

# The Vine

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## *Editor's Ramblings*

If you listen to the radio in the mornings, you might come across the message, "Gaia is

burning" referring to the Earth (Gaia) heating up due to the harm humans have caused the environment. Don't we know that already? The Holy Bible has already made known to us that the world will end in fire (2Peter 3:10). In the past, people believed that this could mean we blow ourselves up with nuclear weapons, eg in the Cold War period or that the earth will crash into the Sun. Now apparently, it will burn up through environmental damage. Certainly, there are many signs of the world's weather going havoc with increasing reports of floods in various parts of the world.

Crude oil prices aiming for the moon will certainly cause missionary expenditure to rise because even budget airlines will not be cheap anymore. Check in baggage to be charged will mean that carrying stuff overseas will cost us more too. Are we able to make the most of our remaining time to fulfill the Great Commission?

I know that the Bible Society of Singapore is planning to rebuild its premises at Armenian Street at the cost of \$15 million. One of their fund raising activities is to raise donations of a brick at \$1000 each. Your name will be engraved on the brick. I guess it will take 15,000 bricks to construct their new building. How many bricks are required to build JCC? Have you counted the bricks on the walls?

Our renovation works have just been completed. Are we ready to make use of the improvements made, to invite more people to come to JCC or will we be quibbling about how we can raise \$7 million in 5 years? Because the accounts are not up to date, I am not able to get a picture of how much money we have raised since the AGM. However, I have not got any exiting reports of sudden surges in collections for the re-building of JCC, so I can safely assume that after the AGM, nothing has



changed with regards to increase in collection. Did I expect that? Reluctantly, I must admit that I suspected it.

My Treasurer role has just kicked in and I realize that I am not able to meet all my deadlines. Either I complete the accounts (which is already 3 months behind), or I finish The Vine. Well, I guess you know that The Vine is going to be delayed from now on.

How can you help? Send me your stories and reports with photos, if available. Don't leave me groping around for stories and photos to fill The Vine. I don't have the time. What makes a good story? Well, maybe you were part of a mission team to Cambodia or elsewhere, your CG had a retreat in some exotic location out of Singapore or even within Singapore, God spoke to you or answered your prayers, you appeared on TV in a disaster zone. Do you read the newspapers? There are so many stories that can be news but usually in the newspapers they are all bad news. What we need is cheerful, victorious news for The Vine. Are you going to hide your light under a bowl? Pretend that God did nothing for you all this time? Even if He didn't, you could write a book entitled, "Where is God when it hurts?" or "Disappointment with God".

I have to be everywhere so that I can catch some news for The Vine.



Help me out.

*Martin Cheah*

# My Quiet Time Reflection

"Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.'" (Mk 12:41-44)

The poor widow gave all she had to God in the temple offering. Many others who were rich also offered much. What is the contrast? The poor widow willingly gave up all even though it was little in absolute terms, but the wealthy offered up little in sacrifice even though the sum of money might look big in the eyes of men. God sees the significance in the personal sacrifice offered up rather than in a big show of generosity among men.

Love for God counts more than whether you are rich or poor. It is better to be poor and generous than being rich and stingy.

Recently, I read an article about a mother who pushed her two sons out of the way of an oncoming vehicle. In the process, she took the place of her sons as the fatal victim of an accident. Her love for her children was unconditional; she devoted her life to them, a life she freely sacrificed.

If our love for God were at least a little comparable to a mother's love for her son, what will hinder us from giving to God what is required of us?

## **JAMES SUM**

Continuing from Bro James' observations, I would like to add that it seems strange that Jesus did not stop the poor widow from donating all that she had to live on. In our pragmatic century, we will tell our poor brothers that it is okay not to tithe because they have insufficient funds to even feed themselves. If they give, how will they live? Are they to be like the poor widow of Zarephath (1Kings 17) who will eat their last meal and die?

Do we lack faith when we don't give or is it because we have wisdom that says we have to feed ourselves first before others? We also believe that God will take care of the lilies of the fields and the birds of the air but we suspect He will not take care of us.

Why did God choose poor widows as examples? Is it because in those days, poor widows are the poorest of the poor because as a woman, they cannot find jobs? Did the poor widow starve to death after donating all that she had? Do we sometimes tell the flag sellers that we don't have any coins to donate to them? That is not equivalent to having no money, but just no loose change. Maybe the poor widow had some money at home but only 2 copper coins in her pocket?

Well the Bible does not mention what happened to the poor widow after she gave all that she had but I believe that God would have taken care of her.

*Martin Cheah*

## TRY THIS AT ANOTHER CHURCH

Do you want an eye-opening experience? Try attending a different church one Sunday this month, a church where you don't know anyone, maybe a church that's outside your tradition. Go by yourself. When you walk in the door, take a careful mental tally of the way that you feel and why. Ask yourself if you'd come back to this church. How does it feel to be a newcomer? How would your own church stand up under this same test? This experiential knowledge of what it's like to be a visitor will be invaluable for anticipating the needs of newcomers to your church.



### SUNDAY 25 MAY 2008

In an effort to rekindle the Care Group ministry, JCC had a CG Sunday complete with skits and videos. Time will tell if the event prove successful or not.



### KAIROS FACILITORS' COURSE IN MAY 2008



Ken Chua came alongside the Lutheran churches to help us to facilitate the Kairos course on our own. He trained a bunch of us on 2 week nights at JCC.

"This article first appeared in 8 May 2008 issue of **Christianity Today**. Used by permission of Christianity Today International, Carol Stream, IL 60188."

## **The Irony of Iron Man** by Frank Smith



What can we learn from an armor-encased superhero who can protect others, but can't save himself? And what does his story say about finding strength in weakness?

Iron Man is based on the Marvel comic book of the same name and featuring Robert Downey Jr. as Tony Stark, a millionaire industrialist who dons technologically advanced iron "armor" to fight evil. But beyond its obvious entertainment value, does Iron Man have more in store for us than battle suits and repulsor rays?

### Iron Man

Superhero movies offer plenty of food for thought and our souls, right down to their premises and the philosophy behind them. Tony Stark, the man beneath the armor in Iron

Man, is one of the most complex and compelling characters in comic book history.

### Superpowered in the broken places

Recent comic book movies have shown us that superheroes can come from just about anywhere, and that physical or situational limitations need not be a roadblock. In fact, sometimes they can prove exactly the opposite.

We often find superheroes, in their beginnings, to have physical weakness. In order to fight evil, they must overcome their disadvantage and become "strong in the broken place"—and in the comics, they become not only strong, but superpowered. Blind lawyer Matt Murdock becomes Daredevil, whose superpowered "radar sense" far surpasses normal sight. And as we'll see in Iron Man, industrialist Tony Stark—with



a damaged heart only a handful of beats away from death—becomes an unstoppable Iron Avenger.

The idea that no one is destined for failure, that it's possible to rise above our circumstances and make a difference, is also an important part of our cultural heritage—and something that needs reaffirmation. Yet this is only part of the truth. And it's here that the philosophies behind comic books—and adventure stories in general—often fail to give us the entire picture.

Isaiah 55:8 reminds us that God's ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our own.

Paul's observation about strength in weakness (2 Cor. 12:10) refers not to a physical ability to rise above our limitations, thus imposing our will—for good or ill—upon the scene. Rather, it refers to the joyful recognition that our weakness in itself is a good thing.

Our limitations pull us back from single-minded reliance upon our own strength—a course that leads either to failure, or victory accompanied by the deadly price tag of illusory pride. Only God can see all ends, and we can't accomplish anything lasting without him—but with him, all things are possible.

#### Freedom fighter

Iron Man was originally created in the early 1960s amidst the dynamic idealism of John F. Kennedy's America. It was a time when the U.S. looked to defend not only her own freedom but the world's. As the only openly political superhero—his first armored "suit" was created to free himself from a Vietcong prison camp—Iron Man fought for the American way across the globe.

For the new film, Marvel has updated the character and his origin, substituting Middle Eastern terrorists for North Vietnamese soldiers. But the basic story remains the same, as does Tony Stark's job as an industrialist and munitions supplier to the army.

#### 'Ironic' symmetry

The most fascinating aspect of the story is the character of Tony Stark himself—the man behind the iron mask. In the early 1980s, Iron Man fans learned that Stark had grown up estranged from his wealthy parents, and that his early life had been an ongoing attempt to impress his father, to solicit some degree of paternal approval from a cold and emotionally distant man.

Failing to do this, Stark chose instead the life of a playboy, walling himself up from others and encasing himself in an emotional armor of his own making—years before the prison camp experience that gave rise to Iron Man, and the literal armor he would don to fight evil.

But as he risked his life against apocalyptic villainy, acute anxiety began to take hold. And soon Stark discovered that the emotional shell designed to protect instead isolated; instead of keeping pain out, it bottled up his feelings and kept them in. Iron Man was trapped in an armor that he couldn't put on and take off, and gradually, inevitably, he began to break down.

This ironic symmetry of the man encased in armor who can protect others—but can't save himself—is central to the comic and the character. It shows how overcoming our limitations through our own strength can sometimes create an even more crippling weakness in result.

#### Art imitating life

There's more irony here: Robert Downey Jr., the actor who plays the title role, has had his own Stark-ian journey—battling his own inner demons and addictions. Stark was once in a prison camp; Downey has also been imprisoned, serving several sentences on various drug charges. Stark had his emotional armor; Downey's emotional armor came via mind-altering substances. Though Downey was never "estranged" from his parents like Stark, his father introduced Robert Jr. to marijuana when he was just 6 years old, and his parents divorced when he was 13. Like Stark, Downey has been the playboy.

Art imitating life? Or vice versa? Either way, as we watch this character's story unfold on the big screen, we might ask how our own lives and choices reflect his. To what extent do we rely upon our own strength and wisdom, and not on God's? What emotional "armor" and masks do we wear? Where and how do we differentiate between protecting our privacy and being vulnerable, especially to people God can use to speak into our lives? What are the drugs—literal or metaphorical—we use to numb life's pain? And how can God help us with these things?

Whether we see Iron Man the movie or not, these are certainly the types of things we all should be asking of ourselves—and each other.



# LCCS Walkathon & Family Day

## 31<sup>st</sup> May 2008

Murphy's Law states that if anything can go wrong, it will. For the LCS-LCCS Walkathon & Family Day, something did not go right – from the start. The planners for the LCS-LCCS Walkathon & Family Day set up a tent with the intention of assembling the participants according to the various LCS congregations they came from; but the tent, large as it was, was inadequate in size to accommodate all. However, nobody complained. It was indeed encouraging to



see such a supportive crowd spread out in the open spaces around the tent as our guest of honour, Associate Professor Ho Peng Kee, delivered his encouraging speech.

As in much past experience with event planning, church members had the habit of throwing last-minute surprises. It was the same this time at Jurong Christian Church. The

confirmations of participation started piling up only on the last few days, quite a number of them coming in on the eve of the event as transport arrangement was being finalised. Due to earlier slow response, we made transport enquiry only a few days before the event, and ended with a "no bus available" response from our regular transport provider. Finally, we managed to secure 3 buses just one day

before the big day to ferry close to 100 persons to the East Coast grounds. This number excluded those who decided to make their way there in their own cars. Adding on the participants coming from all the other Lutheran churches, it was no wonder that when the walkathon was flagged off, the footpath at



the park instantaneously turned into a flowing river of white with dashes of red (the colours of our walkathon t-shirt).





It was a non-tiring leisurely 5-km walk in cool weather. This was followed by some Family Day fun under the tent. For the energetic and adventurous young ones, there was an inline-skating demonstration by a professional. For everyone – young and old – food on the buffet tables with altogether 10 menu items (including 2 desserts) was more than enough to satisfy all, with ample leftovers for “ta pau” (taking home).

The Lutheran family in Singapore is a small one, with members spread across a little more than a handful of churches. I felt great working with my brother-in-Christ George Ng of the Chinese congregation and

Dr Paul A. Tambyah of the Redeemer Church in the area of logistics, and getting to know more co-labourers better across the various Lutheran churches in the process. The Walkathon & Family Day was simply an excellent occasion for brothers and sisters to have a reunion, catching up with those we had infrequent contacts and striking up fresh interactions with many with whom we shall have the ongoing prospect of collaborating in Kingdom’s work.



I am pleased to note the support of JCC members and friends in our fundraising effort. The English Section managed to raise a sum of \$4900. It is about the same amount from the Chinese Section. So altogether, JCC raised close to 10% of the LCCS fundraising target of \$100000.

Thank God for His blessings.

*John Lee*

# *Separation between Church and State*

Have you ever thought about why there is a need for separating Church and State?

A simple answer is that if there is no separation, there will be a big clash. (Maybe this answer is obvious to all.)

Separation means: You (the State) take care of the State's business; we (the Church) take care of the Church business. Let us enjoy our entitled freedom to do God's business and let you enjoy your entitled authority to run the State in a way that is just. In other words, each side has its own space.

From the standpoint of a true-blue Singaporean born and bred here, I see the blessing of peace arising out of the separation of Church and State in practice. However, standing on a pedestal and looking out, you could see that the blessed harmony is not a given. Much as peoples tried to work hard at it, there remains States and Church at loggerheads because of different views and limited ability to build mutual trusts. In history, incidences abound of States' bulldozers at work in running down faiths, or believers' preferring force to reason in their attempts to get their way. If it takes two hands to clap, likewise it would take two fists to have a punch-up. So it is safe to say that both Church and State share responsibilities for the final condition of harmony or strife. It would not be fair to give credit for good condition to "self" and give blame for poor condition to "the other".

In Singapore, where irreconcilable strife between Church and State is unheard of, it is easy for us to think nothing of it. Notwithstanding the absence of clashes that become news around the world, tension between Church and State always exists. It is by the wisdom of the government and the perspicacity of the citizen Church members that differences of outlooks on any issue are worked on in a calm and steady manner, with mutual forbearance and conciliation.

Separation between Church and State does not mean jettisoning one's conviction to do what is right and necessary. As a matter of fact, Christians may still do what is right by God even if an immense chasm exists between the moral teachings of the Church and the worldview of the State. Let's take a quick view of some prominent divergence:

- Church's teaching: Thou shalt not kill

State's tolerance: Some kinds of killing can be justified (e.g. legalized embryo destruction or abortion)

- Church's teaching: Gambling is wrong  
State's argument: There is such a thing called responsible gambling. Controlled gambling is ok. A little leisure flutter with 4-D or Toto is ok. The permissibility is justified by the existence of demand and the economic imperatives.
- Church's teaching: Thou shalt not commit adultery  
State's leniency: No need for law against adultery *per se* even though it is a citable reason for divorce and bigamy is an offence.

You may recall the infamous Edison's sex scandal in Hong Kong. In the society, the man might not even have committed a crime. Even so, he was surely not alone in committing a terrible deed without infringing the legislated laws of the land. For another example, a person who gambles away his fortune and subject his dependents to poverty may not be a lawbreaker. Legal sanctions do not apply, but counseling (state-sponsored or by social charity) may be applied as balm on the wounds (efficaciously or otherwise). Gambling, very much against the moral laws of major religions, is in fact openly supported by governments around the world for less-than-persuasive justifications. Similarly, one who prostitutes himself/herself as a "duck" or "hen" (pardon the slang) may not fear being indicted for anything criminal so long as he/she keeps the immoral acts within legal bounds.

It is vital for everyone to understand that freedom from punishment under the official law of Man does not absolve one from punishment from God's Law. Man's law may change with the times with increasing permissiveness, but God's Law forever changes not. However, for people like Edison Chen and his partners in lusts of the flesh, including possibly many in a decadent world who hide similar, though yet undiscovered, secrets behind a modest moral veil, there is still hope. They have paid, or will pay, a heavy price by human reckoning; but the greatest price for Man's sin has already been paid by Christ on the Cross. Hope lies in the following steps:

- **Own up. Do not cover up.** "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." (Prov. 28:13)
- **Forsake the wicked way and evil thoughts. Turn to the Lord.** "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the

LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.” (Isa. 55:7)

Tension between Church and State is hard to wish away – what the State condones are sometimes anathema to the beliefs and teachings of the Church. Admittedly, there are also many areas of concord between a good Christian and a conscientious government. However, since contentions arise out of differences, it is fitting for us to be vigilant for the maintenance of peaceful co-existence within spaces with autonomous and overlapping regions. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Singapore is a blessed place where the government is able to discharge its mandate without the distractions of revolts from the people and the Church is able to carry out its business of promoting the values founded on Jesus Christ without any fear of ill-treatment from the government. The Church does not seek to encroach on the space of the elected government in respect of setting rules for the secular State; likewise, the government is mindful of not encroaching on the space of the Church in respect of the latter’s Christian responsibility to preach the teachings of Jesus Christ. Reciprocal respect between the State and the Church is always mutually valuable.

Talking about mandate, does the government’s mandate to rule come only from the population through a democratic election or via some autocratic political system? From the Christian standpoint, the answer is “no”. There are all kinds of governments and rulers (including the ordinary and the extreme in either goodness or badness), but their authority and legitimacy are all founded upon the will of God. This is clear by what Rom. 3:1 tells us, that “everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” Whatever good, whatever bad, whether it be due to those in authority with the responsibility to see to the well-being of the governed, or due to events beyond anybody’s control (say, Acts of God), there is a purpose for every agony or joy, and everyone knows from experience that agony and joy have never been fixed in place or time. The book “*Rise and Fall of Nations*” by Richard F. Ames is a good read. Here I quote a portion from it:

*“You can know the future from Bible prophecy. You can know the broad outlines of world history, and what will happen to the great nations of this 21st century! There is a God in heaven who is working out a great plan here on earth. He is giving human beings and human civilization six millennia to experiment with religion, science, government, business, education and social institutions. God is allowing human beings to go their own predictable, carnal*

*way of selfishness, war, and violence, but He often intervenes in order to teach lasting lessons of life and death.*

*“Why do nations decline and fall? History has proved, time and again, that a nation’s moral condition and its character are key to its endurance. God’s moral law applies to nations as well as individuals. The Apostle Paul wrote: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). Individuals and nations that sow immorality, violence and oppression will not long endure.”*

The Bible also teaches children to obey their parents. Specifically, Ephesians 6:1-4 says,

*“Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with promise. That it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth. And you, fathers do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”*

Obviously, obedience is limited by what is right in the Lord. If parents expect their children to rob and steal, the parental authority ordained by God becomes taken over by the higher authority of the law of the land enacted by the government that is ordained by God too. The separate yet related commands to children (“Obey your parents.”) and parents (“Do not provoke your children to wrath”) work in harmony and both the “governor of behaviour” (the parents) and the “governed” (children who are being cared for) can hope for peaceful co-existence without any attempt on subjugation on the part of one and rebellion on the part of the other. In short, there is reciprocity of duties. Obviously, children as they grow up do have influence to improve parental rules sans outright rebellion and parents have influence to mould the children. Mistakes are made along the way, corrected and then there is progress. All will be well if everyone is conscientious in the Lord.

Using the above rightful relationship between children and parents as analogy, any God-ordained authority placed on a person or an institution is never absolute. The authority of the government to rule and set decrees is never unlimited. Notwithstanding the separation between Church and State, both parties are capable of exercising positive influences on each other and have conscientious expectations with regards to each other’s performance of duty in a peaceful co-existence. Ultimately, each will be held to account (to a higher authority) in spite

of one's recognition or otherwise of a supreme God overseeing all events on Earth. The adoption of diplomatic persuasions and mutual respect within God's order and guided by the fiat of conscience is the best way forward for both Church and State whose rights to exist cannot be mutually exclusive.

Pray for God to bless both Church and State.

*John Lee*



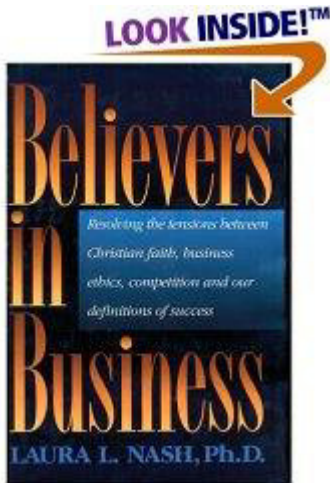
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It's official! Anthony Loh has been installed on 15 June 2008 as a co-worker of the LCS. Officially, he became Pastor Anthony Loh on 1 June 2008. However, effectively, he has been pastoring in JCC for many years already.

*A Sunday school teacher asked her children as they were on the way to church service, 'And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?' One bright little girl replied, 'Because people are sleeping.'*

*A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin 5, and Ryan 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.' Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, 'Ryan, you be Jesus !'*



**BOOK REVIEW** by Goh Young Kwang  
*Believers in Business* by Laura L. Nash, PhD  
Thomas Nelson, Inc. USA. 1994

### Introduction

Are the Christian values of charity and selflessness directly in conflict with the profitable exploitation of the marketplace? Can the Christian boss/CEO reconcile his/her personal faith with his/her duty to maximize the profit of the company by maximizing the economic contribution of the resources (including human resources)? Can the Christian Businessperson call on God to help him/her win

a deal, beat the competitor, have a 24/7 business to maximize return? These and many dilemmas are explored, studied and analyzed through exhaustive interviews with 85 Christian CEOs/executives in the US by author Laura Nash.

The subject itself is subjective, dependent on one's interpretation of his/her faith and the inter-relationship between business/work and faith. Laura scrutinized these with reference to the tensions between the various aspects of the Christian faith and the reality of business practices.

### Tension 1: The Love for God and the Pursuit of Profit

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, was greatly disturbed when he saw the drinking and carousing of the poor coal miner in England in the eighteenth century. He began his evangelical journey and converted many, who then embraced industriousness and thrift. To his dismay, they also adopted the tendency toward indolence and the love for money. The very qualities that believers exhibit – hard work, self-discipline, sobriety and thrift – are the key ingredients for a material success that is the downfall of those not fully committed to God. As the Bible warns, no one can have two masters: “You cannot serve God and money” (Matt 6:24-25).

One interviewee put it, “I really believe that materialism can separate you from God.”

God decreed that Man should toil for his food, all the days of life. However, with his ability to till the ground and reap its abundant reward (especially with modern technology), Man begins to rely on his hard work and ability rather than realizing that it is the Grace of God working. Is work his religion and his worship?

To the evangelical business leader, a career as a captain of industry holds the potential for both weakening one's personal relationship with God and fulfilling God's order. Most, if not all of the interviewees, showed a great enthusiasm derived from work. In addition, they have an attitude of wanting to be exemplary, to be the best in their industry. Although they work very hard and have an uncanny sense for making money, they do not seem driven by these goals in the overt and helpless ways in which managers today idealize their career obligations. Some see in business success the reassurance that life matters, "saving" oneself in the modern world; however, Christians do not need this form of assurance, having already the deeper reassurance of God's love through Jesus Christ.

Many sources of influence directly affect the commitment of Christian men to God and to business. One source is the Christian community of businesspersons wherein the members counsel one another and share mutual assistance in business. However, the most direct source of influence is *prayer*, either alone or among fellow Christian businesspersons.

### Tension 2: Love and the Competitive Drive

Is life a game of winners and losers? I win, you lose. Score more goals, more tries, sink more baskets or use the least number of strokes.

Be aggressive, be stronger, be more accurate, be ruthless, and beat the competitors. Is business a game?

Win the tender, secure the deal, gain the market share, wrestle the controlling share; there are prizes in business and rules are meant to be bent, selectively followed and creatively observed. The better man wins the prize, as advocated by Adam Smith. In business, the game is real. One man's gain is another man's loss, taking away the rice from somebody's bowl. However, this is the modern economy and everyone accepts it. Should the Christian business follow suit, or should it be benevolent without giving in to the apprehension of being swallowed by the competition?

A common occurrence in business is the employment of experienced staff that may come with a customer base that was developed while he/she was working for a previous employer. The employment may even take on a liberated strategy; i.e., poaching staff and/or customer. Certainly, this is a common practice; but for the Christian businessperson, he is faced with an ethical issue. An interviewee related a similar situation, except that the other firm is facing financial problems and the



customers are all finishing their contracts anyway. Legally, there is nothing to stop him; however, he decided to offer a share of the first year profit on ethical consideration. Eventually, the old firm helped the new firm to secure a large contract as well.

What is the goal of a Christian business? Certainly, all the interviewees agreed that the firm must make profit, but how much? Shareholders would expect as much as it can make regardless of the costs to others. Certainly, the conventional goal as given by noted economists from Adam Smith to Milton is to maximize profit through self-interest. The basis for decision-making is one's own selfish return. The author suggested that there is an alternative, the covenantal ethic with a different base for problem solving. Assumptions are:

- a. The primary goal of business is the creation of value for others
- b. To ensure that there are economic rewards
- c. Service to others will achieve a mutually satisfying economic end
- d. Primary focus of decision-making is the creation of mutually enabling relationships

In covenantal ethic, the first question asked is not "How much money did we make?" but "How is the customer faring?" Maintaining a specific product is not a sacred duty; maintaining a beneficial relation is!

### Tension 3: People Needs and the Profit Obligation

In the days of the assembly lines, workers were the lowest in a hierarchy and deemed to have minimal skill, so much so that some corporate person said, "a monkey could do the job." When asked whether they were religious at work, the believer CEO's frequent reply would be, "I would like to think so; I mean, I have a good relationship with my employees." Many said that the strongest linkage of faith and work is observable from the manager-employee relationship. Employee relations were just about the distinctive area of spiritual relevance – second only to their personal relationship with the living God. So "how you treat your employees" became both the representation and concrete test of faith at work.

For some, work is an unpleasant task involving an effort or something "taken out" of a worker. Motivation then rests on overcoming a natural distaste for the task and providing compensation for the effort expended. For others, work is something that satisfies certain basic needs beyond the securing of a livelihood. Thus, the employee becomes a person to be managed, organized and motivated with regards to his emotional, physical and intellectual needs. Commitment to

hard work is an expression of obedience to God's order and an imitation of Christ. The CEO's duty is then to provide and guide his employees to perform meaningful work.

According to the interviewees, business should be organized and employees treated in such a way that provides an opportunity for emotional fulfillment and social acceptance. Christianity requires unconditional and redemptive love. Fiduciary obligations and the needs of the corporation's internal society require a disciplined view of the bottom line as well. To a Christian, self-respect, humility, and self-sacrifice are complementary notions. So the Christian businessperson tends to have a little crisis of conscience in putting the needs of the business above individuals. The tension is to seek a commonality between the goals of the company and the goals of the individuals and, in doing so, to shape the employee "good for capitalism" without sacrificing Christian ethics.

Another tension is the problematic area of growth for the company. Growth is a primary measurement of corporate success for most CEOs. The expectation of growth also poses a trade-off between Christian and financial duties. One interviewee said:

*"I'm not so sure that growth is consistent with the Christian context for social order. I mean, it might be better to embrace the idea of staying the same and living in harmony. To grow you have to innovate, and that means pain to someone. Is this Christian?"*

Technology changes may necessitate the re-deployment of workers or retrenchment. Resisting changes may compromise the company's survivability in the fiercely competitive world. The common response is proactive: to nurture new job opportunities both within and outside the company. All interviewees agreed that Christians are not immune from painful layoff. However, the Christian believer attempts to keep people longer in employment in anticipation of business upturn. "To everything there is a season."

#### Tension 4: Humility and the Ego of Success

Repeatedly mentioned are three areas of conflict in connection with the ambiguities of success: wealth, power and self-reliance. All three have the potential of being the foundation or result of effective leadership as well as a distraction from one's relationship with God.

By most accounts, the engines of capitalism are driven essentially by a longing for money and power. Thus, two types of managers emerge – the driven and the

withered. The driven find that no amount of money or power gives them satisfaction, and yet the only compensatory action is to search for more of the same. The withered suffer “fame-induced apathy” or “no activity is worth pursuing unless one can become very famous pursuing it”. The culture of the top man is essentially focused on power, and the saying “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupt absolutely” is a sobering reminder of the danger. For the CEO, the first corruption is his own judgment and perception. Success and its associated material benefits not only feed ego but also has the tendency to isolate one from others. Those who drive cars are not expected to be seen bumping along with public bus commuters. Those who can eat comfortably in air-con restaurants have less to do with crowded hawker centers.

Even leaders in the Bible were seduced by the ego of success and power. Just look at David’s greed in stealing one of his most loyal officer’s wife, and Solomon’s total disregard of God’s commandment when he took hundreds of wives including those from foreign lands and religions. The problem of ego is not with having an ego, but with losing one’s perspective – thinking too much of one’s own ability or hyper-inflated self-regards. This leads to broken relationship with God and with one’s neighbour.

#### Tension 5: Family and Work

Family has always had great significance within the Christian tradition. The author has concluded that the family is clearly a chief source of spiritual sustenance for all of the interviewees; quite a few of them attributed their strength in their faith to their spouses. Wives also facilitate an integration of faith and business, and help the busy executives keep everything in perspective in the face of contradictory pressures in the business world. It is a three-way partnership between the CEO, his family and God. Many expressed strong commitment to improving the ways they cared for their wives, and they focused on their children’s welfare in making career decision.

The most obvious conflict is the competition for a CEO’s time that family and business represent. How do executives with responsibility for a whole company take seriously the time needs of the family? Should family time be the “left-over” after business is done? Although a potentially conflicting situation, Christian businesspersons are also to draw their family into a partnership with their business. They have to be clearer about setting limits on the demands of work and taking extreme risks in their career, aware that the necessary family stability is dependent on the right balancing of their time between family and work.

*To be concluded in the next issue of The Vine*

## DO YOU KNOW HOW THE APOSTLES DIED?

**Matthew** Killed by the sword in Ethiopia.

**Mark** Died in Alexandria , Egypt , after being dragged by horses through the streets until he was dead.

**Luke** was hanged in Greece.

**John** Faced martyrdom when he was boiled in huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos. He wrote his prophetic Book of Revelation on Patmos. The apostle John was later freed and returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.

**Peter** was crucified upside down on an x-shaped cross. According to church tradition it was because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ had died.

**James**, Just The leader of the church in Jerusalem, was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a club. \*This was the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during the Temptation.

**James** the son of Zebedee, was ultimately beheaded at Jerusalem. The Roman officer who guarded James watched amazed as James defended his faith at his trial. Later, the officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian.

**Bartholomew** also known as Nathaniel was a missionary. He witnessed in present day Turkey. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia where he was flayed to death by a whip.

**Andrew** was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it." He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he expired.

**Thomas** Was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips.

**Jude** Was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.

**Matthias** The apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded.

**Barnabas** One of the group of seventy disciples, preached throughout Italy and Cyprus. Barnabas was stoned to death at Salonica.

**Paul** Was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero at Rome in A.D. 67. Paul endured a lengthy imprisonment which allowed him to write his many epistles to the churches he had formed throughout the Roman Empire.

*Perhaps this is a reminder to us that our sufferings here are indeed minor compared to the intense persecution faced by the apostles for the sake of the Faith.*

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**And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But he that endureth to the end shall be saved.**