



TOWARDS
THE YEAR
2000

MANNA

ISSUE 27
1996

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MANNA IS PUBLISHED BY
THE DEPARTMENT OF LITERARY MINISTRY
INTERNATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF
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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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from the **editor**

Some theologians teach that there are three distinctive periods in human history, and each period consists of 2,000 years. The first period spans the time from the creation to the era of the patriarchs. The second period follows immediately and ends with the birth of Jesus Christ. The third is from the time of Jesus to the end of this century. This view therefore advocates that Jesus will come within these four years. While it is acceptable to preach that the Lord is coming soon, to forecast the date of the Lord's coming is contrary to the teaching of the Bible. The Lord had explicitly said that no one knows the exact date of His second coming.

What must we do then since we know that the Lord is coming soon? Do we just sit tight and wait for Him to come? Or worse, fall into a slumber like the five foolish virgins, who were caught unprepared when the bridegroom arrived?

Knowing that there is not much

time left before the Lord comes, let us prepare ourselves to meet Him by fighting the good fight of the faith, running the race till it is finished and keeping our faith to the end.

In this issue, the feature article, "*Towards the Year 2000*", reminds us to renew our awareness of God's two great commissions – evangelising to the world and pastoring the flock – in preparation for His Second Coming.

The other feature quotes Jesus' saying, "*My Time is Near*", as a reminder that since we do not control our destinies, we need to pay attention to the signs of the times, lest our hearts be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and cares of this life, and be taken unawares when the Lord comes again.

"*The Gerasenes Episode*" tells us of the people who valued their pigs more than the life of one who was delivered from demon possession. In some ways we are like the Gerasenes,

for we would rather not have Jesus if we need to make sacrifices for our faith.

"*Moses on Trial*" presents an interesting topic for our study. A lesson to be learnt from this story is that to speak against God's chosen servant is a serious matter. To sow seeds of discord amongst co-workers is even worse. Don't miss reading it.

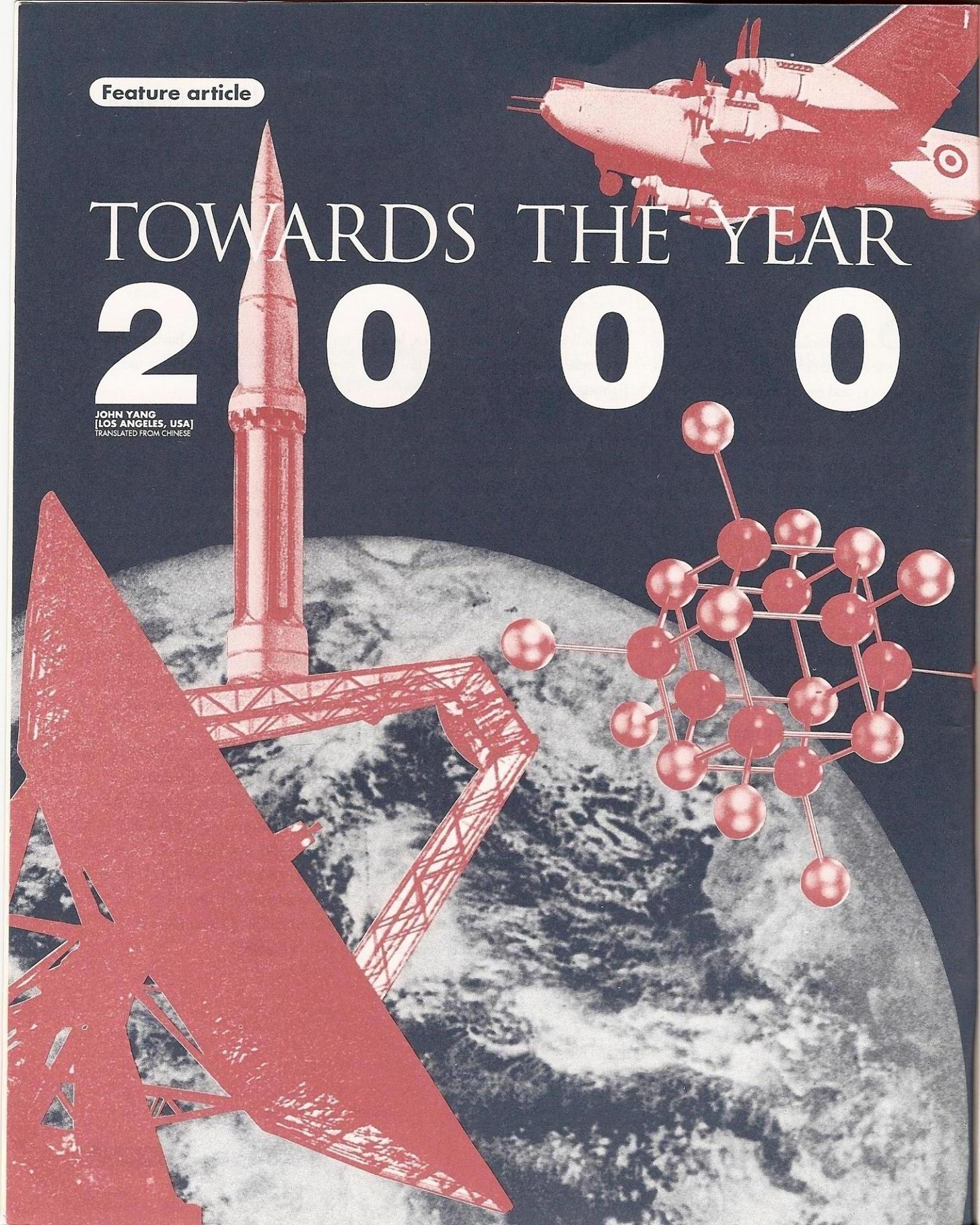
Under practical living, "*Growing into the Full Stature of Christ*" tells us that Christ is the criterion by which we measure our growth. As believers, we must imitate Christ in our process of growth.

"*Here am I, Send Me!*" gives an interesting account of the actual experiences of a few volunteers who went on mission trips to India and Africa, together with a brief report on China and Russia. It brings into focus the importance of increased involvement of our members in global evangelism.

Feature article

TOWARDS THE YEAR 2000

JOHN YANG
[LOS ANGELES, USA]
TRANSLATED FROM CHINESE



Four years from now, 2000 AD will mark the end of the current century and usher in a new century. Some Christians believe that it is also quite likely to mark the end of humankind. For more than 100 years, many have fallen into the folly of fixing the date of the Lord's return. None of these predictions have proven true. We ought to be careful to avoid such hasty conclusions as that the Lord will return no later than 2000 AD. Jesus has said that the day of His return will not be made known to man (Mt 24:36). What really matters is to ponder over how the church should strive during the four years preceding the turn of the century to spread the Gospel of salvation to the lands it has not yet reached, and to perfect the spiritual virtues of the True Church in preparation for the Lord's return at any time.

More than 1,900 years ago, our

**... the church should
strive during the four
years preceding the
turn of the century to
spread the Gospel of
salvation...**

Lord, the incarnated Word, came to the world to preach the good news of the heavenly kingdom. To redeem us from the world and deliver us into the heavenly home, He was crucified on our behalf and secured our salvation (1 Cor 15:1-3). Ten days after His ascension, the promised Holy Spirit was bestowed upon the disciples, who were greatly empowered to preach

the Gospel in all Judea, Samaria and, through Antioch, spread it abroad to places such as Galatia, Media, Asia, Macedonia, Achaia and Rome. Regrettably, in subsequent years, the pure Gospel was lost in the Roman Empire's integration of church and state. Although Martin Luther advocated reform in the 16th century, erroneous teachings still permeate both the Orthodox and Protestant churches today (cf Eze 23:1-2, 11). Thanks to God's grace, in His scheduled time, the Holy Spirit of the Latter Rain descended during this end time, restoring the knowledge of the Truth in many countries throughout the five continents.

During the four concluding years of this century, the church must renew her awareness of God's two great commissions of evangelising to the world and pastoring the flock, moving forward valiantly.

Evangelising to the World

(Mk 16:15)

Believers

The church has to encourage all believers, young and old, to be courageous in witnessing to others. They are to preach the Gospel in word (through conversation and verbal persuasion), deed (through good virtue and behaviour, shining for the Lord to attract people to Him) and literature (writing, publications), introducing the salvation of the Lord to relatives, friends, neighbours and strangers (Rom 1:14-15).

The Church

Personal Evangelism by Districts

Divide the locality of the church into several districts and organise the believers to preach through spoken and written word, house to house, district by district. ►

Preaching to Assemblies

The church can hold more evangelistic meetings, on a weekly or at least monthly basis, so that members may have the opportunity to invite their friends, relatives and even strangers to attend. With discretion, home gatherings can be used for evangelistic purposes. The church may also organise groups to preach in hospitals, prisons, schools or jointly hold large-scale evangelistic meetings with nearby True Jesus Churches.

Step up Prayer for the Spread of the Gospel

Besides intensifying our efforts in preaching the Gospel, we also need to pray more earnestly for this mission. To bring souls into subjection to Christ and acceptance of salvation, we need the Truth, miracles and the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:18; Acts 1:8). The General Assemblies in various countries and the International Assembly should rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance and find ways to actively promote the Gospel both at home and overseas (cf Mt 24:14; Rom 15:20-23).

Pastoring The Flock

(Jn 21:15-19; Eph 4:11-16; 5:26-27)

Establish faith

Build up believers' faith in the Lord Jesus and His True Church according to biblical teachings. Only faith rooted in the Truth can grow and bear fruit (Mt 13:20; Isa 37:31; 27:6; Jn 15:1-6; 1 Jn 2:19).

Build Up Virtue and Character

We have to encourage members to pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit and for constant in-filling so as to be renewed inwardly and manifest the image of Christ, becoming the

light of the world and the salt of the earth (Tit 3:5; Eph 4:20-24; Mt 5:13-16).

Live for the Lord

We have to constantly remind members of the Lord's grace in His propitiatory death and encourage them to set their minds on living for the Lord, each faithfully serving God according to his gift, and through the bond of love build up the church (Rom 14:7-8 ; 2 Cor 5:14; Eph 4:11-16).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we should not arbitrarily connect the year 2000 to the end of the world. We only need to cherish and direct our efforts towards the two main missions of the church as outlined above.

Evangelising to the world and pastoring the flock are analogous to the two wheels of a vehicle. To push

it forward, equal amounts of power must be applied on both wheels. The International Assembly and the General Assemblies in various countries should develop overall strategies and plans to be executed in phases. Especially with regard to the work for the next four years, a pace must be deliberated and decided upon, announced to the entire

congregation, so that every member can attend to his duty and act in concert.

May the Lord work with us so that by the year 2000 the holy work will see great accomplishments – unprecedented increases in membership and number of churches – acceptable to the Lord, to the glory of His name. Amen! ■

“MY TIME” IS NEAR

When I first thought about the theme of this issue of *Manna*, I have to admit that I was a little intimidated. The theme “racing towards the year 2000” has a kind of eschatological ring to it that forces us to look into the future. But I know nothing about the future! Whenever I think about the future I am always reminded of a conversation I had with someone from our church. I remember asking questions about the significance of the New Age Movement. I explicitly remember discussing the possibility of the apocalyptic monarchical world government being instituted as mentioned in Revelation chapter 13. But he looked at me and said, “Why are you asking me?! I’m no prophet!” This incident left a deep impression in me.

When we talk about racing towards the year 2000, we are, in a sense, trying to grasp the future, a future that often intrigues us. As humans, we realise that we know nothing of the future explicitly. James talks of those who devise great plans for the future: “Whereas you do not know about tomorrow” (Jas 4:13-14). Jesus also teaches us, saying, “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day” (Mt 6:34). Yet even if today’s troubles are enough for today, humanity has a seemingly inherent tendency to worry about tomorrow. On the other hand, we cannot take Jesus’ statement to

mean we cannot even peer into the future. As Christians, we carry a living hope, a hope that cannot die. Our hope lies in the future, so all the limitless potentialities of our dreams and aspirations must also lie in the future. The future is rapidly moving towards us, but at the same time, we are also racing towards the future. And for me, this race towards the future is what the theme “racing towards the year 2000” signifies.

Racing towards the year 2000 is just another way of saying we must race toward the future; more specifically, it means we must race towards the coming of God’s kingdom. But this race should not be an exercise in predictions. Rather, if this theme is to have any meaning at all, it must carry a reality on a more personal level. In this light, how does the theme “racing towards the year 2000” relate to us personally?

I can think of two benefits of the theme: one is that “racing” brings with it a sense of imminence, that we do not have much time; secondly, focusing upon the future forces the issue of who we are and what we are doing in our present lives. Working from the common understanding of linear time, the conclusion that the present has a direct impact upon our future is inescapable. Accordingly, let us now move towards examining the dynamic effect time has upon our lives. ►

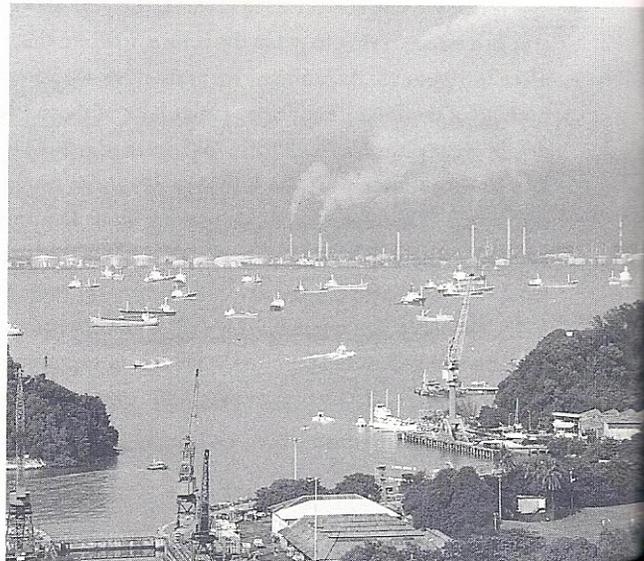
TIME is a very important aspect of our social, biological and religious lives. Take for example, the Sabbath. As God's covenant people, we are commanded by Him to remember, observe and keep holy the Sabbath, a concept that has a basis in the notion of time. As Christians, we often distinguish time – the "sacred" and the "secular". So we think, "OK, I'll go to church for a few hours today because today is sacred time." When we consider whether to serve God, we think, "I'll work for God later, when I'm about to die or when the world is about to end." We think this way because we somehow distinguish between "God's time" and "my time". But we have to ask ourselves if this dividing of time benefits us in any way. For by such labelling of our time, God becomes part of our time schedule. We are often only looking at time from our point of view. How many of us, I wonder, actually consider God's time schedule?

Jesus tells an interesting parable that forces us to reconsider our division of time. He shows us that it is not time in itself that matters, but what we do with our time. It is not so much the division of time, the distinguishing between 1996 and 2000, that matters, but what we are going to do between 1996 and 2000. In Jesus' parable concerning labourers in the vineyard, the principle that comes across is that "how long" matters less than "what we do". Jesus ends by saying, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." This statement is a complete reversal of our normal assumptions of order. What we think is important is actually in the last place, and what we feel insignificant is actually of the first order (Mt 20:1-16). One message from this parable is that we need to re-examine our priorities and values.

THE COMING KINGDOM OF GOD

Many Christians set their hearts upon the material world or material enjoyments. Others have their hearts set upon an "eschatological" time when God will punish the wicked. To have our hearts set upon a new age is not contrary to the Bible, for even Jesus stated, "Now when these things [signs] begin to take place, look up, and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Lk 21:28). For a long time, Christians of different stripes have predicted, debated and hypothesised about the end of time. The millennium often becomes the focal point of a new era for the Christian. In this sense, many Christians are avid "New Ager". Sadly enough though, while we live in the hope for God's kingdom, we often fail to live up to the principles of the kingdom.

A group of Pharisees once asked Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming. How did Jesus reply? He said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' For, behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you [or within you]" (Lk 17:20-21). We do not have to look anywhere "out there" for the kingdom, rather we must



look within and among ourselves. We have to start asking ourselves if we are ready for the kingdom, not whether the kingdom is ready for us. Again, we should not even begin to worry about when the kingdom of God is coming if we cannot comply with the principles of that kingdom. If we live as if we are the rulers of our own bodies, as if we control our own destinies, then why do we even bother to look to an eschatological age?

But as Christians we recognise the fallacy of putting our whole heart into the belief that we control our own destinies. And we do not have to be Christians to realise this fact. We experience it everyday of our lives. We do not control our own destinies. We wish to get a hundred percent in the test, but we receive a poor score. We hope against hope to make a business deal, but we fail at the end. We look around us and we do not see beautiful trees and smiling faces, we see cold hard faces and smog thick enough to obscure the stars of heaven. Since we do not control our destinies, we need to pay attention to the signs of the times.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

What is the significance of signs? Jesus once spoke about the signs of the times, using as analogy the weather. He said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'A shower is coming; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" (Lk 12:54-56). From Jesus' statement we learn that "signs" do not imply good or bad. When we think of signs we often think about the ecological crisis, or the increase in earthquakes, and so forth. But actually signs do not, in themselves, forebode trouble. The clouds rising in the west bring rain, often considered a sign of blessing.

So what do the signs really tell us? Signs bring a measure of change, that is, signs are a turning point. Some Pharisees and Sadducees who wished to test Jesus once asked for a sign from heaven. Jesus answered, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah" (Mt 16:2-4). So we find that signs, in themselves, do not forebode; rather, they signify a turning point. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees for lacking the discernment to recognise the time which in Greek is the *kairos*. ▶



The *kairos* means an opportune time or reasonable time; it is a time that brings something important, an opportunity that should not be missed. In our daily lives, we are often faced with *kairos*. When we reflect upon our lives, we often reminisce how we could have done things differently. We think to ourselves, “if only I had prepared a little harder! I could have got the best grade in the class!” We say, “I wish I had gone on that trip. I could have made ten thousand dollars!” We slap ourselves in the face for the opportunities that we have missed. We often see the opportunities after they pass, but by then, it’s too late. Today, Jesus may be asking you, “I am giving you an opportunity not to be missed. Will you accept it?” Perhaps God has allowed many opportunities, many seasons, to pass before us. Perhaps we have often turned God down, blinded by our own pursuits. I too can look back and see past spiritual failures. I too can look back with spiritual regrets. In a sense, we are like the Pharisees and Sadducees Jesus addressed. We are often blind to the signs of the times. If God grants us a *kairos*, let us accept it in readiness and humility.

An opportune time is not necessarily a joyous time. When we think of opportune times, we may think of times when we get “lucky”, such as winning the lottery. But Jesus must have had quite a different perspective. Jesus understood Himself very well. He knew His mission, and He also knew His times. The Gospel of John often recalls Jesus saying, “My time has not yet come” (Jn 2:4; 7:6, 8, 30). Jesus was very sensitive to the timing of God. He did not fit God into His schedule, rather, He lived and died according to God’s schedule. We too must learn to understand the nature of our times. It is no longer a time to sleep and carouse. We are warned, “But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that day catch you suddenly, like a snare. For it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the whole earth” (Lk 21:34-35).

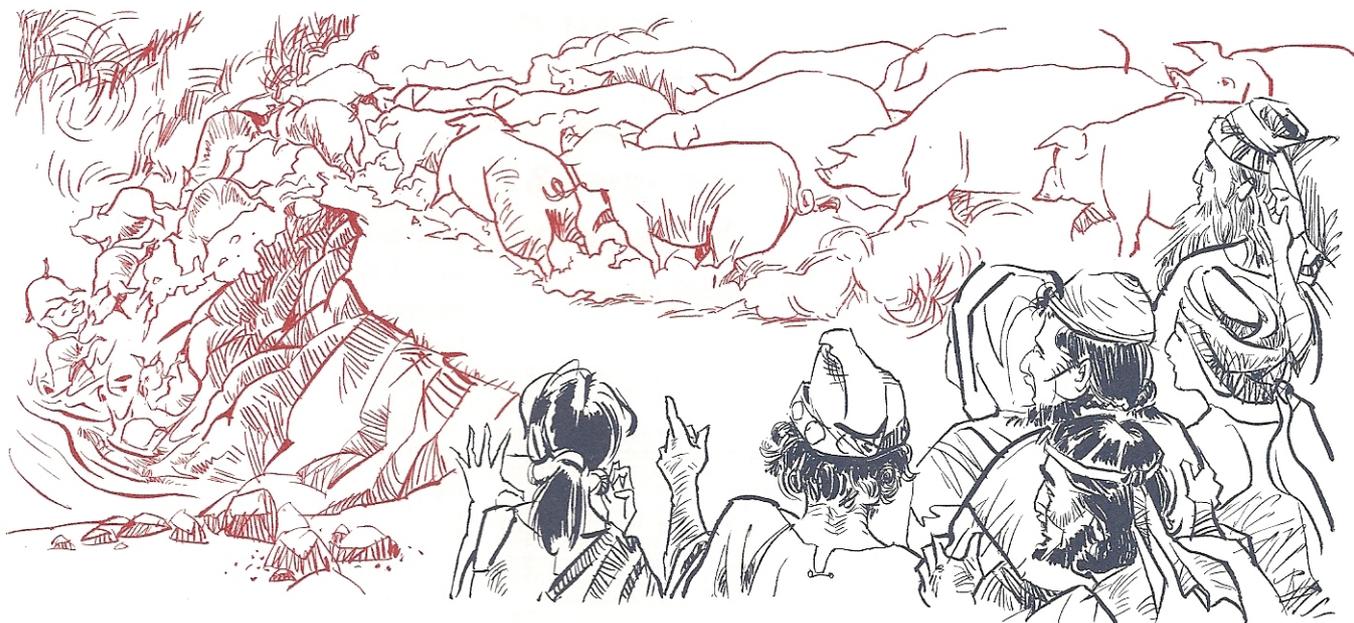
CONCLUSION

Finally, I want to leave you with a thought about Jesus’ perspective of time, a perspective that is probably very different from ours. As said before, we like to think of the “good times”. We like to dream of unlimited potential in our ambitious future. Sorrowfully, we often meet with the harsh reality of unfulfilled dreams and desires. But Jesus once told His disciples, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it [again] until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Lk 22:15-16). We often wonder what opportunities lie ahead of us. Respect? Fame? A great-looking spouse? But Jesus said something that left a deep impression in me. He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” The *kairos* Jesus looked forward to was not part of a self-seeking ambitious enterprise, rather it was a cup of bitterness. It all fit together to make for a *kairos*. The disciples were listening, a donkey was prepared, a man was willing to lend his house, and a cross was waiting for someone to bear it. May our Lord Jesus help us to recognise our time. And may He grant us the strength of heart to seize hold of the opportunities we often do not wish to grasp. Amen. ■

“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go... After this He said to him, ‘Follow me’”

(Jn 21:18-19)

THE GERASENES EPISODE



The dissonant scream pierced the air.

Scrambling down from the rocks, the shocking semblance of a man approached Jesus. Wild-eyed and dishevelled, the putrid stench from his filthy naked body filling the air –

– he fell prostrate before the Lord.

“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!”

“What is your name?”

“Legion ... but not into the abyss, no Lord ... the pigs, there – we beg you ... let us ... there.”

“Go!”

And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the swine and the herd numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned – concluding another of the Lord’s miracles. But it was not the end of the episode.

The herdsmen fled, and told it in the city and in the country. And the people came to Jesus, and saw the former demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the man who had had the legion, *and they were afraid*. And those who had seen it told what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine. And they began to beg Jesus to *depart* from their neighbourhood (cf Mk 5:1-17).

Surely, this was no way to treat someone who had just liberated a fellow human being from his anguish. Also, this was in sharp contrast to the adoring crowds that clung to Jesus, attracted by His teachings and His miracles. What was wrong?

It is doubtless that the Gerasenes were awed by one who could control the demons. Perhaps, they were afraid that Jesus would ask the demons to possess them just as He did the swine and so begged Him to depart. The writer thinks not, not in these circumstances, for when He had liberated one man, would He ask the demons to possess another? No, the answer does not lie in the fear of *possession* but rather in the fear of *dispossession* – in the down-to-earth,

The Gerasenes episode draws attention to an oft-neglected aspect of our religion —

WHY do we believe in Jesus?

WHY do we go to church?

everyday and often sordid affairs of money and profit!

Remember the swine? Now pigs may not be the most beautiful of animals, not what one would consider household pets, but they would bring in quite a tidy sum at the market. Two thousand pigs, the Bible records; and at the present market price of Singapore (S) \$6.50 per kilo and taking the average saleable weight of one pig to be 100 kilos, that herd would have brought in **S\$1.3 million** today. Now that is money.

The people were afraid of Jesus. They had seen what He had done to the demoniac and they had seen what He had done to the pigs. The people were most likely afraid, not for their

lives nor for the demoniac, but of the possibility that Jesus would liberate other demoniacs and kill more pigs in the process. It was no good, their livelihood would be affected. Jesus had to go.

The Gerasenes episode draws attention to an oft-neglected aspect of our religion – **why** do we believe in Jesus? **Why** do we go to church?

The attitude of the Gerasenes, later revealed even in the adoring crowds who followed Jesus, shows the ugly side that arises from a *selfish* belief in Jesus Christ. The very people who shouted ‘Hosanna’ deserted Jesus at His crucifixion when they saw their source of profit – healing, free bread, hope of a revived Israel – die.

Is this attitude among church-going and professing Christians today?

Certain trends signal an unsatisfactory attitude. Irregular church attendance and going to church only when there are no other pressing matters is one. Stopping our children from attending religious education class on the basis that they have to

study their schoolwork for their own good is another. But would two or three hours spent in the worship of God and the building up of character be so unprofitable? Do we ask Jesus to depart and leave the demoniacs as they are so as to save the pigs?

‘Wretched man that I am!

Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then I of myself serve the Law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.’

Romans 7:24-25

We are in a sense like the demoniac, possessed by our flesh and committed to sin. We need Jesus for our liberation and to attain that, we need to be always close to Him, not ask Him to depart whenever it affects our profit!

Surprisingly, many professing Christians do not realise that believing in Jesus requires commitment and not mere involvement. The simple allegory of ham and eggs illustrates the difference. The pig is committed while the hen is involved. The pig dies in the production of ham but the hen suffers only a little inconvenience.

Does one come to church only when there is something to be gained —

peace of mind, success in life, social respectability



Commitment requires sacrifice and sacrifice often excludes profit. Does one come to church only when there is something to be gained — peace of mind, success in life, social respectability? All these are not wrong by themselves but if they constitute the sole reason for belief, one is open to disappointment and disbelief when these are not quickly forthcoming.

It is not surprising then that Jesus remarked, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” One of the delineating factors for this is the line between commitment and involvement.

But does one truly forsake profit when believing in Jesus? No, if true profit, as in the biblical sense, is appreciated :

‘... godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.’

1 Timothy 4:8

True belief in Christ to the point of sacrifice does not ‘only’ procure salvation, it gives one a truly abundant and meaningful life here. It is not measured in dollars and cents but in smiles and peace. Is not one son who is filial and of unimpeachable character worth more than ten who attain worldly status but who cause you heartache, a result of stunted spiritual development? Isn’t a sane man worth more than 2,000 fat pigs? Isn’t Christ worth more than what the whole world has to offer? If we can sincerely answer yes to all these questions, then truly our belief is not in vain and the Lord God will surely accept our humble sacrifice.

One other thing is worth emphasising in conclusion: Jesus never meant to exterminate all the pigs in Gerasenes. It remained only a dreaded possibility in the minds of the people, stirred perhaps by the fact that Jesus was a Jew who did not eat pigs. Just as it is today, commitment does not always mean the loss of all things, just the willingness to lose all things for the sake of Christ and to be with Christ. The question, do we, for fear of losing all, ask Jesus to depart?

Save the pigs or save the demoniac? ■

**TAY ENG GUAN
[SINGAPORE]**



CHALLENGES OF EVANGELISING IN MULTI-CULTURAL BRITAIN

AUDREY CHAN
(LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM)

The church in London was blessed with the opportunity to play host for a hymn training and outreach session from 18 to 22 December 1994. A group of 11 brethren, comprising youths from local churches and overseas students, gathered in London for hymn singing training and a series of talks and discussions on evangelism. On the last two evenings, evangelistic services were held during which the choir presented hymns which they had practised hard.

On the evening of the 18th, two sessions were scheduled – a talk and a workshop which focused on the topic, “Evangelising in multi-cultural Britain – the challenges”. The following are summaries of the talk and the outcome from the workshop, which we would like to share with Manna readers. It is hoped that the spirit of God will move you, just as He has moved us, to take up the challenging task of evangelising to “every tribe and tongue and people and nation”.

The speaker began the talk with two passages from the Bible:

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

“It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord ...’”
(Isa 2:2-3).

Jesus left an important commission with His disciples – to preach to people from all nations. It is His will that all should come to know Him through the Gospel and be saved. The Old Testament prophesied of the end time when people from different parts of the world will gather to worship the Lord in the True Church.

By the power of God, the church’s ministry is beginning to fulfil His will. The message of salvation is beginning to reach different corners of the world. Just as exciting, brethren living in multi-cultural societies such as the UK, USA, Australia and Canada also have the opportunity to realise this important commission much closer to home, for literally the ‘world’ is at their very own doorstep.

Britain is now recognised as a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society. 94% of Britain’s population is white while a significant of the people are from other ethnic groups (OPCS, 1991). This latter figure is predicted to rise to 9% in future years (Ballard & Kalra, 1994). It is therefore important that the True Jesus Church endeavours to do her part by bringing glad tidings of the truth to these diverse communities with the love of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. How joyous will the day be

when the church in the UK brims with people of all different ethnic backgrounds who worship and praise the True God with one heart and mind!

Many of the more established ethnic minority communities arrived in Britain in the economic boom years of the 1960s when people came to seek their fortune. Among these new arrivals were people from the West Indies, India, Pakistan and Hong Kong. More recently, other communities have arrived in Britain but, for some, not by choice. These are the refugees and asylum seekers who have escaped from political or religious persecution in their own countries. Among them are those who are from war-torn parts of Africa such as Somalia, Zaire, Angola, Turkey and Bosnia. Some of these communities consist of sizeable numbers of single people who have left family members behind in their own countries, or mothers with children. Another group not belonging to either category are those people who are in the country temporarily, for example, students who have come from abroad to study in Britain.

The speaker noted that quite a number of the London boroughs, particularly in the east-end and parts of the north, are home to large communities of ethnic minority communities, including refugees and asylum seekers. In some of these boroughs, the ethnic minority communities account for nearly 50% of the local population. While

How can we reach those
who are lonely, isolated and with
more than the usual share
of life's problems?

Would we know what to say
if, in the event of evangelising,
we come upon someone suffering
from AIDS,
or to someone who is depressed,
having lost hope of ever
seeing again loved ones left
behind in a war-torn country?

there are some who have established comfortable lives for themselves, others live under very deprived conditions. It is not uncommon for many families to be in temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfast hotels, placed there by the Government-related local council until more permanent housing can be found for them. They may live in squalid conditions, with little living space and privacy and poor access to basic amenities such as hot water, heating or proper cooking facilities.

Languages other than English are widely spoken by the ethnic communities in Britain. The speaker noted that in one east London borough, Newham, some 11 community languages are officially recognised as being spoken. If the dialects and languages of some of the smaller communities are included, this figure may be nearer 20. What is significant is that there are many people in the communities, especially those who have newly arrived in the country, who are unable to speak English. This means that

unless these people have access to a supportive social network locally, they are bound to feel isolated.

What the various communities have often brought with them is great cultural diversity. This includes their affiliation with different religions. The speaker noted that one source identified the existence of some 250 religious organisations in one borough of London. These include mosques affiliated to the different Islamic sects as well as a plethora of Christian fellowships – mainstream and new, large and small.

The speaker concluded the talk by outlining a number of significant challenges as well as opportunities with regard to the church ministry in Britain for the group to ponder.

In terms of opportunity, Britain is clearly a fertile field waiting to be harvested – for apart from the indigenous population, there are many other ethnic communities who have set up home here and who have not yet heard of the complete Gospel. The church needs to plan how to bring the Good News to these people of ‘every nation’.

There are, however, challenges, including how to overcome language barriers. How is the church to take the Gospel to people who speak little or no English? How do we preach about the Holy Spirit, baptism, the Sabbath and other doctrines of salvation to people with whom we do not share a common language? Also, how can we cross the cultural and religious barriers by sharing the Gospel in a sensitive manner, and introduce biblical teachings which may seem alien to someone of another faith? How can we reach those who are lonely, isolated and with more than the usual share of life's problems? Would we know what

to say if, in the event of evangelising we come upon someone suffering from AIDS, or to someone who is depressed, having lost hope of ever seeing again loved ones left behind in a war-torn country?

DISCUSSION

The workshop provided a good opportunity for the youths to consider some of the challenges facing the church in her evangelistic ministry to a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society and to explore some practical solutions. It produced some interesting ideas which have much potential.

One important lesson which emerged from the exercise is the necessity of innovation and creativity within the church in planning how to share the Gospel with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, it is not difficult to find ideas within our reach, as good ideas can be found, with the help and guidance of God.

An implication of the ideas generated is that the goal of sharing the Gospel with different ethnic communities cannot be achieved in a short space of time. It requires pioneering work to make contact with people, and more importantly, extensive follow-up measures to nurture any initial interest generated. This calls for long-term strategies. A way of achieving this could be the mobilisation of bilingual members as linguistic and cultural 'bridges' to share the Gospel with the various communities in their own mother-tongues, in a way that deals with existing beliefs sensitively.

The implications for the church are manifold. They include the need to prepare members for active evangelism through both religious education and training in a more systematic way. She also has to plan how to support her workers as they will face many difficulties and even direct opposition from the communities they are preaching to. As a church, we can adapt selectively from other Christian groups who are more progressive in this area of work.

This workshop has been devoted to looking at the role of strategic planning in the promotion of evangelism. The indispensability of God's guidance and empowerment is implicit. All planning must conform to His will. To this end, prayer and planning must go hand in hand, lest the direction of the work be determined by the workers and not by God. Moreover, by being Spirit-led, the workers will experience the joy of working for God and not see the task before them as being daunting or burdensome, even in the face of difficulties and opposition.

In conclusion, the challenge is set before the church. Her evangelistic activities have to address the diversity of communities from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. To overlook them is to forget the needs of a significant part of the population. It will mean ignoring people like refugees who often have had more than the average share of life's problems and have a desperate need for God. The advantage the church has is that she can tap on the infinite power and guidance of God to carry out this ministry with the potential of abundant fruition. ■



TOWARDS A BETTER TOMORROW

LIN YUNG-CHI
[TAIPEI, TAIWAN]
TRANSLATED FROM CHINESE

Personal Reflection

With rapid advancement in technology, society changes rapidly as well. A moment's delay in upgrading one's skills can render one obsolete.

Accompanying these rapid changes in society are stress and insecurity about the future. A sense of loss looms in the background as the fortune-telling and palmistry trades mushroom in a bid to soothe the hearts of modern men.

As children of God, we must fulfil our duties to study and learn so as to meet the challenges of societal changes. Nonetheless, we do not place our hope in this world. Rather, we look to a more beautiful heavenly home; this life is but a stepping stone

to that. Hence our values should be different from the people of the world. To them, happiness is defined by marital bliss, multiple offspring, health and prosperity. Without these, life has no meaning for them. But we children of God do not measure our lives in such terms. In the famous parable, the rich man is the successful one in the eyes of many. However, in the eyes of God, he is a complete failure because he does not act according to the truth. On the contrary, Lazarus the beggar withstands trials, holds to the truth and gets to enjoy heavenly blessings.

The past forty odd years of my life convince me that only by going in the direction according to God's will can one have a better tomorrow.

During my childhood, my whole family was brought into the grace of the Lord. Our financial situation improved and my father even opened a little shop. When business became too hectic, we neglected God. Then God's chastisement came. We were forced to close down the shop. On top of that, I fell critically ill. My father did not bow to adversity. He remembered God's words, that "the blessing of the Lord makes rich and He adds no sorrow with it" (Prov 10:22). God did not want us to lose our lives for the profit of the world. He wanted us to return to His loving bosom.

My family then learned to rely on God. My father prayed most zealously. He did not forget to draw near

to God even as he toiled to make ends meet. He often fasted and prayed for my illness. At one stage, my illness was so serious that the doctors could not do anything. That was when my mother made a vow in her prayer. Thanks to the grace of God, I was miraculously healed.

My father constantly reminded me not to forget the vow. Even as a young child, I told myself that I was to live for the Lord and to study for Him. In my pre-university days, I chose to study humanities as I believed I could thus serve God better. But on the eve of the university entrance exams, I thought to myself: how would I be able to serve God in the future since He has not granted me His Holy Spirit? In that moment of weakness, I put down Commerce as my choice of study, hoping to help shoulder the financial burden of the family. After I completed my tertiary studies, I secured a well-paid job. Little did I expect the chastisement of God to come once again upon my family. Then in my prayer, I received the Holy Spirit. From that time on, I knew I wanted to serve in the full-time ministry. Looking back, I can only conclude that man's path is not his own.

Because of my decision to take up full-time ministry, my first principle in choosing a spouse was that she must be able to walk with one mind with me in my ministry. Academic qualifications and other factors were

In the ministry, I have faced difficult challenges. Each time I thought that I could no longer go on, the words of the Bible became the light to my path...

peripheral to me. Unless I was match-made, if this first criterion could not be met, I refused to compromise. Thank the Lord! He gave me someone with whom I could walk together. When we put God's affairs first, He will certainly bless us. During these more than ten years of service, my marriage has been a great support indeed. This experience gives me greater confidence to march towards a better tomorrow.

In the ministry, I have faced difficult challenges. Each time I thought that I could no longer go on, the words of the Bible became the light to my path: "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." When we hold fast to the promise of the Bible, with prayer, God will grant us sufficient strength to succeed. Such spiritual success is much more valuable and significant than that of the world. Riches, status, fame and power do not show us the path to peace. How can anyone who live in

sin ever be truly happy? Paul writes "as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (2 Cor 6:9-10). Such is the spiritual experience that grants true fulfilment and joy, which is found only in Christ. We must have the faith that as long as we hold on to God's promise, our service to Him will meet with His favour.

As I count my blessings, I am filled with thanksgiving. At the same time, I feel I really do not deserve the grace that is upon me. I constantly remind myself that inevitably, there will always be a battle between the Holy Spirit and the flesh. If we but relax for a moment, our flesh will get the better of us. Around us, we can easily see many weaknesses which displease us. In such situations, I remind myself to always look at

Exhortation

Around us, we can easily see many weaknesses which displease us ... I tell myself

to always look at others' virtues, to offer suggestions instead of criticising, to pray instead of passing judgement and to encourage instead of opposing

others' virtues, to offer suggestions instead of criticising, to pray instead of passing judgement and to encourage instead of opposing. Of course, this is easier said than done. If we do not nurture ourselves spiritually and pray consistently, neglect to examine ourselves daily and strive to do good, we may easily fall into the miserable state of murmuring "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of sin!" To secure a better tomorrow, we have to discipline ourselves and always examine our ways.

"Agree with God and be at peace; thereby good will come to you" (Job 22:21). By planning our direction according to God's will, we will receive true peace and blessing. In all circumstances, we trust that God's arrangement is good, and accept them with faith. We should also leave a good impression wherever we go according to God's will so that we can be good testimonies to God's wonderful plans. So, we must first be clear about what we are striving for: not for wealth but industry, not authority but love, not status but humility.

When we are in Christ, our future will not be like a mist. May we support one another as we move on to a better tomorrow!

Looking back, a humble vessel like me has been richly blessed. In my 18 years of full-time ministry, I have had the opportunity to participate in the teaching of theology for the past 14 years. I love this work and know very well its role as the foundation of one's faith. It is hoped that brethren in the church will esteem highly this aspect of our faith so that we can grow sturdily in our spirituality and take up the work to preach the gospel to the ends of the world.

Church Development

The development of the church is an important factor in God's salvation plan. The true church raised in the last days has to complete the work of reforming the religious beliefs of the world. We have to preach the complete gospel to the ends of the world. This is not a pompous claim but rather a commission of the Lord. The church therefore has to nurture talent in various fields so as to be able to reach and propagate the gospel to different religious groups, different races and different strata of society.

We have many of our trained preachers participating in the work of world evangelism. But we still fall short of the grace of God for the harvest is plenty and the labourers are few. In fact, the results achieved do not tally with the grace that God has showered upon us. There are a few reasons for this and these are also the very areas on which we have to focus in the years to come.

Theological training must be extensive

The divine work today cannot be completed solely by the efforts of full-time preachers. Although the church periodically organises Bible classes for the general congregation, there is still a need to have a more systematic theological training programme to provide a solid foundation for the members' faith.

By the guidance of God, when theological training is extended to the congregation, preachers would have more co-workers to push the Lord's work to greater heights.

Theological training must be in-depth

Preachers can have tremendous influence in the believers' life of faith. If we wish to see more believers obeying God, preachers themselves also need to improve on their own spirituality. Only then can the church grow. When the Lord was on earth, He did not forget to pray even in the midst of leading the disciples. Amidst the busy schedule of pastoral work, preachers must find time to improve themselves. It is essential for them to calm down and examine themselves and the work they have done. They can also, with arrangements by the Theological Seminary, attend enrichment courses.

Theological training should be multi-faceted

It is an unavoidable trend that the church's divine work becomes multi-faceted. Besides the present need for preachers, literary workers, religious teachers and administrators, there will in the future be a greater need for workers gifted in the areas of counselling, languages, youth affairs and music. Hence the church should encourage believers talented in these diverse areas to offer themselves. When we extend theological training to these different areas, we would solve the problem of having to make use of the same people for all different kinds of work.

The church has to expand her resources in nurturing talents. This is crucial to her progress. Each and everyone of us should be concerned and pray for this important work. The above are some of my humble observations. May we all work together for a better tomorrow for the kingdom of God. ■

MOSES ON TRIAL

From Kibroth-hattaavah, the people journeyed to Hazeroth; and they remained at Hazeroth. Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman . . . (Num 11:35 – 12:15)



Once, the Israelites journeyed to a place called Hazeroth. They were to remain there for more than a week. On their Canaan-bound journey through the wilderness, the Israelites had stopped by many places. Each time, the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire from God determined how long they had to encamp at that place. For most of them, having encamped at many stops, for how long and for what reason they had to stay put at a particular place had perhaps become something of the banal and not worthy of note. However, this place, Hazeroth, was different. At this place, a dramatic event occurred which was to leave an indelible mark in their memory – Miriam, one of the three of their great leaders, was suddenly struck with leprosy. For that, she was shut out of the camp for seven days and the whole Israelite congregation could not journey until she was brought in again.

Miriam, together with her brother Aaron, had spoken against their younger brother, Moses. Was that merely a domestic dispute? The Bible does not tell us. But we know for certain that Miriam's leprosy as a result of that dispute could not have been kept from the nation¹. A closer analysis of that event reveals one fact. Miriam and Aaron accused Moses on the premise that his leadership was questionable, not on private, familial grounds as they claimed. It was not a case of who this younger brother ought to have married or who he ought not have married. It was rather an indictment against the spiritual authority Moses wielded as the chief leader amongst them. So, it was probably not a private trial that Moses was put on. The matter involved the whole nation, how they were to be led and who to lead them. It was a matter serious enough for God to even intervene personally and

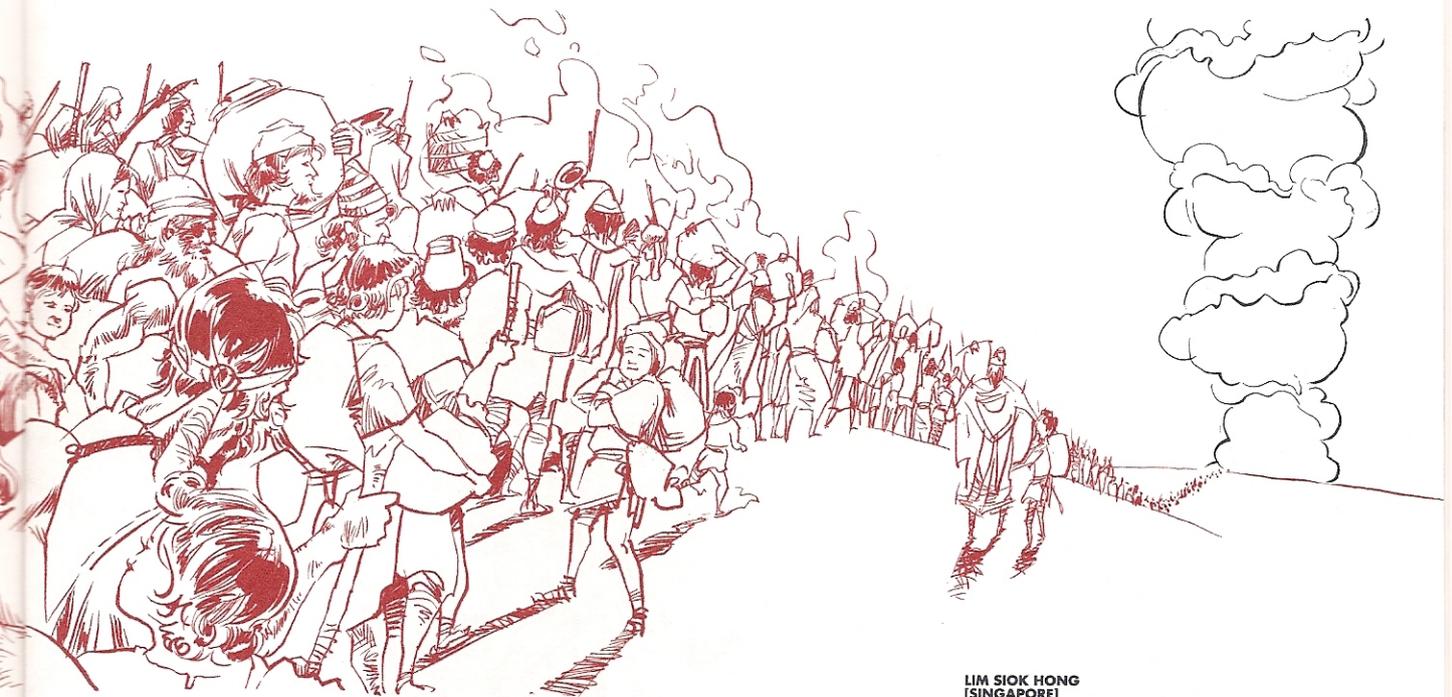
act harshly against Miriam, who was herself a leader.

The trial of Moses is an important event in the history of the Israelite nation. Seen in the modern-day context, it offers teachings about the spiritual nurture of servants of God and the relationship between co-workers. It is hence an event worth a close examination.

The Plaintiffs

Miriam and Aaron were great assistants to Moses as he led the people out of Egypt. "For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam" (Mic 6:4). In the sight of God, these three siblings were important leaders to His chosen nation. They each had their own roles in the redemption of the Israelite nation from Egypt.

¹ "He is a leprous man . . . he shall cover his upper lip and cry 'Unclean, unclean' . . . he shall dwell alone in a habitation outside the camp" (Lev 13:44-46).



LIM SIOK HONG
[SINGAPORE]

As a child, Miriam was already a part of God's strategic plan to save the Israelites from their oppressors. When Baby Moses was left among the reeds at the river's brink, Miriam stood at a distance to watch. It might be that she was entrusted with the task of finding out what was to happen to her baby brother. She must have been a reliable and resourceful girl. When the Pharaoh's daughter discovered Moses, she was quick to recommend her mother to be the child's nurse (Ex 2:9). Consequently, Baby Moses was able to be nurtured by his own mother, something crucial in the moulding of his identity. Spending his formative childhood years in a Hebrew home, Moses grew up knowing very well who he was and where his loyalty should belong. So, "when he was grown up, (he) refused to be called the son of the Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people

of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Heb 11:24, 25).

When the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea, leaving the Egyptian army behind them completely drowned, Moses led the people in singing to God a song of praise. Then, Miriam took a timbrel in her hand and continued the song. She showed herself to be a natural leader; all the women went out after her with timbrels and started dancing. The Bible also describes her as "the prophetess" (Ex 15:20). In the eyes of the Israelites, especially among the womenfolk, Miriam was an outstanding woman, a spiritual leader.

As for Aaron, God chose him as Moses' spokesman right at the beginning (Ex 4:14-16). When he went with Moses to negotiate with the Pharaoh, God performed a miracle using his rod, turning it into a snake (Ex 7:8-10). God chose him for an even greater task – that of a High

Priest (Ex 28:1). He was a central figure in the life of worship of the whole nation. On top of that, only those of his lineage could become priests. They were an elite group chosen from among the Levites, who were chosen from all the tribes to serve in the tabernacle. Like his sister, Aaron was also given a special leadership position.

The Charge

Both Miriam and Aaron were important vessels of God. Unfortunately, this time round, they allowed their weaknesses to get the better of them.

Miriam and Aaron's allegation was that Moses should not have taken a Cushite woman as his wife. Was it because of his position as the leader of the nation? Were Miriam and Aaron concerned that Moses' marriage to a foreign woman would make him a target of gossip and disapproval

Exhortation

among his people? The Bible does not explicitly provide the answer. The Bible, though, does tell us the true motivation behind their disapproval and accusation. They said, "Has the Lord indeed only spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" (Num 12:2). Underlying the charge they hurled against Moses was a strong resentment that Moses was the greater leader amongst them. Are we not his equals? Is this younger brother of ours really greater than we? Why is he getting all the limelight while we appear to be merely his "tag-a-longs"? Are we not as capable; are we not prophets too? They began to question the spiritual endorsement behind Moses' leadership position. Their psychology had become frighteningly unstable. They failed to realise what they were actually doing and the implications involved.

Pride, the Devil's age-old weapon, was at work in their hearts. Right at the beginning, Eve was motivated by pride when she ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, hoping that she would be like God (Gen 3:5). Pride has caused countless downfalls amongst God's people over the millennia. It continues to be Satan's lethal weapon.

Pride has ominous potential for destruction. It gives rise to jealousy. Hence, Miriam and Aaron could not accept the fact that Moses was a greater leader than they were. They



were not humble enough to recognise that they were but particles in the vast creation of God and that He had the sole prerogative to assign whatever task there is to whoever He so pleased. Their pride had caused them to question God's sovereignty. Their lack of humility had also blinded them to the grace that God had bestowed upon them in allowing them to have a significant part in the nation's leadership.

Then, they went on to a more grievous wrong. Their open statement of crime against Moses was that his marriage was objectionable. However, there was no religious grounds to their objection to Moses' marriage to a foreign woman. The Bible tells us that Moses took a wife when he was in the wilderness of Midian. It is very likely that his wife,

Zipporah, was a proselyte, for she was the one who circumcised their son (Ex 4:25) and she followed Moses back to Egypt to lead the people. In the Bible, there is no mention of Moses taking a second wife. During the exodus, he was kept busy and we can presume that he could not have taken another wife. Even if there were a second wife, Moses would surely have taken a wife who was a worshipper of his God, someone who would support him in his ministry. Hence, the charge of Miriam and Aaron could not be substantiated.

In actuality, the true source of displeasure hidden in the hearts of Miriam and Aaron was that Moses' leadership position was superior to theirs. Instead of openly admitting their jealousy, they gave their cause a



twist and made the whole matter seem like a case of Moses committing wrong in the matter of marriage. They created a false charge against Moses, veiling everyone, including themselves, from the real underlying reason; that of pride. They probably did not realise what they were doing; that as a result of their resentment, they were fabricating a narrative to suit their cause.

The worst part of it all is that this challenge of Moses' authority became an act of sowing discord. Firstly, unrest was created at the leadership level. It can be expected that the ordinary Israelite would have got to know it. Perhaps Miriam and Aaron had even moved among the people and publicly threw their doubts and interrogations at Moses. For, after all, their motive was to undermine

Moses' credibility as the great leader and to strip him of the respect he commanded.

At this juncture, God had to step in. He could not allow anyone in His congregation to sow discord, forgetting that He as the sovereign Lord was watching over them all. Even if Moses had really done wrong, Miriam and Aaron were still not persons in the position to "execute justice" using their own methods. That was to be left in the hands of God, and in His hands alone, for vengeance is the Lord's. They had overstepped their boundary. They had forgotten who was in charge. They had even sinned in the way they handled the matter, hiding their jealousy behind twisted facts and generating disharmony. For that, God had to act.

The Defence

"Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" God's voice resounded in the air (Num 12:4). How did Miriam and Aaron feel then? Did God's voice hovering over their tent wake them up from the delusion and narrative they had fashioned for themselves? Were they awakened to the fact that it was the sore in their hearts, the resentment against Moses, that was compelling them to do all that they had done? Did they realise they were at fault?

"If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is entrusted with all my house. With him, I speak mouth to mouth, clearly and not in dark speech; and he beholds the form of the LORD" (Num 12:6-8). God spoke and gave them the answer to the fundamental question that brought forth all the dissension. Yes, Moses was the leader, the greatest amongst the three of them. The questions Miriam and Aaron had asked earlier were all given a reply. Indeed, God had chosen them too. But Moses was different. With them, God spoke through visions, dreams and dark speech. With Moses, God spoke face to face. Miriam and Aaron had probably forgotten that whenever the presence of God descended upon the Tent of Meeting, all in the congregation would rise and watch

Exhortation

Moses go into the tent to meet with Him. God spoke to Moses like one would to a friend (Ex 33:9-11). Maybe they had also forgotten that it was Moses who went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments (Ex 19, 20). Hence, God had to remind them. That reminder was not a sweet experience. It was no gentle reminder. God's tone was severe, "Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?" (Num 12:8). Miriam and Aaron probably had not expected this. By their words alone, God's wrath was incurred. For that, they had to pay a high price.

The Verdict

"And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed; and when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous" (Num 12:9, 10). Miriam had wanted to weaken the influence of Moses. She got a taste of her own medicine instead. She was suddenly made leprous. The whole congregation would surely get to hear of it. Their great female leader was punished with the most unclean disease. The prophetess who led the womenfolk in

They had learnt their lesson that to speak against God's chosen servant is a serious matter before God. To sow dissension amongst co-workers is all the more unbecoming of God's servants

singing to the Lord was completely humbled, before herself, before her people and before God. All the admiration and veneration she had received were gone almost all at once. In trying to assert her own leadership position, she had brought upon herself the very reverse plight. She was terribly shaken. What was more frightening was that God had departed. God had turned His face away from her (Num 12:9). What was she to do?

It was at this point that Aaron pleaded for Miriam's cure and manifested his repentance. To reverse the tragedy, he had to admit that what they had done was wrong. The message behind God's punishment was clear. They had to acknowledge that Moses was indeed the leader among them. "Oh, my lord, do not punish us because we have done foolishly and have sinned"

(Num 12:11). Aaron finally reckoned Moses as his "lord". He begged Moses to heal Miriam. This was an open acknowledgment that Moses was the one whom God had chosen to lead them, the one with the spiritual, heavenly authority. They had learnt their lesson that to speak against God's chosen servant is a serious matter before God. To sow dissension amongst co-workers is even more unbecoming of God's servants. This change of heart in them was a necessary step before Miriam could be healed.

At this point, Moses' voice was finally heard. He pleaded with God to heal Miriam (Num 12:13). Prior to this, throughout the whole trial, Moses did not utter a word. When the contentions, as to whether he was the sanctioned leader amongst them, were rife, he held his peace. What was going through his mind then? We are not offered any insight. But he certainly knew he had to leave the matter entirely to God; God was the best one to judge the matter. He knew that if he was approved before God, God would vindicate him. He did not need to go round the camp

soliciting support. There was no need to explain himself. In the first place, he did not volunteer to be the leader. It was God who had personally called him from the burning bush when he was tending sheep in the wilderness (Ex 3:1-10). Since his position was given by God, only God could take this authority away from him. If he had been found lacking, then let God deal with him accordingly. Nothing that anyone were to say would sway God's decision in any way.

It is significant that the only biblical record of Moses' response to the raving accusations and disapproval hurled at him was "now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth" (Num 12: 3). In the narration of a situation of unrest created, a seemingly irrelevant and most incongruous comment about the accused's meekness is juxtaposed in the middle. This serves to highlight a stark contrast between Moses' response and the ways of Miriam and Aaron. Towards his accusers and in handling the whole issue, Moses had only one response – maintain his meekness by staying calm, gentle and humble.

It is also worth pondering why the only verse which records Moses' opening his mouth is that which

“ If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work ”

shows him interceding for Miriam. Moses cried out to the LORD, "Heal her, O God, I beseech thee" (Num 12:13). This is the only record of Moses' voice from the beginning to the end of this whole event. Moses, the great intercessor, who pleaded with God for his people when they turned against God to worship the golden calf (Ex 32:31, 32), was the same figure of compassion when faced with opposition and personal attacks.

Through the trial, Moses' behaviour proved that he was indisputably the unchallenged leader of the whole nation. It explains why God was on his side. There was no need for him to say anything more.

God the Lord sovereign chooses his own workers. These workers must also prove their spiritual integrity. "If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work" (2 Tim 2:21). Moses did just that. His heart was one that was pristine, not harbouring any grudges. He stayed composed and silent amidst the noise and squabble for power. When the plea came for him to intercede for Miriam, he further manifested his great magnanimity by his unquestioning readiness to forgive and humbly do what he could for her, just as he had always done for his people. With that, he silenced all his contenders and the whole congregation and won God's added approval. With that, he also left for posterity a precious lesson about what a worker approved by God should be like. ■

GROWING INTO THE *full* STATURE OF CHRIST

We are approaching the end of the twentieth century. A new century will be dawning soon. Living in this transitional period, we are compelled to look back, to think, and to prepare for the coming new age. Let us begin with examining our identity as Christians.

We used to be sinners, unworthy of God's love. But God, through His divine grace, called us into His fold. We were grateful and determined to be His followers. This tremendous conversion experience is the indelible memory that stays with us as long as we take our Christian identity seriously. We may however, react inadequately to the experience of grace and love. We have recognised that God is a merciful God. He is also almighty – so lofty and transcendent that we feel our lowliness. His omnipotence and absolute goodness, manifested in His redemptive act, sometimes appear so overwhelming that we feel ourselves all the more humbled and totally dependent on Him. We feel secure with this sentiment. We regard our self-abasement as a virtue that makes us more deserving of God's grace. We hold that our nothingness in contrast to God's almightiness is the appropriate description that defines our relationship with Him. Gradually our under-

standing of God as an active, all-giving figure and ourselves as passive, receiving beings is reasonably justified.

This is indeed a misconception. It prevents us from being mature and responsible Christians. Hebrews instructs us to "leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity" (Heb 6:1), emphasising the importance of growing from spiritual childhood to adulthood (Heb 5:12-14). The Apostle Paul specifies that mature manhood should be understood against "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). In other words, continual growth and progress is required of us Christians, and Christ is the criterion by which we measure our growth.

We should remember that Jesus Christ, although God incarnate, had gone on to maturity through a series of stages of growth. He was not born a mature man. Nor did He acquire His power and wisdom without much ado. Rather, He was conscious of His weakness but aimed to accomplish His goal through continuous effort. In His childhood, He was studious about spiritual learning, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (Lk 2:46). He first realised the impor-

tance of being in the “Father’s house” (Lk 2:49). He already knew very well then how essential it was to absorb spiritual knowledge, in view of the mission entrusted to Him. The self-awareness and the concomitant effort kept Him growing “in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man” (Lk 2:52).

In His manhood, Jesus evangelised. As powerful God, He performed miracles from time to time whenever and wherever occasion deemed fit. But this does not mean that He accomplished His work effortlessly. His long preparation for the holy work was far beyond what we would expect. In order to choose the twelve disciples, for example, “He went out to the mountain to pray; and all night He continued in prayer to God” (Lk 6:12). Did He not know whom He should choose? Or was He so indecisive that He needed God to strengthen His will? The true picture is that He wanted to show us the importance of growing, particularly when encountering difficulties. The two places He frequently visited, the temple in the daytime and the mountain at night (Lk 21:37), bespeak His effort to consolidate His work and His preparation. These two modes of activity, work and prayer support each other. They also show that Jesus’ growth was always dynamic and goal-oriented.

Jesus regarded growing into maturity as absolutely essential. At one time He led His three closest disciples, Peter, James and John, to a mountain whereupon He was transfigured. “As He was praying, the appearance of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became dazzling white” (Lk 9:29). Moses and Elijah appeared with Him in glory (Lk 9:30-31). It is correct to interpret the passage as indicating what Jesus was about to accomplish in the near future. More revealing is the fact that Jesus was showing His disciples how essential it was to grow spiritually, to the extent of becoming “dazzling white”. If the Master sets a good example, can His disciples do otherwise? Jesus’ exemplary act implies this important teaching.

Most climatic is the event that happened at the last stage of Jesus’ life. There we see how Jesus learned to

grow into absolute obedience, the hardest lesson of all. Although He had been growing all the time, the final task proved so insurmountable that He was hesitating and struggling in His heart. With earnest and importunate prayers, He asked God for more power to complete the assignment. “And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground” (Lk 22:44). A life-or-death struggle appeared before the disciples’ eyes, although, unfortunately, they had all fallen asleep. Persisting in what He had always been doing, that is, continuous growing, Jesus struck His last blow and broke through His physical limits to the final consummation. Because of this, the mission of salvation was realised.

Jesus’ continuous growth was a process from humanity to divinity; it was indeed an arduous and circuitous process. By determination and ceaseless effort, He trod His way to full maturity. Jesus’ example is a model for Christians, and we have a lot to learn from Him at this turn of the century.

In the first place, we have to be keenly aware of the era in which we are living. Jesus once lamented that His contemporaries were a “faithless generation” (Mk 9:19). More careful observation reveals that, from the spiritual perspective, our generation and the generations to come might be even more disheartening. The new age, characterised by scientism, cultural pluralism, thorough secularisation, nihilism, etc., will pose a great challenge to our faith. Pursuing spiritual maturity in an environment like this naturally demands more strength and devotion. A longer preparation and struggle are inevitable, and it is wise to recognise this fact from the outset.

There can be no argument that, in such a complex world, the pursuit of knowledge is necessary for our maturity. Here knowledge is not for knowledge’s sake, but for the benefit of helping our faith grow. In a narrower sense, knowledge of the scripture, “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in right-

eousness" (2 Tim 3:16), is a fundamental requirement. It is the source of power by which we judge and evaluate. In a wider sense, other types of worldly knowledge, including those of language, history, philosophy, world religions, social and natural sciences, etc., should be respected and learned in earnest. They are important means through which we come into contact with the world and by which we conduct our daily lives. A truly mature believer is one who is able to combine spiritual and worldly knowledge to work for his or her own good.

In the process of His growing, Jesus, on the one hand, constantly prayed to God and, on the other hand, invited His disciples to join His effort. Prayer is indeed the breath of Christians. It is the source from which we derive our spiritual life. In view of the coming challenge, its importance cannot be overemphasised. Praying is the creation of an inner sanctuary where we and God engage in an intimate dialogue. It is a holy place which is qualitatively different from those places where we conduct our daily activities. The prayer hour, likewise, is a holy time which we and God enjoy together. Extracting ourselves from our routines, we cherish this wonderful moment and devote ourselves to the spiritual exercise. It is only in the holy place and during the holy time that we recover our real selves; selves often easily forgotten in the secular world. Through prayer we renew our spirit and strengthen our will to go on to maturity.

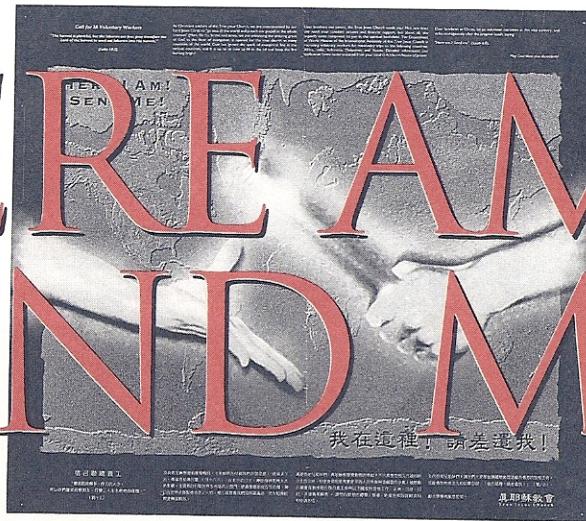
We should also be reminded that it is important to have spiritual companions with whom we can grow together. Jesus' co-workers were mostly spiritually weak, but He never ceased inviting and encouraging them. In contrast, we are fortunate to be surrounded "by so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1), be they ancient Christians or current church members. Their experiences we should share. These accumulated, collective experiences are the inspiration by which we "run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1). Growing into maturity

should not be a lone act. It is God's purpose to call us as a group to be His disciples, because He knows that we might easily lose heart. With mutual support, we are not afraid to stumble but are strengthened to pursue our course.

The coming era will be a time full of challenges. The world will be more complicated and, spiritually speaking, more dangerous. But Jesus is the beacon which guides our path. Since He has run the good course and set a good example as an ever-growing man, we have good reason to be courageous and follow His footsteps faithfully. Whatever difficulties we may encounter and whatever decisions we have to make in our lives, we are assured that Jesus had gone through the same process and come out triumphantly. He would surely like to see us grow into full maturity as He did. ■

YEN-ZEN TSAI
[TAIPEI, TAIWAN]

HERE AM I, SEND ME!



A hand firmly holding a baton. Another reaching out to receive it. This poster hangs in many a True Jesus Church building all over the world. The International Assembly's call for more volunteers marks an important development in our world evangelism. For too long, we have depended on a handful of full-time ministers who juggle between their pastoral duties and missionary work.

The Great Commission was given verbally to the apostles¹, but when the actual commissioning took place at the upper room on Pentecost, the entire assembly of disciples numbering about a hundred and twenty received power from the Holy Spirit to become “witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth”². Later, while the apostles remained at Jerusalem, the disciples were scattered and “went about preaching the word”³. Among them was Philip, who preached in Samaria. And when Paul covered the places beyond Samaria, he was accompanied by Joseph Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, Timothy and Titus. It is evident that missionary work was carried out extensively by many who were not part of the Twelve.

The Great Challenge

The Great Commission is truly a great challenge for

several reasons. One is the great disparity between the number of workers and the amount of work to be done. It is almost two thousand years since, but there are still unreached peoples and lands. Another is that the gospel has become corrupted with paganistic elements of foreign lands. By the turn of the first century, the adulterated form of Christianity overshadowed the true faith and from thence, Christianity was introduced to the world as a western religious (sometimes political) system.

The size of the nominal Christian population is far from satisfactory, but the ratio of True Jesus Church members to the world population is really dismaying. Theoretically, any saved person should have a passion for lost souls that forces him into action because he has been touched by the love of Christ. In practice, the majority of us are laid back while souls perish by the second. There is an *abnormal* lack of urgency. ▶

1. Mt 28:16, 19 2. Acts 1:8 cf 1:15; 2:1-4 3. Acts 8:4 cf 8:14

Practical christian living

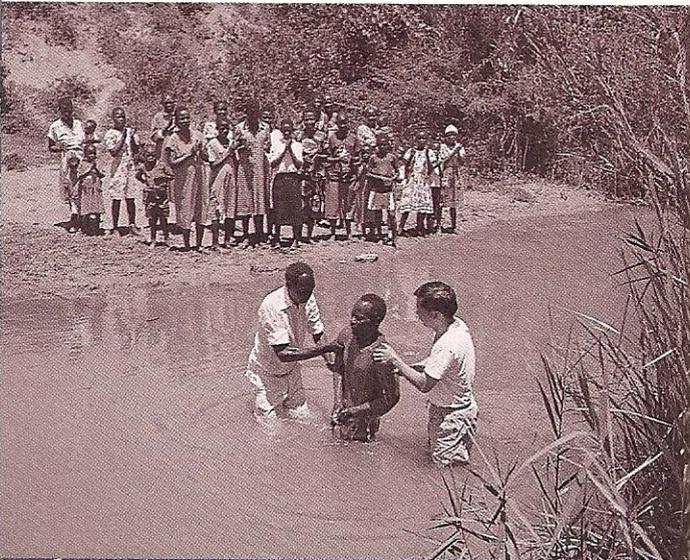


Left: Baptism in 3 groups

Candidates leaving for baptism (Ngiya, Kenya) .
September 1995.

Below: Baptism

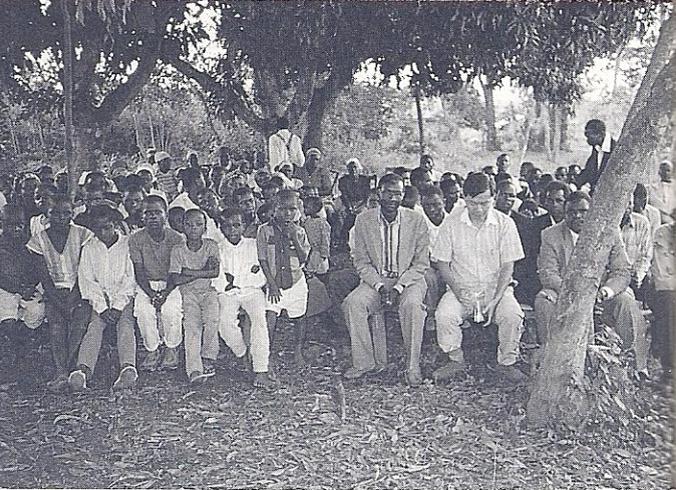
First group of people being baptised.
Total of 98 were baptised.



Third-World Countries

Africa, the 'dark continent', is still awaiting the true light to shine through the darkness. Out of the numerous countries occupying this vast land, the true word has only reached four countries. For hundreds of years, our fellow men living in that land have been suffering physical oppression and poverty. Who would help free them from spiritual bondage and enrich their souls with things eternal?

The word of truth was first received in Nigeria in 1979 and subsequently spread to Liberia, Ghana, Kenya and Zambia. Many of our audience have been Christians for many years, some even for 50 to 60 years. To be able to find the truth is indeed a home-coming to them. Are we willing to leave the comfort of our homes to make this possible for many more out there? Do we not have an



Above: Worshipping under mango trees

After foot washing sacrament. Awaiting Holy Communion.

Left: True Jesus Church, Accra, Ghana

Workers' seminar 1995.

To be able to find the truth is indeed a home-coming to them.

Are we willing to leave the comfort of our homes to make this possible for many more out there ?

example in Jesus who left His glorious throne to labour like a servant and finally to die a criminal's death?

The early Christians faced much hardship and peril while pioneering in foreign lands. If the latter day church were to do greater things as prophesied⁴, surely we must accept more than a share of their suffering. At present, our missionaries have not really suffered; they only have had to put up with some inconveniences. However, for the unaccustomed, even such would be scarcely tolerable. It would be good to know what to expect. Last year, a brother accompanied a full-time preacher to Africa while three deacons and two brothers joined as volunteers in India.

The brother who spent a month in Africa last September had the experience of worshipping in places like a mud chapel, a pitched tent, or simply under the shade of mango tress. Prayers were said while kneeling on muddy ground. Often, services in the open were interrupted by heavy rain. The schedule was hectic, and much time was spent waiting for the tent to be erected or on travelling. Once they had to travel for an hour on a hired lorry packed with about 70 people to the baptismal site. On another occasion, a hired van was used to make a few trips to get 98 people baptised. The roads were bad, and it was not easy to ford through flood waters with their very old hired car without having to push-start. Sometimes travelling was

done on foot. Meals were simple, and there was a lack of drinking water. Hotel accommodation was poor. One room they stayed in had no bathroom while another had no electricity. Both had no water supply; but hot and cold water would be fetched upon request.

The experience was nevertheless found to be rewarding. *The opportunity to address gatherings of 60% to 99% truthseekers is seldom found in one's home-country.* The eagerness to hear the complete gospel, the enthusiasm in asking questions and the zeal in praying for the Holy Spirit were some of the things the Africans displayed that brought joy to those involved in the ministry.

On the whole, the Africa ministry still needs to be strengthened in many ways. Our African brethren, especially those in Zambia, are rather poor. Physical poverty has affected the faith of quite a number of them. Subsidies are needed for construction of decent places of worship. Religious education is only slowly taking form, and proper set-up will be looked into this year.

India was visited twice last year; in March and September. Though the word was brought to this country in 1969, we only have churches in two out of 24 states. Two other states have prayer houses. It was only last year that we managed to reach out to one more – Bangalore. Moreover, few people are sufficiently familiar with the situation in Madras and Kerala, where we have churches. It is necessary that ties be strengthened with our own brethren before any attempt to break new ground. The first trip in March was mainly for fact-finding. Most of the volunteers admitted having little or no idea of the India ministry before embarking on the mission. One deacon remarked that despite being briefed before the trip, it was only upon arrival that he began to see what it was really like.

To enable the team to work better during the first trip, two brothers from the Tamil Fellowship of Federal Territory Church (W. Malaysia) joined as volunteers. Besides serving as interpreters, they also acted as cultural advisors. But they too felt a cultural gap. It seems advisable

The church was only lit with one gas lamp. The sermon had to be preached off the cuff, relying on God's inspiration.

that volunteers of Indian descent be more involved in this work. This would agree with Paul's extreme passion for the salvation of his own race⁵. It could be a good alternative to reach out to the large Chinese communities in Bombay and Calcutta, since a substantial number of them still maintain Chinese literacy, as evidenced by the existence of the Chinese press circulating a few daily newspapers. The majority speak the Hakka dialect which happens to be the most predominant vernacular amongst our churches in Southeast Asia. However, it is not desirable that the main composition of our churches worldwide be Chinese. God's redeemed should hail from every tribe and tongue and people and nation⁶. The aim of global evangelism is to save the native people of each land we visit. So ultimately, it is the Indians that we want in India!

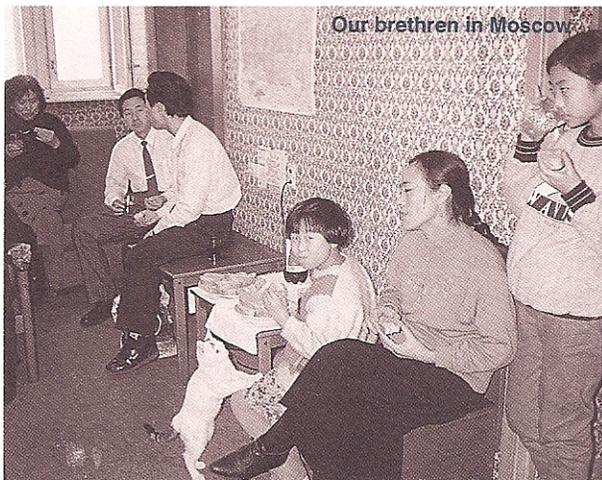
Apart from cultural differences, our volunteers encountered physical difficulties that required adaptability and spontaneity. Once, they arrived at a village late in the evening and discovered that there was no electric supply. The church was lit with only one gas lamp. The sermon had to be preached off the cuff, relying on God's inspiration. Travelling was extensive yet difficult, due to pollution and insufficient transport. One of the voluntary workers was nearly thrown off a very packed bus. Hygiene was poor and basic amenities were inadequate. Using the open latrine in the bushes was commonplace while toilet paper was expensive or unheard of in the rural areas. Transportation and infrastructure was poor, which aggravated the hectic schedule.

The second trip was easier as the voluntary workers had become more accustomed to the conditions. It would seem prudent then, to have a core of committed workers willing to go for future trips. Work would then be more efficiently carried out in the long term. Getting a totally new group of volunteers to adapt is time-consuming.

There is much benefit in joining the India ministry. One member pointed out that it gave him the opportunity to be totally cut off from secular cares and be fully dedicated to the Lord's work. He admitted honestly that back home, he had been fitting God's work into his secular schedule rather than making it his primary concentration. Another said that instead of just going there to teach, he was in fact taught by the example of the Indian believers. Their faith was simple, and though physically poor, they had great zeal in reaching out to remote areas to establish churches. He saw his own inadequacies and regretted his lethargy. It was, he said, "like having cold water splashed onto my face to awaken me and to make me sit up and take action". This vast land of more than 800 million souls

Their faith was simple, and though physically poor, they had great zeal in reaching out to remote areas to establish churches.





Our brethren in Moscow

presently has only 3,200 believers. There is an urgent need for more of us to take action. Have we felt the cold water on our faces?

Beyond the Iron and Bamboo Curtains

For many years, communist countries like China and Russia have suppressed religious activities and persecuted Christians. Many of our churches in China went underground and in some places, members just scattered. The government ban on teaching religion to children below 18



Many children of our China brethren were not baptised in infancy and grew up with little knowledge of Christ.

Russian membership
 Moscow: 34 members
 St. Petersburg: 9 members
 July 1995

years old has hindered the passing on of the faith to the next generation. Many children of our China brethren were not baptised in infancy and grew up with little knowledge of Christ. Presently, China has about 300 million children*, who are not legally allowed to hear the gospel. Till recently, communication with churches in the free world was virtually non-existent. The International Assembly made a milestone visit to the People's Republic of China last year and made some headway in Russia.



The current situation in the Chinese Christian Churches, according to our IA visitors still reflects centralised control. The two main organisations, namely the Chinese Christian Council (CCC) and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Council, generally referred to as "the two councils", seek to unify the churches into a single "post-denominational" church, anonymous and concordant in faith and polity. Theological training is centralised at state-sanctioned seminaries, and only those trained at these seminaries can be licensed to serve as ministers in their individual churches. The unique identity of our church would naturally be challenged in the spate of

*From New Evidence, January/February 1996 issue

In the seminaries at Nanjing and Wuhan, our theological students have introduced the true gospel to their fellow students.

such ecumenism. Also, the official position of the authorities, which is in line with the concept of a "post-denominational" era, disallows the posting of signboards. There is also some difficulty in conducting baptism by immersion in the open, since evangelistic activities in the streets, hospitals, or prisons are outlawed. Hence, some Christian leaders deem the True Jesus Church as non-conformist.

Despite the hindrances, the church is flourishing in Fuzhou, Fuqing and Xiamen. Quite a number of churches have been erected bearing our church's name. As one journeys farther into the interior, pressures upon the true church are reportedly more tenacious. Nevertheless, the IA visitors found in Nanjing, Wuhan and Beijing many groups of workers and lay ministers who demonstrated strong faith and members who hold unwaveringly to the doctrinal tradition of our church. In the seminaries at Nanjing and Wuhan, our theological students have introduced the true gospel to their fellow-students. Instead of succumbing to ecumenism and liberal theology, they are effective witnesses who are instrumental in bringing many students to the truth. This has inevitably caused displeasure among some in the faculty as well as the student body.

On the whole, the holy work in China is dynamic, abounding in signs and wonders and conversions to the Lord. The churches in China are in urgent need of Mandarin sermon cassettes, theological training materials and a continuing supply of periodicals. Above all, they require our intercession and actual participation. If Hudson Taylor could be so willing to spend and be spent for the sake of China, why should we feel less for the land where God first raised the true church of the last days?

Despite having been brought up in an atheist educational system, they personally experienced God and increased their faith

The work in Russia is very new, and limited to Moscow and St. Petersburg. Although pioneering started in Moscow in May 1994, due to the lack of a permanent centre, only one person, a Chinese, received the Holy Spirit and subsequently reverted to his own church. The present flock in Russia traces its beginnings to the same year when a brother from the United States sent tracts and cassette tapes to Chinese friends residing in Moscow. Two became very interested in the truth and contacted our church. Thus in January 1995, a second trip was made which met with some success. After preaching for ten days at the Beijing Hotel, where about 30 attended, a number were strongly convicted of the truth and even received the Holy Spirit. A follow-up trip was made in the same month, lasting a fortnight, and by then there were more than 10 stable truth-seekers, most of them having received the Holy Spirit. In March, during a 10-day visit, it was

**Not only were they
observing the Sabbath
and paying tithes, they
zealously brought friends
to hear the gospel.**

noted that regular attendance at services and Bible study had doubled to 20.

For four wintry months, the truth-seekers burned with zeal, having regular services and unceasing prayer. Despite having been brought up in an atheist educational system, they personally experienced God and increased their faith. Not only were they observing the Sabbath and paying tithes, they zealously brought friends to hear the gospel. Finally in May, a total of 34 were baptised, including five entire families. A further nine were baptised in the months of June and July, bringing the total Russian membership to 43; 34 in Moscow and nine in St. Petersburg.

The economic and political situation in Russia is rather unstable. Businessmen and missionaries have suffered violence. The underworld is gradually gaining strength. The newly established church in Moscow has been entrusted with a great responsibility. The IA will have to help her train personnel, so as to bring the gospel to the ethnic Russians and even the Jews residing there. There is an urgent need for evangelistic materials in the Russian language.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union, the opening up of communist nations like China and Vietnam are great opportunities to preach the gospel. We must also realise that the time available is not indefinite. Though many have remarked that communism is dead, we know from God's Word that before the world ends, it will rise to great power. If this present period corresponds to that of the "mortal wound" in Revelations, then when the wound is healed, we will have no time to preach. Before the sleeping giant awakes, before the curtains close on us again, let us bring the gospel to the end of the earth. ■

**SHEE TSE LOONG
[SINGAPORE]**

EVANGELISE

The world is a mess
So full of stress
For those who live in darkness
They are trying their best

Tell them that there is One
Who can do them much better
Spell it out for them
Right down to the letter

Many want to do right
But still they do wrong
They know they are weak
So tell them who's strong

Tell them about yourself
Having been tried, even tested
But can overcome all things
Through His Spirit manifested

Jesus came for those lost
Spoke, and with them too
Being who He is in all His glory
He did this, so why can't you?

Don't worry about what people think
Don't worry about what is said
Not only does God go with you
But know that He goes ahead

The season is near
We must realise
The harvest is ripe
So – Go Evangelise

What does it take
For you to plant the seed?
The full armour of God
That's all that you need

Evangelise
Help restore a soul
For what good is the truth
If it's not being told?

For where would you be
If someone had not told you
So be a faithful witness
It's the commanded thing to do!!!

Now listen closely
And make this discovery
Rejection from man is nothing
But from God – No recovery

Be ye disciples
Be ye wise
See their sorrows
Hear their cries – Evangelise

CHIRECE MITCHELL
[DETROIT, USA]

here am i, **send me**

Respondents on full-time ministry

OUR Lord Jesus once said, the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. When we compare the number of full-time ministers with the demands of the church's ministry, the Lord's statement is true indeed. We believe that an insight into the motivation and experiences of the current ministers will help to inspire, direct and encourage more of you, our Manna readers, to at least consider serving the Lord on a full-time basis. It is with this in mind that we have designed this simple questionnaire for our ministers to share their testimonies with you.

Preacher Chao Ming Yang

Area: Taiwan

- 1. What made you decide to offer yourself as a full-time minister?**
To repay the grace of God.
- 2. In your ministerial work, what experiences have you encountered that left very deep impressions?**
 - (a) God's wonders and miracles testifying to the truth.
 - (b) Believers being lukewarm, doing injustice to the grace of the Lord.
- 3. What are your aspirations/hopes for the True Jesus Church?**
 - (a) To revive the Apostolic Church.
 - (b) To preach the gospel to all nations.
 - (c) That the latter temple would have greater glory than the former.

Preacher Yang Yuh Ming

Area: Paris, France

- 1. What made you decide to offer yourself as a full-time minister?**
I have never told anyone.
- 2. In your ministerial work, what experiences have you encountered that left very deep impressions?**
 - (a) Return of the prodigal son.
 - (b) The lost sheep.
- 3. What are your aspirations/hopes for the True Jesus Church?**
 - (a) To return to the simple truth.
 - (b) To regain spiritual strength.
 - (c) To be united in love.
 - (d) The whole world united as one.

exhortations

bible study

THIS PAGE COULD HAVE BEEN FILLED BY YOU FOR HIS NAME

doctrine

practical living

testimonies

SEND YOUR WORKS TO

DLM TRUE JESUS CHURCH
32 LORONG H, TELOK KURAU
SINGAPORE 426020

JESUS LOVES ME

Hallelujah, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I testify. This incident took place in Pacifica Church, California, during a prayer session at a National Youth Theological Seminar. Before the prayer, Pr Derren Liang encouraged us to pray earnestly, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and be enriched with the Word of God. Pr Liang also encouraged us to change our old selves and become humble and obedient children of God. A few minutes after the prayer began, a bright light suddenly shone into *my eyes*. *At first, I thought the light was coming in* through the window. I decided to ignore it, and lowered my head. The light continued to shine into my eyes persistently. I then lifted my head, and realised that this was no ordinary light. It was a glorious experience.

A few minutes later, a person in a white garment walked towards me. His face was somewhat unclear. He pointed to me and said, "I live in you." At that moment, I was overwhelmed with rivers of living water that welled up from the depths of my heart. I stretched out my arms to grab hold of His garment. I felt incredible joy at that moment. Then He said, "I must leave." I wanted to call to

the sisters in front of me, to ask them to help me hold on to His garment. At this point, my head was almost touching the carpet, and I exclaimed, "No, no, please, God, no!" I said, "It was so difficult for me to grab hold of your garment. It is impossible for me to let it go!" Once again, Jesus said, "I must leave." I continued to hold His garment, and said, "No, no, no!" A sister then approached me and said, "Hallelujah, Amen!" I then let go of His garment and He disappeared, and the vision ended.

This was truly a wonderful experience, one which I will keep with me for the rest of my life. I now know that He will take care of me, love me and always live in me. Just as John 7:38 records, "He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" May all glory be given unto the name of our Lord Jesus Christ forever and ever. Hallelujah, Amen. ■

BELINDA YONG
[VANCOUVER, CANADA]

UNDER GOD'S PROTECTION

In the name of Jesus Christ, I would like to bear this testimony of how God saved me from serious bodily injury. If it were not for His compassion and His grace, I would have become an invalid, or even worse, I would not be around to write this testimony.

On 24 September 1995, which was a Sunday, my wife and I rushed home at about 9.30 a.m. after shopping for flowers. We were in a hurry so that I could get to church by 10.00 a.m. to attend to some work. Just as we pulled into the driveway, we noticed a friend waiting for us. It was not usual for her to rise early on weekends, and so we were pleasantly surprised when she showed up unannounced. My wife promptly got into the house, while our friend followed me up to the sundeck to help me hang the big basket of flowers from the roof rafter. I stood on a foot-high milk carton so that I could reach the edge of the roof. Proceeding to hang the basket of flowers, I leaned over the railing as far as my body could flex. Since I had elevated myself higher than the protective level of the deck railing, I instinctively realised that it offered no barrier should I tip over. Sure enough, I suddenly plunged head first over the railing towards the driveway some 4.5 metres (14 feet) below. It happened so fast that I did not have time to be afraid. In the blink of an eye, I laid prostrate on the asphalt, totally dazed and unable to focus on or comprehend my surroundings. When I recovered minutes later, I crawled on my hands and knees into the house and waited for the ambulance. Moments later, I was rushed to hospital. Before departing, first aid staff tested my faculties to make sure I did not suffer any serious concussion. I responded well and they told me that I was very lucky. I could have hit my head hard on the driveway

or the big clay flower pot nearby. It was like there was a protective shield. cursory examination of the rest of my body also revealed no injury. I was even able to walk, albeit quite slowly, to the ambulance without help. My wife and our friend followed in her car. Thank God for the presence of our friend, for it was very unusual for her to show up on the day and time that she did, considering that she has never visited us on a Sunday morning. Coincidence? Or was it God's plan? At the hospital, the attending physician checked me up, and discharged me on the condition that I rested from work for at least a week just to be on the safe side.

At this juncture, it is important to mention one other thing. Because I am extremely myopic, I wear very thick glasses. Even if I had not broken any bones, one would have expected my glasses at least to be shattered due to the impact. By the grace of God, my spectacles were lying on the driveway, about two metres (7 feet) from where I landed, in a position as if someone had carefully left them on a shelf. They were not even chipped or scratched. The only rational explanation I can offer for this rather miraculous occurrence is that God knew how important my glasses were to me. They would have been very expensive to replace because of their specification and I cannot function at all without them.

During my recuperation, many of our church brothers and sisters visited and prayed with me. I am grateful for their love and concern. Despite my condition, I was extremely happy to experience such true love. It has taught me that while we have our own families, we also have an extended family in church; and when catastrophe strikes unexpectedly, we can count on church members

for hope and encouragement. Thank God for them.

It is important after such a traumatic experience to reflect, self-examine and discover some reasons for its occurrence. Had I offended God in some way such that He had to give me a wake-up call to check myself, or was it pure coincidence? Was it sheer good luck that I came through all this safe and sound or was it God's mercy and constant care? We often do not realise that we can offend God daily in our lives, through wrong speech, wrong thoughts, wrong actions or wrong intentions. And so, if we do not constantly examine ourselves, we would have failed somewhat in our Christian living. In the one week of rest, I had plenty of time to do some self-examination. I wrestled with the issues and concluded that this was indeed a wake-up call for me. But God had, through His grace and compassion, protected me from serious physical harm. Two office colleagues of mine had fallen from lower heights before. One became a quadriplegic; the other shuffles around with a walking stick, whereas today, I am as good as new. Given this scenario, I am convinced that when we serve God in some way, His great love abides with us. When we meet with adversity, we can trust that He will deliver and protect us, so that we remain physically capable of doing more work for Him. This testimony is therefore given for the glory of His name.

Hallelujah, Amen. ■

SIMON CHAN
[VANCOUVER, CANADA]

GOD'S LOVE AND POWER

Hallelujah, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I would like to testify about our family's experiences of God's great love and power.

In June 1991, my 14-year old daughter Grace suddenly felt tired and became pale. Since she had always been healthy and rarely fell ill, I was surprised by her condition and took her to see the doctor. The doctor found that her blood count was dangerously low and immediately transferred her to the state medical centre for further tests. The tests results showed that Grace had aplastic anaemia. This is a rare disease that occurs mostly in young people between the ages of 15 to 30. Even though medical science has attributed the major causes of this disease to chemicals, radiation and viruses, in over 80% of the cases, the exact cause cannot be identified. This disease suppresses or even completely stops the production of red blood cells in the bone marrow, creating severe anaemia. This disease is not cancer, but the decreasing blood cells makes it equally, if not more, life-threatening. The doctor explained that although treatment was available, its effectiveness in children was much lower than in adults (approximately 10% - 20% versus 50% respectively). Nevertheless, Grace entered the medical centre for

treatment and the doctor told us that the outcome would be known within two to three weeks. At the same time, a bone marrow match test was conducted on my family members and close relatives in preparation for a bone marrow transplant in the event that the treatment failed. A bone marrow transplant is one of the most expensive and painful medical operations, requiring six months of painful recuperation. At the medical centre, Grace's blood had to be extracted daily to test for her response to the treatment, but six weeks later, her condition did not improve. We even consulted the world's leading medical authority in this field, but he could only give us a transplant success rate of 50%.

Since Grace had always been very healthy, we believed that her illness might have come with God's goodwill to call us back to Him and to His church. When I came to study in the US, our church had not been established yet. Even now the nearest church is three states away from where we live. So during my stay in the US, I had not been regularly attending church services. In addition, although from time to time we had Bible Studies and prayers at home, the rest of my family members had yet to receive baptism and become part of God's family. This in itself was a transgression against God's love and glory. We knew God is love and would forgive us if we sincerely and deeply repented of our transgressions. So during Grace's illness, we prayed long and hard to God daily for His forgiveness, and my family members resolved to receive baptism in His holy name. At the same time we also asked our relatives and church members to pray for us. At this time, a church minister invited us to attend the forthcoming Youth and Spiritual Convocation in Elizabeth Church, New Jersey. Through the help and arrangement of the ministers and relatives, we were able to attend despite the doctors' reservations about Grace's condition. At the convocation, we were deeply touched to learn that during the two weeks preceding our arrival, the church had been fasting and praying for us. With so many loving brothers' and sisters' intercession, we believed God

would answer their prayers of faith and love. Not only did God not reject us, we also received showers of blessings beyond our greatest expectations. My wife received the most precious Holy Spirit during the first day of fasting prayer. On the second day Grace also received the Holy Spirit. The night before my family was baptised, many church members remained in church after the evening evangelistic service to pray beyond midnight for the baptism. During the baptism, both my wife and Grace saw the vision of the blood of Jesus Christ. After the baptism, the paleness in Grace's face and the coldness in her hands disappeared.

We had to return to Mississippi the morning following baptism because Grace still needed weekly transfusions at the medical centre. From the airport, we went directly to the medical centre for the pre-scheduled test. Miraculously, Grace's blood count actually increased! God had restored her bone marrow's normal production of red blood cells. Having seen God's power, our faith grew stronger and Grace stopped taking the prescribed medicine. Instead, we relied on praying harder everyday, knowing that many brothers and sisters in Christ were doing the same. We continued with our morning fasting prayer for three months. Thank God, Grace's blood count continued to increase and now she has completely recovered. ►

Testimonies

By the love of God, during these past four years, Grace has been leading a healthy life filled with physical activities. She has also participated in numerous spiritual convocations and seminars, and visited many churches in Taiwan and Hong Kong. She is currently pursuing her university education in California.

Though we had a belief in God in the past, through Grace's illness we have experienced Him. From this extraordinary incident, there are several points deeply felt by us that we would like to share:

- Our God is the sole source of life. He is also the greatest physician. He created not only all life in the universe, but every cell in our body. Only He has the absolute power and authority to heal all diseases and restore health and life. Believing in Him is the foundation and the beginning of all healing (Jn 11:25; Mt 8:14-16; 9:35).
- Deep and earnest prayer is the foundation of our daily faith and spiritual strength.
- The greatness of God's love and power is beyond human comprehension. If we come to Him with a repentant heart and a sincere, humble faith, He will eventually shower His mercy and grace upon us (Mt 7:7; Lk 15:17-32).
- Our health, peace and achievement come from His blessing. Without it, humans labour in vain. The world's knowledge, wealth and fame are temporary and cannot help when real trouble comes. God and our life of faith are most fundamental and should take priority over all else (Mt 6:33; Ps 127:1).

May all glory, power and praise be given to our Lord forever. Amen. ■