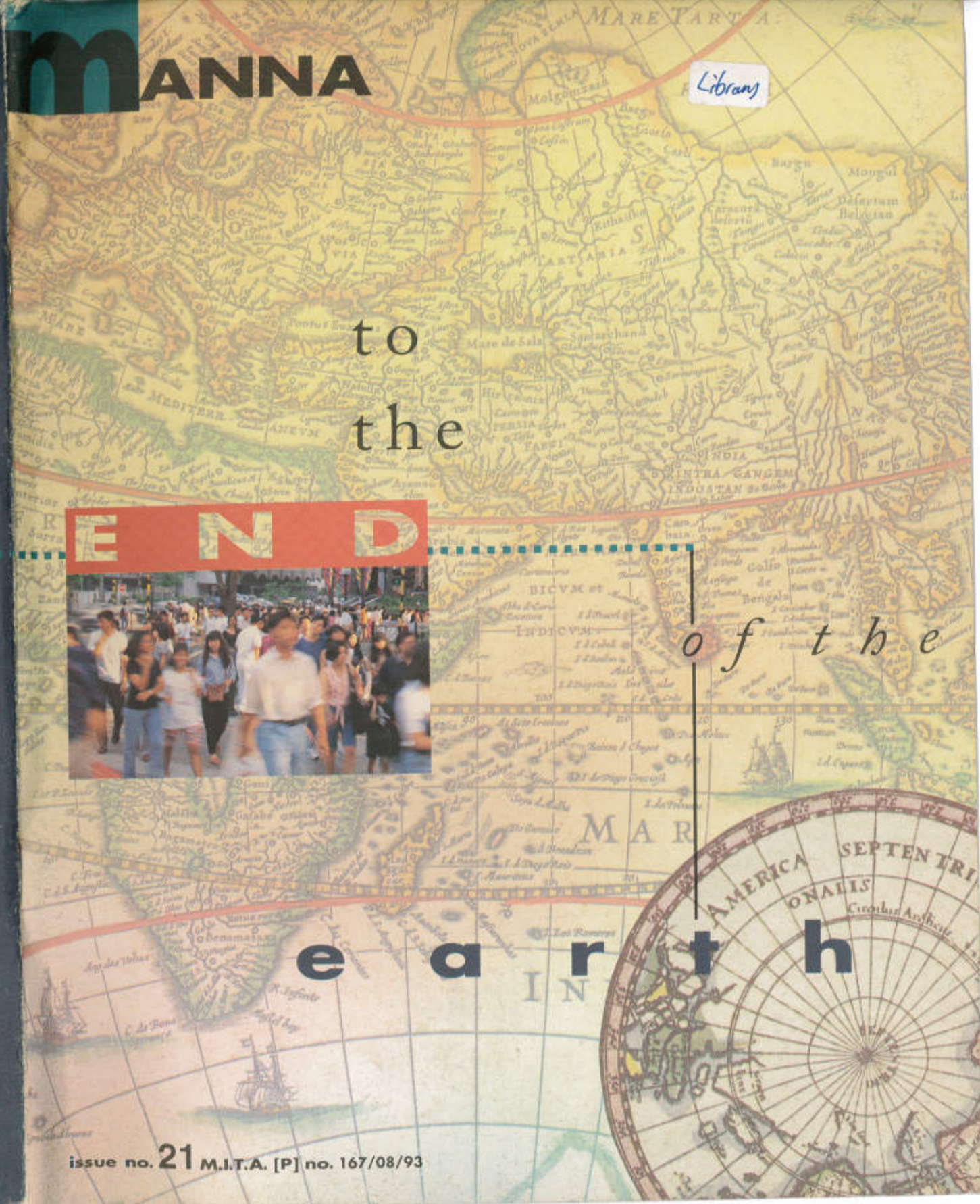




world evangelism

write a word for
THE WORD

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AT THE SIXTH WORLD DELEGATES

Conference held in Taiwan in March this year, I.A. decided to set up a world literary evangelical centre with the aim of publishing books in various languages actively so that the basic beliefs of our church, the important doctrines, the Gospel of salvation and the perfect truth can be preached to countries where the church has not yet been established. The conference stressed further that literary ministry should be the fore-runner of missionary efforts. This speaks well of the importance of literary evangelism. May the Lord bless the plan. "I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).

As announced in our last issue of Manna we temporarily ceased publication in order to upgrade the standard of the magazine. Our planning committee intended to organise a study tour to Taiwan and the United Kingdom: [1] to study their publication, [2] to enlist writers and [3] to take photographs for publication inserts. However, we did not go to Taiwan because I.A. informed us that GA Taiwan was busy receiving more than one hundred delegates and observers attending the Sixth World Delegates Conferences. Instead our group left for U.K. on 31 March, 1993.

At the Edinburgh Airport, we were greeted by a large group of brethren, among them were also deacons and deaconesses. We were truly moved by their love. We are thankful to the General Assembly of the United Kingdom to have made such plans for us to visit the seven churches including a prayer house in the U.K.

One thing we cherish very much is the love and warmth the U.K. members have showered upon us. We had dialogue sessions in every church except in Elgin where service ended at almost 3 o'clock in the morning. During the sessions, a survey form was distributed to seek ways and means to improve the publication. We also sought contributions for articles and witnessings. With concerted efforts, we believe Manna will be a universal True Jesus Church publication, not merely a Singapore church journal. Praise the Lord, the participants in the dialogue sessions showed much enthusiasm to improve the publication. Their responses can be seen from the result of the survey published in this issue.

We observed two exemplary features about the U.K. churches: [1] Every church lays strong emphasis in religious education. The set up in Newcastle church is very impressive. But one problem they face is the lack of teaching materials. This is

experienced in other parts of the English speaking countries as well. [2] Their devotion in magnifying God is very inspiring. In Edinburgh, they now have two places of worship following the recent renovation of the premises in Gilford Park. The Sunderland members will be rebuilding their church shortly and in London, a five-storey building will be dedicated to the Lord next year. Another observation is that we now have brethren, originally from such diverse places as Africa, Middle East and the West Indies, who rely solely on our English publications. In addition, most of the second generation believers (the first generation believers are mostly immigrants from Ap-chau, HongKong) who were born and bred in the U.K. cannot read and write Chinese. One source disclosed that there are no less than 700 who cannot understand our church publications from Taiwan. In view of the current emigration trend of our brethren, notably from Taiwan to the English speaking countries, we are inclined to think that the need for English reading materials will increase. It is really hoped that believers who have a good command of English and a flair of writing will contribute articles.

In this issue, the feature article, "We are His Witnesses" tells us that as members of the True Jesus Church, each one of us has an invaluable role to play in the propagation of the message of salvation. Further, we have to make full use of the present to strive for a progressive and dynamic faith to lead a life worthy of the Lord's calling, "such that when we have to bow out from this stage of life, we are ensured that we have adequately testified to the world that we are the followers of Christ". Under practical Christian living, the article, "Do we care?" makes us aware of our responsibility towards our fellowmen. The society is so ill that a lot of people suffer from untold miseries. This happens every day and everywhere so much so that we tend to be indifferent and cold by thinking that it is not our business. Is this the right attitude? Under religious education, the article, "Mum and Dad, what shall I be?" is an interesting writing portraying the anxiety of parents in Singapore regarding their children's future. Is this also the anxiety in the society you live in? If you care to know more about Manna then you must not miss the "Summary of Manna Survey". It is interesting to note the expectations of our readers who have so frankly spoken. From this issue onward we have also provided a column known as "Echo" containing letters from our readers. So if you have any suggestion, idea or constructive criticism, do write to us.

WE ARE HIS W I T N E S S E S

ON 25 TO 28 MARCH 1993, the International Assembly of the True Jesus Church [IA] held her first ever symposium. With the chosen theme of 'Strategies Toward World Evangelism', presenters shared with the audience their personal experiences in the Lord's ministry, their hopes and aspiration for the future. They also expressed their views on such issues as the global integration and utilisation of resources, cultural pluralism and world evangelism, theological studies and church growth, youth participation in the ministry, IA finance and reorganisation. In all, some twenty papers were presented.

BY LEE JIN

With the 21st century a few years away, the symposium was timely. The invaluable messages presented will assist the church in developing an effective global strategy for the coming decades of the next century. As individual members of the True Jesus Church, it is also timely for us to identify our own contribution toward world evangelism. Do we have a role to play in this global ministry? Or, do we feel that with our limited ability and strength, world evangelism is best left with the 'professionals', namely, members of the International and General Assemblies and the full time preachers and ministers? The question is, what does the Lord Jesus require of us?

Prior to His ascension, the Lord Jesus gave His followers an important commission. When the Holy Spirit comes, they shall be His witnesses to the end of the world. They are to propagate the good tidings to the entire human race, so all will come to believe in Him and receive the salvation of God. Quite rightly, we have acknowledged this commission by taking up the task of proclaiming the message orally as well as through the written word. But these by themselves are incomplete. From the teachings of the Lord Jesus, we would note that the bearers of the message themselves are also important. Time and again, this point is stressed. In their everyday life, they are to manifest such distinctive characteristics that others could tell that they are the

Lord's disciples: they have to establish a community that is built upon the foundation of love (Jn 13:35), and members of this community are to be "the light of the world", "the salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13-14), the ones who bring the lost souls of this world to the Lord through their good deeds and their Christ-like behaviours. The teaching is clear: the bearers of the message are the Lord's witnesses.

Every member of the True Jesus Church has an invaluable role to play in the propagation of the message of salvation. We can participate in the evangelistic activities of our local church. We can share the message with our friends and neighbours. And just as important, we can testify through our way of life that we are the followers of Christ. It is time to take stock and assess our contributions to the evangelistic ministry. Have we played our part in preaching the Gospel of salvation? Are we effective as His witnesses?

We are privileged to have received the complete truth of salvation. This gift, freely received, must be freely shared amongst all. We have to preach the salvation of God at all times. But in practice, we can only orally preach to those who are willing to listen. Likewise, our literary evangelism can only reach those who are willing to read our Gospel tracts. In fact, it is through the way we conduct ourselves that we can reach out to society at large. When we demonstrate



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to the world that there are love and warmth within our true community of faith, that its members are gentle, caring and kind, humanitarians in this inhumane world, they will realise that Christianity does make a difference; that it does change a person and give inner peace, true joy and everlasting hope. They will wish to know more and be receptive to the message of salvation. It is therefore vital that our oral and literary evangelism are supported by our moral and ethical excellence.

William Shakespeare in his comedy *As You Like It* (act II, sc vii) describes the world as a stage, where all men and women are merely the players with their exits and their entrances. There is some truth in this expression. In a sense, life is indeed like a stage. We are born into this world where we live out our days and in the end, we breathe our last breath and we depart. But, unlike the comedy of Shakespeare where his actors can rehearse before the actual show, as well as give repeated performances, in this stage of life, we only have one chance to give the 'performance of our life'. There is no rehearsal, no second chance. At one performance, we either make it or break it. This makes it crucial that we understand the plot and the role in which we are placed. Only then can we give it our best performance.



Sometimes, the pressures of modern living make it hard for us to give our best performance for the glory of God. For a start, we are constantly reminded of the need to climb the social ladder, to make a better living for ourselves and for our families. Phrases like 'upwardly mobile', 'upgrading oneself' have entered into our everyday vocabulary. Our energies are channelled into meeting society's expectations, and we find ourselves chasing after material well-being. To an extent, it is inevitable that we will be governed by the demands of our environment. For instance, we may be reading an intensive study programme or working in a fast moving organisation, either of which demands a lot of our time and energy. We may have no choice but to put in the long hours. But as followers of Christ, we cannot lose sight of the

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fact that we also have to live up to the divine requirements. These are by far more important than those imposed by our society. When these two requirements compete for our attention, we ought to exercise wisdom in order to make the right choice, that we do not misplace priorities between the spiritual and the material.

In this hectic life, it is easy to lose that inner quietude of mind to reflect upon the direction of our faith, to assess whether we are making the most out of our brief time in this world, whether we are investing wisely and laying our treasures in heaven, and not on earth. The danger is that we may be haphazardly muddling through our journey of faith. We may not have declined in our faith; we continue to attend church services, we offer tithes and we pray and read the Bible everyday. But, we make no progress either. Our relationship with God today is the same as that a year ago, likewise our knowledge of Him. Our spiritual character too, remains unchanged. There are no improvements.

It is important to ensure that we are not in this sad state of affairs. Despite our busy schedule, for the sake of our eternal life, we have to somehow retreat from the cares of the world, to quiet our hearts and examine where we stand before God. When one first accepts Christ, he is like a little child who decides to give the best of everything to his father. And if he continues



to live up to this goal, the best that he could give to his father will become progressively better as he becomes older, more mature and understands the extent of his father's sacrifices and love for him. When we search our hearts, we may feel that we have given our best efforts in our journey of faith. But is our best good enough? Is what we can offer to God today better than the best we had offered a year ago? Are we, like a normal little child, giving our heavenly Father our best which become better with time?

Time and tide wait for no man. We cannot afford to procrastinate. We cannot put back the clock to retrieve the past. That is gone forever. We have to make full use of the present, to strive for a progressive and dynamic faith, to lead a life worthy of the Lord's calling,

such that when we have to bow out from this stage of life, we are assured that we have adequately testified to the world that we are the followers of Christ.

In the 16th century, a young Christian, deeply distressed by the ignorance of the clergy of his time, resolved to make the Bible, then available primarily in its original languages, more accessible to the general public by translating it to English. This task became his lifetime work. To achieve this mission, he underwent tremendous difficulties. He was seen to be a traitor by his own countrymen and was arrested by the King of England for undertaking this project. He had to flee from his own country to continue his work in exile. Yet, his enthusiasm remained unimpaired to the last. During the last winter of his life, as he laid in prison, he wrote to a friend requesting for his Hebrew books in order that he could continue with the translation of the Old Testament books. Against all odds, William Tyndale was determined to change the status quo of his days. And armed with this goal, he worked single-mindedly to complete his mission. Although he was executed before he could finish his work, he had nevertheless charted the way for others to follow. And because of the fortitude of one man, we are able to hold in our hands an English Bible today.

At various points in our journey of faith, we may have resolved to be a

He
has promised: when
you pass through the
waters I will be with
you; and through the
rivers, they shall not
overwhelm you;
when you walk
through fire you shall
not be burned, and
the flame shall not
consume you...For I
am the Lord your
God...Fear not, for I
am with
YOU.

better Christian, and to play a more active role in the evangelistic as well as pastoral ministry of the church. Such resolutions are easy to make, but often they are difficult to achieve as they have to pass the test of time, where obstacles and disappointments will arise. The Devil too will lay traps along the way. When faced with these, the easy way out is to give up and revert to the status quo. This is where the need for fortitude comes in. The realisation of any resolution requires time and effort. It is a laborious process where there are no short cuts. Often hard work and toils, suffering and pains, all form part and parcel of the process. What is important is that we hold on to our initial resolution, and are prepared to meet with all forms of challenges.

When, over a period of time, we begin to lose heart and there is a gradual slackening of resolve, the author of Hebrews offers invaluable advice. Fix your eyes upon the Lord Jesus, he suggests (Heb 12:2). And when we meditate upon the Lord Jesus' ministry, we can understand why this advice is given. For three long years, Jesus had to undergo physical hardships, where He Himself admitted that He had "nowhere to lay His head" (Lk 9:58). And what must be even worse was the fact that even His close companions often failed to understand the purpose of His mission (Mk 8:17, 21; 9:32). They argued amongst themselves as to who was the greatest (Mk 9:34). Eventually one of



them went to the extent of betraying him. On top of all these, the impending suffering on the cross loomed closer with each passing day. Yet, our Lord never gave up. He knew that He had to complete the work entrusted to Him (Jn 4:34b). With fortitude, He fulfilled His mission. If we are to imitate Him, we have to imitate this virtue of His too.

From his letters, we could see that Apostle Paul understood the importance of fortitude. Ever since his conversion on the road to Damascus, he dedicated his entire life to live up to the purpose of his calling: to be an apostle to the gentiles. Along the way, he met with such hardships that he confessed he was "despaired of life itself" and he felt that he had received the "sentence of death" (2 Cor 1:8-9). Yet he was able to remain resolute until the very end.

Towards the last days of his life, he shared with Timothy the secret of his success: "The Lord stood by me and gave me strength" (2 Tim 4:17); a simple yet comforting statement for all who are facing hardships in their strive to become effective witnesses for the Lord.

As we walk along the rugged terrains of life, let us always remember that we are never alone. The Lord is always near by. When we accepted Him as our personal Saviour, He did not promise us a life free from hardships. In our strive for spiritual maturity, we, like the post-exilic community, have to "pass through the waters" and "walk through fire" (Isa 43:2). But we also have the precious assurance that He will always be there for us, as He has promised: when you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not over-

whelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you...For I am the Lord your God...Fear not, for I am with you (Isa 43:2,3a,5a). With the Lord on our side, we can bear effective testimony for Him everyday of our life.

The development and implementation of a strategy towards world evangelism is not confined to the various organised bodies within the True Jesus Church. Every member can have his/her own personal strategy towards world evangelism. The Lord Jesus wants everyone of His followers to be His witnesses. We have a responsibility to meet this divine directive. Our stay in this world is temporal. Let us not be so entangled by the cares it imposes that we misplace our priorities. Let us also avoid being in the consequence caused by "a little slumber and a little folding of the hands" (Prov 24:30-34).

Under the guidance of God, the True Jesus Church has been established in the oriental as well as the occidental world. Much of this can be credited to the dedication and laborious efforts of

both the early and contemporary workers of the true church. As the church moves towards the 21st century, it is time for every conscientious member to identify the role he or she can play in promoting the complete Gospel entrusted to the true church. Are we equipped to bring the church into the 21st century? Where do we stand in terms of our knowledge of God and His Word? How much time do we devote in prayers each day? And in our daily behaviours, can others see Jesus in us? These are pertinent questions for our contemplation as we prepare ourselves for the challenges of the new century. We cannot remain complacent with the efforts to date. Rather we have to build upon the good works by our predecessors and gear ourselves up as we strategise towards more effective world evangelism. Remember, we do not cease, till our Gospel reaches "the end of the earth".

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Exhortation

Who can enter the kingdom of GOD?

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT AN EARTHLY ONE. It exists in a spiritual dimension not detectable by our carnal senses. It is a realm where God reigns sovereign, a habitation which He prepared for us even before the creation of the world. Such a kingdom cannot be shaken and will never change, for it is untainted by earthly sorrow, sickness or death; aptly called the kingdom of Heaven. This enviable place is the ultimate goal of every Christian, and his greatest hope. If anyone has hope in Christ only in the present life, he is of all men

most pitiable (1 Cor 15: 19). But Jesus said, "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven; but he that does the will of my father who is in Heaven" (Mt 7:21) and also, "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves" (Mt 23:15). These are serious remarks which demand serious pondering and self-evaluation.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Every believer properly taught in the fundamentals understands the necessity to be "born of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5) – that one must be baptised for the remission of sins and must receive the Holy Spirit for his constant renewal (Tit 3:5). However, the full implication of being born of the Spirit – the utter transformation of our carnal nature into one that reflects the very spiritual qualities of the son of God (Rom 8:29; 12:2), has not always been sufficiently stressed. What then are the marks of grace manifested by one who would eventually be accepted into the pearly gates?



childlikeness

All four Gospels bear the account of people bringing their young ones before the Lord Jesus so that He might touch them. When His disciples tried to stop them, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child shall not enter it" (Lk 18:15-17).

This incident clearly tells us that people in the kingdom of God are like little children. Therefore the most lovable and beautiful period of a person's life is his childhood, wherein one may almost catch glimpses of man's original guilelessness and innocence.

This suggests that though infants are born with depraved natures, the ability to sin increases only with age, just as does understanding. So Paul reminds us, "Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking, be mature" (1 Cor 14:20). The Corinthian believers should not be babes in understanding but be mature.

transcending pharisaic righteousness

Jesus taught His disciples, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 5:20). "Righteousness" refers to doing what is right in the eyes of God. In order to enter the kingdom of Heaven, our behaviour must excel over that of the Scribes and Pharisees. From the teachings of the Lord Jesus, we know that the Scribes and Pharisees were not ignorant of doing righteous deeds. They were taught from the Books of the Law and they placed special emphasis on displaying before others, their ardent devotion in observing the Law.

As recorded in the Gospel according to Luke, a Pharisee would say these words when he is praying in the temple, "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get" (Lk 18:11-12). Though we cannot deny that they indeed performed all these, we know that there is much left to be desired, since the Lord wants us to excel over them. To do so, we must first examine their weaknesses.

The first is *arrogance*, as recorded in the Scripture: "They do all their deeds to be seen by men; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the places of honour at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called rabbi by men" (Mt 23:5-7). The arrogance of the Scribes and Pharisees, and their love for self glory are clearly described. Since they desire the glory of men, they will not receive the reward of God. Therefore, we must not be arrogant nor crave for vain glory. Rather let us be girded with humility, serving one another. The things that we have to do, let us do them silently. Let us not boast about our efforts. This is the message behind the Lord Jesus' saying that we ought not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing.

Next is *hypocrisy*. The Scribes and Pharisees were adept at putting up pretences. They loved to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the street. In doing so, their intention was not that of petition towards God but rather, that they might be seen by men, so as to receive their praises. For instance, although on the surface, they seemed to regard highly the observances of the Sabbath day, they actually did not understand the true significance of keeping the Sabbath. Therefore, the Lord Jesus rebuked them, calling them hypocrites and white washed tombs, which are beautiful outwardly, but are full of dead man's bones inside (Mt 23:27-28). In whatever we do, our actions must be in accordance with our

intentions. The Lord Jesus said, "First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean" (Mt 23:26). This is to teach us that we must first adorn our inner self, before a good image of truth without hypocrisy will naturally appear.

We have to learn from the virtues of the Scribes and Pharisees but remain wary of their weaknesses. We have to be alert and keep ourselves in check, performing our duties with sincerity and living our lives befitting true Christians, thus transcending the righteousness of the Pharisees.

obeying the Father's will

The Lord Jesus once said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in Heaven. On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers'" (Mt 7:21-23). The Lord Jesus will surely come one day. At that time, there will be many who are left outside the gates of Heaven, weeping and gnashing their teeth. Only those who have obeyed the will of God will be allowed to enter and enjoy eternal life.

What is the will of the heavenly Father? The Bible teaches, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that you abstain from unchastity; that each of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like heathens who do not know God" (1 Thess 4:3-5). It also says, "See that none of you repay evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess 5:15, 18b).

These two passages of Scripture clearly tell us that it is the will of God that we be holy and do good to others. The Scripture also records that one should "strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). When the Lord Jesus comes again, only those who are holy will be able to meet Him. To be holy is to depart from all unrighteousness, fornication, idolatry, adultery, theft, covetousness, drunkenness, and so on. These are acts that we should not commit. Those who practise them cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-11). One must also have the full stature of a Christian, allowing no unclean, filthy, foolish talk or coarse jesting to proceed from one's mouth (Eph 5:3-5). In one's strife for holiness, one must always pray, relying on the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, "God chose you from the beginning to be saved through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thess 2:13).

striving for the kingdom

The Lord Jesus said, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and men of violence take it by force" (Mt 11:12). In this world, there is nothing that can be gained without any toil. For students to obtain good grades, they must put in effort in their studies. For a farmer to obtain the precious produce of the land, he must work hard at cultivating the land. Though Christians are saved by grace, this does not exempt them from necessary effort. What should believers specifically strive for?

Firstly, strive for perfection. The Lord Jesus said, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). This is a reference to the nature of a believer, in terms of his spiritual cultivation in practising the Word. The level of perfection is to be measured against the standard of the Lord. Whatever the disposition of God is, we must also be likewise. This cannot be achieved in a short period of time, but rather through continual striving. Peter says, "For this very reason make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control... so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:5-11). Paul was one who strived for perfection. We normally reckon that for someone who had done so much divine work, salvation seems a natural consequence. But Paul continued to strive with fear and trembling, never relenting. He said, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own" (Phil 3:12). Paul reckoned that only upon the attainment of the life of Christ in his own body, could he be assuredly saved. Therefore he once said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21). "To die is gain" refers to the laying hold of salvation and entering the kingdom of Heaven.



It is quite clear now, that in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven, one must strive to complete the heavenly journey. However, the road heaven-ward is by no means easy; it is long and undulating. The Lord Jesus said, "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life" (Mt 7:14). The exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt was in order to enter the land of Canaan. After they had crossed the Red Sea, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. In this long period of time, they underwent desolation, led a monotonous life and endured hardships. Very often, they were intimidated and attacked by enemies. Their experiences prefigure the sufferings a Christian pilgrim would have to undergo. As such, we should persevere and strive to run the race till we reach the final destination. Paul mentioned the Israelites who had faltered and died in the wilderness as an example to encourage believers (1 Cor 10:1-11). We must emulate Paul, as he himself had encouraged us: "Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14). Paul had run the race with hope, endurance, faith and perseverance. In the end, he had won. He said before passing on to glory, "I have finished the race... Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness" (2 Tim 4:7-8). This is the fruit of perseverance.

Come unto Me...

I will give you REST



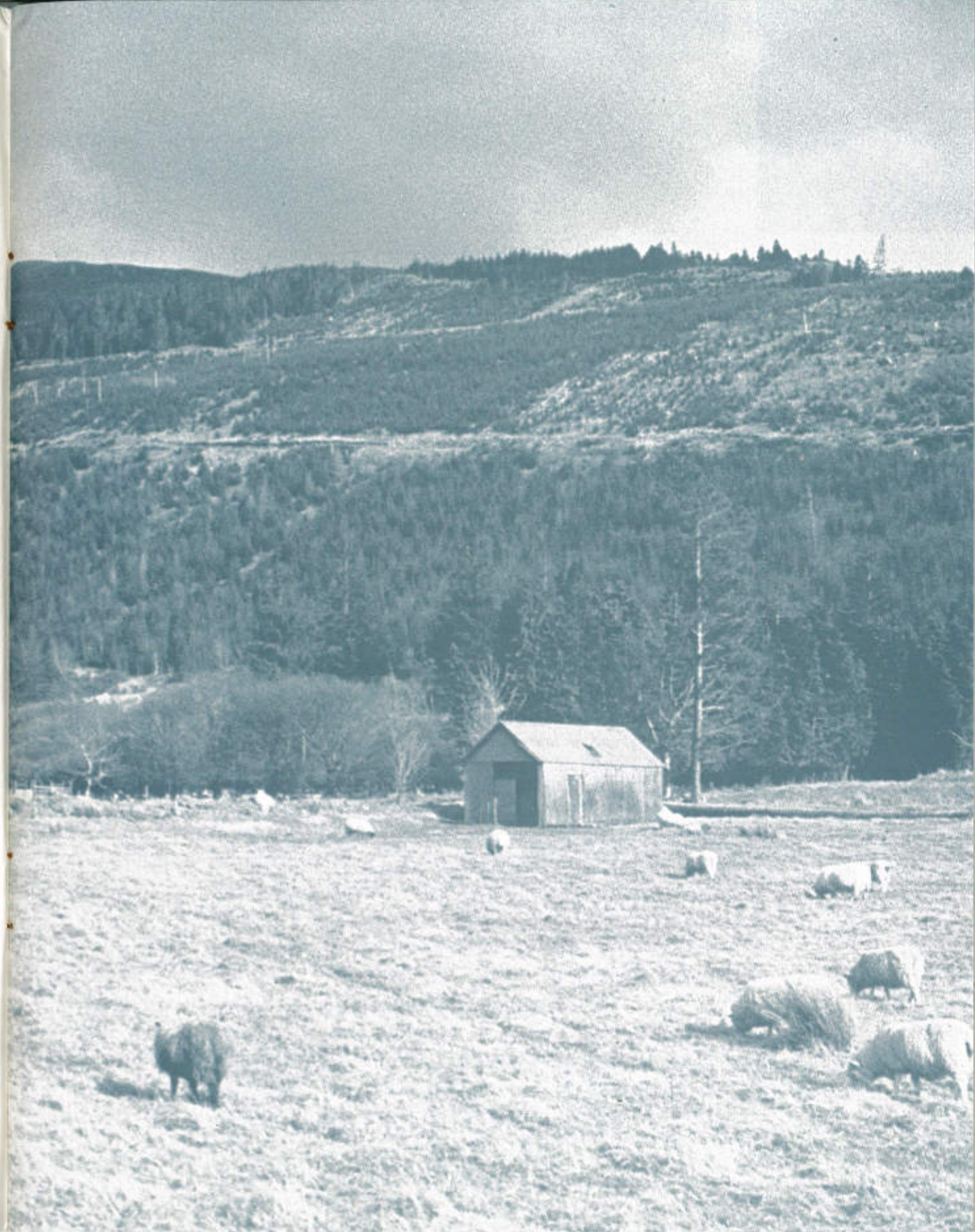
HUMAN BEINGS have never before had to cope with so much psychological turbulence as the modern man. As students, we worry about examinations and grades. Out of school, we are anxious over our jobs and positions. We strain ourselves and try to stretch out time so as to maintain or upgrade our living standards. Furthermore, because we live in an age of complex human relationships, we have to constantly cope with different types of people. It has become a common thing hearing complaints of being "stressed". Being "busy" has become the very epitome of life in the modern societies.

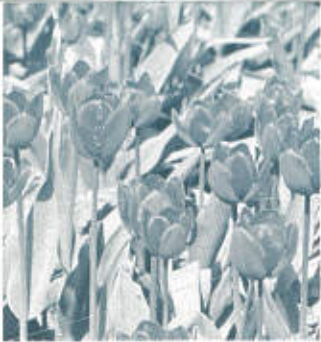
Most of us are familiar with the invitation of our Lord Jesus: Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Mt 11:28). Jesus calls us into His rest, that we may echo from our hearts the quietness and calm experienced by King David—I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul (Ps 131:2). It is a call of love. Jesus sees our anxious and weathered minds. He stands waiting with His arms open to embrace us, just like the father awaiting the return of his prodigal son (Luke 15:20).

Yet, tearing down the layer of verse-familiarity, how many of us truly experience the rest promised in Jesus' invitation? Was it not a long time since we last had a deep, heart-to-heart communion with our Heavenly Father? Haven't our hearts been often too distracted by thoughts of the extent of tomorrow's workload or the unfinished work today? Do we not wonder when these incessant burdens will ever end? Or have we accepted such toils as an inescapable reality of life?

Clearly, there exists a discrepancy between what we should experience and what we are experiencing; between the rest Jesus calls us into and the unrest prevalent in our lives. There are two basic issues underlying such a discrepancy.

BY LIM SIOK HONG





Our concept of Life

A person's concept of life directs his actions, lifestyle and the pre-occupations of his mind. We, the true believers of Jesus, have been called out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Pet 2:9). We should no longer conform to the views about life held by the people living in this world of spiritual darkness. Today's world can be likened to a departmental store where the price tags have been tampered with and switched about. What is actually of little value is now a more highly priced than what is in fact a great treasure, and vice versa.

Jesus says, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of things he possesses." This however is not what the world views. Today, man is almost invariably valued by the amount of possessions he owns, the extent of his wealth, his status and his power. The pursuit of these worldly "valuables" have swept through the whole of mankind. As Christians, we must have the wisdom from God to see these as the ploy of the devil to hold the world more tightly in his clutches.

The cunning of the Devil lies in the delusion he creates for many of us that worldly pursuits need not be at the expense of our walk with God. The Bible states clearly that he who loves the world will not have the love of God in his heart (1 Jn 2:15) and one cannot serve God and mammon at the same time (Mt 6:24). These are true sayings. One evidence of the truth of these verses is the very fact that many Christians are too "stressed" or too "busy" to enjoy the rest and quietude promised by our Lord Jesus. Many backslided in faith because they were taken in by the Devil. They could not recognise the true values of life. In their pursuit of the worldly "valuables", they found that they could not keep up with a close relationship with God simultaneously. Ultimately they were swept away. This is one reason why we continue not to see a bigger congregation despite more names being added to the register. We continue to hear the unheeded, repeated appeal "the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."

Life is like a vapour that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. For how long is this vapour going to last, one can never tell. No one can ever be sure he will live to see his tomorrow (Jas 4:14). It is hence a matter of immediacy that we decide how we want to live our lives. The decision is ours whether to join the world in its never-ending pursuits of transient "valuables" or to choose a godly life with contentment (1 Tim 6:6).



Our faith in Jesus' invitation

Even when we have chosen to opt out of the pursuits of the world, we continue to live in the world. Cares continue to surround us, like thorns that sprung up to choke the seeding in the parable of the sower (Mt 13:7).

The following anecdote can illustrate such a situation: There was a man carrying a very heavy load on his back, struggling every step on a road. A kind man on an ox-cart came along and urged him to hop onto his cart. Gratefully, he accepted the lift. After travelling for some distance, the driver turned back only to be shocked that the man on his cart was still carrying the load on his back!

The Lord's salvation for us is one that has power. Jesus saves our souls. At the same time, He also saves us from the material and mental bondage. The Bible tells us that we can entrust all our cares to Him (1 Pet 5:7). Jesus Himself assures us: Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows (Mt 10:29-31). So, we are precious in the sight of the Lord! Surely He will take care of every detail of our lives.

The cross of Jesus will save us into the eternal Heaven in the future. But it also has power to grant us peace and rest amidst the heavy burdens of life. Apostle Paul exhorts thus: Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called... (Col 3:15). Let us not know "Jesus cares" only in theory; let us bring all our cares to Him and experience for ourselves the wonderful effects of a complete trust in the Lord.

More than two thousand years ago, God's message came to the people of Israel through the prophet Isaiah:

***"In returning and rest you shall be saved;
In quietness and in trust shall be your strength." Is 30:15***

Today, these words are all the more relevant to us, the spiritual Israelites. God is calling us to return; to examine our concept of values, to truly entrust our all to Him that we may be saved and have strength upon strength.



Do we care?

IN THE SUMMER OF 1992, attention was once again drawn to the plights of the people in Africa. Newspapers reported how famine, war and debt were threatening the lives of 40 million people there. In Somalia, the situation was so severe that relief workers rounded numbers of dead to the nearest 10,000. 1.5 million of the country's estimated 6 million faced imminent starvation. Worse may be yet to come. Drought has also struck the southern part of the continent, creating an arid swath through 11 countries.

But Africa is only an example. In the floods that swept Pakistan in September 1992, at least 2,500 people were drowned. This natural disaster, one of the worst in 45 years, destroyed innumerable villages, food crops and livestock, and left tens of thousands homeless. Relief organizations had to airlift food and subsistence for these victims.

To us, these crises may seem far removed from our every day life. So many have occurred in recent years that we have come to accept them as nothing more than just another piece of news, another set of statistics to support the view that the Lord's second coming is near. Besides, places like Africa and Pakistan are like a world apart from those of us living in stable, affluent societies. Yet, poverty, homelessness and deprivation exist even in our own backyards.

As Christians, do we have an obligation to alleviate the suffering of our fellow human beings? Indeed, our hearts may be moved when we are confronted with malnourished faces staring hauntingly at us from our television screens. And we feel sorry for the homeless that wander around in our cities begging, who live rough and have to make do with cardboard boxes for protection at night. But are such expressions of sympathy on our part sufficient? Doesn't God expect us to do more?

As part of His divine plan, God incarnated into the human plane some two thousand years ago, to open a way for humanity to return to Him. He achieved this through the blood He shed on the cross. When a person confesses his sins, repents and receives baptism in the mode as prescribed by the Bible, he will have the living hope of eternal life. Yet more than this, while Jesus was in this world, He also led

There are children rejected by their parents, elderly men and women forgotten by their families, people who through no fault of their own have found themselves jobless and even homeless ... such human suffering and social deprivation are all around us, if only we take the time to look.

BY LEE JIN

an exemplary life for all future generations to emulate. If we are to follow Him, we have to walk the way He did (Jn 12:26). In order to search for a Christian answer for the questions posed above, we have to return to the Scripture.

death toll rises to 290

specify whether the new figure was a final count of the victims, said that four police officers were among those killed.

The newspaper added that about 400 houses were swept away by water from the burst dam,

leaving 3,000 people homeless.

It said that a breach of the six-year-old, 71-m-high dam in China's western Qinghai province brought 3.3 million cu m of water crashing down on villages below. — AFP

During His brief ministry, the Lord Jesus travelled through the land of Palestine, from Galilee in the north, to Judaea in the south. Along His journeys, He encountered many lost souls who, deprived of God, were wandering aimlessly through life. So He preached to them about the Kingdom of God (Mt 4:17), the need to repent and be reconciled once again with God. But Jesus did not preach this message in oblivion of everything else. He also catered for the physical well-being of those around Him. As the Scripture testifies, He performed miracles of food to feed the crowd (Mt 14:13-21, 15:32-38), and miracles of healing to relieve human sufferings (Mt 4:23-24, 15:30). The author of Matthew aptly summarizes the Lord's ministry as one of preaching and healing (Mt 4:23, 9:35).

What is more, the message of salvation and the miracles were not confined to the Jews. Jesus' disciples had to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). In the last days, "men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at the table in the kingdom of God" (Lk 13:29). Just as the message of

salvation was universal, so were the miracles. As He fed the four thousand, He did not instruct His disciples to distribute only to His own people. All who were present received a share of this providential care (Mt 15:29-38). In Capernaum, He did not turn down the request of the centurion to heal his servant (Mt 8:5-13). And once travelling along the border between Samaria and Galilee, He healed ten lepers, one of whom was a Samaritan, member of a community which did not associate with the Jews (Lk 17:11-19; Jn 4:9).

In many instances, the Lord Jesus' actions were prompted by His compassion. Time and time again, the Gospel writers attested to this fact. When He saw the widow of Nain mourning for her son's death, Luke states that Jesus "had compassion on her" and resurrected her son (Lk 7:13). The author of Mark relates that during the early days of His ministry, a leper approached Jesus for healing, and his request was granted because Jesus was "moved with pity" for him (Mk 1:40-41). Once, as Jesus was leaving Jericho, two blind men sitting by the roadside heard Him passing and cried out for help. Matthew records that Jesus "in pity" healed them (Mt 20:29-34). Even the feeding of the four thousand was an act of compassion. When Jesus saw how the crowds continued to stay with Him, He admitted to His disciples that He had compassion for the crowd and was unwilling to send them away on empty stomachs. As they had been with Him for three days, He feared that they might faint along their journey home (Mt 15:32-39).

As previously illustrated, Jesus cared for his fellowmen and did what He could for them. And in this respect, the greatest deed He undertook was the giving of His life in exchange for their souls. Deeply moved by this gesture, the apostle Paul confessed that the reason he lived a God-centered life was that Jesus, the Son of God, loved him and gave Himself for him (Gal 2:20). Today, it is through this gift of God that we have the hope of eternal life, and which enables us to lead a meaningful existence in this often incomprehensible world. As we meditate on this saving grace, we also have to remember that we, as His followers, have to emulate Him, and practise charity as part of our Christian living.

Indeed, the Lord Jesus has taught us the essence of giving, that such acts should be prompted by our hearts. After all, Christianity is a religion of the heart, of faith built upon inner conviction. It involves knowing whom and what we believe in, and manifesting this belief through our speech and our conduct, as a testimony to the world that we are the followers of the One who came to bring hope to a world without hope. So it should be that from our innermost being, the compassion in us is to be externalised into actions. Only then will we be able to give to humanity whatever is within our ability, not because we have to, but because we want to.

Jesus has shown us that compassion itself is insufficient. He not only had compassion for the needy. He actually helped them. As He travelled, He saw the human miseries which touched His kind and tender nature. And He did what He could to remove the pain and suffering. As His followers, we have to turn our feelings of compassion and sympathy into actions to find ways of helping and giving. After all, it is very easy to feel for those who are less fortunate but it takes courage to actively help them. Just consider, how many times have we stopped short of contributing to some worthwhile charity? Perhaps we were just about to write a cheque for a good cause and we stopped when we thought of the financial loss to us, or perhaps we had joined up for a task force to care for the homeless but we pulled out at the last minute when we realized the demand on our time.

Another touching feature in the Lord Jesus' acts is in the way He gave without condition. He did not select the recipients of His care. The crowd irrespective of gender and creed received His grace. As His



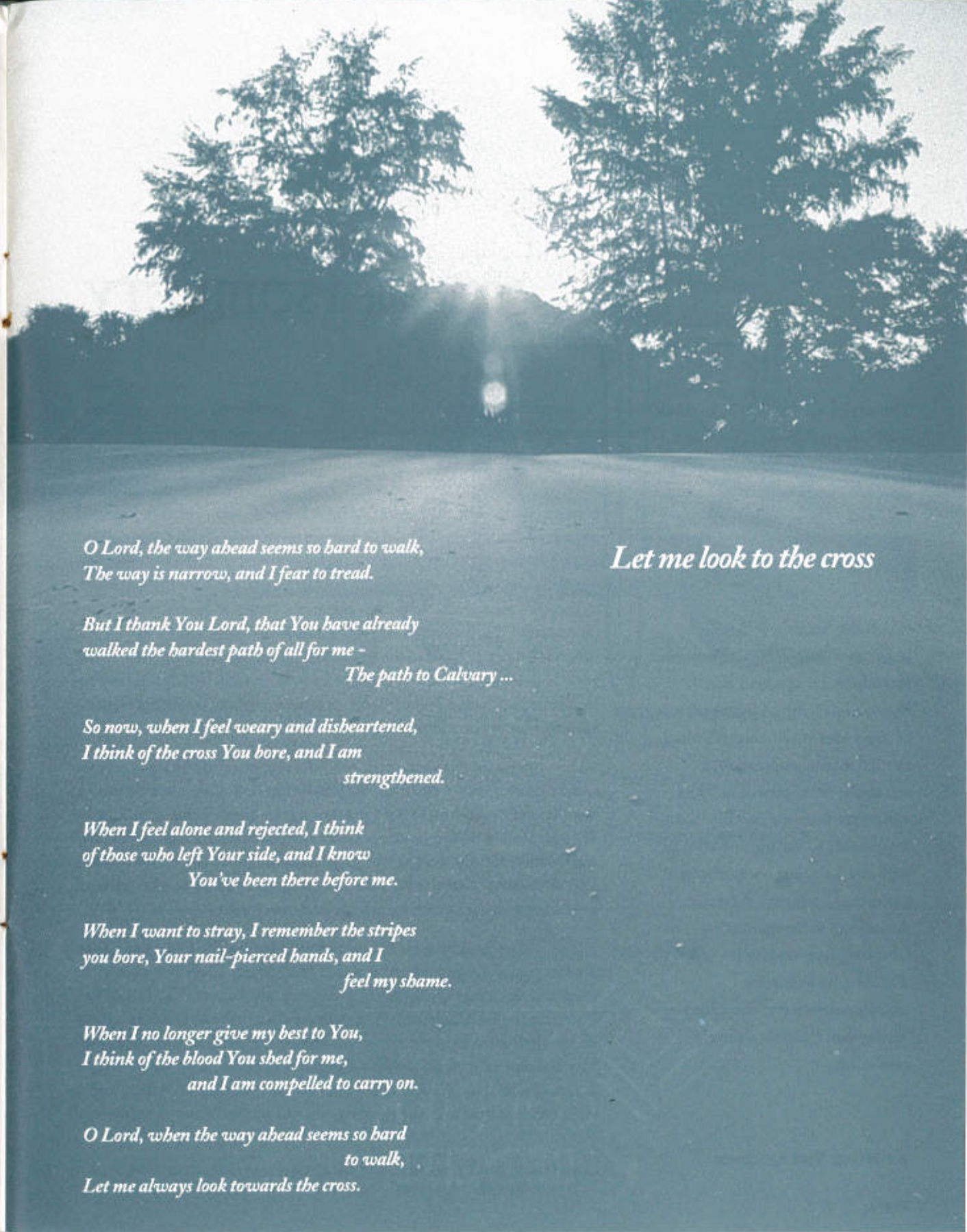
A pledge for a more peaceful world in the form of tiny folded birds symbolising freedom and drawings by Japanese students at the Hiroshima Memorial Hall in Japan

followers, this point is important. We are to extend our charity, without bias, to all who are in need, just as our heavenly Father gives sunshine and rain to both the righteous as well as the unrighteous (Mt 5:45).

As Christians, we are still part of society. Whilst we have to be vigilant not to be influenced by its decadence and falling morals, we cannot segregate ourselves. The Lord Jesus wants us to be the "light of the world" to set good examples such that others can see Him in us. We can only achieve this through social interactions with them. Therefore, let us not isolate ourselves but strive to increase our awareness of society's needs, not only in terms of their spiritual welfare, but also in terms of their daily well being. While we do not wish to give to the extent where our focus shifts from the spiritual to the social, we must not let our lack of caring make our preaching hypocritical (Js 2:14-16). And when we do take a closer look at the world around us, we will see the depressed, the homeless, the handicapped, the abused, the poor and the list is endless. How can we not care and help? The time has come for us to re-assess the meaning of following on the footsteps of our Lord Jesus. He had a compassionate and caring nature. He led a life of giving. And He contributed to the society of His days. Have we really emulated Him?

The Christian faith is a dynamic faith, one which constantly breaks new ground and soars new heights. As we learn more about the God we believe in and His expectations of us, let us search our hearts and re-appraise our values. Let us lend a helping hand to 'neighbours' less fortunate than us, to take the opportunity whilst we still can, to show that we care. Let us not turn a blind eye at the miseries of this world. Christians, like their kind and compassionate Master, have to live up to the axiom: it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

[The sequel 'Caring in Action' to be published in a future issue, will present some practical ways of caring for our neighbours.]



*O Lord, the way ahead seems so hard to walk,
The way is narrow, and I fear to tread.*

Let me look to the cross

*But I thank You Lord, that You have already
walked the hardest path of all for me -
The path to Calvary ...*

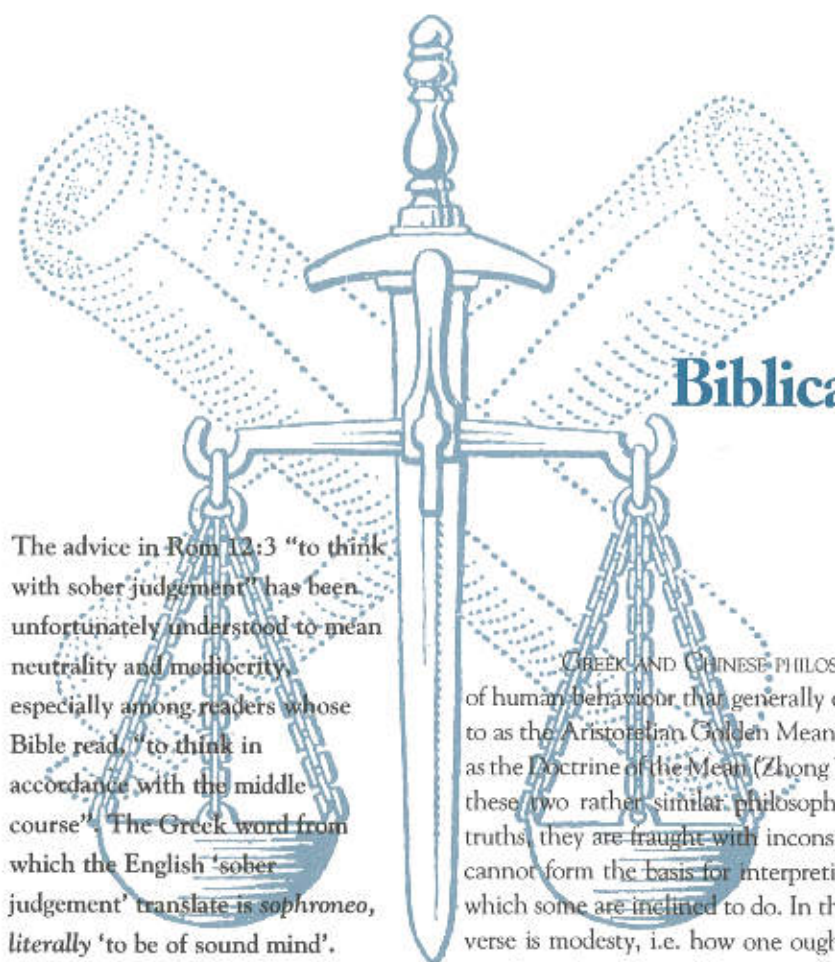
*So now, when I feel weary and disheartened,
I think of the cross You bore, and I am
strengthened.*

*When I feel alone and rejected, I think
of those who left Your side, and I know
You've been there before me.*

*When I want to stray, I remember the stripes
you bore, Your nail-pierced hands, and I
feel my shame.*

*When I no longer give my best to You,
I think of the blood You shed for me,
and I am compelled to carry on.*

*O Lord, when the way ahead seems so hard
to walk,
Let me always look towards the cross.*



Biblical SOBRIETY

The advice in Rom 12:3 “to think with sober judgement” has been unfortunately understood to mean neutrality and mediocrity, especially among readers whose Bible read, “to think in accordance with the middle course”. The Greek word from which the English ‘sober judgement’ translate is *sophroneo*, literally ‘to be of sound mind’. But in Greek thinking, soundness of mind means self-control, which in turn means moderation, a refraining from extremes. Thus *sophroneo* is etymologically ‘to be temperate’, ie ‘having self-control’ with the ‘avoiding both extremes’ undertone (compare different definitions of ‘temperate’ by LONGMAN and WEBSTER). This secular influence unfortunately led to the Chinese ‘zhong dao’ (‘middle course’) rendering.

GREEK AND CHINESE PHILOSOPHIES both advocate a certain mean of human behaviour that generally exists between two extremes. Referred to as the Aristotelian Golden Mean in Greek philosophy, it is expounded as the Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong) in Chinese philosophy. Though these two rather similar philosophical concepts do reflect some moral truths, they are fraught with inconsistencies. Being of *human* origin, they cannot form the basis for interpreting the *divine* principle in Rom 12:3, which some are inclined to do. In the first place, the subject matter of the verse is modesty, i.e. how one ought to view oneself, and not Christian moral conduct. Nevertheless, viewpoints stemming from the misapplication must themselves be addressed.

First, we examine other relevant scriptures¹ in which *sophroneo* and its other forms – *sophronos*, *sophrosune*, *sophron* – are used. (*Sophron*, literally ‘sound mind’ is the root word of all the other forms mentioned). They are used in relation with goodness, holiness, renouncing of irreligious and worldly passions, upright living, godliness, and preparation for Christ’s second coming. There is no hint of taking the middle course. Instead, we read of a vigilant guarding of high Christian morals.

Next, touching on the two ancient philosophies mentioned, we observe that the word ‘mean’ is rather misleading. Christian morals are fixed and unchanging², defined by the very attributes of God’s nature³. Therefore the biblical principles of right conduct make up the core against which all waywardness are measured. Hence the term, *deviant behaviour*. The concept of a mean would suggest the opposite; that what is right is not *absolute* but *relative*, depending on the existing extremes, and a sober person would take the middle path, without inclining to either side:

BY SHEE TSE LOONG

Ref: [1] 1 Tim 3:2 2 Tim 1:7 Titus 1:8; 2:4-6, 12 1Pet 4:7 [2] Ps 119:89, 129, 142, 152, 160 Is 51:6-8 Lk 16:17 [3] Ps 19:7-14 Ps 119:68

	← LEFT EXTREME (Deficiency)	THE MEAN (Virtue)	RIGHT EXTREME (Excess) →
Eg 1 Eating	Anorexia	Eating Just Enough	Gluttony
Eg 2 Carefulness	Reckless	Cautious	Cowardly

This is not compatible with Christian teaching because many Christian morals are extremes in the general opinion of the world as shown in the following examples :

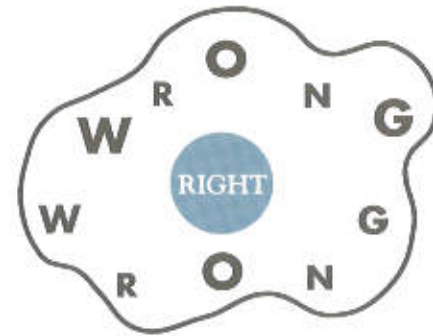
	← LEFT EXTREME (Deficiency)	THE MEAN (Deficiency)	RIGHT EXTREME (Virtue) →
Eg 1 Premarital Sex	Acceptable between consenting adults	Acceptable if parties have intention to marry each other	In no way acceptable
Eg 2 Abortion	Allowable	Allowable in certain circumstances	Not allowable at all

Also, for each moral issue, the extreme points at either polarity change with time. The intermediate point equidistant from either extremity would also shift as a result. Hence, what is the mean now has not always been the mean and will not always remain the mean in the future. To the Christian, moral standards cannot be defined by shifting extremes, which is derived from the distribution curve of current popular opinion. Moreover, in many cases of polarities, one cannot find an intermediate point that corresponds to virtue. For instance, what is the mean of wisdom and foolishness, kindness and cruelty, love and hatred?

Aristotle, when expounding the Golden Mean, had to admit that sometimes one extreme is more opposed than the other to the mean. This contradicts the equidistant concept and more importantly, makes determining the mean rather arbitrary. Aristotle further admits that in certain cases there is no mean and that certain extremes are nameless. Such confusion can be avoided if one adheres to the biblical concept of a core of moral absolutes right at the start.

The Chinese *Zhong Yong* is thus defined by Chengzi in Zhuxi's prologue to the classic: "Being without inclination to either side is called *Zhong*; admitting no change is called *Yong*. *Zhong* signifies the correct course to be pursued by all under heaven; *Yong* signifies the fixed principle regulating all under heaven." The chapter then begins, "The Ordinance of Heaven is what we call the law of nature. To fulfil the law of nature is what we call the Way. To cultivate the Way is what we call education." This seems to echo the biblical concept of remaining spot-on, at the centre, of absolute morals. However, we find an inconsistency in a latter part: "Confucius said, 'I know why the Way does not prevail. The wise go to excess and the foolish do not go far enough. I know why the Way is not understood. The worthy go to excess, and the unworthy do not go far enough.'"

In the final analysis, we find that both philosophies are not advocating a mean between good and evil, but a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency. Followers of neutrality or mediocrity have not only missed the Bible's principle of right and wrong but also that of both philosophies. However, Apostle Paul warns against such empty philosophies because they fail to point out the truth despite their sophisticated and often complex reasoning. Without a set absolute values, they define morals on a linear scale without a point of reference. Following the Bible's teaching of a narrow way of right versus a broad way of wrong⁴, coupled with its insistence on moral absolutism, we define morals as a core with a myriad of possible wrongs which are opposed to the rights in varying degrees and in different directions⁵. We are noble in only one way, but bad in all sorts of ways.



As beneficiaries of inspired truth, we test all things and hold fast to that which is good⁶. Before we can hold fast to anything, we must define the core of Christian ethics, applying the principle of moral absolutism. It must begin with a clear discernment between good and evil based on the Scripture⁷.

We must not think it harsh to call sin by its name⁸, otherwise we will be artificially creating a middle path when there is no middle. This is not being sober about right and wrong.

Ref. [4] Prov 14:12 Mt 7:13-14 [5] Ps 37:31, 119:5, 67, 101, 104, 128 [6] 1 Thess 5:21 [7] Heb 5:13-14 [8] Ps 32:5

Mum & dad,
what shall I be?



BY VINCENT YEOH

REMEMBER DORIS DAY'S "Que Sera, Sera"? What if your own little kid comes up to you and asks, "What shall I be?" What is the single most important thing you would impart to your child?

You do not need to drive into your child the necessity of earning a living. Society will do that for you. At every turn, newspapers, magazines, movies, television and radio glorify the making of money. Almost everybody loves money and so loves to talk about money – how to get it, what to do with it or who has it.

You also do not need to push your child to study hard. The very day your child steps into a classroom, he is already on a conveyor belt that goes at an ever increasing speed until he reaches the other end with a degree or until he drops out.

Strangely, many Christian parents, like other parents, stress the importance of a good career and a good education when it is totally unnecessary to do so. What does God want Christian parents to tell their children?

First we must understand this fact: Children are a heritage from the Lord (Psalms 127:3). Your child belongs to God. God makes you a guardian and places the child under your care. Your child is not yours for you to mould as you desire. Your child is not an extension of yourself to fulfil your dreams. Your child is God's heritage for you to bring up in the way of the Lord to achieve this supreme plan. From the beginning this was God's charge to Abraham as a parent:

"I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has promised him."
(Genesis 18:19)

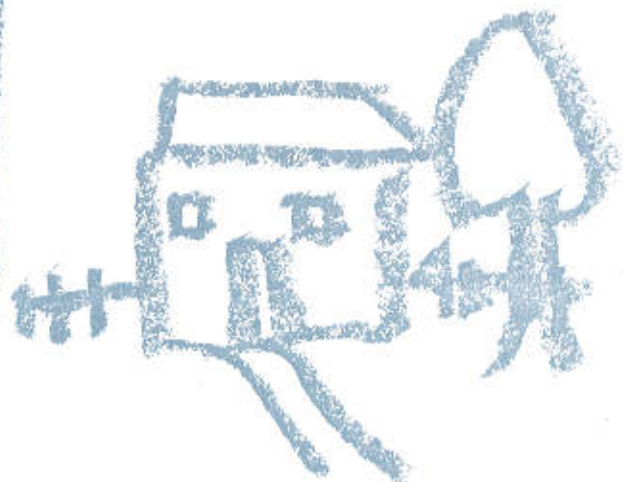
Note that God did not charge Abraham to charge his children to get milk and honey. Abraham was to charge his children to keep the way of the Lord and they will be blessed with a land flowing with milk and honey as the Lord had promised.

The same charge was laid upon the nation of Israel when Moses repeated the laws of God in the wilderness:

"And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk to them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."
(Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

This same charge now applies to you as a parent. When you are with your kids, what do you talk about? Asaph the psalmist says:

"Tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and His might, and the wonders which He has wrought....so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments." (Psalms 78:4-7)



Emphasize the way of the Lord. Impress in the mind of your child the laws of God. Then he will set his hope in God. When a person's hope is in God, he will not be moved. Speak to him about the glorious deeds of the Lord and all the good things God has bestowed on your family. Let your child know that the Lord is good. Teach him to trust in God. Warn him against disobeying God. God is a God of love. God is also a God of justice. When a person disobeys God, God will punish. Your child must learn this.

If you accept that this is your duty as a parent, then the next time your child asks, "What shall I be?", you will say, "You are a child of God to be used by Him as He wills."

However all these are merely words if your actions do not confirm that you really believe what you have told him. Children learn so much from what you do and what you say. When you say that it is important to put God first in everything and yet tell him that he may stay at home to study instead of going to church for services or for religious education classes, you are confusing your child by sending him conflicting messages. Parents must realise that attending church services including religious education classes has never adversely affected a Christian youth's studies. I have been baptised for about 20 years and have worked with Christian youths for not less than 15 years but I have never known or heard of a Christian youth's studies suffer because of attending church services. On the other hand, I have seen many active Christian youths who excel in their studies. Therefore when you teach your child the importance of worship, it is your duty to show him you mean what you say by actually bringing him to church (if he is still young) or encouraging him to attend religious education classes on his own. In this way, you are giving him a clear message that God is most important.

The same applies to all other teachings you impart to your child. You must show by your example what you teach.

teach
him
to
trust
in
GOD.

HALLELUJAH, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I testify. The following is an account of my personal experience which I hope will serve as spiritual edification for all brothers, sisters and friends, as indeed it was very much so for me.

When Queen Elizabeth II of England proclaimed in her Parliamentary speech at the end of 1992 that for her, 1992 had been an "annus horribilis" (Latin for 'horrible year'), I immediately thought how true those words were from a personal viewpoint. In more ways than one, my 1992 had indeed been a 'horrible year'.

responsibilities of the church and place God as my last priority. The consequence of this was that I gradually lost interest in both church work and fellowship with our church members. I became reluctant to do further divine work assigned to me. I reckoned attending church service, R.E. class and choir practice as tiresome, and taking up precious study time.

In contrast, I started to draw near to my school friends outside the church. I would often go out with them until very late at night, pursuing worldly pleasures, and generally enjoying their companionship. I was more

GIVE GOD THE 1ST PRIORITY

I was in my final year of pre-university studies at a very competitive private school. The pressure upon all the students was intense as they worked towards the final examinations that would gain them university places. I was under added pressure, having to help out at my parents' shop during weekends and school holidays, from early evening to the early hours of the morning. Unlike all the other students, I also had to attend church services. I was busy with a lot of church work assigned to me and also had to attend religious education (R.E.) classes, choir practices and Chinese language classes. All these put a considerable strain upon me, and I felt I would no longer cope. At that moment, I really wish that I could somehow ease the burden. Unfortunately, I had begun to form a distorted view of my priorities, deciding that education was most important.

Since I could not avoid helping my parents to run the business, I saw the easy way out was to shake off the

concerned for them than for brothers and sisters in church. My spirituality and faith became weaker and weaker, and God seemed to be further and further from me, or rather, I was drawing further away from God.

It was no coincidence that throughout this period, I underwent the deepest depression. I became more and more tired and burdened with my life. I thought how unjust it all was, that here I was a Christian, a believer in God, yet still burdened with so much pressures. God was supposed to be with me. Yet all my school friends seemed to have an easier environment in which they could concentrate on their studies and still could relax and enjoy themselves at the same time. I thought that there was no justice and reward in leading a Christian life.

My poor relationship with God and the church manifested fully when I decided to rely on my own

intellect and ability, instead of on God, for the important examinations. At night, I would read my school text books without turning to a page of the Bible. It was under these circumstances that I sat for the exams.

Suffice to say that when the results were published in August 1992, I found that I had missed a place at university. The bitterness, anger and sorrow that I felt were indeed unforgettable. But these feelings were not directed at God, the church or my parents—these feelings were directed at myself. For I realised immediately how I landed in that situation. I knew that the true reason was that I had not given God my highest priority. Though at the time it seemed that it was God's punishment for me for not having love and faith towards Him, with hindsight now it truly was a blessing in disguise.

So for this year, I knew that I had to re-align my relationship with God. I was determined to give God first priority. With all my school friends gaining their university places, I had the opportunity to draw near to my brothers and sisters in church again. With the pressure of study being less intense, I was able to undertake church work with sincerity and enjoyment. I began interpreting for services, became a trainee teacher for R.E. classes, and developed a hunger for spiritual advancement.

In giving God my highest priority, He has indeed added blessings upon me. He gave me a place in a

university, starting this October 1993, with the examination results I obtained. Furthermore, the university He has given me is prestigious, and offers a better course than my original choice. But more importantly, it is located close to a church so that I can continue to maintain a close relationship with God and the church, with my brothers and sisters.

In denying me a university place the first instance, God gave me a better chance. I have been given the wonderful opportunity to come closer to Him, as well as my brothers and sisters. He has also enabled me to undertake divine work, and to grow up in personal maturity and spirituality.

I hope that this sharing of my personal experience will enable us to see that God indeed works in a mysterious but wonderful way. We should not be concerned about our immediate worries or troubles, a man's steps are ordered by the Lord. Therefore as Christians and fellow brethren of the True Jesus Church, all we need to be

concerned with is to give God our first priority, and He will surely provide for us. Finally, I would like to share with you a Bible verse, taken from Matthew 6:33,

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

May all glory be unto God, hallelujah.

BY A BROTHER FROM PORTSMOUTH, U.K.



LATELY, I FEEL I AM so full of God's love that I sometimes feel I could burst. I want so much to share it with others, with everyone. It is hard to explain. I just feel so full of His grace and blessed with the real understanding of His word, His Will, of Him, and I wish I could give the same understanding to others. I feel I have so much to give. You know, God is truly, truly wonderful. And He is always there looking over us, with His arms open wide, waiting to hold us in His loving embrace and keep us safe from all harm forever. James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." He is waiting for you. He truly loves us. How can we ever comprehend the love He has for us? How can we ever repay His patient endurance, His long waiting, His yearning for us. His love is perfect, without comparison, and beyond human comprehension.

I know of His love because I received the Holy Spirit. When I was praying for the Holy Spirit, I just shut everything out. A church brother had told me to pray out loud—something I did not want to do before since I felt others would be listening, that they would hear what I said. But then I did it without thinking about this. I was just determined to do it, and I confessed to Him aloud. It seemed so right. There was God and me, no one else was in the conversation—a personal line between Him and me. The funny thing is no one heard anything I said, I don't think they even noticed I was praying aloud. It was truly a prayer that only God heard.

After my confession, I could feel my hands going up and down. I prayed, "Oh, please give me your Holy Spirit" and I began to speak in tongues. I cannot possibly tell you how happy I was. It happened during the prayer before a sermon. It was quite difficult to stop praying. I don't think my mind was on the sermon at all after the prayer. Then, as the sermon was coming to a close, I was getting a little worried that when I prayed again, the Holy Spirit would no longer be there. I was so nervous. But as I knelt down for the second prayer, hardly had I got the words out, "Hallelujah, in the Name...", I was speaking in tongues again. I felt so happy, so joyous, like nothing could possibly bring me down, and yet so peaceful, oh so peaceful—true spiritual joy and peace. It was really a wonderful feeling.

When I went home, I prayed again just before dinner. Apparently I prayed for an hour. To my amazement, everyone had finished eating by the time I stopped. An hour? I thought, "No way!" It passed so quickly!

I really thank God from the bottom of my heart that He answered my prayer so quickly. I truly know that He is there, always waiting for us to ask Him for the Holy Spirit. If we just believe in His word He will give to those who ask for Him. If we ask with a truly repentant and humble heart, He hears us. He refuses no one. It is His promise.

BY HEATHER MACDONALD
ELGIN/EDINBURGH

The following testimonies are extracted from Elder John Yang's sermon of the same title. The testimonies were used to demonstrate the love that we must have for God and our fellowmen in obedience to the chief commandments singled out by Christ in Matthew 22:37-40:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself." The first three testimonies tell of how some of our members showed their love for God. The latter testimonies describe the love we ought to have for people who constitute our 'neighbours' — parents, spouses and the world at large.

Testimonies of Love

"I know of an elder who should have died when he was thirty-five. Then, he contracted tuberculosis which also affected both his throat and digestive organs. This meant that he could not speak or take in food. He thought he was coming to the end of his life. But, thank the Lord! After three years, he returned to good health and resolved to live for Christ. In fact, he lived until he was in his seventies. Before he passed away, he was full of joy and satisfaction. On the eve of his departure, he told me "I thank the Lord that He has allowed me to live for forty more years." During these forty years, he had offered much and before he died, he gave a piece of land, currently valued at around US\$1.3 million, to the General Assembly of the True Jesus Church, Taiwan. Why did this elder love God so much? Because he knew that the Lord loved him."

"There was a young couple who had to make a crucial decision that would have an impact on the rest of their lives. The husband had just received his doctorate degree, and was about to embark on a teaching career when he was encouraged by the church to become a full time minister. He did not know what to do. Together with his wife, he prayed and seriously considered the proposal. In the end, he decided to offer himself to the service of God. Initially, his wife found it difficult to come to terms with this decision, especially when he would be stationed abroad. Eventually, she supported her husband's decision. What prompted her to agree? She remembered how God had loved her at a critical moment of her life. When she was delivering her child, she suffered severe haemorrhage and nearly lost her life. It took the medical team more than three hours of administering emergency blood transfusion before her condition stabilised. Later the

doctor told her husband "Jesus has blessed you. It is good that we have such ample supply of blood at the hospital for the transfusion. Otherwise, she would have died." When the sister recalled this episode in her life, she was reminded of the love of God. God had kept her alive. She must love God more. Although her husband's decision meant that she had to make certain changes in her life, she had to give him her full support. This would be her way of thanking God."

"Most touching of all, such testimonies of love are also found among the young believers today. During one Chinese new year festival, I received an offering of approximately US\$700 from two young boys. They had learnt that the believers in Africa and India lead a very difficult life, and they were so moved by their hardships that they decided to offer all the money collected from their new year gifts (it is customary for Chinese families to give money as new year gifts) to the African and Indian ministry. Even at such tender age, they knew how to love God. Instead of offering just one tenth of what they had received to God, they offered everything. We ought to learn from them."

"Jesus says, 'Love your neighbours'. Who are our neighbours? First, they are our parents. Our parents love us very much. Yet, many fail to understand their parents' love for them. In the past, I too did not fully understand the extent of parental love. Through my travels as a minister, I have come into contact with many families. Some families have handicapped children who require full-time care and attention. Yet I could see how the parents of these children love them even more. They would not institutionalise their children. Year after year, they continue to look after them. They never complain. When I observed just how these parents care for their child, I began to appreciate the essence of parental love. We need not teach parents how to love their child. It is in their basic nature. The question is whether their child will love them. I know of a very beautiful sister, with a good career, who was still single when she was in her thirties. This was not for want of suitors. She decided to remain single because she wanted to care for her mother who was blind. She was afraid that if she were to marry, her husband might not understand her commitment to her mother. To care for her mother, she sacrificed her own marital prospects. But the Lord blessed her. When she was forty, she eventually married a very considerate brother who understood her filial duty toward her mother."

"Apart from our parents, our spouse is also our 'neighbours'. We must love them. Once, I met a lady whose husband was paralysed from the hip downwards. She was having a difficult time looking after him. She could not go out to work. Caring for her husband alone became a full time job. Her family and friends advised her to divorce him. How long could she continue to take care of him, they argued. This lady was in a dilemma. Later, the message of salvation was preached to her and she believed in Jesus. She knew then that she had to continue to take care of her husband. Given his condition, he needed her love even more. She also wanted to share her new found faith with her husband. So she stayed with him. Eventually, her husband was also converted and both received baptism together. Having accepted Christ, this lady decided to turn to God for help. She believed that God is omnipotent. He is also merciful. So, she prayed, "If you do not help me, what am I to do? Before me is darkness, day by day, year by year." The Lord had mercy on her. Gradually, her husband's health improved. Although he was not able to walk, his paralysis was cured. Soon, he was able to make a living through traditional Chinese herbal massage-therapy. Today, this brother is earning a good income. The Lord Jesus saw the great love of his wife and the sacrifices she was prepared to make. By staying with him, she had helped to sustain the faith of her husband. Now, she has received her due reward. It is no longer a bleak future before her."

"Finally, the people of the world are our 'neighbours'. Our love should be extended to all humanity. I know of a Christian doctor who made use of his profession to help others. His consultation fees were lower than the market rate. He even offered free consultation to the poor. Whenever the opportunities arose, he would preach to them. He loved his patients and cared not only for their physical health but also their spiritual well being."

As members of the true church, we have all received bountiful blessings from God. Let us search our hearts and ask ourselves these questions, "Do I really love God? Have I loved my neighbours?" When we live a life of love, there will be satisfaction and joy in our hearts. And when we are joyful, we can then bring this joy to others, so that like us, they too can lead a meaningful life in this world of darkness.



BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON

Psalm 137 is a deeply intense psalm, charged with human emotions. It reveals experiences of suffering and anguish, and tells of tremendous faith in the midst of religious uncertainty. At first reading, one cannot but feel the writer's deep sense of loss and immense sadness as he describes his days of exile along the rivers of Babylon, mourning for the past. As the words continue, one notes his anger and indignation at the cruelty inflicted on his people, and his appeal to the almighty God to vindicate them and manifest His divine justice.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

PSALM 137 IS SAID to be written by one of the deportees to Babylon. It provides a glimpse of life in captivity within a foreign heathen land. What then is the historical background to this Babylonian exile, and why did it invoke such emotions in the writer?

587 BCE marked the watershed in Judean history. Babylonian troops under Nebuzaradan, the commander of the royal bodyguard, destroyed Jerusalem (2 Kgs 25:8; Jer 52:12) after laying a two-year siege (Jer 37:7-9, 11; 34:21). The Temple, the royal palace and homes of citizens were burned. The city walls were pulled down (2 Kgs 25:9-10; Jer 52:13). Temple vessels and treasures were looted (2 Kgs 25:13-17; Jer 52:17-23). The top priests, surviving royal officials, commanders and provincial leaders were rounded up and executed (2 Kgs 25:18-21; Jer 52:24-27). Many were led away into exile (2 Kgs 25:11-12). Archaeological excavations also show that many Judean cities as far apart as Lachish, Arad and Engedi suffered similar fates during this period of Nebuchadnezzar's Palestinian campaigns. In Lachish, for example, 22 inscribed ostraca (or inscribed potsherds) were found belonging to the last years of Judah, and on them were references to battle preparations, the use of fire signals, etc; indicating perhaps the difficult final days of the kingdom.

Sizable groups were exiled to Babylon and the deportations frayed the very fabric of society, having siphoned off many of the upper and artisan classes. It also led to the redistribution of Judean properties and wealth to those who remained (Eze 11:15).

Very little biblical material directly describes life in exile. Primary biblical sources are the prophetic books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah chapters 40-55. Jeremiah witnessed both captures of Jerusalem (in 592 BCE and 587 BCE), and participated in the life of Judean community during the rule of Gedaliah (2 Kgs 25:22; Jer 40:7). Ezekiel's ministry, spanning the period from 593 BCE (Eze 1:2) to 571 BCE (Eze 29:17), appears to have centred entirely on the Babylonian exile, and the book is a key source into the life of the exiles in Babylon. Much of Isaiah 40-55 provides historical records of the transitional period between the closing years of the Babylonian rule, and the rise of Persia under Cyrus.

There is no clear biblical evidence to suggest that the exiled community was forced to live in inhuman conditions. They appeared to have remained relatively free, and in no sense could be considered as slaves. The letter to the exiles in Jeremiah 29 encouraged them to

1 By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.

2 On the willows there we hung up our lyres.

3 For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

4 How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?

5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!

6 Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!

7 Remember, O LORD, against the E'domites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, "Rase it, rase it! Down to its foundations!"

8 O daughter of Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall be he who requites you with what you have done to us!

9 Happy shall be he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!

Psalm 137



"build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat their produce; take wives and have sons and daughters" (Jer 29:5-6). In Ezekiel (8:1, 14:1, 20:1), "elders" gathered at the prophet's house, suggesting some freedom of association. The genealogical records of the returning exiles (Ezra 2) show that family structures were preserved. Further analysis of the returnees also reveal that they had servants and some degree of wealth (Eze 1:6, 2:68-69). The presence of the Davidic royal family members would also help to promote the sense of identity. For instance, during exile, years were reckoned by reference to Jehoiachin's reign (Eze 1:2, 33:21, 40:1).

Non-biblical sources of this period are varied. The Babylonian royal cuneiform tablets refer to Jehoiachin in exile, mention foodstuffs that were given to him and his five sons as pensionary payments (ANET 308). Although such payments were common and do not in themselves reflect any preferential treatment, they do suggest a degree of humane treatment given to Jehoiachin and the Judean

nobles. Furthermore, seal impressions unearthed in excavations at several Judean sites bearing the inscription "Belonging to Eliakim steward of Yaukin (Jehoiachin)" suggest that even in exile, Jehoiachin was allowed to retain possession of some Judean crown property administered by Eliakim. Finally, tablets discovered in Nippur in 1893 dating from 455 to 403 BCE (Persian era) which record the commercial activities of a certain Marashu family, also mention the names of some Jewish persons, indicating that the Judean exiles also became involved in the economic activities of the Babylonian communities.

The brief analysis above suggests that conditions for the exiles were tolerable. They were allowed to settle together and to generally get on with their lives. This being so, why did the writer of Psalm 137 express such bitterness? The real key to the disaster in 587 BCE lies in its spiritual and emotional impact. Essentially, it caused a theological crisis.

THE RELIGIOUS SETTING

The calamity in 587 BCE robbed the Jews of the very elements of their religious identity. The people witnessed the desecration of all that their religious faith stood for by the Babylonian invasion.

The land played a vital part in the religious thought of the people. The Shema call of "hear O Israel" (Deut 6:4) presupposed a close link between religion and the land. The people of Israel were seen as a clearly defined entity dwelling in a land promised to its ancestors (Deut 6:1, 7:1). The worship of God was intimately associated with the promised land, taken to be a divine gift to the nation. This concept formed a prominent and distinctive feature in the religious thinking of the people, eg, homilies of Deut 5-11 is directly related to the concern

with the land. The annexation of the Northern Territories by Assyria around 721 BCE was bad enough—now to have lost Judah too to the Babylonians was the ultimate tragedy.

Closely related to the possession of the land was the concept of Israel as the "elect", a people "holy to Yahweh, chosen to be a people for His own possession" (Deut 7:6-11). This theme runs through the traditions of the Patriarchs (Gen 12:2, 17:7-8), the exodus (Ex 10:3), the settlement (Josh 2-4), and the military conquests of David. These events are seen as confirmation that Israel was favoured (2 Sam 5:10, 12). It therefore seemed almost inconceivable that the chosen people could suffer such a humiliation as to be exiled to an unclean heathen land.

The city of Jerusalem, captured from the Jebusites (2 Sam 5:7) and converted into the capital of his empire by David, is the third important element in the religious thought of those days. For here lay the Temple, built by Solomon in the mid-tenth century, and where the Ark of the Covenant was housed. According to Deuteronomy 12:5, the Temple in Jerusalem was "the place where the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name and make His habitation there." It was the focus of the religious life of Israel, most likely following the religious reforms of Josiah late in the seventh century (2 Kgs 22-23). It was also the only legitimate place of sacrifice (Deut 12:5-14). For these reasons, the holy city was, to many, impregnable—a notion supported by the turn of events in 700 BCE when the city was spared from the Assyrian attacks (2 Kgs 19:35-37; Is 29:5-8). But in 587 BCE Jerusalem suffered her greatest defeat: her Temple was destroyed and her treasures ransacked. It was no wonder that the author of Lamentations mourned over the fate of this city "How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become. She that was great among the nations! ... The enemy has stretched out his hands over all her precious things: yea, she has seen the

nations invade her sanctuary, those whom Thou didst forbid to enter Thy congregation" (Lam 1:1, 10).

Finally, there is the concept of a permanent Davidic dynasty. Israel embraced monarchy some two centuries after the settlement (1 Sam 8:19-20). Following the prophet Nathan's announcement of the divine promise of a permanent royal house of David (2 Sam 7:4-16), this concept became a powerful ideology, as the "royal Psalms" (i.e., Psalms relating to the king in Jerusalem) illustrate (e.g., the Davidic king was viewed as the "son" of God <Ps 2:7>, sitting at God's right hand <Ps 110:1>). Yet in 597 BCE, King Jehoiachin was exiled and ten years later, his successor, King Zedekiah met with the same fate.

By 587 BCE, Judah had lost her land, and with it, her status as the "chosen" people of God. She had been stripped of her city, and not one but two of her kings, and her people were captured and exiled. To top it all, her Temple, the focus of her religion, was razed to the ground and the treasures ransacked. All in all, it would appear that the very nerve of the religious system was severed. It is no wonder that the writer of psalm 137 lapsed into such despair.

COMMENTARY

The Psalm offers no introduction. Instead it moves straight into the key scene by the waters of Babylon (Ps 137:1). Herodotus, the historian, described Babylon as having "a moat, deep, wide and full of water which runs entirely round it." Also, "And the city consists of two divisions, for a river, called the Euphrates, separated it in the middle: this river is broad, deep and rapid. The wall on either bank has an elbow carried down to the river." He also told of how all the streets lead to the river, and that at the end of each street "a little gate is formed in the wall along the river side ... they are all made of brass, and lead down to edge of the river."

It could have been at such a place, by the waters of Babylon, that the writer together with the exiled community, sat and wept, when they remembered Zion. Zion, to them, represented the national centre of worship and is a name which applies to Jerusalem, or portions thereof since the time of David. The usage of the word has changed over time and it is difficult to pinpoint its precise location. Originally, it could have referred to a designated Jebusite fortress at the south-east spur of the hill, at the junction of the Kidron and Tyropoean valleys which David captured and renamed "City of David" (2 Sam 5:6-9). In prophetic writings, the name referred to the hill on

which the Temple stood, which was metaphorically extended to mean the place where God's name is present (Is 2-4, 8:18; Mic 4:1-5; Jer 31:6). In Hebrew psalmody, the term applied to the entire city of Jerusalem (Ps 48; 125).

The songs of Zion are likely to be sacred songs – songs to magnify the power and majesty of God. In this heathen land, God seemed so far away. So how could they sing to Him?

The religious devotion of the author is illustrated in verses 5 to 7 in which he proclaimed that, should he ever forget Jerusalem, "may his right hand fail him and his tongue cling to the roof of his mouth." This passionate proclamation expressed his religious fervour. The failing of his right hand implied his inability to play the harp which accompanied the sacred songs, an important part of his worship of God. Likewise, his tongue cleaving to his palate meant that he could not utter words of praise and thanksgiving to God. From these expressions, one may conclude that although he was in captivity and the very fabric of his religion torn, he remained loyal to his God and held fast to his beliefs.

CONCLUSION

Psalms 137 expresses feelings of separation from God, as when a believer is deprived of the opportunity to be in His presence within His Holy Temple. Yet, in these moments of apparent hopelessness, he remained assured that God was with His people. He held fast to his faith and continued to yearn for Zion, the centre of his religious faith. He pleaded with God to avenge the humiliation and injustice done to His people.

As a twentieth century reader of this psalm, we ought to ask, "Will we still display such religious conviction if one day the very essence of all that we believe is threatened, or even apparently destroyed?"

There is a sudden turn of thought in verse 7. The writer here wrote of the enemy nearer home, the Edomites who had been opponents of Israel throughout history (Num 20:14-20, 1 Kgs 11:14-17). Although they were descendants of Esau (Gen 36:1-17, 25:30), and occupied the land south of Judah to the Gulf of Aqabah, they had often sided with the enemies of Judah. The prophet Obadiah described their attitude when Jerusalem fell: "On that day that you stood aloof, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them" (Obad 11-14).

Verses 8 and 9 revert back to the main subject – Babylon, the devastator of 586 BCE, who displayed such cruelty as dashing children against the rocks. Such actions had existed before (2 Kgs 8:12; Is 13:16; Hos 13:16; Nah 3:10) and were now equally deplorable.

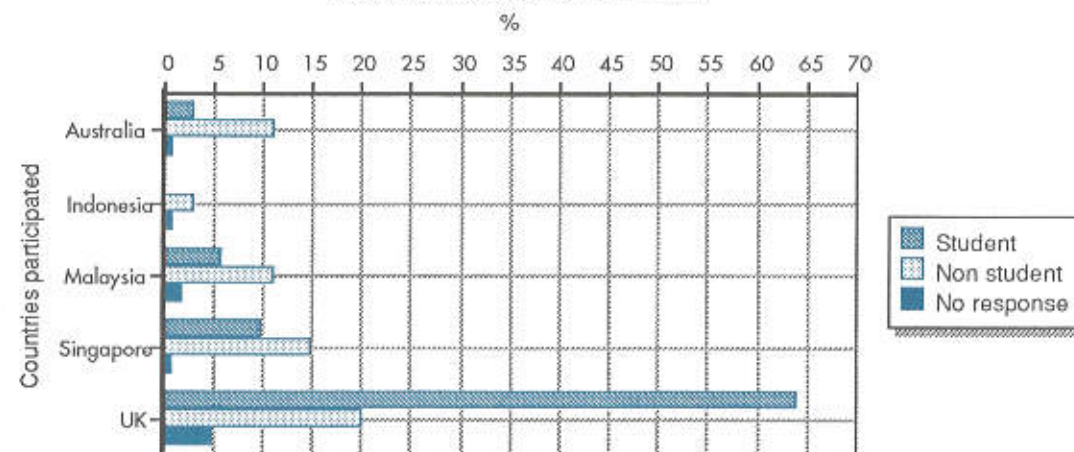
From verse 7 onwards, the writer appealed to God not to avenge for him the humiliation he had personally suffered, but to defend the divine sovereignty, and to manifest His divine justice. To the writer, such atrocities against God's chosen people should not go unpunished. He wanted God to act, to show that He was still in charge.

Manna survey results

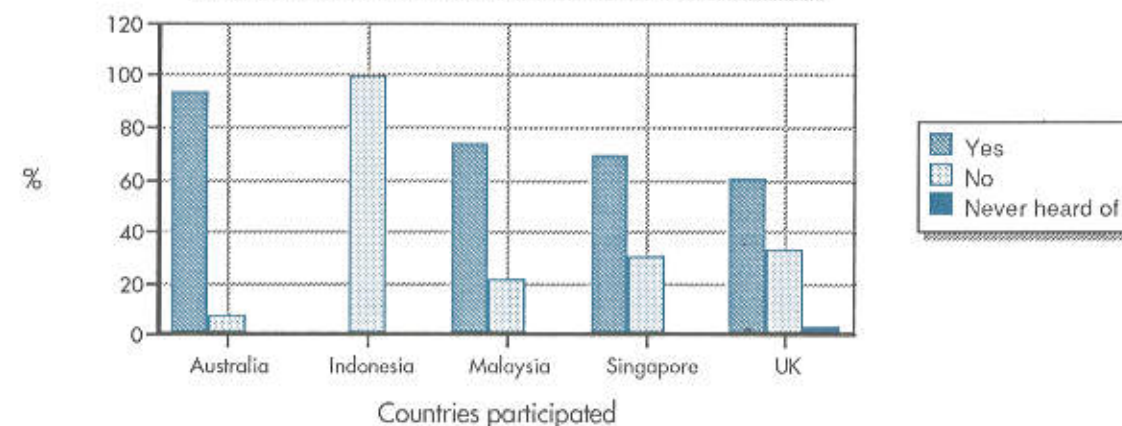
UNDER THE GRACIOUS guidance of the Lord, Manna has been in publication since the mid 70s. Yet throughout this period, we have not approached you, our reader, to ascertain whether we have catered to your needs, nor have we sought your assistance in identifying areas for improvement. To rectify this oversight, we conducted a survey by means of questionnaires in the first half of 1993, and we would like

to share the summary results of our findings with you. A detailed breakdown of these results is also available upon request. May we also take this opportunity to thank you for your participation in the survey and extend our invitation for your continued readership as well as your future contributions for the glory of God.

General Response

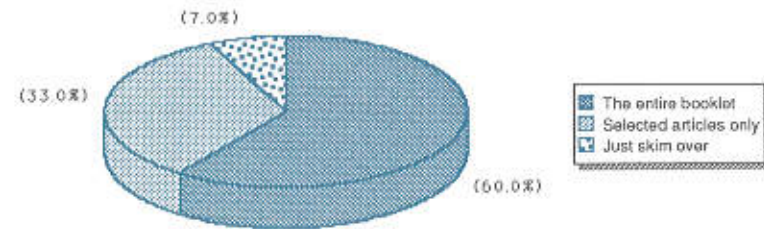


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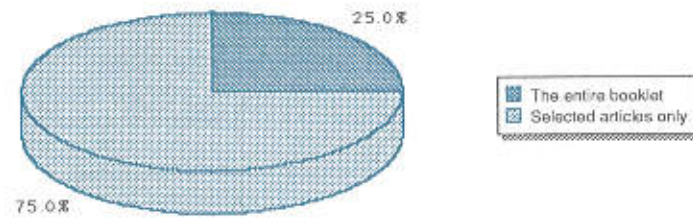
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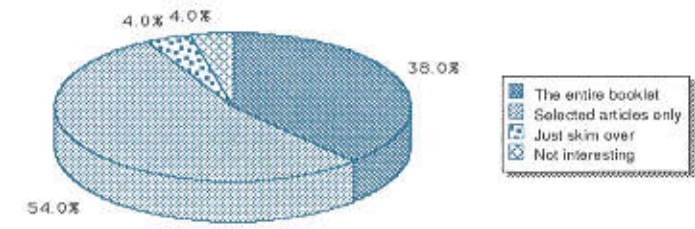
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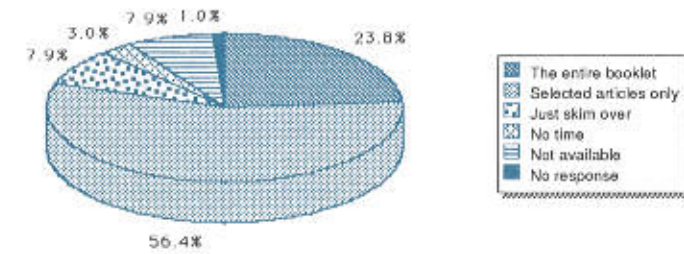
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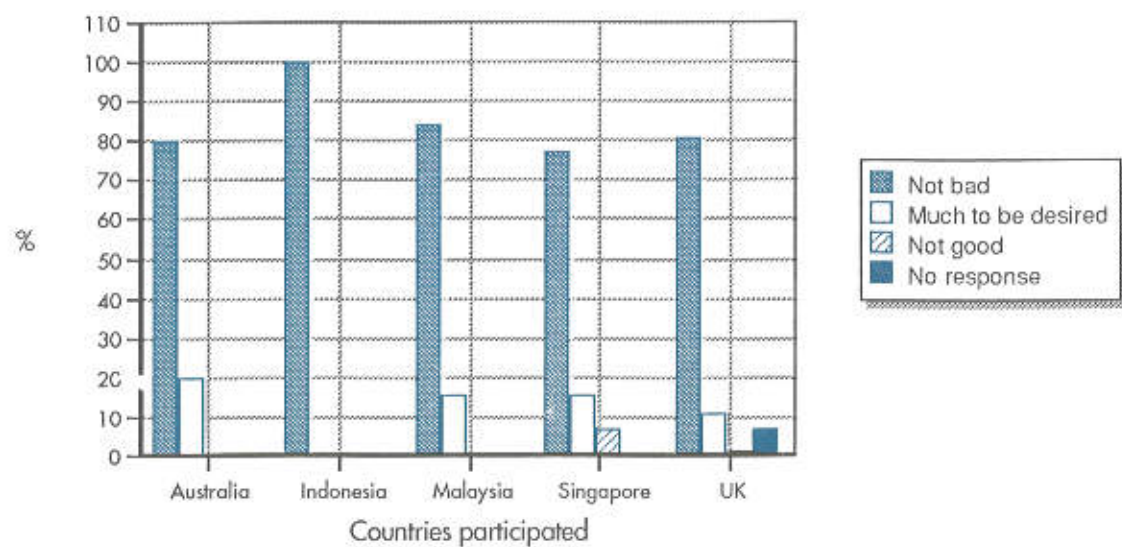


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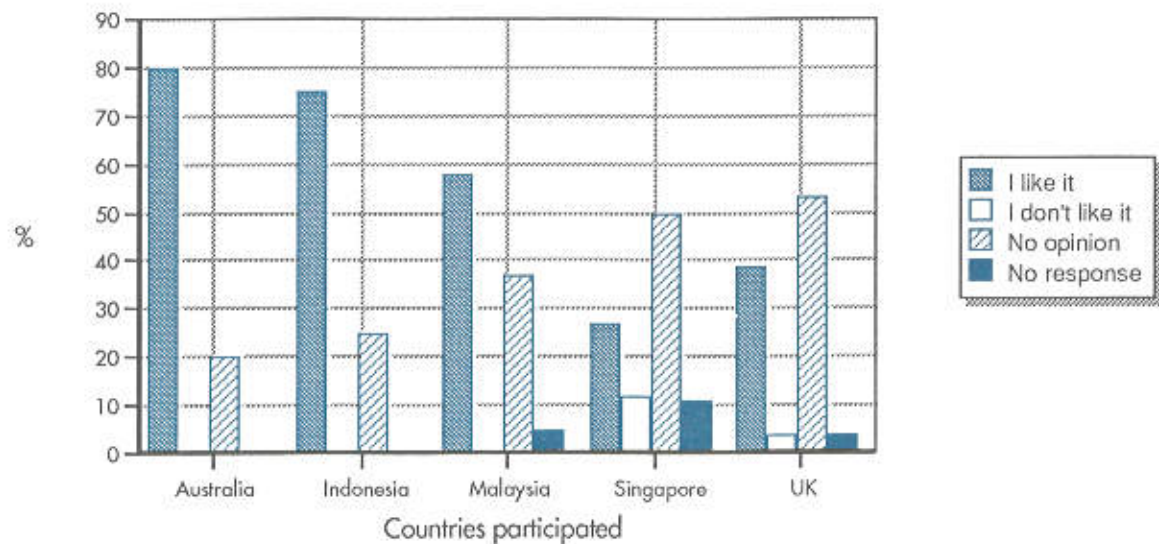
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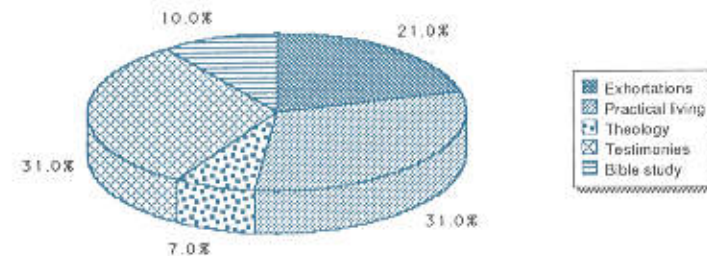


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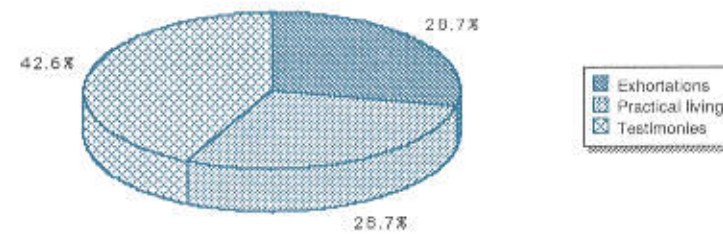
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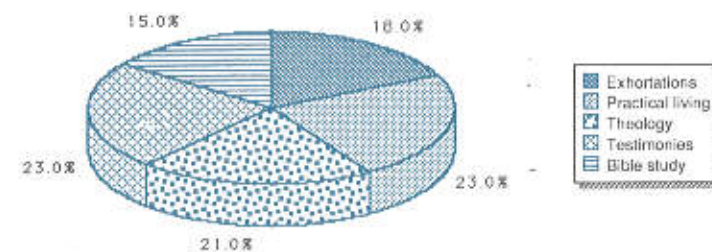
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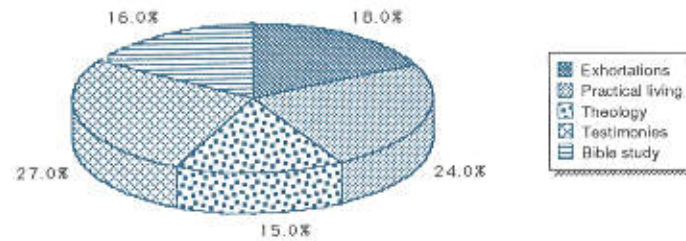


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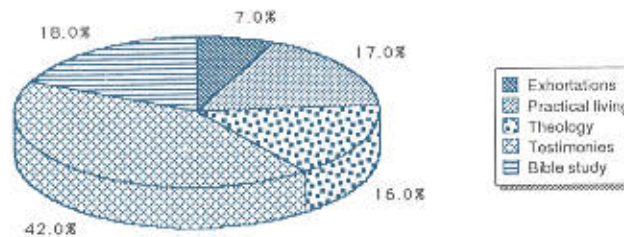
Preferred articles



SINGAPORE
Preferred articles



UNITED KINGDOM
Preferred articles



When we asked our readers "how would you suggest to improve the publication" in our recent Manna survey, suggestions from a sister in the United Kingdom is representative of the many responses received. We are thankful to her for allowing us to share her invaluable comments with the rest of our readership.

Articles relating to Christian living are needed. These articles can target different age groups, and address daily issues encountered by our members living in different parts of the world.

The publication could try to include more articles with current-affairs perspectives.

Articles can also be based on special topics such as student life, marriage, career, old age.

A "Question and Answer" column or page can be introduced to deal with Bible queries.

To ensure high quality and biblically sound articles, manuscripts should be vetted as part of the selection process. This can then minimise personal opinions which may have little biblical backing being published.

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