

The Vine

The Vine Committee

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Editor's Word

JCC Stewardship Month is here again. We are all reminded that we are but servants of the Almighty God. What we “earned” for the past year is actually a blessing from Jehovah Jireh, our Provider. As we thank God for the food we eat, do we also remember to thank Him for the jobs we keep, or the incomes we receive? Do we sometimes feel that we have earned it by the sweat of our brows, no thanks to God? I am sure your pre-Christian friends think that way, but do you?

When King David wanted to build the temple, he raised a lot of money, probably by GST (God Sent Treasure). I wonder if the people protested about the waste of money to construct a building to house a small box (the Ark). Well, even as we wisely keep the money for better use, the GST will come along to wipe away our savings. Isn't it strange how God can bless us as we give and take away from us as we hoard?

Do we all keep aside money for that rainy day? Nothing wrong with that, Proverbs 6:8 talks about the ant which stores away provision. However, I read one author who claims that Jesus

did not even handle any money while he was here. Judas was the one who kept the money and when Jesus had to pay the temple tax, he asked Peter to get it from the fish's mouth. He even asked the people to show Him a coin when he wanted to teach a lesson on taxes. What did Jesus say about money, “unrighteous mammon” (Luke 16:9) and “the deceitfulness of riches” (Matthew 13:22).

Thinking about it, if Peter was the one who kept the money, would it end up that Peter betrayed Jesus instead of Judas? Could it be that the one who kept the money fell into the money trap? Money can replace your trust in God. In various degrees, we could be like the rich young ruler in Luke 18: 22 who could not let go of his money.

Have you heard of stories of people who lived a poor life even though they had lots of money stuffed inside their mattresses? May it not be so with us as we learn to handle money and not let money control our lives, our time and our giving.

In God we trust.

Martin Cheah

Continued from last issue of The Vine....

LUTHER on DEPRESSION

Combating Depression

The caregiver's attitude can make a great deal of difference in treating depression. Judgmental and guilt-provoking attitudes never help. Fortunately, Luther displayed no such attitudes. He accepted people and helped them understand they were not alone in their suffering. For him, depression was in some regards a universal occurrence afflicting even the people of God. This type of attitude often saves sufferers from unnecessary guilt and shame.

Given Luther's complex understanding of depression, his multifaceted approach to its treatment should not surprise us. First and foremost, Luther emphasized spiritual factors. Luther assured his "clients" of Christ's nearness, His love and esteem. He told them that Christ cared and would help believers carry their burden. They needed to trust His atonement as a buttress against Satan's accusations. In addition, Luther counseled depressed persons to use prayer and suggested that they read or have read to them comforting words from Scripture. Luther also knew the soothing qualities of music. Therefore, he advised believers to sing and play spiritual songs unto the Lord until their sad thoughts vanished.

Second, Luther emphasized God's work through other believers. He understood that God uses believers' words to strengthen and comfort struggling persons. Depressed persons should receive these words. Luther advised one severely depressed person, "cease relying on and pursuing your own thoughts. Listen to other people who are not subject to this temptation. Give the closest attention to what we say, and let our words penetrate to your heart. Thus God will strengthen and comfort you by means of our words." In this emphasis, Luther espoused a concept similar to Larry Crabb's "eldering." Like Crabb, Luther believed godly believers can successfully help one another. The church needs to take this more seriously.

Believers also serve a second function. Their company pulls depressed persons away from dangerous solitude. In Luther's view, solitude fosters depression. Therefore, he counseled sufferers to seek the company of believers not caught in the web of depression. He knew that godly company serves several purposes: it affords an opportunity to receive a different and brighter perspective on life; it serves as a precaution against suicide; and it provides an opportunity for good, clean, wholesome fun. Luther repeatedly recommended playing games, joking, jesting and enjoying other forms of merriment.

The emphasis on merriment might surprise us. It should not. Luther knew that depressed persons give up pleasurable activities. They restrict life to narrow, confining limits. In this sense they sap the vigor and fun out of their lives. What else but depression can result when joy is sucked from life? But Luther emphasized merriment for a second reason: some Christians avoided pleasurable activities, thinking them sinful. This rigid scrupulosity threatened the hope of defeating depression. To counteract this tendency Luther reminded Christians that "proper and honorable pleasure with good and God-fearing people is pleasing to God."

Third, Luther suggested strategies to combat cognitive distortions. He understood that depressed believers sometimes should not trust their own thoughts because depression distorts reality. Instead they should seek the company of non-depressed believers. Such

persons can pull them away from distorted thinking and bring them back to reality. Scripture serves a similar function. It presents the ultimate reality, an antidote to distorted views of one's circumstances. Scripture also reminds us of God's love, esteem and presence in our struggles. These truths represent the opposite of what Satan would have us believe; namely, that we are unloved, worthless and abandoned.

Luther also gave insight into handling the depressive thoughts Satan instills. The believer must resist the devil. Sometimes this means avoiding any disputation with the devil. At other times, Luther endorsed disputation. He did not seem to hold to a fixed rule. Much depends on one's condition. For example, Luther advised against disputation when a person is fasting. In general, one might conclude that disputation is unwise whenever one is vulnerable in body or mind. At those times, believers should draw strength from spiritual persons and from Scripture.

Ultimately, Luther was a realist. He recognized that depressed persons sometimes plunge deep in despair and need protection. Caring persons should take every possible precaution against the threat of suicide. Providing a safe environment is fundamental, which in modern times sometimes means hospitalization until the threat passes. When necessary, such actions do not represent callousness. They represent genuine Christian love in action.

Finally, Luther impresses me with his "commonsense" approach. I cite three examples that illustrate this approach.

Eat, don't fast!

Luther suggested that spiritual disciplines used at inappropriate times contribute to greater difficulties. For example, Luther believed disputing with the devil requires one to be well fed, not fasting. This sounds unspiritual but makes good sense. Depressed people need sustenance to combat the loss of appetite and subsequent weight loss characterizing depression. In addition, unlike Luther, I see solitude as a legitimate Christian discipline. However, for the deeply depressed individual, retreating alone does not make sense, but going out with a friend does. There is a time and place for everything, even legitimate spiritual disciplines.

Be realistic -- improvement may be slow!

While remaining optimistic and encouraging dogged determination, Luther kept a realistic perspective. He knew improvement could be slow. This sounds discouraging but needn't be. Sometimes persons focus too much on what is not right and what has not changed. Instead they should focus on what is right and even take note of small incremental changes. Such improvements represent hope for a better day.

Time is a great healer.

Though he did not advocate inactivity and passive waiting, Luther viewed time as a great healer. He once noted that "old age and other circumstances will in time render present depression and melancholy superfluous." There is some truth to this statement. Age and maturity can bring new perspectives that help foster healing. Matilda Nordtveldt reflects this perspective. She wrote, "At age 71 I still struggle with my desire to bolster my self-image as well as my reputation by overworking. ... Even if I have not learned my lesson perfectly yet, I am on my way. I know that my value in His sight is not determined by what I accomplish but [by] my relationship to Him, and I have learned that giving thanks in every circumstance brings joy and peace." Time still does its work! Luther's insights into depression are still instructive as people seek treatment in this modern-day world.



What does Christ's descent into hell mean?

Every Sunday, we confess the Apostle's Creed, which says that Christ was "...crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again...." However, in Luke, Jesus says to the thief next to him: "Surely today you will be with me in paradise." So are these two statements contradictory? If not, how do we make sense of them?

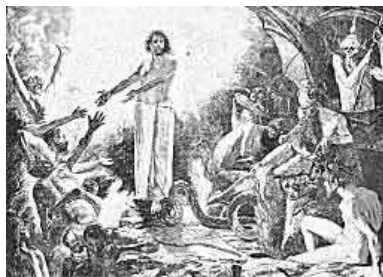
What does Christ's descent into hell mean? Members of the church might also ask the following questions:

Where in the Bible does it ever talk about Jesus descending into hell?

When did Jesus descend into hell?

What did Jesus do in hell?

I do not wish to bog you down with all the technical details, interpretations and discussions. I shall just summarise.



Our Lutheran understanding:

Christ's descent into hell is described in 1 Peter 3:18-20. While this passage does not provide a great deal of detailed information about this event, it is clear that after Christ died he was "made alive in the spirit" and that in this state of exaltation he descended into hell -- not to suffer, but to proclaim his victory over hell and the devil.

One of the Lutheran doctrinal writings (Formula of Concord, TD, IX, 1-3) says this:

"....we simply believe that the entire person, God and man, after the burial descended into hell, conquered the devil, destroyed the power of hell, and took from the devil all his might. We should not, however, trouble ourselves with high and acute thoughts as to how this occurred; for with our reason and our five senses this article canbut we are simply to believe it and adhere to the Word. Thus we retain the substance and consolation that neither hell nor the devil can take us captive or injure us and all who believe in Christ."

If you have any further questions on this you can send it to the editors of the Vine and I will try to answer you in The Vine, if I can.

Rev. Martin Yee

When Dr. Schroeder and his wife Marie (sent by ELCA) came to Singapore in 2004, they visited all the Lutheran Churches to teach - and they were also at JCC.

There was a session held at QLC for all to attend but the attendance was very poor. I was there on that day and could hardly count more than 30 people. Here is an account of his teaching which I thought would be appropriate for us this month as it is also the month of celebrating the Reformation.

I've inserted in parenthesis and italics some notes to help the reader a long.

*Happy Reformation,
Ps. Samuel Wang*

Luther's Theology of the Cross is Not a Theology of Suffering

The Cross for the Modern World

Queenstown Lutheran Church, Singapore
March 24 and 31, 2004

1. Is the Cross "old" and the world "modern"? Or is it just the opposite? Depends on what you think "Cross" means, and what "modern" means.
2. What does "modern" mean in today's world? Are East and West the same in their "modernity?"
3. Martin Luther's words about what it means to "have a god" in the First Commandment apply to modernity -- "Western modernity" for sure, possibly also "Eastern modernity." What people "fear, love, and trust" is the actual god they have, regardless of what they say they "believe" -- or "don't believe."

"Fear, love, and trust" are verbs of the heart, not of the head. Human reason comes second. It "serves" the gods that we "fear, love, and trust." And they are usually plural. Any one of us may have several going at the same time.

(Luther's Small Catechism: "The First Commandment: You are to have no other gods. What is this? Answer: We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things.)
4. That is people's "practical" theology in any age -- modernity included.
5. Finally, said Luther, there are only two sorts of theology. It makes no difference if they are "modern" or not. The two alternatives are "theology of the

cross" or "theology of glory."

6. The key text for Luther in his Heidelberg Theses is 1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:5.

DIGNOSIS: The Bad News in Theologies of Glory

1. Daily Life in Glory Theology

Living by "wisdom of the wise, discernment of the discerning, the scribe (Jewish religious expert), the debater (Greek religious expert). Seeking signs (of moral achievement, the Jewish religious goal), desiring wisdom (the Greek religious goal)."

2. Trusting Glory Theology

Having "faith" in moral achievement (Jewish) or religious insight (Greek). No faith in the scandalously immoral and absolutely "moronic" (Paul's actual word) Cross. Christ crucified a stumbling block.

3. The God-Problem in Glory Theology

Not knowing the God who was crucified, the God who saves, 1 Cor. 1:31. Perishing. God shames the wise, shames the strong. God destroys the wisdom of the wise, reduces it / them to nothing.

NEW PROGNOSIS: The Good News of the Theology of the Cross

4. Saved by the [Weak] Power of Christ and His Cross

Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. The foolish wisdom, the weak power, the shameful glory of "Jesus Christ and him crucified." The consequences: "righteousness and sanctification and redemption," which heal the God-problem of #3 above. [Paul's own proclamation of that Christ and his cross also carries the same trademarks--weakness, trembling, no lofty words of wisdom. His very biography -- the "loser" apostle, harried from one town to the next -- replicates his Lord's own biography, and that Lord's own theology of an unglorious God.]

5. Called to Faith

Called by God to find the "source" of your life in Christ Jesus. Resting your faith in the power of the crucified Christ.

6. Boasting in the Lord

Living from that Source in a world full of theologies of glory. Demonstrating the Spirit and power in your own weakness and in fear and in much trembling. Living the cross's "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption" in daily life "in the modern world." We hear that in order to be a superlative person in Singapore you must have 5 C's: cash, credit card, condo, car, country club. Any time you need to bring along your own credentials to be somebody, you're stuck in a theology of glory. But that's just as much the case in my country -- and then the calling of being Christian in the face of it all -- as it is in yours, and maybe even more so. [In 1 Cor. Paul contrasts "cross" with "glory." "Cross" is the ultimate shameful way to die. Ergo, the theology of the cross is a theology of the unglorious God. It's not focused on horrendous suffering, though that's the way Mel Gibson took us in his super-movie. (*The Passion of The Christ*). Remember, important people were executed by the daggers of other important people in the Roman Forum. "Worthless" villains were dragged out of town and crucified. Paul is doing here in 1 Cor. 1 and 2 what John does throughout his gospel. This un-glory, Christ's cross, is paradoxically the actual glory of God, Christ the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Do you know any other theology that makes such an offer?]

The Heidelberg Disputation

Brother Martin Luther, Master of Sacred Theology, will preside, and Brother Leonhard Beyer, Master of Arts and Philosophy, will defend the following theses before the Augustinians of this renowned city of Heidelberg in the customary place, on April 26th 1518.

THEOLOGICAL THESES

Distrusting completely our own wisdom, according to that counsel of the Holy Spirit, "Do not rely on your own insight" (Prov. 3:5), we humbly present to the judgment of all those who wish to be here these theological paradoxes, so that it may become clear whether they have been deduced well or poorly from St. Paul, the especially chosen vessel and instrument of Christ, and also from St. Augustine, his most trustworthy interpreter.



Christian Marriage in a Chinese Cultural Context

Many couples come from traditional Chinese families, get acquainted in church fellowship and activities, relationship blossoms and soon they decide to “tie the knot.” In Jurong Christian Church, this is pretty obvious, as there are many such couples around including myself. At times some cultural elements and conflicts with parents may kick in, over wedding protocols, date selection, arrangements, procedures, rites, ceremonies and other nitty-gritty details. Reason is that there may be clashes in worldviews underlying the Judeo-Christian and the traditional Chinese concepts and rites of marriage.

In Chinese culture, the main purposes of marriage according to Mabel Wu are propagating the lineal succession of descendants, and maintaining and enhancing the social position of the family¹. Singapore’s Anglican Clergy, Rev Daniel Tong, added that the wedding rite is the passage into adulthood and maturity². For Christians, we understand the purposes of marriage to be:

- 1) The union of one man and one woman to become one flesh (Genesis 2:24), Ephesians 5:22-33
- 2) The procreation of children and their upbringing (Genesis 1:28) and
- 3) To protect the individual from indulging in sexual immorality (1 Cor 7:2-3).

Also the Christian couple will need to understand the significance and worldview underlying the tea ceremony, the dowry, the matching of horoscopes, the selection of date, the wedding dinner and other superstitions as explicated by Daniel Tong. The understanding is very

¹ Wu, Mabel. “Marriage Rites in the Chinese Cultural Context” in Baptism, Rites of Passage And Culture. S.Anita Stauffer, Editor. Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1998. p 217

² Tong, Daniel. A Biblical Approach to Chinese Traditions and Beliefs. Singapore: Genesis Books, 2003. p47.

important, so that any negotiations, compromise, drawing of boundaries and mutual agreements between the couple and their parents can be done in an understanding, tactful and win-win situation. It may help to defuse tensions and prevent being stereotyped as Westernised “bananas”

Therefore for Christian courting couples preparing for their wedding I suggest that you should read Daniel Tong’s writing on it in chapter 5 of his book “A Biblical Approach to Chinese Traditions and Beliefs”. It provides some dos and don’ts guidelines. This book is can easily be purchased in many local Christian bookstore at about S\$15.

For some couples you may want to be more adventurous, and think of creative ways to adapt and contextualize some Chinese cultural elements into a new form that will not violate your Christian convictions. Mabel Wu of Hong Kong has made several bold suggestions in her paper published by LWF; example, to “wear the red dress for both the family wedding banquet as well as church wedding.”³. White is in fact a color for mourning in Chinese culture, red is the color for festivity and joy. Presenting gifts or flowers to parents in the wedding ceremony can convey filial piety. Mabel also noted that wedding sermon should not be overtly evangelistic as it may turn people off, but the wedding liturgy itself if carefully thought out, can proclaim the Gospel of God’s promise of salvation in a very powerful yet non- threatening manner to the non-Christians present.

Blessings for happy courtship & wedding.

Rev Martin Yee

JCC Family Day
21-10-06



³ Wu, p 223



Four busloads of people made their way to the East Coast Park for a day of fun in the sun. Organised by YAM, the activities included sand castle competition, captain's ball, and group games. The people had great fun building their sand castles and partaking in the various activities. The children must have enjoyed themselves the most, but we did not forget to entertain the seniors as well.



Martin Luther's Definition of Faith:

An excerpt from
"An Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans,"
Luther's German Bible of 1522
by Martin Luther, 1483-1546
Translated by Rev. Robert E. Smith
from DR. MARTIN LUTHER'S VERMISCHTE DEUTSCHE SCHRIFTEN.

Faith is not what some people think it is. Their human dream is a delusion. Because they observe that faith is not followed by good works or a better life, they fall into error, even though they speak and hear much about faith. "Faith is not enough," they say, "You must do good works, you must be pious to be saved." They think that, when you hear the gospel, you start working, creating by your own strength a thankful heart which says, "I believe." That is what they think true faith is. But, because this is a human idea, a dream, the heart never learns anything from it, so it does nothing and reform doesn't come from this 'faith,' either.

Instead, faith is God's work in us, that changes us and gives birth from God. (John 1:13). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever. He stumbles around and looks for faith and good works, even though he does not know what faith or good works are. Yet he gossips and chatters about faith and good works with many words.

Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures. The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith. Because of it, you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace. Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire! Therefore, watch out for your own false ideas and guard against good-for-nothing gossips, who think they're smart enough to define faith and works, but really are the greatest of fools.

Ask God to work faith in you, or you will remain forever without faith, no matter what you wish, say or can do.

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All about TRUTH

What is truth? “Truth is that which conforms to reality,” so a common definition goes.

What is reality? Reality itself is a concept. Put simply, reality is the state of being real. Is the existence of God real? If so, then it is reality. When I say that God exists, my statement conforms to reality, and so I am telling the truth.

There is a problem. Whatever is true (whatever is reality) depends ...

Yes, it depends I set out to prove this in a brief conversation with someone during a class on Conversational Evangelism conducted by Dr Geisler in JCC this year. The conversation went like this (pretend that you are the other person in conversation):

- I:** Take a good look at any stationary object nearby – a table, chair, cupboard, etc. I ask you, “Is it moving?”
- You:** No!
- I:** You are wrong. Look very carefully. It is really moving. In other words, the reality is that the object you perceive as stationary is moving.
- You:** No, how can it be? It isn’t moving. It is stationary!
- I:** The object is standing on the floor, right?”
- You:** Right!
- I:** The floor is standing on the Earth, right?” (You are gradually getting the drift.)
- You:** Right!
- I:** The Earth is moving, right?
- You:** Of course.
- I:** Q.E.D. (Quod Erat Demonstrandum – that which I set out to prove is proven!)

So, true or false, it depends on your definition – In the above example, your definition of motion (relative to the floor or to the Earth). One may also say that truth depends on mental perception.

According to the eminent Einstein, space/time is not absolute. Motion (a change of state/position) can be visualized in the context of a transformation in space/time relatively between objects. When looking at two objects A & B, supposing someone perceiving either one or both of them to be in motion, a contrarian may argue that A is moving but B is stationary, or vice versa.

The idea of truth being non-absolute leads to another problem. If the truth about God depends on one's perception, then you may adopt the truth as Tom proposes it according to his perception, "God does not exist"; or you may go along with Dick's observation and analysis, "God does exist!" So, who is right and who is wrong, since both cannot be right at the same time? You know that if you decide one way or other, you risk making the wrong decision with consequences. If you decide like Harry to sit on the fence, it is still a decision that you make with its attendant effect. Can we afford not to care?

Basing a decision on the subjectivity of the mind is certainly fraught with peril. On the other hand, if everything, every truth, is relative, then we simply have no objective basis to work on. Does that mean that we stop working our mind altogether? Assuming that there really ("really or not" being itself subjective reality) is no objective basis because humans are only capable of subjective thoughts, then we simply have to live with what we possess – the subjective mind – and use it to discover the truth about God – whatever the truth is – whether that truth itself conforms to some subjective or objective reality. A decision in any of the forms, 'God exists', 'God does not exist', 'I don't know', or 'I do not want to know' carries an impact on our life now and into the future.

"I think, therefore I am." This is a famous saying of Descartes (the founder of Cartesian Co-ordinates). The suggestion of this statement is that the human mind's reasoning power leads to knowledge. Our reasoning power is such that we are capable of breaking down a complex issue into simpler components and thereby work out new understanding and builds up our knowledge store. Even if our mind is subjective, by it we can still try to fathom the depth of truth about God. The limited resource of our subjective mind is capable of taking on a complex question (Does

OBJECTIVE TRUTH exist?), contemplate it in abstraction (i.e., digesting it in manageable portions) and then build up our knowledge enough to grasp the objective reality about God. Our subjective mind is like an ant, insignificant in size, yet able to lift a weight many times heavier than itself.

An alternative philosophical idea is that our knowledge derives from our experiences (rather than our mental power of reason) through our senses – not just the five senses we learn in elementary Biology class, but also the complex sensations of joy, sorrow, love, disgust, etc. When several persons encounter an event, how do they feel? They may have different feelings, and through their different perceptive experiences they make their conclusions about the knowledge they have gained. But one doesn't simply settle down on his own conclusion like that, because he does also vicariously feel or experience the feelings of others (of pleasure, pain or any other sensation) in the same event. Hence, experiences are not just personal “hands-on” or “bodies-on” that lead to knowledge gain. The social nature of man ensures a dynamic system of cross-influences in the totality of our experiences, by which we are able to make the leap from a cautious personal subjective belief to a confident collective stand on objective truth. In Chemistry, different elements can make a compound that is entirely different from its constituents. Analogously, though our subjective minds individually may be of such limited appeal, they collectively can become a mighty source of a different kind of power that allow us to understand what we would otherwise not be able to, including grasping objective truths.

“Man is useless, because he cannot fathom knowledge, because any particular ‘knowledge’ (not the amount of knowledge) he can grasp can never stand unchanged in time, because it goes along with the perception of his subjective mentality that is, by definition, variable with time. In short, there is no objective reality that stands firm against the rages of rain and storm in life that holds his mind sway.” Is this what you think you are that your mind is subjective and useless? Hope not, but it is the kind of dangerous result arising out of the abandonment of objectivity, which further leads on to the idea that God is dead. Be this as it may in the minds of the post-modernists, it is subjective knowledge (by the claim that objectivity is non-existent) anyway. Accordingly, it is fair game for another person to embrace the alternative idea that God is alive. At the end

of the day, no one is wiser what the truth is. This is what the ‘death of objectivity’ ultimately leads to! (NOTE: The ‘death of objectivity’ stand cannot logically lead to the claim ‘God is dead’.)

The Latin version of Descartes’ famous saying is “*Cognito, ergo sum*”, which would directly translate to “I am thinking, therefore I exist.” It would be a stretch to claim that if I am not thinking, therefore I do not exist. It is a fallacy that when we fail to be aware (*cognito*) of something, then it does not exist. It may be regrettable for anyone not to comprehend the objective truth about God, but this does not in any way prove that the objective truth is not secure somewhere to be discovered if only one would seek.

Language shapes our thought. If you can speak English to a high standard, you can carry a discussion with anybody lengthily on religion, politics or any other topic between the sky and the sea. (It does not matter if you are not supremely knowledgeable). Try to do the same if you use your limited command of your dialect or second language. Our thought, and hence knowledge, is built up with language as an essential tool. (Parents with young children better take note: If you give your child a strong foundation in the language when they are young, they think better, learn better, become knowledgeable in all their school subjects faster, and pass their exams with flying colours more easily. ☺ I can’t help thinking whether you would disagree. ☺) In primary school, you learnt that the mimosa leaves can sense touch, and so they close up when touched; the chameleon changes its colour so as to camouflage itself; the body’s white blood cells can recognize invading germs; and so on. All the expressions are of course paraphrases to help the learners retain some ideas, but they convey some misinformation about the plant having capability of sensation like animals’ consciousness – the chameleon changing colour by voluntary choice, the cells having ‘eyes’ and ‘brains’, etc. In fact, the reactions are basically the product of complex natural (involuntary) chemical changes, which cannot be clearly enunciated at the particular level of instruction. The misinformation may be unimportant in the context, but it reveals to us how people communicate by their language imperfectly. Gradually, our mind becomes shaped to think along the lines of the language.

When we talk about ‘subjective truth’, what do we understand by the term; and similarly, what do we grasp of the meaning of objectivity? When astronomers say that the universe is still growing, our mind follows along with the conceptualization of growth in the ordinary sense of the word; and it escapes us to contemplate the universe as an entity that is already there with all the heavenly bodies and empty space, vacuum or abstruse matter of varied descriptions. Then, into what further space beyond does it grow? How about ‘the space beyond’ (nothingness being itself an entity)? Where are the boundaries, and the boundaries of the emptiness beyond, and beyond that ... ad infinitum? In Mathematics, we talk about infinity as obtainable from $1/0$ (1 divided by 0), and this can be explained as a certain value (a limiting value of the fraction $1/x$ as x approaches 0). However, looking at it another way, there is nothing called $1/0$ because 1 can never be divided by 0 to produce a valid quotient in the ordinary sense of division. Thus you see that infinity is actually something yet nothing. The opposite, zero, is to Mathematicians something rather than nothing. We are taught that any number multiplied by infinity is infinity, and anything multiplied by zero is zero. So what is the result when zero is multiplied by infinity? **Never mind ... never mind ... if you are bemused or confused by all these because you find it too “chim”; just attempt to catch my drift that our mind is finite in power and this power is further constrained by the limitation of our tool (language) to enable us to discover deeper ideas in the universe of knowledge. Furthermore, be aware that what we do not think (by choice or because our mind fails us) does not mean the non-existence of objective truth somewhere.**

In science, when you want to prove a statement, you can give all the step-by-step reasons leading to the conclusion of proof. You can also prove that the alternative to the statement cannot hold water, so the statement must be true. Is TRUTH subjective? Is there no objective TRUTH? In this discourse, I started off with the postulation that TRUTH is subjective (In fact, there are subjective truths.) However, are all truths subjective? This became the issue of the discourse, and it led to the realisation that if it is true that all truths are subjective, then this truth about all truths is itself subjective and this would lend itself to circulatory arguments and reach no end. (Further, the denouncement of objective truth does not prove the non-existence of God.) Therefore, the statement ALL TRUTHS ARE SUBJECTIVE is logically unsound. This must naturally lead to the

conclusion that there exist objective truths. Finally, by illustrations, I made the point that the finite capacity of our mind to grasp it (objective truth) does not mean the non-existence of it.

Sorry, if you find this article too perplexing, especially if you are not inclined towards philosophical arguments. Actually, it is just skimming the surface of the philosophical thoughts on TRUTH. Palpably, philosophers are a kind of creatures who like to confound. We don't have to know all the quixotic theories, but just a sample (1%) to get a feel of how they are like, and be mentally prepared to face up to the philosophical barrage that sometimes come our way during our outreach. What I am concerned is that if we are not so prepared, we may end up being stumbled instead of being a help. **If we have at least an inkling that philosophy does not negate the existence of God, we will less likely be perplexed by the challenges even if we cannot give good answers on our toes.** If you are philosophically inclined, you may wish to contemplate:

Do we really know what we think we know?

If so, how do we know what we know?

If you tear your hair in despair in contemplating what the truth about truth is, your struggle could well be resolved by extending priority to faith and then uncovering the truths of it – not the other way round. (1 Tim. 4:6) Thomas set eyes on Jesus first before he believed, but more blessed are those who believe first and then behold the truth revealing itself before them. (John 20:29). *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone) – **F**orsaking **A**ll **I** **T**rust **H**im – because man's mind has already been too polluted by the propaganda of sin that truth will always be hidden and therefore man needs help to break free from his ignorance of the truth in order to gain eternal bliss. This help can only come from Jesus, but first and foremost we must be able to put our trust in Him. Thus, every one of us should proclaim, “**Polluted I Surrender To Icthus (Jesus Christ) Saviour.”***

John Lee

**PISTIS* is a transliterated Greek word for FAITH (as in Matt. 8:10, Mk 2:5, Rom. 1:8, etc.). *Icthus* is the Greek word for fish, which is used by early Christians as an acrostic for “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour” to avoid persecution.

MARTIN LUTHER – LESSONS FROM HIS LIFE

Martin Luther was born November 10, 1483 in Eisleben to Hans Luther a copper miner and his wife Margaretha. Having risen from the peasantry, his father was determined to see his son bring honor to the family. To that end, Hans sent young Martin to schools in Mansfeld, Magdeburg and Eisenach. At the age of seventeen in 1501 he entered the University of Erfurt. The young student received his Bachelor's degree after just one year in 1502. Three years later, in 1505, he received a Master's degree. According to his father's wishes, Martin enrolled in the law school of that university.

His father had wanted him to be a lawyer. All this changed during a thunderstorm in the summer of 1505. A lightning bolt struck near to him as he was returning to school. Terrified, he cried out, "Help, St. Anne! I'll become a monk!"

Fifteen days later, to his father's dismay, he kept his vow. In the summer of 1505, he suddenly dropped out of law school, abandoned his studies, sold his books, and entered the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt. The decision surprised his friends and appalled his father. Luther felt that he has not made the right decision as it was against his father's will.

However, we see God's merciful providence working in what seems like a bad decision. God is not hindered in his sovereign designs from leading Luther out of his perceived bad decision into fruitful accomplishment and joy.

Young Martin fully dedicated himself to monastic life, he strenuously tried to do good works to please God and to serve others. Yet peace with God escaped him. He devoted himself to fasts, flagellations (self inflicted beatings), long hours in prayer and pilgrimages, and constant confession. The more he tried to please God, it seemed, the more aware he became of his sinfulness.



Luther was 21 years old when he became an Augustinian Monk. It would be 20 more years until he married Katharina von Bora on June 13, 1525. During these 20 years he struggled with his own faith in God. Luther wrote, "in the monastery, I did not think about women, money, or possessions; instead my heart trembled and fidgeted about whether God would bestow His grace on me ... For I had strayed from faith and could not but imagine that I had angered God, whom I in turn had to appease by doing good works." There was no theological gamesmanship in Luther's struggles. He said, "If I could believe that God was not angry with me, I would stand on my head for joy".

Fear of sin and God's judgment had struck terror into Martin Luther but he was unable to find the peace he was looking for in the monastery. In spite of this, Luther determined to keep his vows. He was ordained a (Roman Catholic) priest in 1507 celebrating his first Mass on May 2, 1507. He was so overwhelmed at the thought of God's majesty that he almost ran away. Recounting his first Mass, Luther wrote:

"With what tongue shall I address such Majesty, seeing that all men ought to tremble in the presence of even an earthly prince? Who am I that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine Majesty? The angels surround him. At his nod the earth trembles. And shall I, a miserable pygmy, say "I want this or I ask for that?" For I am dust and ashes full of sin and I am speaking to the living, eternal and the true God."

Luther had a sense of the "mysterium tremendum," (tremendous mystery) of the holiness of God throughout his life. This prevented pious routine from creeping into his relation with God and kept his Bible studies, prayers, sermons from declining into a routine; his ultimate concern in all these is to know the living God.

For two years, after his ordination, Luther taught philosophy to the younger monks. He said later that teaching philosophy was like waiting for the real thing. In 1509 the real thing came and his beloved superior and counselor and friend, Johannes von Staupitz, allowed Luther to teach Bible instead of philosophy. Three years later on October 19, 1512, at the age of 28 Luther received his Doctor's

degree in theology, and Staupitz turned over to him the chair in Biblical Theology at the University of Wittenberg which Luther held the rest of his life.

So Luther was a university theology professor all his working life. Luther was no academician, he was intensely engaged in ministry, Church life and providing instruction for Christian living. Luther's life and faith serves as a model for many lessons we can learn about ministry and calling.

Lessons from Luther's life.

Luther - lover of God's Word

Luther was driven by a passion for the exaltation of God in the Word. In one of his prayers he said, "Dear Lord God, I want to preach so that you are glorified. I want to speak of you, praise you, praise your name. Although I probably cannot make it turn out well, won't you make it turn out well?" He said, "If I could today become king or emperor, I would not give up my office as preacher"

Luther's passion for study was interwoven with this desire for the true gospel. He saw study as life giving. Luther was immersed into the Bible since his younger days and wrestled with the Bible to bring out the light of the gospel.

When I was young, I read the Bible over and over and over again, and was so perfectly acquainted with it, that I could, in an instant, have pointed to any verse that might have been mentioned. I then read the commentators, but soon threw them aside, for I found therein many things my conscience could not approve, as being contrary to the sacred text. 'Tis

always better to see with one's own eyes than with those of other people"

Luther was well acquainted with the Bible, he wrote in 1533, "For a number of years I have now annually read through the Bible twice. If the Bible were a large, mighty tree and all its words were little branches I have tapped at all the branches, eager to know what was there and what it had to offer"

Luther studied and wrote voraciously, his writings included Bible commentaries, homiletics (preaching), liturgical, educational, devotionals, hymns, which has shaped Protestant Church life for centuries. He translated the Bible into German, preached at the unbelievable pace, it was recorded that between 1510 and 1546, a span of 37 years Luther preached 3,000 sermons, i.e. nearly 2 sermons a week for such an extensive period. Luther traveled extensively for meetings, conferences and engaged in controversies and debates with the powerful Roman Catholic Church. Luther's heartfelt concern was for the preservation and purity of the faith. One commentator on Luther's life remarked, "Never a weekend off—never even a weekday off. Never any respite at all from preaching, teaching, private study, production, writing, counseling"

Luther recognised that there was such a thing as overwork and counter-productive strain. However he clearly preferred to err on the side of overwork than under-work. We see this in 1532 when he wrote, "A person should work in such a way that he remains well and does no injury to his body. We should not break our heads at work and injure

our bodies ... I myself used to do such things, and I have racked my brains because I still have not overcome the bad habit of overworking. Nor shall I overcome it as long as I live"

Suffering was woven into life for Luther. We have to keep in mind that from 1521 on Luther lived under the threat over his life by the empire. The emperor Charles V said, "I have decided to mobilize everything against Luther: my kingdoms and dominions, my friends, my body, my blood and my soul" He could be legally killed, except where he was protected by his prince, Frederick the Wise of Saxony.

He endured relentless slander of the cruelest kind. He once observed, "If the Devil can do nothing against the teachings, he attacks the person, lying, slandering, cursing, and ranting at him." Physically he suffered from excruciating kidney stones and headaches with buzzing in his ears and ear infections and incapacitating constipation—"I nearly gave up the ghost—and now, bathed in blood, can find no peace." It's not surprising then that emotionally and spiritually he would undergo the most horrible struggles.

Though Luther tried to live as a monk without reproach, he felt deeply that he was a sinner before God and was extremely disturbed in conscience. As he read the book of Romans, the verse in chapter 1:17, "In it the righteousness of God is revealed." The word "righteousness of God" and the thought of the righteous God punishing the unrighteous sinner troubled him deeply. He confessed he did not love, but hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and even murmured

secretly if not blasphemously that he was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteous wrath!" It was his troubled conscience that drove him to seek incessantly and importunately, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul meant

Luther meditated on these troubling words day and night --, "In it righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." There he began to understand the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Here a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory

Luther knew so much of the word of God that from memory he could see the truth of justification to confirm what the Spirit illumined. Luther did not have a personal copy of the Bible in his earlier years and must have treasured up much of the word in his heart.

What an exemplary model for scripture memory and of on in the spirit of the Bereans, who, "they received the

message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." (Acts 17:11) Luther's love and dedication to the Word of God speaks volumes to our casualness and lack of diligence and discipline towards the word of God. His striving and life of wrestling with the Word, his uncompromising stand against error for the preservation and purity of the Word has left a lasting legacy of a true lover of God's word.

Luther - the lover of God.

For all his devotion to study Luther seems to contradict himself when he writes,

That the Holy Scriptures cannot be penetrated by study and talent is most certain. Therefore your first duty is to begin to pray, and to pray to this effect that if it please God to accomplish something for His glory—not for yours or any other person's—He very graciously grant you a true understanding of His words. For no master of the divine words exists except the Author of these words, as He says: 'They shall be all taught of God' (John 6:45). You must, therefore, completely despair of your own industry and ability and rely solely on the inspiration of the Spirit.

Luther believed in not just seeking the Word but God himself so the He is the one who illumine and enlighten out minds. He instructs that we bathe all our work in prayer, and cast ourselves so on God that He enters and sustains and prospers all our study. The true way to study the Bible is saturated with prayer and self-doubt and God-reliance moment by moment. Luther counsels, "kneel down in your private

little room and with sincere humility and earnestness pray God through His dear Son, graciously to grant you His Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide you and give you understanding”

Luther's emphasis on prayer in study is rooted in his theology, He was persuaded from Romans 8:7 and elsewhere that "The natural mind cannot do anything godly. It does not perceive the wrath of God, there cannot rightly fear him. It does not see the goodness of God, therefore cannot trust or believe in him either." Therefore we should constantly pray even in our study that God will help us overcome our blindness and hardheartedness.

At the heart of Luther's theology was a total dependence on God's omnipotent grace rescuing powerless man from the bondage of the will. Luther argues, " For since, apart from Christ, sin and death are our masters and the devil is our god and prince, there can be no strength or power, no wit or wisdom, by which we can fit or fashion ourselves for righteousness and life. On the contrary, blinded and captivated, we are bound to be the subjects of Satan and sin, doing and thinking what pleases him and is opposed to God and His commandments”

Luther's theology states that man is powerless to justify himself, powerless to sanctify himself, powerless to study as he ought and powerless to trust God to do anything about this.

For Luther the issue of man's bondage to sin and his moral inability to believe or make himself right—including the inability to study rightly —was the root issue of the Reformation. The freedom of God, and therefore the freedom of the Gospel and therefore the Glory of God and the salvation of men were at stake in this controversy. Luther ascribed all freedom and power and grace to God, and all powerlessness and dependency to man.

Prayer is the root of Luther's approach to studying God's word. Prayer is the expression of the freedom and sufficiency of God in the heart of powerless man.

Luther ascribed all glory to God alone and nothing to man, for to God one cannot ascribe too much glory. This is what our vision asserts, "To glorify God" and one of our core values, "dependence on God". This is how we express the purpose of what God has made us for and how we express our love for God. Luther epitomizes the true lover of God in how he lived so the God gets all the glory and we get the grace.

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An email from Edmund Ng....

A few years ago, a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. The convention lasted all week, and all the salesmen had assured their wives that they would be home in plenty of time for Friday night's dinner.

As they hurried to the airport to catch their return flight, they rushed down the airport's corridor with their briefcases in hand. In their rush, one of these salesmen inadvertently kicked over a table which held a display of apples.

Apples flew everywhere. Without stopping or looking back, they all continued running so they would make their plane. All but one. He stopped after running a few more yards, took a deep breath, and experienced a twinge of compassion for the girl whose apple stand had been overturned.

He told his buddies to go on without him, waved goodbye, told one of them to call his wife when they arrived at their home destination and explain his taking a later flight. Then he returned to the terminal where the apples were all over the terminal floor. He was glad he did.

The 16 year old girl running the apple cart was totally blind. She was softly crying, tears running down her cheeks in frustration, and at the same time helplessly groping for her spilled produce as the crowd swirled about her, no one stopping and no one to care for her plight. The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, put them back on the table and helped organize her display. As he did this, he noticed that many of the apples had become battered and bruised; these he set aside in another basket.

When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, "Here, please take this \$40 for the damage we did. Are you okay?" She nodded through her tears. He continued on with, "I hope we didn't spoil your day too badly." As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, "Mister..... " He paused and turned to look back into those blind eyes. She continued, "Are you Jesus?" He stopped in mid-stride, and he wondered. Then slowly he made his way to catch the later flight with that question burning and bouncing about in his soul: "Are you Jesus?" Do people mistake you for Jesus?

That's our call, is it not? To be so much like Jesus that people cannot tell the difference as we live and interact with a world (shopping, working, reacting to others that are serving us) that is blind to His love, life and grace. You are the apple of His eye even though we, too, have been bruised by a fall. He stopped what He was doing and picked you and me up on a hill called Calvary and paid in full for our damaged fruit. If we claim to know Him, we should live, walk and act as He would. Knowing Him is more than simply quoting Scripture and going to church. It's actually living the Word as life unfolds day to day.

Let us live like we are worth the price He paid. Be kinder than necessary, for everyone you meet is fighting some kind of battle.

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