give God the glory or pat ourselves on the back for a job well done? Let us all humbly come before the Almighty to pray for we know that "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain."

(Psalm 127:1)



JCKK FAMILY DAY 2006 – Food & Fun Fair on 27th May

It was a very successful Family Day – many thanks to JCKK staff, parents of the kindergarten tots, and members of JCC who turned out in force to lend their efforts for the fun raising fundraising event. Even before the event, church members and parents already showed their admirable backing for the event by their fund raising efforts and their volunteering of time and contributions in kind for the fun fair. It turned out that at the end of the day, we had ample food left over. Thus, not only were all who turned up at the fun fair enjoying themselves in the fun and games, they were also well fed.



We targeted a collection of \$10 000. We managed a taking of \$11 000 and, after deduction of expenses, have a net proceeds of \$9000 plus. This amount will go towards the Charity Fund that is set up to assist needy parents who have their children with JCKK.

Apart from the fundraising aspect, the Family Day was a wonderful fellowship opportunity for staff, church members, kids and their parents. When JCKK staff, parents of JCKK kids and members of the church jell together for a happy event like the Family Day, we know that the JCKK exists in their minds not simply as an organization that provides pre-school education services, but that there is a distinctiveness of character in JCKK that makes it different from any ordinary kindergarten. Significantly, the Church is behind the kindergarten and the kindergarten is with the church in our service to the community. Our love-based mindset in serving our little clients (the JCKK kids) is clear to all parents. This is expressed not by words but by our actions in reaching out to the parents.

Needs would exist so long as still living!
John Lee, FEBA Engineer

There was a pastor who would go hither and thither for the cause of a social organization. Regardless of whether it's a visitation or fund-raising activity, he would give his all without a word of complaint. One Sunday, the pastor shared (again) from the pulpit on the mission and value of this organization, and exhorted the congregation to contribute generously. After the service, a brother came up to the pastor and commented: "Pastor, each time you come, you always ask for money. When will you stop doing this?"

The pastor smiled and replied, "I have three sons. The eldest has just set up a small company. He's always asking me to lend him money for cash-flow purposes. My second son is in the university. He's is always asking money for his study expenses. My

“Needs would exist ... so long as still living!”
 – This is the title of an article written by a FEBA Engineer in the March 2006 issue of *skywaves*, a publication of FEBA LTD IN SINGAPORE. It is reproduced on the right with the permission of FEBA.



The article just quoted cogently brings to mind that JCC & JCKK, so long as they exist, will always have needs. Let us be counted among all who play a significant part in the sharing of our love in all that we do in witness for Christ.

May God bless JCC & JCKK always!

Happenings

21 May 2006 –
 Church Cleaning day for JCC as members rolled up their sleeves and scrubbed away the dirt.



23 June 2006 –
 A number of JCC members went to the airport to bid safe journey to 3 young people who were selected to go to Australia for the Giraffe course.



third son is the best, because he has no need of my money at all.”
The brother asked, “Has your third son make it big or is he financially independent?”

The pastor signed with emotion and answered, “No, my third son died of an accident two years ago. And since then, he does not require anything from me anymore. Truth is in my heart, I longed for him to ask things from me – so long as he’s still living!”

Indeed, dear brethren, only a dead person will have no need for money. Similarly, a dead entity or organization would cease to ask for assistance from the community or church body. So long as one is living, needs would always exist. For this reason, let us be broadminded, exuding the fragrance of Christ towards needy people or works.

The book written by Rick Warren called "The Purpose Driven Life" is a Christian best seller and has influenced many Christian and churches including many of us I suppose. The article below written by Dr. John G Strelan provides a Lutheran perspective to this influential book. Dr Strelan is a retired lecturer, Australian Lutheran College Faculty Emeritus, and came to Singapore a few years ago to teach LCS pastors and lay people. The excerpt from His writing below which I have slightly adapted comes from the part II of his essay. This is a succinct presentation and is an epitome of classic Lutheran Reformation Theology and its hermeneutical stance.

THE LEGALISATION OF THE GOSPEL - by John G. Strelan

If we mix justification by faith with love, good works, obedience, or discipleship, we are mixing law and gospel. We are legalizing the gospel. And the results are predictable: Christ is not magnified and the troubled sinner is not comforted. When we oblige sinners to analyse their own love or lack of it, their own obedience or lack of it, their own good works or lack of them - and suggest that their continued blessed status before God depends on their imperfect performance, then we are pointing them to themselves, their own righteousness, and driving them back to the law. We are depriving them of the comfort they should have in the 'pure' gospel, that is, in the gospel which has not been legalized or mixed with law. As the Apology in the Lutheran Confession says: 'If they are supposed to believe that they have a gracious God because they love and keep the law, they will have to doubt whether they have a gracious God' (IV,301).

'The Purpose Driven Life'

I want to demonstrate that in this discussion I am not just resurrecting an ancient straw man, by referring to a book which is widely read and used in the English-speaking Lutheran church: Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* (Zondervan, 2002). The title of the opening chapter of this book is 'It All Starts with God'. Warren writes: 'If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose' (17). And again: 'It is only in God that we discover our origin, our identity, our meaning, our purpose, our significance, and our destiny. Every other path leads to a dead end' (18).

Warren emphasizes the importance of knowing God's purpose for our lives and of

living 'purpose-driven' lives. Living such lives has five great benefits, he says: Knowing your purpose

1. gives meaning to your life
2. simplifies your life
3. focuses your life
4. motivates your life
5. prepares you for eternity (30-32)

It all begins with God, and it's all for God, we are told (53). Who is this God with whom it all begins and exists? According to Warren, it is the God who created us for himself and for his glory. The God who saves sinners, not for their own sake, but for his own sake, so that he might be glorified and praised by the creatures he made and saved. God saves people to serve him: that is the purpose and goal of their existence. This God commands us 'to recognize his glory, honour his glory, declare his glory, praise his glory, reflect his glory, and live for his glory' (54; italics in original). And why should we do this? 'Because God deserves it! We owe him every honour we can possibly give... [L]iving for God's glory is the greatest achievement we can accomplish with our lives' (54,55).

This God who creates us for his own sake, saves us for his own sake, and demands impossible things of us is an awesome God, one to be feared, even to flee from. This God is not the God-for-us and the God-in-Christ of the gospel. This God is the God who dwells in glory, unapproachable, hidden from our view. The God who must be obeyed. The God who seems to value our obedience more than he values us. In his reading of God,

Rick Warren owes much to Calvin and little to Luther.

'Surrender'

We must 'surrender' to this God, Warren writes. Indeed, 'the heart of worship is surrender' to God (77). Surrender is not an odd word for Warren to use, given his image of God. Surrender speaks of submission and obedience. Not surprisingly, Warren writes that 'surrendering is best demonstrated in obedience...Surrendered people obey God's word, even if it doesn't make sense' (80). It is true, Warren goes on to say that '[a]nother aspect of a fully surrendered life is trust' (80). But he is not talking about faith or trust in God's promise of mercy and forgiveness in the crucified and risen Christ. He is talking about relying 'on God to work things out instead of trying to manipulate others, force your own agenda, and control the situation. You let go and let God work' (80,81).

The result of using 'surrender' language is that the relationship between us and God, between our actions and God's actions, is disturbingly distorted. To give two examples from *The Purpose Driven Life*: Warren insists that 'God chose Mary to be the mother of Jesus, not because she was talented and wealthy or beautiful, but because she was totally surrendered to him' (82). As evidence he quotes Mary's wondrous response to the angel's words: 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word' (Luke 1: 38). But these words bespeak Mary's trusting response to God's word, not God's motivation for choosing Mary. God chose Mary, not because of her surrendered life but because God in his mercy chooses earthen vessels, unworthy though they be, to be his instruments in the economy of salvation.

The second example: Warren relates that he asked Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ: 'Why did God use and bless your life so much?' Bright's answer:

When I was a young man, I made a contract with God. I literally wrote it out and signed my name at the bottom. It said, 'From this day forward, I am a slave of Jesus Christ' (84).

This again is an inversion of how things are in the Kingdom. Jesus says to all disciples: 'You didn't choose me. I chose you and sent you out to produce fruit, the kind of fruit that will

last' (John 15:16). And the apostle Paul confessed: 'By the grace of God I am what I am' (1 Cor 15:10). Peter said: 'Lord don't come near me! I'm a sinner'(Luke 5:8). Yet Jesus pronounced the great 'Fear not!' and out of sheer grace called Peter to follow as a disciple. God blessed Bill Bright's work, not because Bright made a contract with God or 'surrendered' to God, but because God in his grace and mercy calls and uses the Bill Brights of this world to get the gospel of Jesus Christ out into the world, the gospel which is 'the power of God unto salvation to all who believe' (Rom 1:16).

Surrender is a 'law' word and it fosters 'law' thinking (I surrender and obey, and God chooses me or uses me). Surrender is not the language of the gospel. The gospel is promise or offer or invitation. You accept or trust a promise; you hold on to it or embrace it. You don't capitulate or surrender to a promise. The notion of surrender confuses law and gospel; it legalizes the gospel.

Making God Smile

Cut from the same legalistic cloth is Warren's discussion in the chapter entitled 'What Makes God Smile?' He writes:

The smile of God is the goal of your life. Since pleasing God is the first purpose of your life, your most important task is to discover how to do that (69).

From the example of Noah, Warren deduces 'the five acts of worship that make God smile'. God smiles when we love him supremely, trust him completely, obey him wholeheartedly, praise and thank him continually, and when we use our abilities. Warren concludes: 'What God looks at is the attitude of your heart...Will you make pleasing God the goal of your life? There is nothing that God won't do for the person totally absorbed with this goal' (76).

Gerhard Forde, who abhors 'adverbial theology', would shudder at the adverbs (supremely, completely, wholeheartedly, continually, totally). By their adverbs ye shall know them. It is not enough to love God; it must be done supremely; it is not

enough to trust God; it must be done completely, and so forth. Troubled sinners are driven to analyse and evaluate their love and trust and obedience and praise and commitment. What lack I yet? Where am I falling short? My love and trust is not what it should be. Conclusion: God does not and will not smile on me.

Once again, the distortion is deadly for the troubled conscience. The gospel announces: for Christ's sake, because of Christ, God forgives us, is merciful to us, smiles on us. Christians pray with the psalmist: 'Smile on us and save us' (Psalm 80:19). When God looks at us, he sees Christ and his righteousness - and he smiles on us. God's smile is the sun which brings to life in us the love and trust and obedience and praise and service of God which pleases him so. God sees what he has wrought in us, and pronounces it good, very good - and we continue to blossom in the warmth of his smile. The 'pure' gospel says: God smiles on us, and that smile enables us to love and trust and obey and serve him. The legalized 'gospel' says: when/if we do these things, then God smiles on us. This is a saddening exchange of law for gospel. It fails to magnify Christ and it fails to comfort troubled conscience.

Heavenly Rewards

In the faith+obedience model, rewards are important. Given the law hermeneutic which is at work in Warren's book, it is not unexpected that he uses the promise of heavenly rewards as a motivation for living the 'purpose-driven life'. Jesus stood at a fork in the road. Would he fulfill his purpose and bring glory to God, or would he shrink back and live a comfortable, self-centered life? You face the same choice. Will you live for your own goals, comfort, and pleasure, or will you live the rest of your life for God's glory, knowing that he has promised eternal rewards? (57; cf 39,44,57).

The New Testament does speak of 'rewards' in heaven; so do the Lutheran

Confessions. But three things need to be borne in mind: first, despite the word suggesting something earned, the New Testament insists that 'rewards' are gifts of God's grace. They are undeserved. Jesus said: 'When you have done all you should, then say, "We are merely servants, and we've simply done our duty"'(Luke 17:10) .

Secondly, motivating Christians to act appropriately towards the neighbour with an eye to rewards in heaven, is an affront to Christ. Is the heaven which Christ won for us not good enough? Is something lacking in Christ's work for us? Thirdly, a reward mentality puts the neighbour second in our concern. Our first question will be: which action will score the most brownie points before God? A healthy attitude to rewards is not to think of rewards at all, but to get on with loving the neighbour. Knowing that eternal life in its richness is ours, we can relax and focus on loving the neighbour. What we do for our neighbours is determined by their needs, not by what actions might score greater reward points.

The Neuralgic Point

Where has Warren gone wrong? What is the theological misstep at the heart of his unhappy book? I suggest that his problem is caused by his failure to understand and teach the centrality of the gospel, of Christ, of justification, not only at the start of the Christian walk, but during every moment and every step of that walk. We cannot live without forgiveness, without the imputed righteousness of Christ. The extent to which we think we can escape that necessity is the extent to which we make room for our righteousness before God instead of Christ's righteousness.

The skeleton of the model with which Warren operates is this: my life as a Christian begins with God; I am responsible, with the help of the Holy Spirit, for continuing it and for bringing it to a successful conclusion. Faith is necessary to begin my Christian life; obedience is required if I am to continue it

and complete it. The gospel converts me and brings me into a relationship with God; the law drives how I live and what I do in the new life. First the gospel, then the law. Justification is the beginning of my life before God, after that it ceases to be relevant for all practical purposes. It has no real dynamic in my life.

The skeleton of the model with which Lutherans operate (or should operate) is this: my life began in solidarity with Adam. I was 'dead in trespasses and sins', condemned under the law. My life as a Christian, however, begins in solidarity with Christ. Through him I have access in the Spirit to the Father (Eph 2:18). So my life begins, continues, and ends with and in the Triune God. 'Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.' (Rom 14:8). Trust in the promise of God's mercy and forgiveness makes my life as a Christian possible, and sustains my life as a Christian, even in the face of my many failures and acts of disobedience. 'The life I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal 2:20). Through the gospel, signed and spoken, the Holy Spirit brings me to faith and keeps me in the faith.

The law, however, is not a matter of faith (Gal 3:12). The law has to do with works. The law and my works have their proper place, namely, in the world of my neighbour. But not before God. Never before God. Before God what matters, solely and exclusively, is Christ's work for me and my grasping him in faith. Justification is the beginning of my life before God, and an ongoing reality throughout my life; I cannot live without it. 'Those who through faith are righteous shall live' (Rom 1:17).

I take up just one of these statements, by way of elucidation of the Lutheran position. Justification is not merely a past event in the life of a Christian; justification is our continued relationship with God-in-Christ. Jesus Christ is always my mediator in the presence of the law, which always accuses me. Perhaps the place of

justification in the life of a Christian is more clearly seen if we use its synonym: the forgiveness of sins. I live in forgiveness, just as I live in Christ and in the gospel (cf John 15:4,5). Without the daily assurance of forgiveness for Christ's sake my life in Christ would wither and die. Through the life-giving word and sacraments, God nourishes and sustains the reality and relationship expressed by the word 'justification'. Every moment my life is 'hidden with Christ in God' (Col 3:3).

What then of sanctification or the new obedience? The temptation to introduce at this point the law, or a legalized gospel, as a dynamic must be resisted at all costs. It is not the law but the 'pure' gospel which empowers and drives my life of love for my neighbour. It is not my knowledge of my purpose in life which drives my life (pace Warren), but my faith-knowledge of Christ crucified (Phil 3:7-11). When the old self dies to sin and the new is made alive to God in Christ (Rom 6:11), sanctification results.

Thus the ongoing dynamic of sanctification is justification by faith in Christ. The object of the sanctified life, this new obedience, is not God but my neighbour. Both justification and sanctification are the Holy Spirit's work in me, from beginning to end of my life. Hence the same means by which God nourishes and sustains the reality of my justification also nourish and sustain my sanctification: the gospel in its various forms and modes (cf Smalcald Articles Part III, Art IV).

III

This essay is an appeal to Lutheran pastors, first, to be on their guard against turning the gospel into law; secondly, to strive to weed out of the church every vestige of a legalized gospel. And thirdly, to make preaching the pure, unmixed gospel their constant delight. At stake is the honour of Christ and the comfort of troubled sinners.