

The Vine

The Vine Committee

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Editor's Rambling

For Christmas, my brother-in-law got me a GPS receiver. He must have heard from his mom (my mother-in-law) how often I drove around in circles, not knowing where I am going. The GPS is an amazing piece of equipment. It can receive signals from any 4 of the 27 Earth-orbiting satellites to determine its location on a map. I have tested it out over the last few weeks and found it to be amazingly accurate. There is a pleasant female voice to tell me to turn left or right or to slow down or beware of speed cameras, if you are wondering how I could keep my eye on the tiny screen while driving. Actually, after setting the destination, I don't look at the screen at all. I just listen to the voice directions. If I decide not to follow the directions given, the GPS receiver will just do a quick recalculation and still get me to my destination but via a different route. I believe the GPS has the shortest route planned but will keep re-directing if I do not follow its planned route to my destination.

What has all this to do with a Christian newsletter? If you have not figured it out yet, it is similar to **God's Providential Spirit**. God the Father has provided us with the Holy Spirit to guide us along the way. Oftentimes we do not follow the directions He gives to us and we stray from the path but he is always there to re-direct us back to our final destination – Heaven. If we follow the voice of the Holy Spirit we will never get lost. However, we need to trust the voice when it tells us to turn. I remember driving to Sin Ming to attend Moses Christian's funeral. I decided to follow the GPS directions and it led me to the place in the shortest route even though I was not familiar with the route it had planned. I remember telling Joo See, "If the GPS don't tell me where to turn now, I am lost." Well I

followed the voice and it led me to where I wanted to go. Many times, it is the same with the Holy Spirit. Although we do not know where we are going, we have to trust that He will lead us. We have to move by faith and not by sight.

This is 2009 and many things are happening, financial crisis, war in the Middle East, earthquakes in neighboring countries, worms in oranges and many more fearful news. Do we want to listen to all the bad news or listen to the Good News that Jesus is coming again and maybe soon?

Will JCC be able to weather the storms of 2009? It all depends on where we put our trust. If our trust is in our own abilities and our own resources (money, included), then we will surely not make it. Psalm 20:7 says, *“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.”* That is where we must place our trust.

If Moses Christian (dearly departed brother of Michael Christian) had trusted his own righteousness to get himself to Heaven, then he is a fool indeed for Isaiah 64:6 says, *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”* However his trust is in Jesus, **God’s Power to Save** and that is all that is necessary.

May we begin our journey into 2009 with full confidence in **God’s Plan of Salvation – Jesus Christ**. Let us share this Good News with everyone we meet.

Martin Cheah

Sorry for the delay in publishing The Vine. That’s what you get when you take on too many portfolios. Everything gets only a little of your attention and many things get delayed.

Christmas?

**JCC Christmas
Concert 2008**

A colleague told me that City Harvest Christmas Concert attracted a full house crowd of 50,000 people with about 4,000 responses. Bro Kok Hwa told me that his church held a Christmas Concert at a concert hall with very good backdrops and even special effects. I wonder how impressive were their concerts



and how much it may have cost them to organize such a production. Was it value for money? As Richard would have said, "It's going to cost MONEY"

Did you get any feedback from our guests on our Christmas Concert? The lady I invited felt that it was quite good. Most of us felt that it was quite well done. We



had a standing room only situation. Could we have attracted more people if we held it in a bigger location? Could we match the performance level of the other church's productions if we had the money?



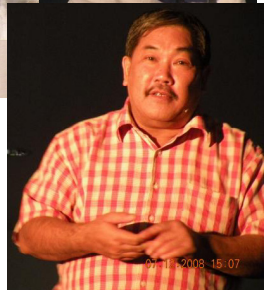
Personally, I don't think that even if we were able to afford the Expo hall for the concert we would be able to draw a crowd of 50,000 people. However, that is not the most important factor. I believe the ratio of the composition of the crowd is more important. Let us assume that the 4,000 people who responded were the only outsiders out of the 50,000 crowd that is only 8% of the crowd. In our case of 400 people I figure that we had somewhere around 200 outsiders because our normal service is around 200 people. So our ratio is about 50% of the crowd are outsiders,

which I think is a very good ratio.

What is the response, I don't have the statistics.



However, I know that we have planted 200 seeds and God will make it grow where and when He chooses. "...so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11)



So take heart people. We may not be as big as the mega churches or even the independent churches but if we do

our best, that it is all we have to offer to God. 100% of our own effort





was what we offered, from the script, direction, acting, singing, dancing, lighting, sound and even stage setup. May God use our offering to reach out to our friends, relatives and neighbours who attended the concert.

25 Dec 2008

On Christmas Day, JCC held its first 3 generational church service where the

Rev Samuel Sia preached in Hokkien and Rev William Chang translated it to English. The worship songs were a mixed of Hokkien and English songs also.

Among those who visited JCC on Christmas Day was **Kurt Kusserow**,





the son of one of JCC's earliest missionary pastors. When he was last in Singapore, he was a young boy of Sunday School age, and he played a joke on his Sunday School teacher, none other than James Sum.

For a moment in time, we forgot that in the world there is a crisis but within the walls of JCC, there was peace and joy, fellowship and worship because Jesus had come to the world more than 2000 years ago to bring us home. We are reminded by Christmas that Jesus will be coming again.

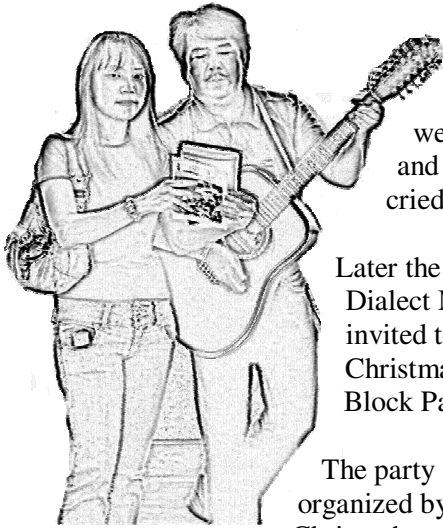


Dialect Hospital Outreach

On 20th Dec 2008, the Dialect Ministry gathered at NUH together with several other churches to reach out to the patients through songs and fellowship.

Many of the patients we





ministered to
were truly touched
and some even
cried.

Later the same day, the
Dialect Ministry was
invited to present
Christmas Carols at a
Block Party in Taman Jurong.



The party
organized by
Christopher

Wang and his RC team invited
us to join them for dinner.
Christopher was very
appreciative that JCC could
provide a team to entertain the
party. Maybe next time, we can provide them with our youth band but that
is another story.



1 Jan 2009



The Wedding
of Samuel Tan
and Su Ren was
the fruit of a 10
year romance.
You might say it
was from JC to JCC.



This is indeed a bright start
to 2009 for JCC. A joining
of two individuals, two
families and two
congregations to celebrate
the goodness of God.



The Christmas Story

From Genesis to Revelation

Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

It is the time of the year when best wishes fill the air. Nevertheless, it is a plain fact that not everyone will be merry or happy. Even on the first Noel, while the angels rejoiced and the shepherds watched in awe, there were people (such as Herod and his followers) who were not much enthused, to put it very mildly. Zechariah's song (Luke 1:67-80) also did not fail to mention enemies. Obviously, Christmas is not invariably a "day of celebration" for everyone.

No matter which part of the world you are in and which culture you belong to, New Year's Eve (signifying the end of a year and farewell to anything that had not been good) and New Year's Day (signifying a new beginning with fresh hopes of better things ahead) are not joyful times for people caught in storms of any kind (political, economic, ideological conflicts, etc.) when the only predictable thing is suffering and pain.

To businessmen, whether a day gives rise to cheer or frown depends on how the cash register rings – the volume of sales any time of the year is a good reason for celebration, less important being the *raison d'être* of any festival.

The Twelve Days of Christmas stretch from December across the New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. Presently, I come across words like "recession", "depression", "inflation", "deflation" and "stagflation" in the vocabulary of analysts who are dissecting every different way the financial ills roiling the world. Whatever be the accurate word to describe the distress that has ensnared the world, those people who have lost their fortunes in the Pinnacle Notes or High Notes (or any other financial market investments) are surely not in their peak (pinnacle) mood for high-fives this Christmas, and they will usher in the New Year on a low note.

This Christmas for me will be spent in Shanghai with my son. I was wondering whether it would be a White Christmas there, a different experience from Christmas in Singapore. However, I have been told that

despite the temperature getting close to zero degree in winter Shanghai, there is no snow – so it won't be a white Christmas after all. Then I think: Whether the Christmas is white or in more vibrant colours, it is still the same and only one Christmas with the universal and enduring message that is carried in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Theologians had called Genesis 3:15 the protoevangelion, or “first gospel” – the first prophecy about the birth of Christ, “*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*”

The “seed of a woman” (instead of “seed of a man” as is common biological sense) could be an allusion to the extraordinary virgin conception. This prophecy was repeated by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 7:14) and further light was shed on it in Matt 1:18-25. Obviously, the holy child was not welcome by God's enemies; and we can picture what the enemies (in the image of Herod and his followers) would do, to pounce upon a “helpless” babe to put him to death. Despite Herod's failure, Satan did not give up but continued in his attempt to recruit other helpers to eliminate the Christ. (See John 13:2 to see how the devil turned to Judas Iscariot for his evil aim.) The Book of Revelation gives us insight of the ongoing battle between God (to save sinners through “a boy who was to rule all nations”) and Satan (who was “ready to devour the baby as soon as it was born”). Here is the Revelation passage (underlining mine) that you may prayerfully meditate and seek wisdom from God to understand the Christmas message within:

“ Then I witnessed in heaven an event of great significance. I saw a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant, and she cried out in the pain of labor as she awaited her delivery. Suddenly, I witnessed in heaven another significant event. I saw a large red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, with seven crowns on his heads. His tail dragged down one-third of the stars, which he threw to the

earth. He stood before the woman as she was about to give birth to her child, ready to devour the baby as soon as it was born. She gave birth to a boy who was to rule all nations with an iron rod. And the child was snatched away from the dragon and was caught up to God and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where God had prepared a place to give her care for 1,260 days. Then there was war in heaven. Michael and the angels under his command fought the dragon and his angels. And the dragon lost the battle and was forced out of heaven. This great dragon – the ancient serpent called the Devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world – was thrown down to the earth with all his angels.” (Rev. 12:1-9)

Sin is actually the reason for Christmas, and Satan is very much in the whole picture. God would not have to send His Son if not for sinners who need a Saviour. Mankind would not have been under the curse of sin if not for the cunning serpent. While the birth of a Saviour is worth a celebration and rejoicing, in the knowledge that the “*great dragon – the ancient serpent called the Devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world*” would be crushed, we cannot avoid the consequences of a battle being started between good and evil, and the untoward fallouts that we have to bear before the final victory will be claimed. The fallouts are the collateral suffering of man in this world, the price of sin. By the grace and mercy of God, mankind has been given a second chance for eternal bliss through Jesus Christ.

The Book of Revelation is not merely about future Armageddon, but also revealing of the past and present that form significant portions of the whole story of God’s creation encompassing the progression of events through time. The Christmas message is a thread that runs from Genesis through the Gospels to Revelation. It is not just the Gospel story about “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son ...,” but it spans the whole gamut that reveals to us the cause and effect of Christ’s birth. Knowing the full range of the Christmas story, we can appreciate better

why happiness and sadness are often jumbled at any time in our life. We have reason to rejoice for the promise, yet at the same time experiencing afflictions of one kind and degree or another as a result of the collateral consequences of an ongoing spiritual battle.

Notwithstanding the good reason to exult in the Twelve Days of Christmas (covering the celebrations of Christmas and New Year), let us also be mindful of the “sin basis” for Christ to come.

How often has God longed to gather His children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but we are not willing, whereby our house is left to us desolate? Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. (Matt. 23:37-38) If people of the world are wise to the instructions of our Lord to turn from their evil ways, God will turn the curse of sin into a blessing, like what He did in Nehemiah 13:2.

John Lee

2 Questions posed by Drew Dych

Have you ever walked into a new church and felt completely invisible?

That's how my wife and I felt a few years ago when we attended a large church in a new city. Upon arriving we were politely handed a bulletin, but no one seemed interested in talking to us. People in the church were friendly with each other, but it felt like we couldn't break into their group. We probably could have done more to get involved, but after we stopped going I wasn't surprised to hear that the church's numbers had been declining for years.

Have you ever thought about the obstacles an unbeliever must overcome just to visit your church?

A visitor has to find out what time the service starts, how to get there, and where to park. And those are just some of the logistical hurdles. It's the emotional uncertainties that are most formidable. What will people think of me? How should I dress? Will I be accepted or judged? Will I feel awkward? These are the kinds of questions that are sure to race through a newcomer's mind.

So when someone has made the effort—and mustered the courage—to walk through the doors of your church on a Sunday morning, be sure to take full advantage of this unique occasion. They've faced down their fears to be there. Now you have to do your best to welcome them and facilitate a connection with God.

Sharing Your Faith with Modern and Postmodern Thinkers

by Drew Dyck

Mike was raised as a Christian, but abandoned his faith during college.

"I don't know what happened," he shrugged. "I just left it."

His father, a pastor, was devastated. He rushed Mike C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*, hoping the book might bring his son back to the faith. Mike read the book but remained unmoved.

Since Lewis had been a formative influence in my own spiritual journey, I was intrigued by Mike's indifference. Mike and I had been friends in high school. When he came to visit, I probed him with questions.

"What do you think of Christ's ethics?"

"I can't see anything wrong with them," Mike conceded.

Now I have him cornered, I thought. "Okay, then how do you deal with his claim to be God? How can someone with flawless ethics lie about his identity?"

Mike was educated, and he knew the Bible. I expected him to make a clever explanation for this apparent contradiction. Maybe he would attack the historicity of the Gospels or challenge my traditional interpretation of them. I was ready for such objections. But I wasn't ready for what he said.

"I don't really believe in rationality," he said. "Reason and logic come from the Western philosophical tradition. I don't think that's the only way to find truth."

His response silenced me. How could I reason with someone who didn't believe in reason?

Of course I should have been prepared. Mike's mental framework is now a fairly common one. It's often called the postmodern world view. As I researched the term I felt as though I was reading Mike's personal manifesto.

According to philosopher J.P. Moreland, "On a postmodernist view, there is no such thing as objective truth, reality, value, reason and so forth." This suspicion of

absolutes stems from the belief that truths actually come from "meta-narratives," the over-arching stories that a group of people share. There are many such stories. The postmodern mind shies away from any universally held truth. "True for you, but not for me" is the postmodernist mantra.

A Second Kind of Unbelief

Just weeks after talking to Mike, I encountered Brent. I didn't have to broach the topic of faith with Brent. He brought it up the first time we met, taking no pains to mask his antipathy.

"How can you believe in religion? If the Bible is true why are there no miracles today?"

This time I recognized the world view. So I saved my new friend some breath.

"Let me guess," I asked him. "You believe that everything we don't understand we automatically consign to the realm of the supernatural—a tendency that only demonstrates our ignorance and fear of the unknown. You think science will eventually eliminate the need for religion by pushing back the boundaries of knowledge, elucidating all mysteries." He was a little stunned to hear this coming from a Christian.

"Yeah ... that's about it," he agreed. Brent was a modernist.

Since postmodern thinking developed as a reaction to modernism, it is no surprise that the two are very different. From a modernist perspective, "There is no such thing as a spirit, soul or the supernatural," writes Rick Wade. Modernists believe that truth isn't found through revelation but through scientific investigation and reason. The 20th century thinkers who promoted modernism argued that "knowledge now had to be dispassionate, objective, and certain."

Brent's irritation with what he deemed "irrational belief" placed him firmly in this camp.

Mike and Brent were both unbelievers, but they operated under different ways of thinking. For Mike the claims of Christianity were too exclusive, and he was suspicious of absolutes. Brent, on the other hand, was still intoxicated with the Enlightenment tradition. Brent had no problem with reason and truth. He had simply pushed God aside and set science in his place.

Brent and Mike can help us understand the two main ways of thinking among non-Christians today. My conversations with them taught me that conveying Christian faith to modernists and postmodernists takes two radically different approaches.

Speaking to Modernists

Modernist thought and Christianity are often viewed as polar opposites. One seeks empirical proof, dismissing as superstitious any belief in the supernatural. The other focuses on the unseen, claiming that the physical world is but a shadow of a higher reality. Evolutionists rigorously debate creationists. The philosophical sparring of atheists and theists fills bookstores. (Atheists are almost always modernists, since they absolutely negate God's existence.)

Rarely do the entrenched debaters pause to consider how much they have in common. Yet often the vitality of such debates testifies to the presence of common ground. And on at least one crucial point, both modernists and Christians agree: truth and absolutes do exist, and they are worth fighting for!

For Christians who want to reach modernists, this is a good place to start. Modernists are less likely to be offended by truth claims, so Christians can lay out their beliefs with conviction. A good, logical defense of the faith—good apologetics—may resonate with a modernist.

We need to take care, though, not to assume that every modernist—even sophisticated ones—understand the basic tenets of Christian faith. Even though many have strong feelings about religion, they may never have truly investigated Christianity. Many people today have serious misperceptions about what Christian faith is. Brent, for example, is dogmatic about his atheism, although he confessed to me that he had "never actually read the Bible."

A cogent presentation of the Gospel message can really impact a modernist thinker. Many modernists have simply rejected the wrong God—a deity assembled from popular sentiments, bearing little resemblance to the God of Scripture. After I discussed Christ's life and teaching for an evening with one modernist thinker, he conceded that he had never really understood Christianity.

"Okay," he said. "Maybe I could follow that."

Speaking to Postmodernists

I have a Christian friend in Los Angeles who recently told me how he was getting frustrated trying to share his faith. "People are nice to me. They just don't listen."

He had talked with a co-worker who even thanked him. "I'm so glad you found something that makes you happy. Thanks for sharing," the co-worker said. "I'm glad that works for you."

My friend had encountered a postmodern thinker.

According to the postmodernist view, there is a different "truth" for each person. And experience—not rationality—is the key to finding that truth.

Yet postmodernism also has similarities to Christianity. Postmodernism involves a concern for marginalized groups. Andy Crouch writes, "Many streams of postmodern thought are animated by the desire to do justice to the claims of those whom the dominant culture has excluded." On this point Christian doctrine emphatically agrees. One can hardly open the Bible without seeing God's concern for the poor and disenfranchised.

Dwelling on this commonality will move a postmodern thinker more than launching into traditional apologetics. Christians can point out that Christ championed the cause of marginalized people and even linked his identity to the lowly (see Matthew 25:45). Catholic theologians remind us of God's "preferential option for the poor." The Book of James stipulates that "pure religion" is attending to the needs of widows and orphans (see James 1:27). These facts are crucial topics to address with postmodernists.

In a way Christian faith encompasses aspects of both world views. Though logic and philosophy play a part in discovering and defending the faith, they do not tell the whole story. There is an important postmodern element in Christianity. The Bible speaks of knowing God in terms of revelation.

Yes, God's existence can be deduced through philosophical reasoning. But the experience of a personal relationship with a loving Creator is not the same—rather, it is inculcated. Christians become frustrated when they must mount clunky, academic defenses of what, for them, has become living reality. For postmodernists, though, nothing speaks as loudly as the fresh and joyful expression of dynamic faith.

Even for the modernist, the same can be true. The ultimate evidence of God is still a life changed by Him.

Drew Dyck is the editor of Outreach & Evangelism Today

Baptism and Transfer of Membership

21 Dec 2008 Three youngsters, Wan Jing Hng, Chantel Wan and Hannah Lee, and an adult, Jimmy Lim were baptized and two ladies, Mandy Cho and Caroline Loy were transferred into the fold of JCC on this day.



May God the Holy Spirit continue to uphold them and guide them from this day forth! May their lives be a good witness of the Love of God for man!

“The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life..” (John 3:35).