

MITA 208/12/97

Church and Society

A PERIODICAL CONCERNED WITH
THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY AND MISSION IN MODERN SOCIETY

VOLUME I, NUMBER I, APRIL 1998

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Church & Society

**A Periodical Concerned with the Church's Ministry
and Mission in Modern Society**

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Subscription Rates

Church & Society is published by Trinity Theological College three times a year (April, August and December). Annual subscription rates are as follows:

Singapore S\$15

Malaysia RM\$30

Others US\$15

Individual issues may be obtained at S\$7 an issue.

For subscriptions please write to the Editor. Cheques (made payable to 'Trinity Theological College') should be sent to Trinity Theological College, 7 Mount Sophia, Singapore 228458.

At the Threshold of a New Millennium

Dr Simon Chan

The following is the text of a sermon preached on the occasion of the 49th anniversary service of Trinity Theological College in October 1997.

It happened a thousand years ago when Christian Europe reached its first millennium. History tells us that there was a sudden upsurge of eschatological speculation and an eager expectation of unprecedented events. Today we come to the threshold of another millennium and feel the same excitement. Eschatology is once again becoming fashionable, not the kind associated with dispensational prophetic charts and date-setting of the return of Christ, but the kind associated with the "theologies of hope". Many Christians are making grandiose plans, working out grand mission strategies for the new millennium.

We are all exhorted to look forward. And so, the eyes of many are rigidly focused on what lies ahead. But here is where the rub comes in. Simply looking ahead, of course, will get us somewhere, but it may not be the place we want to be. What, then, are we supposed to do in the light of all the excitement about the new millennium? Whatever we do, we need to bear in mind two fundamental biblical truths.

Looking Back before Looking Forward

Several months ago you might have read in the newspapers about a group of adventurers who got lost on Mount Ophir. One of them happens to be a member of our church. Here is his story:

We came to a fork road and took the path that we thought would lead us to the top. It looked like a well-trodden path. But after some time the path looked more and more unfamiliar. Instead of turning back we continued to forge ahead hoping that we would eventually reach the top and find the familiar patch once again.

Well, they never found the familiar path again and for the next two days they groped their way down until, battered, bruised and hungry, they were found by rescuers.

There is an important lesson to be learned here: Moving forward in itself is not a virtue. We could be lost even while we seem to be taking broad leaps forward — unless we take time to look back to make sure that we are on the right path that leads us to our true destination.

This is also one of the big lessons from Scripture. The covenant people in the Old Testament were constantly told to remember the great events in their history. How

many times did God remind Israel: "I am the Lord that brought you out of Egypt"? They were to remember what God did to Pharaoh, what happened at Horeb, at the waters of Meribah and on and on. In addition, there were remembrance meals, memorial stones, solemn festivals and happy festivals. The hope of the future is a replay of the glory of the past in a transposed key. We see this in the sweeping visions of Isaiah: a new creation similar to but not quite the same as the Garden of Eden; a new David who will bring Israel to an even greater golden age.

The same lesson comes through in the New Testament. Whenever we celebrate communion we are to remember what Christ has done; only then can we look forward to the future marriage supper of the Lamb.

We dare not look ahead if we do not first look back. If we think that we need only look forward without looking back, we are in grave danger. The common tendency is to fall for novelties. We read in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* about a new slogan that was invented after the animal revolution: "four is good, two is bad". This is the big lie that modern advertising thrives on. New ideas, like new toys, provoke interest and excitement. But like new toys they get out of fashion rather quickly and so more new ideas have to be generated to sustain the same level of excitement. In short, we live in a world dominated by fashion. Ideas and practices are, like the clothing industry, subject to the same human whims.

This state of affairs raises the question: What are we training people for in ministry? Is theological education a more sophisticated way of helping students to keep track of the latest fashionable idea? In some theological seminaries, particularly in North America, this seems to be the case: The seminary is no more than the purveyor of the latest theological fashion. It could be right-wing or left-wing, but still fashion. What is supposed to be theological education is essentially induction into the current reigning ideology.

In some circles the fashion may be about "political correctness" and the use of inclusive or genderless language. Using "he" for God will provoke a frown; using "man" for human beings could provoke a law suit. This is left-wing ideology. On the right, a very different kind of fashion prevails. Here people are obsessed with holy laughter and Toronto blessings and the latest "territorial spirit" lurking in the rain forests of Kalimantan.

If we are to keep ourselves from being side-tracked by peripherals and fleeting fashions, we need to remember a second fundamental truth: we need to stick to the essentials.

Getting to the Most Essential

We live in a world that is characterised by much ado about very unimportant things. People are always inventing new and more colourful ways of saying fewer and fewer significant matters. If we are to move forward into the future where God wants his church to be, we need to go back to find out what the really important things are.

Here, Scripture and the Christian Tradition that grows out of Scripture provide us the answer. We find in Scripture that the really important things are actually quite few. Thus Paul exhorts Timothy that in his ministry he is to “keep reminding them of these things”. What are “these things”? They are the basic Christian teachings embodied in the gospel as vv. 8-13 make clear. Sixteen hundred years later, another famous pastor, Richard Baxter, told a group of his fellow-pastors: “The preacher must be oft upon the same things, because the matters of necessity are few.”

We are not in the business of creating new things to hold the interest of people but are in the business of reminding people of the few “matters of necessity” that will mould them after the image of God.

What are some of the few “matters of necessity”? First, whatever we say or do, it should be aimed ultimately at increasing faith, hope and charity. Anything else that sidelines these three great theological virtues is not worth doing, even if they seem to bring on a tremendous surge of public interest. The real measure of a person’s spiritual maturity is always: has he or she grown more in faith, hope and charity? That is the only real question worth bothering about in our pastoral work. These qualities are called the theological virtues because they have to do primarily with our relationship with God. Faith is always faith in God; hope is always hope in the future created by God; charity is first love for God, then love for others.

It doesn’t mean, however, that God is only interested in our private relationship with him. In fact, if we truly have the theological virtues, we would have the qualities to embrace the entire world — just as God himself is concerned about his world.

The second “matter of necessity” closely linked to the first is this: How can we improve our relationship with God? The answer is prayer. “To pray,” as Jean Danielou puts it so well, “is an act of faith, hope and love.” It is now an exaggeration to say that the basic duty of a pastor is to teach people to pray. The work of a pastor as Eugene Peterson has rightly pointed out, is to be a teacher of prayer. Prayer does not mean that we are closeted in a private world with God. Prayer (again, to quote

Peterson) is an “unselfing” process. It brings us face to face with a God who is interested in no less than the renewal of heaven and earth.

But instead of doing what is necessary, many modern preachers are under tremendous pressure to perform, to make the next sermon more interesting than that one before. The problem with trying to create pleasing sermons is that the hearers’ tolerance level keeps increasing. It takes all the ingenuity of the preacher to maintain the same level of interest. No wonder many don’t last very long because they quickly run out of new ideas to give to people.

But if we teach people what is needful, especially the “one thing needful”, the basic orientation of their lives and values will change. People will begin to see that the problem is not how to overcome boredom, but how to be closer to God and to be in communion with God’s people. Instead of running after the latest religious craze to assuage their restless spirit, they will be praying like the psalmist: “As the hart pants after the water brooks, my soul pants after you, O Lord!”

Teaching people how to pray does not mean that every sermon should refer to prayer in one form or other. It means, rather, that for anything we say, we must always keep in view the ultimate end, namely, to direct souls to union with God. We can cover any subject in the Bible or outside the Bible, from play to patriotism, from health to holiness. But everything is always with the view to knowing God and to greater faith, hope and charity. In fact, the only way that we can properly understand any subject is when it is brought into meaningful relationship with God. Play and patriotism make sense only when they are pursued “for God’s sake” and never apart from him. Even health and holiness must be turned into channels of intimacy with God. Health without intimacy becomes the most hideous form of egocentrism; holiness without intimacy is the worst kind of hypocrisy.

And where there is awareness of God’s presence, there is increase in faith, hope and charity.

Conclusion

You may be wondering what all these things have to do with our 49th Anniversary. Anniversaries are like milestones. They are predictable markers on life’s road. When we reach a milestone it is quite natural that we take measurement: How far have we gone? How close are we to our destination? But at the same time we cannot stop at a milestone without also engaging in an act of remembrance. We need to recall: Why are we on the road in the first place? Why are we embarking on this journey — the journey of theological education or of pastoral ministry — and not another? Such

questions cannot be answered by simply looking ahead but by looking back to the very reason for being.

So, for all the excitement that A.D. 2000 has generated both in religious and non-religious circles, for all the grand celebrations planned for the occasion, the truth is, when the clock strikes 12 on 31 Dec 1999, probably nothing very unusual will happen. Except for a few more road accidents from drunken driving, perhaps a few dramatic computer crashes, everything else will remain very much the same. This is because for us, the most decisive point of history has already been crossed when God sent his Son into the world to save sinners. Whatever happens subsequently grows out of this grand Fact of history. We must look back to that Fact and order our lives and work by it, if we are to face the future and shape it. It is the failure to maintain such a perspective which has caused many in ministry to lose sight of the most essential, the "matters of necessity", and to be side-tracked by peripherals. May we not be led astray by false voices luring us into the new millennium with promises of new things, great things and exciting things without grounding any of these things on the Grand Fact of history, namely, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

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The Parable of the Unjust Steward in the Context of Luke 16

Dr William Dumbrell

There is general agreement that the materials of 16:1-7 constitute a parable spoken by Jesus but that is the limit of the extent to which agreement prevails. The aim of the parable, the audience addressed, the relationship of vv. 8-9 to 1-7, the speaker references of vv. 8-9 and the relationship of vv. (9)10-13 to the parable as well as the general import of Luke 16 are all matter of wide dispute. In view of the activities of the major player of the parable, the unsavoury and crafty steward, it is conceded that the parable could hardly have been generated by the early community and must go back to Jesus himself. An estate steward, faced with dismissal shrewdly provides for his future at what seems to be his master's expense. It is conjectured that the patron of the parable was a rich Galilean landlord, though not an absentee landlord, often the case in the times, in view of the summoning of the steward before the master in v. 2. In this employ the steward may have exercised the wide agency

powers of the time. The substantial size of the estate may be gauged by the extent of the debts, detailed in vv. 5-7. The steward comes before us with comment on the accusation touching upon his administration of the estate in v. 1. There seems to have been more than some substance in the accusation since the steward confronted by the master in v. 2, is asked for a reckoning.

What appears to be the silence of admission also occurs in v. 2 which then moves us on to a quick review of the future possibilities by the steward in vv. 3-4. It seems from the present of the verb in v. 3 the dismissal is about to be undertaken. It is possible, however, that his affairs are only being investigated for he must give an account of his stewardship. But probably the steward who knows the inevitability to result from the charges, takes steps to anticipate his dismissal or v. 2 may summarize at some length proceedings and arrive at a result whereby the steward is apparently heard, and then dismissed. Either the charges levelled against the steward could not be made to stick or else the master was lenient in the extreme for the steward was not arrested nor was compensation from him required. The tenor of the account speaks for more than mere mismanagement though of course we are dealing with a story.

He somewhat inspirationally in vv. 3-4 dictates the course of his future. Dismissal means degradation — a life as an agricultural labourer or a beggar. He is then possessed of an idea and the dramatic aorist of v. 4 (I know) places the idea before us. He cannot reverse proceedings taken so he knows that he must make provision for himself beyond the range of his present employment. What better way to do it than to ingratiate himself with his master's debtors while he still may! We see the execution of this grand scheme in vv. 5-7. Each debtor is singly summoned and a summary of the steward's *modus operandi* is given by two examples. If he plays his cards correctly the steward reasons he will be advantaged by hospitality from the debtors after he has been dismissed, perhaps even given employment.

The debts are large, possibly too large to have been owed by tenant farmers and probably merchants who have been furnished with goods from the estate are on view. The reductions of 50% and 20% seem arbitrary or perhaps signify the relative degree of confidence for the future that the steward places in each merchant. We do not receive the outcome of the steward's plan but the praise from his master in v. 8a that he has acted shrewdly might suggest that it has been implemented.

Luke 16:8a presents the problem of whether the master is either Jesus or the lord of the parable. The praise of the master on either view is puzzling. If v. 8a is the Lord of the parable then the parable is continuing with Jesus' report of the master's reaction. If Jesus is the master then the parable ends at v. 7 and v. 8a is Jesus' response to the actions of the steward. It is suggested that the master, himself a man of the world recognizes business shrewdness for what it is and cannot help commending his steward for it. The tactics were unscrupulous but compelled a wry admiration. Bailey notes that an Oriental master is often pleased that a servant is clever enough to outwit him. If it is thought that such praise would be unlikely from the steward's employer who is probably financially deprived and who has already decided to dismiss the steward we need to remember that we are dealing with a parabolic world. The suggestion that *epaineo* 'praise' should be weakened to 'ratify' depends for its validity upon the honesty of the transactions undertaken by the steward with the master's debtors and in the light of his introduction in vv. 1-2 this seems very doubtful while such a line of interpretation would weaken the obvious object lesson of the parable which requires an unjust steward.

Ho kurios 'master' is used otherwise seventeen times of Jesus in Luke and some expositors have seen a moral dilemma in suggesting that the reference is to Jesus. In the Lucan parables of Jesus **ho kurios** is used for the earthly authority figure, 12:37, 12:42b, 14:23 and twice Jesus is involved in comment 12:42, 18:6. But in 18:6 the master is clearly Jesus for **kurios** is not used in the parable which has ended in v. 5.

If Jesus is the conveyor of praise, Jesus praises only the foresight and prudence of the steward not his morality. There is no impression that Jesus condoned his dishonesty. Such praise clearly covers the point of the parable that Jesus is wanting to communicate. The other possibility which has been canvassed is that Jesus is using irony in the words 'praise' and 'prudent'. Jesus does use irony, (Matt 23:32, 26:45 Luke 13:33) but there is no way of establishing such a point conclusively. The parable will then be about the folly of sinners who by wisdom avoid repentance. The test will be the plausibility of an ironic interpretation as opposed to the conclusion reached from a literal reading that what is on view is the possession of a cool head to make necessary decisions in a time of crisis. Nothing in the context supports purpose as stemming from irony, particularly in the light of Luke 16:14-15 and especially 16:16-17.

Kurios occurs three times in the parable for the steward's employer vv. 3,5 and the natural assumption, since no change is indicated in v. 8a, is that the employer of the parable is being referred to. We can probably accommodate both suggestions as to the identity of the master of v. 8a by suggesting that the parable continues to the end of v. 8a when Jesus then uses the exploits of a corrupt world to make a good point. Jesus, in the employment of the surprising reversals which characterize many of the parables is able to deduce teaching from such ambiguous personalities as the Importunate Friend (Luke 11:5-9) and the Unjust Judge (18:1-7). Together with Luke 16:1-8, all three parables are similar in that they include an *a fortiori* argument. If a dishonest man showed cleverness and prudence in this evil and temporal sphere of existence how much more should the disciples do so in their sphere. This is Jesus' typical use of contrast to convey kingdom truth. In this story from the ordinary life of the doubtful world of commerce there is an appropriate spiritual lesson. The winds of change are blowing keenly, Jesus is moving fixedly to Jerusalem for the last and great act of the ministry and beyond the cross. As an inevitable consequence will be the fall of Jerusalem as the kingdom is taken away from Israel.

The object lesson of the parable is the prudent use of resources in the present to ensure the future and while the parable's value system is questionable this is for Jesus an analogous indication of how the world works and how personal survival in that difficult context can be illustrated. The shift to the first person in v. 9 seems to confirm such an interpretation. Jesus is clearly speaking there and the transition from v. 8 to v. 9 is natural on this assumption. Though the parable could conceivably end at v. 7 the addition of v. 8a as a conclusion with 8b as a dominical comment (or Luke's comment) rounds the parable off less abruptly.

The phrase 'steward of unrighteousness' of v. 8 is normally explained as a Hebraism. While the general character of the steward has come before us (vv. 1-2), this comment is taken to refer to the steward's actions (vv. 5-7) labelling him for his dishonesty. Some, however, have justified the genitive of quality, **adikias** as indicating the general sphere of the steward's operation, i.e., the present age, a world held in the grip of mammon. So H. Kosmala insisted that **adikias** merely consigned the steward to the worldly, not to the unrighteous. His worldly qualities had been well illustrated by his actions.

But while Jesus commends the steward's prudence and shrewdness he at the same time condemns the actions

by the phrase 'unrighteous steward' which also encompasses the characterization of vv. 1-2. Most take the **hoti** of v. 8b as explicative and as Jesus' own comment on the parable. Jesus is saying that the man presents an object lesson for Jesus' hearers. The contrasted phrases 'sons of this age' and 'sons of light' in v. 8b present an eschatological dualism recognizable for the period in Qumran references (1QS 1:9, 2:16, 3:18 etc.). 'Sons of light' which Qumran used as a self designation are those who have embraced the gospel as Jesus has preached it, and it indicates as a phrase the demands of discipleship for all, and this requires that the whole sphere of personal existence for kingdom members must now be different.

Such an application is directed to both disciples and Pharisees. True adherents of the kingdom must seek treasure in heaven in provision for their future and begin at once. Their goals, methods, values must all be changed. True adherents must learn from the worldly, the people of this age, the world of time and transitoriness. These people are characterized by **adikia**. They are those who make in dealings with their own kind wise provision for their future. Luke 16:8b could be Jesus' sigh of regret over the lukewarm and half-commitment of the disciples but equally could be directed to the Pharisees who not rightly having identified their goals are like the steward trying to serve two masters, God and Mammon. Greek **phronimos** 'prudently' occurring only here in the New Testament is an admission of the steward's wiliness. He has used his cleverness and skill to prepare for the future in the light of the present crisis.

Many have tried to exonerate the steward in vv. 5-7 and restrict the force of the evaluation of v. 8. First century socio-economic customs are appealed to for such a steward acting within his authority and deriving commissions or adding personal extras to accounts which he forwent with his eye on the future as he acted under a personal agency which gave him discretion in the area of accounts. That the steward is described as unrighteous in the evaluation is then on such interpretations referred to his earlier behaviour at 16:1-2 but not to 16:5-7. Transactions there pictured are seen as actions within his competence. This, however, is a very strained interpretation of the passage in which most naturally the general assessment of 16:1-2 is confirmed in 16:5-7. To absolve the steward of dishonesty is to rob the parable of its shock tactics for then the praise offered comes as no surprise. And would the general reader for whom Luke was writing have taken the point offered

with such a minimum of elaboration in the parable?

Luke 16:9 presents a solemn conclusion by Jesus. What he is about to say dealing with use of material possessions is of great importance. V. 9 capitalizes upon the detail of the parable, particularly connections with 16:4b (when it fails, they will receive, into eternal dwellings all have correspondences in v. 4b). Jeremias contended that vv. 9-13 was a primitive church addition and application whereby a summons to be resolute in crisis, originally addressed to the unconverted had been transformed into a direction for the right use of wealth. If, however, v. 9 is not attached to the parable as direct comment, the parable only relates to the exercise in crisis of wisdom or prudence. But it is precisely because the kingdom has come in his person that Jesus directs right use in the sensitive area of money.

The friends of v. 9, who will receive the addressed into the paradoxical eternal 'tents' when mammon fails (i.e. at death), would seem in the context to be the poor who will have preceded them there (cf. Luke 16:19-31), and who have been helped as beneficiaries of love and mercy by the recommended works of charity. Mammon, used four times only in the New Testament, all by Jesus, Luke 16:9, 11, 13 and Matt 6:24, is always presented in a derogatory sense (cf. Jesus' qualification of it by 'unrighteous', a Hebrew genitive) as it is also in Judaism. Of uncertain etymology (most likely 'that in which one trusts'), mammon always refers to material possessions especially money. What must be done is to press wealth into the service of the kingdom and this is the urgent message of the parable.

The subject matter of vv. 10-13 stands in direct relationship to the parable and clearly is continued thought. In illustration of the required faithfulness, a general principle from human experience is enunciated in v. 10, where worldly wealth is described as **elachistos**, what is least, thus asserting how finally irrelevant are earthly possessions. Care has been taken to guard against the misunderstanding possible from v. 8 in that a complete stewardship of earthly possessions is required as the evidence of a total commitment to the kingdom.

The series of parallelisms within vv. 10-12 makes it clear that the expressions **ho adikos mamon** in v. 11 which clarifies that the otherwise vague terms **elachistos** v. 10 and to **allotrion** in v. 12 are references to worldly wealth. Worldly wealth in v. 12 as **allotrion**, is what belongs to the 'other' i.e., to a foreigner, having in mind the fundamental alien

nature of worldly wealth when seen from the perspective of the kingdom of God. True riches (v.12b) are the treasures in heaven, the goods of the messianic kingdom, the kingdom of God. All these in v. 12 are called what is your own, and are the inalienable possession of the member of the kingdom of God. V. 13 presses the point home that there can be service to only one Deity, God and not Mammon, the alternative. This is why the use of wealth is tied into one's future.

Luke 16:14 plainly continues the episode on the same occasion by its note that the Pharisees described as lovers of money were listening. Undoubtedly they saw their wealth as a special blessing for their obedience. But Jesus takes up the language of the Old Testament (Greek *bdelugma* 'abomination' LXX 1 Kgs 11:5, 7), and describes their attitude as nothing less than idol worship.

Wealth is to be used on the principle that one cannot serve two masters for wealth tests the loyalty of the heart. The Pharisees (16:14-15) had attempted to combine a worship of God and Mammon, but their world of wealth and privilege was collapsing for the days of the Mosaic economy were now numbered. Luke 16:16, indicates this and offers an important comment upon reaction to the preaching of Jesus of the kingdom. Greek *biazetai* may be passive "is stormed or taken by force" or middle "exercises force". In the context of the parable of the Unjust Steward which it follows, a middle and good sense for this saying is preferred, i.e. "everyone is forcing his way into it" NIV. The old legalistic gates which barred the way to the kingdom are being broken down. As all are now pressing into the kingdom every risk must be taken to win this prize! John had announced the coming of the kingdom and a new salvation economy!

There was now a new radicalism, a new way of looking at the law and the prophets! This is then illustrated by an example on divorce drawn from an important social arena of difference between Jesus and the Pharisees. Remarriage after divorce for both husband and wife is adultery (16:18) emphasizing the continued validity of the law as originally contemplated but going radically beyond current practice in its definition of adultery. Luke 16:16-18 also provides impetus for the question of "is the law abrogated?" The Old Testament had been prophetic of Christ and the days of fulfilment and now the reality were there.

The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, (16:19-31) naturally fits into the chapter context and comes in

two parts; vv. 19-26 dealing with the rectification of earthly justice in the world to come for the poor but pious and vv. 27-31 the proper hearing of the word. It continues the theme of using one's wealth properly to lay up treasures in heaven. The rich man trusted in earthly wealth and showed no concern for the poor. But the time came for him when repentance was no longer an option. The rich man, presumably a Pharisee, finally was a nobody and only Lazarus is named. It is then added (vv. 27-31) that God's law is a sufficient guide to find life which is presumably its aim. God's will is clear from Moses and the prophets and needs to be obeyed, not amplified. Those who do not read the Scriptures properly will not be convinced by a resurrection.

But while the consistency of the argument of the chapter is clear, the key question is the audience to whom it is directed. The question of the target audience of the parable must now be discussed. Clearly this is both the disciples and the Pharisees but which of the two is primary? If the Pharisees are principally addressed the accusation in v. 1 of wasting their master's goods fits their situation of misused stewardship, but not that of the disciples. The tense of the introductory *elegen* of 16:1 ('he continued to say) implies that the parable is a sequel to the three parables in ch. 15. The addressees are normally taken to be the disciples, so axiomatically that many modern versions (cf. NIV, NRSV) do not translate the Greek particle *kai* 'and' in 16:1 and modern commentators have also concluded this way. But such a sophisticated discussion of wealth would seem to be outside of the disciples' range of interest since they had left all to follow Jesus from what had been prior to that very slender economic bases. This point is usually but not effectively met by suggesting that the range of interests and economic position of Jesus' disciples included reformed tax farmers and tax collectors (Luke 15:1)

Some earlier commentators suggested that the major audience of chapter 16 was the Pharisees. I think this is correct. The discussion which immediately follows the parable and its application, is begun by the Pharisees (Luke 16:14-15) and the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus obviously has the Pharisees in view while a change of audience to the disciples solely does not occur until 17:1. In the anti-Pharisaic context of chapters 15 and 16 the suggested change of audience would have been inappropriate. The *elegen de kai* of 16:1 suggests an augmented audience where the *elegen de* as in all nine cases of its use in Luke connects with what has preceded. L. J. Topel points to continuance with a slight change, while the *kai* is

to be related in 16:1 to the verb and not to **pros tous mathetas**, 'to the disciples' Luke 16:1-13 shows no change of scene or audience from chapter 15 but the disciples (cf. the **kai** "also" of v. 1) have been added to the framework since the general subject of one's attitude to possessions is on view. The Greek **kai** points to the augmentation of the audience while still maintaining a primary address to the original group, i.e. the Pharisees to whom the three parables in Luke 15 were directed. The Pharisees again seem mainly in view in terms of the application in vv. 9-13 since the disciples have left all to follow Jesus. The Pharisees continue to be the target audience until 17:1 when the audience is contracted to the disciples, and the discussion on wealth is discontinued. With the Pharisees as the major audience the flow of thought begun in 15:1 is continued until the end of chapter 16. Chapter 15 focuses on the Pharisees' reaction to the gospel as a result of which, chapter 16, they will suffer eternal damage unless they are prompted to see the relevance of Jesus' present ministry.

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Conversion and Intrafamilial Conflict: Some New Testament Perspectives

Dr Tan Kim Huat

Christianity as an avowedly missionary religion seeks converts. To prevent Christianity from performing missionary work is tantamount to denaturing it. This may sound offensive to some but when it is borne in mind that such a characteristic is not unique to it, the offence is somewhat lessened. Many religions do have such an agenda, especially when they claim to have the Truth and the principles to bring about the greatest happiness to a human being. Hence, Christianity, like some other religions, understands itself as helping to bring about something eternally significant and blissful to someone when it invites him to be converted. However, when this happens, there often comes with it a potentially thorny problem: intrafamilial conflicts brought about precisely by conversion. Such conflicts are often most complex, exasperating and traumatic. A new convert, especially a young one, may find it rather difficult to cope with these. The questions he may need answering could well be those which are Biblical, theological or practical in nature. It is the purpose of this article to look at this problem from some perspectives provided by the New Testament

(NT) and it is hoped that some strategies may be found for pastors to alleviate the pain brought about by such conflicts¹. By so doing, it also hopes modestly to demonstrate the importance of drawing resources from theology (and Biblical studies) to address societal norms, trends and concerns.

To deal with the problem of conversion-generated intra-familial conflict, it is necessary to start by looking at the concept of the family and its place in society. The family is commonly regarded, with very good reasons, as the basic unit of society and, as such, it has fundamental importance for human civilisation in many respects. The nurture and shaping of a person's values and character do not take place without any influence of his family. Indeed, his very identity is determined to a large extent by the family he comes from. How an individual understands his identity and how others perceived this are linked to his familial ties: ancestral, parental, conjugal and consanguineous, and such ties have great currency in many Asian societies. The basic questions often asked by us in order to determine a person's identity betray the importance we attach to such ties: 'Who are your parents?', 'Who is your wife?', 'Who are your siblings?' In the light of the foregoing, allegiance to one's family and kinship ties becomes understandable. Such allegiance is often demonstrated by the adoption of the same ancestral religion, rites of passage (birth, marriage, death) — some aspects of which may be informed by the ancestral religion — and norms for filial piety. This allegiance and the forms by which it is demonstrated are challenged when a person is converted to a religion which also claims his allegiance. Tensions are created and such tensions will be greatly exacerbated when the allegiance demanded by this religion is of the absolute kind. Certain rites of passage which are coloured by the ancestral religion might be deemed to be religiously wrong by the convert but the family may not perceive it as such. To them, to challenge the forms amounts to challenging the integrity and identity of the family. It is not surprising that many non-Christian parents are alarmed by the conversion of their children to Christianity. Often, they regard themselves as having lost a son or a daughter to it.

Some New Testament perspectives

As the Christian Church regards the New Testament as being foundational to its faith, a Christian might legitimately ask whether the New Testament does shed any light on this thorny problem. Perhaps it is gratifying to know, in this connection, that conflict is a major motif in the New Testament, especially the Gospels. Some key passages for consideration are the

following: Matt 8.18-22; 10.34-7; Mark 3.31-5; 7.9-13; 10.28-31; 1 Cor 7.12-16; Eph 6.1-3. The focus in this section will be on the Gospel passages but constraints of space does not, however, permit exhaustive discussion.

Matthew 10.34-7

'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — and a man's enemies will be members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...'

This difficult saying of Jesus is set in the context of the so-called missionary discourse, detailing the tribulations awaiting Jesus' disciples, and the resources and encouragement which are theirs. The saying describes conflicts which are intrafamilial. A few points relevant to our discussion could be easily discerned.

First, the conflict described is brought about by belonging to Jesus. Such conflict involves the breaking up of the original integrity of the family. The difficult saying of Jesus' coming to bring a sword and not peace could be interpreted either in a telic or ecbatic sense, i.e., it is either Jesus' intention to bring about conflict or such conflict is the unfortunate result (or effect) of his ministry, and not his intention². Either way, it is clear that the call of Jesus creates hostility on the part of those who do not accept his message and this leads to division. This division is so fundamental as to break the strong bond of family-ties to the extent that the erstwhile family member is now regarded as a dreaded enemy or contagion to society. What may appear shocking to Jesus' audience is the revelation that the Gospel of peace can become a means of division. And this is a result of the family members' holding diametrically-opposed views of Jesus and his call to follow him.

Secondly, the subordination of family-ties to following Jesus is pronounced and radical (v. 37). In this regard, the mission work in which the disciples are engaged has priority over family ties. Following Jesus' call to mission work is regarded as a demonstration of the disciples' love for Jesus. This love broods no rivals, not even those which are familial, often regarded as foundational to a morally strong society.

And this leads to the third point. The upshot of all these is that Jesus' authority is here presented as absolute, and as a corollary, allegiance to him must also be absolute. This explains why the division mentioned in the first point is so drastic and radical. The allegiance

to the family is superseded by an allegiance which broods no rivals. The conflict is heightened when the allegiance which is superseded once belonged to that (the family) which was the point of reference for the identity of the individual and those related to him. Does this mean that Jesus' message and call is antifamilial (against the family) or is it suprafamilial (transcending the family but not being against it)? Given the fact that Jesus castigated the Pharisees for circumventing the fifth commandment ('Honour thy father and thy mother') in the Korban episode in Mark 7.9-13, he cannot be said to be antifamilial. Thus, the category which best describes Jesus' message and call vis-à-vis family ties is suprafamilial.

Matthew 8.21-22

'Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead..."'

This passage reinforces the conclusions arrived at earlier. In Jesus' day, the duty of burying one's dead father was an important demonstration of honouring one's parent and was therefore one's solemn responsibility³. So important did Jewish society regard this duty to be that it allowed for the non-compliance of other religious duties in order that the solemn duty of burying one's father could be carried out. To treat this matter lightly amounted to disrespect and might make one liable for the condemnation of the OT which involved the death punishment (Exod 21.17; Lev 20.9).

This at once exacerbates the offensiveness of this saying of Jesus in that it does not allow for even a mere delay to carry out a necessary duty when the call to follow him is issued. **That being said, it must equally be borne in mind that there were already precedents in the OT which allowed for the non-compliance of this norm. The priest, by virtue of his calling, cannot touch a dead body or be in close proximity to it lest he be defiled (Lev 21.11-12). Hence, he is absolved from the duty of burying his father. Similarly, the Nazarite is exempted from this by virtue of the vow he has made (Num 6.6-8). Such precedence mitigates somewhat the offensiveness of the saying.**

However, a point of **significance could also be** observed here. If exceptions are **made for priests because** they are divinely called to **perform religious functions**, one can see once again **that the implication of the saying of Jesus is that his call stands on an equal footing with the call of God to the priests. The upshot of this is that his authority is regarded as equal to God. Jesus' discipleship demand absolved the one called from the duty of burying one's parents. Moreover, so urgent is Jesus' call that a mere delay cannot be contemplated.**

Thus, Jesus' authority is once again presented as absolute and this calls for absolute allegiance on the part of the respondent, an allegiance which supersedes that which belongs to the family. The point in this passage is not that a Christian is not allowed to bury his father but that the authority of Jesus transcends all other authority and claims.

Mark 3.31-5

'Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you." Who are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

This pericope is intercalated with the Beelzebul episode (Mark 3.22-30) which contains the famous saying about the sin against the Holy Spirit. Known as the 'Markan sandwich', this is a literary device which is characteristic of Mark and it is applied to show how one episode is related to, or perhaps, interpreted by another.

Mark 3.21 records that Jesus' family was eager to 'apprehend'⁴ Jesus because they thought he was going beyond the bounds of propriety in the exercise of his ministry. It has been suggested that this action was attempted because in the ancient Mediterranean world, shame and honour were pivotal values. The family of Jesus therefore intended to safeguard their honour and prevent shame from coming to them by 'apprehending' Jesus as his conduct in his ministry would affect people's perception of them⁵. The reader is put in suspense as to the conclusion of this episode as Mark goes on to narrate the Beelzebul episode. This episode is similar to that of the attempted action of Jesus' family in that both feature people with the attitude that Jesus is beside himself, either he is out of his mind or possessed by Beelzebul.

The reply of Jesus to his family's request to see him was that his true family consisted of those who did the will of God. In so doing, he did not uphold their honour. Nor did he shame them. He appealed to a higher and legitimating norm, one which was defined by the doing of the will of God. In Mark, this means following the call of Jesus to participation in and obedience to the demands of the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom was present in the person and ministry of Jesus. To reject the work of Jesus by regarding him as being demon-possessed or mad made one guilty of committing the sin against the Holy Ghost.

To sum up what is significant for the present discussion, it could be said that the passage teaches that, at the personal level, the believer's identity is no longer defined primarily in relation to his family or blood-ties but by spiritual kinship to Jesus Christ. Hence, blood-ties are transcended. This new realignment of the disciples' identity also involves the creation of a new community into which he is placed. Mark 10.28-31 also supports this. There, Jesus promises that whoever has left brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or home for his sake will not be without a family but will find himself being placed into a new family: the eschatological people of God. In this regard, it can be seen once again that Jesus in Mark is not portrayed as antifamilial since believers are indeed placed in a family, albeit a new one and one which is defined by kinship to Jesus, which is further defined by obedience to the will of God.

Synthesis

From the above, a few conclusions press themselves upon us. The first is that Jesus' authority is absolute and hence, allegiance to him transcends all other forms of allegiance. The second is that the identity of believers is no longer defined primarily by their blood-ties but by their kinship with Jesus. In fact, the consistent teaching of the NT is such that the believers' identity is not even defined primarily in relation to themselves but by their connection with Jesus Christ. The third is that this new identity is accompanied by incorporation into a new nucleus: the family as defined by doing the will of God and this means ultimately, spiritual kinship with Jesus. Finally, Jesus is not portrayed in the Gospels as antifamilial but, rather, as suprafamilial.

Of course, such perspectives must be balanced by the overall framework of NT teaching. In the NT, the command to honour one's parents is given (Eph 6.1-3) and upheld (Mark 7.9-13). The Christian is commanded to show love to all men, even one's enemies (Matt 5.44-8). Indeed, he is counselled to pursue peace as much as possible (Rom 12.18; 1 Pet 3.11). Because of this, the texts discussed earlier must not be taken as a pretext for despising one's blood-ties. These are to be valued but they must not encroach upon the Christian's relationship with Jesus Christ. The allegiance to him must be absolute. However, adopting this standpoint does put the Christian in some practical difficulties. The next section offers some reflections of a theological and pastoral nature with the hope that they could provide some help and encouragement.

Theological and pastoral reflections

I must start with a caveat. Given the complexity of the problem, I would have preferred to end the article here and refrain from applying the insights gained from the NT on this particular matter. However, since I believe that principles culled from the Bible are relevant to the problems we face in society, I am led to do otherwise. So, what is offered here are some rather tentative considerations which would, it is hoped, alleviate the pain of someone undergoing such a conflict.

It is to be remembered, first of all, that it is accepted in many cultures that a higher calling could transcend one's familial ties: a Buddhist entering monkhood, an ancient Greek pursuing philosophy in the Stoic tradition etc. Thus, the belief that one's religion or philosophy may take precedence over familial ties is not confined to Christianity. This indeed is a minor point but I believe it may help the convert put the matter into perspective.

Secondly, it must also be emphasised that the authority of Jesus is absolute and complete allegiance to him is non-negotiable. Once this is watered down, whether in the name of convenience or alleviation of pain, it will only make for a temporary relief which might bring about dire consequences later on, such as lack of commitment to the teaching of Jesus, nominal Christianity etc. And Christianity would have lost its *raison d'être*. Of course, this perspective must not be abused to further the ends of any church programme or pastor but nevertheless, it is not ours to compromise on the matter of the authority of Jesus. The master who issues the summons to discipleship broods no rivals and demands complete allegiance. Thus, the faithful pastor should teach the converts (and those who have been long in the Christian faith) that the first question we are to ask, when facing conflicts, is not how we could get out of them. Rather, the question should be how we are to act faithfully and lovingly whilst in the midst of conflicts. Certainly, avoidance of conflicts and their resolution are desirable ends but these must not be the primary consideration. The goal of Christian existence is not the avoidance of conflicts.

Thirdly, it should be noted that the person whose authority is absolute is also the almighty and loving God. It is not his intention that we face this matter entirely with our own strength or resources. Therefore, a Christian can draw strength, resources and wisdom from God to face the conflict. He who calls us is also he who provides, and he has promised to be with his people forever.

Fourthly, there is much theological and pastoral mileage in the concept of the new believer's being placed by God into a new family which also gives him a new identity. It is often said that the vertical relationship with God is paramount but it is seldom noted that the restoration of this relationship also sets other important relationships on a right footing. In other words, one comes to understand the true importance and significance of family relationships through being reconciled with God. Instead of their becoming idolatrous, which they would be if they become absolute, they can now be seen as that which God has given for the purpose that we might find love, development and encouragement to be who we ought to be: the people of God. If this is correct, conversion, ideally, does not threaten familial ties but puts them in proper perspective and reorders them in line with the design of our Maker. Thus, a convert should learn to love his family members more even as he knows that his love for God must be primary. Furthermore, the concept of the new family of God formed by spiritual kinship with Jesus broadens one's appreciation of other families and other races, and this could potentially bring about the healing of a divided world. The journey to this new world may be fraught with obstacles and difficulties but it is what the world ought to be and what it will be when the programme of redemption is finally wrapped up (Eph 1.10). Perhaps all these may be regarded as theoretical stuff. But it must be borne in mind that this actually gives foundational conviction for one's life. Moreover, it must be said that the pastoral implication of this is that this troubled convert has found a new family and this new family must do all it can, by the grace of God, to help him. In this way, he would not experience a loss of identity but rather, the joy and power of the new identity given to him in Christ. Sadly, the church often fails to live up to its name as the family of God by failing to show care and concern for these converts.

What is called for is faithfulness to Jesus Christ and his message, and true love and care for the troubled soul facing such conflicts.

A word of advice

Finally, a word of advice. The matter of intrafamilial conflict should not be treated clinically as though once we have established the theological bearings we can say that the job is done and the convert should know how he ought to act. Life is always complicated and the wise pastor would also take into account the personality of the convert and his circumstances. This is not a call for compromise but a call for wisdom to apply what is Biblically and theologically correct. The reflections

above and the conclusions derived from the analysis of the NT data may be said to be, for want of a better word, 'bottom-line' stuff. It defines for us what the bottom line is. It is also directional stuff in that it defines for us what sort of direction we ought to take. But it does not mean we should travel along this direction, unarmed, unprepared and naked. Cushioning the impact, constant prayer and support, providing a listening ear, arranging for support teams, and pointing to forgiveness in Christ for the one who has failed, are provisions and equipment a wise pastor could give to someone on this journey⁶.

¹ I am aware that many Singaporean families today are more tolerant of conversions of family members to another religion and therefore, such intrafamilial tensions may not be commonly found. Nevertheless, such a phenomenon is *still* with us, albeit less commonly than before. It is, therefore, expedient for the church to continue to prepare itself to deal with it as such tensions are often the most traumatic for a new convert.

² Many commentators would support the ecbatic sense as they find this to be more in keeping with the major emphases of Jesus' ministry.

³ In Jewish tradition, this duty was regarded as an entailment of the fourth commandment. Cf. Tobit 4.3; Ecclesiasticus 3m.Berakoth. 3.1. A good discussion on the social implication of this saying could be found in M. Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), pp. 8-15.

⁴ The Greek verb used in Mark 3.21 is *krateo*, which has the meaning of 'to arrest'. This informs us that the action which was envisaged by Jesus' family was drastic and it also reveals their estimate of Jesus' ministry.

⁵ See D.M. May, 'Mark 3.20-35 from the Perspective of Shame/Honor', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 17 (1987), 83-7.

⁶ I am aware that it appears ironical that this article is written at a time when many Singaporeans believe that family is being threatened by divorce and juvenile delinquency. One may ask whether this article is encouraging the further break-up of the family. In answering this, it is to be noted that the Christian perspective supports the importance of the family but not by absolutising it. Rather, it puts it in proper perspective, as an important institution of God and not as an idol. And it is only when we understand the family as an institution of God that a proper attitude towards it could be encouraged and this will lead eventually to strong families. Of course, many familial problems today are the result of making one's self-interest paramount or even absolute. The conclusions of this article would not support this as it is Jesus' authority and this claims over us which are absolute, and not any other forms of interest.

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Genesis, Evolution and A Big Bang

Dr Gordon Wong

The following is the text of a sermon which was preached at Barker Road Methodist Church in September 1996. It was part of a series entitled "Issues arising from the Old Testament".

If you are at a zebra crossing in England, waiting to see if a car will stop before you cross, you will sometimes receive a signal from the approaching car. The driver will flash his headlights at you. In England, everyone understands this signal to mean: "I see you. You can cross. I'll wait for you." If you are driving a car and waiting to make a right turn, the driver in the oncoming car flashes the headlights to tell you to go ahead. He wants to let you cross first. You can turn. But this signal means a different thing in Singapore. If an oncoming motorist here flashes the car's headlights, he is saying, "Watch out! I'm coming. And I'm *not* stopping. Don't you dare turn in front of me."

A signal that is understood clearly in one culture and country is understood in a completely different way in another culture and another country. If this kind of misunderstanding can take place between modern people who live in the same era, imagine the potential for misunderstanding between people who are separated not only by different cultures, but by over 2000 years of history.

Most Old Testament scholars are convinced that such a misunderstanding has occurred in our modern appreciation of Genesis 1. And I think they are correct. Many people in our scientific era have read Genesis 1 and assumed that it speaks about the *physical process* by which God created the physical world. They've seen a flashing headlight and they think they know what it means. We assume that the passage provides us a scientific description of how God chose to create the physical earth. Consequently, there are many books or sermons based on Genesis 1 which try to demonstrate how the theory of evolution or the Big Bang is in harmony with the descriptions in Genesis. Alternatively, we read books or hear sermons which argue that the theory of evolution is wrong because it contradicts the divinely inspired description of earth's creation in Genesis 1. Both approaches assume that Genesis 1 describes the physical process of earth's creation. 1 approach argues that the description in Genesis 1 is in harmony with modern scientific theories, whilst the other approach argues for contradiction. Whether you believe Genesis 1 or the modern scientific theories depends on your bias. This debate or controversy has been a major part of the

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conflict between scientific Christian and non-Christian people for much of the 20th century. It is my conviction that the debate has been based on an almost complete misunderstanding of Genesis 1. A 30 minute sermon, however, is not the place to defend that last statement. I shall concentrate instead on what I think *are* some of the chief concerns God intends for us to learn in Genesis 1.

Firstly, it challenges our misguided fears and distractions. Look at verses 14 to 19. These verses concern the sun, moon and stars. Archaeologists have uncovered many things about the ancient world. And one of the things which is crystal clear is the fact that most of the ancients regarded the sun and the moon and the stars as gods. The sun was widely regarded as the god of creation and sustainer of life. The moon and the stars were responsible for the destiny and fate of life on earth. If the stars came together in a certain way, it would lead to good luck; another way, it would be bad luck. The stars and heavenly bodies were worshipped and feared. To a large extent, many people in today's scientific 20th century still think this way. The horoscopes tell us that we are all born under the sign of a certain star: Gemini or Capricorn or Taurus and so on. When planning a wedding day, many still consult the movement of the stars and the moon to ascertain whether it will be a good or a bad day. Every book store has a section on horoscopes and astrology. Now there is nothing wrong with studying the movement of the celestial bodies. But when we begin to believe that these celestial bodies themselves have the power to control our lives, when we think that our destinies and fortunes are dependent on them, then we have made them into gods, and we have made ourselves their slaves.

But Genesis 1 challenges this idea. The sun and the moon and the stars are not gods. They are created beings. God created them. Apart from God, they would not exist. God has made them for His purposes: to give light to the earth.

Is anyone here an electrician? Do you know an electrician who is frightened of light bulbs? Light bulbs are very important to modern man. They provide light for our homes at night. We would be quite lost today without them. But we don't need to be afraid of them, do we? We should respect the power of electricity which runs through these light bulbs, but we have nothing to fear from the bulbs themselves. Without electricity, they have no power whatsoever.

Genesis 1 says that the sun, moon and stars are just like light bulbs. Without God, they have no ability to emit or reflect light. To worship the stars is to fear

them, and that is as wise a thing as fearing light bulbs. Genesis 1 insists that God alone is the electricity, the power behind all these celestial bodies. It is he we should fear. It is He, not the stars, who controls our lives and who can change our destinies.

Similarly, ancient peoples were understandably afraid of the sea. Many regarded the sea as a god of uncontrolled evil and chaos. Yet Genesis 1 in verse 10 undermines this superstitious fear by describing the sea as just another created body under the control of God. And not only is the sea a created being, God created it good. The sea need not be feared. It has no evil power in itself. It is part of God's good creation. Once again, Genesis 1 is challenging our misguided fears and superstitions.

Again, in ancient Mesopotamia, the 14th, 21st and 28th days of the month were regarded as unlucky days i.e. almost every 7th day of the week was regarded as ominous. This is not unlike Western superstition which regards Friday the 13th as an unlucky day. We cannot be sure if this fear of the 14th, 21st or 28th day was also prevalent in ancient Israel, but if it was, you can appreciate how Genesis would undermine that fear and superstition. Far from being an unlucky day, Genesis 2:2-3 says that the 7th day of every week is a holy and blessed day.

By describing the sun, moon, stars and sea as simply created beings, Genesis aims to free us from unnecessary distractions and fears. And you and I know that such fears and distractions are true of modern 20th century man as well. Once I was told that my flight would be on Friday the 13th, and though I do not regard myself as superstitious, I remember wondering whether or not I should change the date. Houses or apartments in the enlightened West sometimes omit number 13. The developers fear that a house numbered 13 will not fetch a good price. Singapore gynaecologists will tell you that the 8th of August is a day when many would-be parents elect to have a Caesarean birth, since the combination 8-8 is considered to be particularly good for Chinese. Superstitious fears are alive and well in the 20th century. Planning a wedding is difficult enough without having to worry about what the horoscopes say, or about what shape the stars will be in on this or that day. Buying property, especially in Singapore, is a decision which requires a lot of careful and prayerful thought, and worrying over what pattern the planets and constellations will be in is simply an unnecessary and misguided distraction. Unnecessary because we need not fear the planets. A distraction because it takes our eyes away from the source of all power — God. He is the one we should be concerned

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about. He is the creator. This is the liberating message of Genesis 1. We need not be enslaved and distracted by our fears and superstitions. We should be concerned with the One who made the stars and holds them in their place. God is the One who has the control of our destinies in His hand, and He is the One we should fear.

Now secondly, Genesis 1 affirms the privilege and responsibility of mankind. Look at verse 26. Mankind is described as being made in the image of God. Whatever that phrase actually means, it is clear that mankind is given a special place in God's eyes. We are the crown of God's creation and as such, we are given the responsibility of caring for the rest of creation. The Hebrew word which the NIV translates as "let them rule" is better translated as "let them be like shepherds" over the fish of the sea and the birds and all the animals. The word has to do with shepherding, guiding, protecting. Mankind is regarded with dignity and responsibility. Made in God's image.

Incidentally, notice verse 27: mankind refers to both male and female. It is male and female who as mankind are made in the image of God. It is both male and female who comprise the "mankind" which is given the privilege of looking after the fish and animals. So there is no sexual discrimination here in Genesis 1.

Sonja was a bright young woman who had an extraordinary musical talent and a healthy self-confidence. Kind and considerate, enthusiastic and sincere, she showed all the promise of becoming an outstanding school teacher which was her hope when she first arrived at university at the age of nineteen.

But then slowly things changed. This previously happy, vivacious woman often seemed depressed. Her vitality vanished. The brightness in her brown eyes faded. She even seemed to start dressing dowdily. She had come under the influence of a powerful preacher who said that everyone had to die within to themselves. Good feelings were interpreted as sinful; enjoyable acts as wicked. The preacher said she was too full of herself, and that no one deserved to be so happy.

One day, Sonja was hospitalized in the state psychiatric hospital. After a few weeks of intensive care, she was discharged. But her pain seemed unbearable. She had come to believe that she was the most wicked, vile, debased, repulsive, and depraved person that had ever walked on God's earth.

Early one morning, when she could no longer endure the emotional onslaught, Sonja left the centre. She walked the half-mile to the railroad tracks and laid her

head down on the steel rail. Death came quickly as the train rounded the bend¹.

Thankfully this true story does not repeat itself in every one who is made to feel wretched and lower than the lowest slave. Sadly, such a degradation of the dignity of all men and women is sometimes done in the name of Christian theology. But Genesis 1 will have none of this. Mankind, male and female, are accorded the great dignity of being made in God's image, of being given the privilege and position of responsibility, of being declared to be good. Now it is true that by Genesis 3, mankind will have shown itself to fail in its high calling, but that does not change the fact that God still treats us with the dignity and respect which He accorded us in the first place.

Now the biblical balance of mankind's sinfulness and mankind's dignity is a delicate one, and beyond the scope of this morning's sermon. What should be clear, however, is that Genesis 1 tells us that God accords human beings a great privilege and responsibility. This should not only encourage us. It should remind us never to treat a fellow human being, male or female, maid or master, with anything less than human dignity and respect.

Thirdly, and more briefly, Genesis 1 claims to be a message for all human beings. The Old Testament is the Jewish Bible. It tells the story of Israel and her God. It speaks of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac, the patriarchs of the Jewish nation. But the story does not begin with Abraham in Genesis 11. It begins with all of mankind in Genesis 1. Why? Why doesn't the Bible just begin with the birth of Abraham? Why does it waste 11 chapters dealing with a people not racially connected with Jews? Why? Because the Bible is *NOT* just the story of Israel and her God. It is the story of all mankind, the story of the God of all creation. This is the message of Genesis 1. The Bible is not just for Jews and Christians. The Bible is for all mankind. The Bible does not just tell us about the God of Jews and Christians. It tells us of the God of all mankind and all creation. This is the claim of the Bible, and this is why it begins with Genesis 1.

The more I study the Bible and try to understand its message, the more I am convinced of this truth. It has a message which all of mankind needs to hear. It speaks to a world where many people are despairing and pessimistic; it addresses a world which is full of pain and suffering. It speaks to a world where people hurt each other and sin against each other. It speaks to all of us, Jew, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, atheist, agnostic, free thinker and non-thinker. It is a message for all people. It speaks of the God of all creation. This

is the claim which Genesis 1 makes.

Finally, Genesis 1 provokes questions and inspires hope. Many who have read Genesis 1 have been struck by the very neat and systematic presentation of God's creative acts. The pattern is clear. God speaks, and it is so. God sees and it is good. There is evening and morning, day one. The simple pattern is repeated. The impression portrayed is of all creation being in perfect order and in harmony with God's will. All of creation is good and in its right and proper place.

This stylistic and carefully ordered presentation is further enhanced when we look at what happens on each of these 6 days (see Table 1). On Day One, light and darkness are formed. On Day Two, the waters separate and the sky is formed. So now there is water below, and the skies above. Day Three, the waters gather in clumps to form oceans, and this makes dry land appear.

The writer then deliberately matches Day One with Day Four. The sun, moon and stars are created, matching the light and darkness which was formed on Day One. Day Five involves the creation of sea creatures and birds to be placed in the waters and sky formed on Day Two. Finally, the pattern is completed with Day Six, where the animals and mankind are formed to walk about on the dry land and consume the vegetation mentioned in Day Three. Genesis 1 presents the God of all creation, but does so in an obviously stylistic arrangement. There is really no need to try to explain how there could be evening and morning for 3 days before the sun and moon were even created. It is not only modern scientific man who cannot conceive of day and night without a sun and moon; people long ago would not be able to imagine day and night without sun and moon. But I do not think that the original audience of Genesis 1 would have even tried to explain how one could speak of Days One to Three without the sun and moon. Why would they not have bothered? Because they would have known what most scholars today know, and what most Jews and Christians in the days of the early church knew. Genesis 1 is not a description of the chronological sequence and physical process of creation². It is a stylistic presentation of profound theology. I have already mentioned 3 concerns which it conveys, and none of them have to do with the physical sequence or physical process of creation. Now I am suggesting that a fourth concern of Genesis 1 is to invite questions and inspire hope. How does it do this? The very ordered and stylistic presentation of creation emphasizes the harmony and order of creation the way God intended it. God's created universe is meant to be good and well-ordered.

But there is a great chasm between the orderliness of Genesis 1 and the world order which we know today. And not just today, even in Old Testament times long ago, people lived in a world that often did not seem in such good order and harmony. Doesn't your heart at least sigh in sadness whenever you read of earthquakes, famines, and floods? These were very common occurrences then, and not uncommon now. And the beautiful harmonious, picture-perfect presentation of the whole world in Genesis 1 surely provokes the question: Why, O God, isn't our world the way Genesis 1 says you created it? Genesis says you created it good, and in perfect harmony. But our world is far from picture-perfect. Things do not run smoothly. Why? Why? It is a question which Genesis 1 wants us to ask, and it is a question which chapter 2 will begin to answer.

But whilst Genesis 1 provokes such anguished questions of "Why?", it also seeks, I think, to inspire hope. It seeks to tell us that such order, harmony and beauty is God's desire. That's how God intended it, and that's how, perhaps, it can be one day. This possibility, this hope is completed at the end of the Bible, where in Revelation we see the ushering in of a new heaven and a new earth, where the paradise of new creation in perfect harmony is realised. Both Genesis 1 and Revelation 21 use pictures and imagery to convey this hope and inspiration. I want to be a part of that new creation. I want to belong to that world where everything will be in perfect order and harmony. I want to be a part of God's good creation. And the Bible shows me how.

Now I must close. I have said little about evolution or the big bang. But this has been deliberate. Genesis 1 does not discuss the theory of evolution or the Big Bang. It isn't concerned with the physical origins of the earth and humanity. It isn't concerned with the physical process or time at which the universe came into being. I am not a scientist nor a physicist. I am not competent to evaluate the different arguments relating to the plausibility of the theory of evolution or the big bang. Some scientists think that the theory of evolution is highly improbable. They may be correct, but today I want to help you see that even if they are not, and there comes a day when evolution is established as an undisputed and reasonable scientific fact, it will not make Genesis 1 any less powerful or any less true than it is today. For Genesis 1 says nothing about HOW God created the world and mankind. Could He have used a process of millions of years, a process which involved the evolution of species into different kinds? I cannot be certain because Genesis 1 doesn't tell me HOW God created us, nor even how long it

took him to do so. The 7 “days” are not intended to be understood as literal 24 hour periods. Nor does the passage intend to describe the sequence of creation. Genesis 1 says little about the physical PROCESS and METHOD that God used to create the world and us. In this respect, there is no obvious contradiction between Genesis 1 and the theory of evolution or the Big Bang. They do not attempt to describe the same thing. There is NO direct connection between Genesis 1 and scientific theories of evolution. But wait! There is ONE important qualification to that last statement. Genesis 1 DOES tell us that GOD is the Creator. On this important point, Genesis 1 does contradict many evolutionists. For evolutionary theories assume that it was not God, but pure chance, which led to the formation of the simplest cell which over time evolved into more elaborate creatures. Genesis 1 would say, “No!” It was not impersonal Chance or random processes which led to creation. It was an intelligent and personal God. Can a Christian believe in the process of evolution? I believe the answer is “yes”, as long as he does not attribute the power behind creation to random chance processes. I think it is perfectly acceptable for Christian scientists to disagree over the physical process which God used in creation. Whether from a big bang, or from evolution, or any other future theory which scientists may explore, the message and truth of Genesis 1 is not compromised. For Genesis 1 simply does not deal with such issues. To treat it as though it did is to misunderstand its message.

And what is its message? It is a message to those of us who are distracted and caught in the grip of superstitions and misguided fears. God controls our destiny. Not the stars, not bad luck, not fate. Talk to him and ask him for help as you face tomorrow.

It is a message to those of us who feel discouraged, and are struggling to find self-acceptance. Genesis 1 says: You are the crown of God’s creation with an important responsibility. You have dignity in God’s eyes.

It is a message for all mankind. It seeks to provoke all mankind to ask questions and to long for a better world. It seeks to inspire hope and trust in the God who claims to be the Lord of all the universe. I want to know this God. I want to be a part of His new creation where everything will be picture perfect. A place where there will be no sickness, no more crying, no more war. Where little children never will go hungry anymore. Where all of creation will live in harmony with each other and with God. That’s the glorious conclusion which the Bible leads us to hope for. A new heaven and a new earth. That’s where I want to be. That’s

where the Bible says I can be. And that’s where you can be too. I urge you to believe in this God, the Creator of all humanity. Open your heart to Him, and tell Him you want to belong to the new world which He is even now preparing.

Table 1 The stylistic layout of Genesis 1

DAY ONE (vv. 3-5)

Light & Darkness

DAY TWO (vv. 6-8)

The waters separate, Sky is formed

DAY THREE (vv. 9-13)

Dry Land appears, Vegetation grows

DAY FOUR (vv. 14-19)

Sun, Moon & Stars

Day FIVE (vv. 20-23)

Sea creatures & Birds

DAY SIX (vv. 24-31)

Animals & Mankind

1 The story is told by A.D.Hart, *Me, myself and I*, Guildford: Highland Books, pp. 15-17

2 If it were, one would also have to explain the obvious difference in sequence between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. In the former, male and female are both created after the animals (2:18f) and the female after them. There is no contradiction because the ancient writer did not intend his readers to understand the chapters as describing a physical sequence.

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Reversing the Central Role of Deceptive Money

Dr Lee Soo Ann

A common question asked nowadays is, “Where do I keep my money?”

Banks are little safer than shares in companies, if the current financial crisis is anything to go by. If money is kept under the bed, it may be stolen but if kept as bank deposits, they could be “stolen” by bad lending policies of those running the bank. It may be advisable to revert to the previous practices of payment by the week or fortnight so that there is less money to keep between earning it! Perhaps one should even earn less! After all, Malaysians have been exhorted by their own leaders to grow their own vegetables.

Lest these suggestions sound irresponsible or stupid, our Lord has categorically stated that one cannot love both God and mammon. In the last half century, the revolt of communism against reckless capitalism has resulted in many societies, a good example being China, being closed to the full working of the market system for several decades. China's rapid "opening up" in the last decade is possible because of the long sabbatical imposed on its resources. Many "rich" societies now appear to be reaching the limits of further growth so that capitalism needs new "untapped" societies to feed on, in order that it can grow further. What witness should Christians give to the use of money?

I once put the question to my seminary professor and he did not think that money should be abolished despite its evils. It is like asking whether slavery should have been abolished. Slavery was not forbidden in the Old Testament. After God gave the ten commandments in Exodus 20, he gave Israel its system of civil law under which society was to be governed in chapters 21-23. In Exodus 21:1-11, God revealed limits and governing principles to slavery, and wrote them into his legislation for his people.

Perhaps Christians can adopt a similar approach to the use of money today. In this essay, the characteristic of keeping money are first outlined followed by a consideration of how Christians should then handle its keeping in their walk with God.

Keeping Money for What You Can Buy

Money "talks" is a convenient way of stating that money is a common denominator. If I open my wallet to show how much money I have or for that matter how many credit cards there are, I indicate how much I can "talk" in terms of money although I may not actually buy the product being sold. This is very much like indicating how well I can speak English in an English-speaking country. Money is the medium of exchange.

Almost everything can be reduced to money as the saying "a man has his price" indicates. Pay a person well enough and he can do almost anything! Such a reductionist treatment of money arises from its capability to expand arising out of its medium of exchange role. By this I mean that money can be used to buy a variety of goods and services and assets. It is because money can be used to buy so many things that we reduce much of what we want to money in the first place.

Supposing money cannot buy a lot of things. Perhaps local shops do not have enough business connections for them to stock up a variety of items. There is surely

less incentive to earn more money or even to accumulate savings. In the economic development of Malaysia, incentives were given to immigrant labour by the growth of transport and communications in nearby Singapore which widened the range of goods and services which could be bought by the money earned. Today one can even think of the rising cost of living as an incentive for Singaporeans to work harder to earn the money to pay for what is regarded as "essentials."

Today the type of currency in which money is earned and kept is as important as the amount of money earned. What is the use of having lots of rupiah or baht if these cannot be converted into US dollars to pay for what has to be imported? One cannot import with rupiah or baht as the exporter does not want to be paid in these currencies.

Rather than lament the "money-mindedness" of people, Christians should lament the "what-money-can-buy" characteristic of particular forms of, and levels of, money. Different forms of money and different levels of money have different "what-money-can-buy" characteristics. The less variety a particular form of, or level of money can buy, the less its reductionist role, and the less money-mindedness there will be!

Keeping Money As the Provider of Choices Provided by the Market System

The better money serves as a medium of exchange, the more probable would it be chosen to be a store of value also as compared to other assets. One can convert it into other assets and also into goods and services either now or in the future.

In a period of stable prices, money is a safe form of investment which provides the freedom to change one's mind as to what next to buy. Although what one has already bought may be sold in order to have money again in the second-hand market, there is usually a fall in the value which does not make it worthwhile. Even when there is a possibility of capital appreciation, there is a transaction cost in terms of the time needed to realise one's goods in terms of money. Holding money itself as a fixed deposit can bring in a return of interest earning higher than the rate of inflation.

I could use the money saved up to go for a holiday abroad now or to invest in shares when their price goes down. There is also a choice between using the money for a holiday abroad and buying more books. There are so many choices that I may end up forgetting to do anything with the money! So long as the choices are there, this does not matter, provided prices are stable, and so I keep my assets in money form, while I collect

the information necessary to make an appropriate choice.

One crucial piece of information is timing. The market system may not provide me the correct information as to when to make the choice. One fine day, I may just blow the hard-earned saved-up money on a "wrong" purchase or investment!

To what extent is society giving me the correct information? Much of the answer depends on what I myself want, as information search itself takes up time. Information as to timing itself is most difficult to obtain for no one can foretell the future.

Though the market system provides the choices, it may not provide the time to obtain the information to make these choices. It takes time to go through all advertisements in the newspaper, magazines, television, radio and movies (even though many of them are repetitive) and it takes even more time to sort out which ones are true! If one is committed to a simple life-style, why the need to have so many choices?

Different forms of, and levels of money, provide different levels and varieties of access to market-based choices. If the market system is seen not to provide all the information to make consistently wise choices, then why keep money unnecessarily?

Keeping Money as an Index of Oneself

Last but not least, there are some people who keep money not because they want to exchange it for something else or have the ability to do so now or sometime in the future but merely to tell themselves how rich they are compared to others! This arises from the role of money as a unit of account, as money can be divided and added.

However one does not really tell others how much one has! We want others to think we are this rich or that rich, but without disclosing how much we really have. After all, how often do we tell others exactly how much we earn? or have in the bank?

We tell others indirectly, through the goods and services that we buy, the visible assets we hold such as property, jewellery or cars and the company we keep. If we do have much to display, we indicate prospectively, through the professional education we may have attained, or the career that we are now in, as to the income level that we can attain eventually. We may even go so far as to state explicitly the money goal that we have.

Some people cannot spend all that they have, as spending money itself takes time, short of throwing it

around for others to pick up! Yet people keep on accumulating money even though they are already in their old age. Money then becomes an index for oneself, irrespective of others, as if it were a numbers game that one should win.

Money is not always seen as the index of oneself compared to others. Sometimes education is a more relevant index, other times the company one keeps, and as one ages, good health becomes the index to go by and in one's youth, prowess in games or good looks. If money is thus not seen to be so important, why keep money unnecessarily?

Reversing the Centrality of Money

Money was not always so central in community life as it is today. The use of money expanded because it was capable of reducing almost everything into a common denominator, that of quoting almost everything in terms of prices, which is money. The need for such reduction arose from the use of machines which reduced processes to a set which are transferable, the specialisation of labour in which each person is reduced to a set of skills which are capable of being transmitted through training, and the application of such machines and skills to the manufacture of goods and services which are reducible to minimum standards so that they can be produced on a large-scale and exchanged. The "reduction" of economic activity by such changes brought about the use of money which is itself highly "reductionist", in lowering almost everything to a common denominator.

The use of money would shrink if market-biased activities shrank. Robinson Crusoe would need not money. The use of money is marginal in self-subsistent communities and its use would be even less if these communities are very poor, as people would then live from hand to mouth. Does not reversing the centrality of money mean being poor?

In Singapore today, income levels are high and so is specialisation and exchange which are predicated on the use of money. The Christian witness should be that although money is necessary, it is not sufficient for the conduct of wholesome life.

Wholesome life when defined adequately shrinks the relative proportion of attention devoted to the keeping of money by its inclusion of what money cannot buy. There is then less need to keep money for what money can buy. As the saying goes, money can buy a house but not a home, money can buy books but not an education, money can buy food but not good health, money can buy a bed but not a good night's sleep and so on.

Christians can be taught more on what is meant by a home, an education, good health and so on. The use of money can then be seen to be merely one of the means, certainly not the means to these ends. For some, having less money may mean more wholesome living. This is because the second purpose of money, as we have seen earlier, is for the exercise of choices under the market system, money being a store of value.

However money can only be a store of value if prices are stable or increasing only slowly at best. For prices not to rise significantly, considerable trust has to be placed in those running financial institutions and responsible for monetary policies, as well as those involved in international trade, finance and communications. Money is a social invention, though held privately, and if its supply is expanded too fast, its value will fall.

Money is also only worth it as a store of value if the information as to how to spend it is provided accurately and at the right time. However people are often deluged with contradictory information often put out for purposes not consistent with those who are holding the money. Often we are asked to buy, but not when or what or how to sell. Dependence on the trustworthy information of others is even greater when it comes to the keeping of money as an index of oneself. We have seen that money is a worthy index in the eyes of others if it can be seen to buy a lot and this depends on the behaviour of business firms and others in supplying the market with what can be bought. Whether money can continue to do so depends on the trustworthy behaviour of those in positions of financial authority and the supply of reliable information as to how to spend it. However, what makes money an index of prestige is the belief of others that those who have money actually do spend the money and can continue to do so in a worthy manner.

Why should others have such a belief when they are not privy to the spending behaviour of others? After all I would not be telling one and all what I do or do not buy!

The nature of the human heart however is such that we like to think of others behaving in the same way as we do. We may not have the money and we fantasize about what we would do if we had the money and so we look at those who have the money and imagine them spending the way we do. Consequently we envy their ability to do so, forgetting that ability does not mean performance! The person who has the money may in fact be very foolish in spending, which if we had known would invite our ridicule.

Keeping money as an index of others leads to our keeping of money as an index of ourselves in the eyes of others, this being one foolishness leading on to another.

Reversing the Deceptiveness of Money

If the keeping of money is so deceptive, why do we keep it?

The use of money is not obviously deceptive. On the contrary, the use of money is most transparent about economic motives and processes. In any transaction, the seller declares what an object is worth, and the buyer has the right of refusal. No one is forced into any transaction, for the voluntary nature of exchange is always emphasised in the market.

The same goes for the payment of money wages for the services of labour, money profits for the services of risk-taking and enterprise and the exchange of money for land and buildings and other assets.

It is true that for the purchase of many essentials in a place like Singapore, we have to use money but that is because past transparency and trustworthiness in the use of money has led to its extensive adoption. In today's financial crisis, some countries may resort to barter trading since the value of international money is fluctuating considerably but the crisis merely testifies to the strength of currencies being dependent on transparency and trustworthiness. Those countries where the basis of transactions are openly displayed have strong currencies. Where there is cronyism and under-the-table dealings, the weaknesses of currencies are exposed. The use of money is not deceptive where money is there for everyone to see what money can buy, what choices it provides over time and how successful one is as an earner or as an investor. How then does deception arise? Deception in the use of money arises because of yet another characteristic of it, namely, its "fungibility". It is capable of doing many things at the same time and so we "fudge" its use, or collapse these many things into one as if they were not clearly distinct and separate. For example, we need to keep a certain amount of money for what it can buy in terms of essentials but when we see a cheap sale in terms of luxuries, we complain that what we have is not enough since we "must" buy during such a cheap sale!

The same fungibility occurs between the three motives of keeping money outlined earlier. We are already keeping a certain amount of money in its role as a medium of exchange or the motive of what-money-can-buy. We are also keeping some money as a store of

value or the provider of choices given by the market system. However in times of apparent or real distress, the amount needed as a store of value suddenly expands and we feel compelled to reduce the amount of money set aside as a medium of exchange, adding further to our distress. In good times, the amount of money set aside as an index of oneself (the role of money as a unit of account) seems sufficient but if competition is revved up in the company we keep, we find ourselves drawn into ostentatious behaviour so as to keep up with the “Joneses” as the English idiom goes. This is done at the expense of the money set aside as a medium of exchange or as a store of value.

Such fungibility explains why most people complain that there is never enough money. It takes tremendous discipline to decide first of all on what we really need to buy, and stick to it, despite the persuasion of advertisements and peer pressure. Then it needs reliable information at the right time to know how much money to set aside as a store of value. Such information is hard, if not impossible to come by. To add to the uncertainty comes the need for money to tell ourselves how much we are worth! Knowledge of this is most unreliable of all for it is totally dependent on what others think and so the amount of money needed for this motive is extremely volatile.

Dependence on the behaviour and opinion of others makes the fungibility of money a dangerous practice for we end up deceiving ourselves through our handling of money. Not only do we think that we never have enough money (which translates itself into avarice or greed) but we deceive others by not paying what is of true value in our transactions with others (which is stealing) or invest speculatively in maximising our security for the future (which is foolishness) or borrow to keep up appearances as an index of oneself (which is vanity).

Many years ago after I graduated with my honours degree in economics from the then University of Malaya, I was able to obtain employment with the government at a three-digit monthly salary despite the pay-cut for civil servants enforced by the People’s Action Party at the time when it came into power. Previously I was living on a two-digit monthly allowance given by my parents. So concerned was I about mispending my salary that I resorted to an old-fashioned way of spending it. Money for transport was put into an envelope separate from that for food, separate from that for clothing, for tithing, etc. Fortunately the salary came as a packet of currency which could be easily divided! I escaped the habit of fudging money but today it is much harder for the

salary is by GIRO!

Keeping the Heart

Today the question Christians should be asking each other and themselves is “Where do I keep my heart?” as often as they asked “Where do I keep my money?”

Do we know our hearts? Jeremiah 17:9 asks and answers such a question: ‘The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings’ (King James Version).

Money, like slavery, is a social institution, the keeping of which reveals the condition of the human heart. Social institutions themselves require the observance of certain morals, and money demands the transparency of economic motives in economic behaviour, the lack of which goes a long way in explaining today’s financial crisis.

As Christians we pray for an early resolution to the crisis, so that the market system can work better and that economic distress may go away. We should pray for those in authority that they may understand the morality demanded by the working of markets, financial or otherwise. What will not go away however is the fungibility of money which is capable of multiplying human deceit, within oneself and between persons.

Short of abolishing money itself, the fungibility of money can be contained by placing the different motives for keeping money separate, in a hierarchy accountable in a responsible manner to others and to God. Surely we need to keep money for what it can buy and if we are to live from day to day (Matthew 6:34), we are to be grateful for provision of money to do so, as a medium of exchange.

The higher our income, or the higher our aspirations for income, or the higher the income level of the society we are in, the more we need to preserve wealth, and the more the need for money as a store of value. We need to remember however that treasures on earth can be stolen (Matthew 6:19) by those who manage financial institutions or money supply. Lowest in the hierarchy should be the keeping of money as an index of who we are, for that is most precarious of all, though necessary for some in certain occupations.

The ability to order our “money-life” depends on the ability to order our “heart-life” for the keeping of money, though most public, is most secretive. Those who manage our money, whether in banks or shares,

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know our secrets but not our hearts. Only God knows both for it is Jesus who said, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also". If we cannot order our "heart-life" so that our "money-life" is subordinate to it, we may need to reduce our "money-life" so that it can be so ordered. Perhaps this is what the Lord is teaching those of us who have lost a lot in shares, property and currency deposits. What the Lord wants of us however is the enlargement of our heart-life so that money becomes relatively smaller and less fungible. The poor keep money only for what it can buy for they cannot afford more of it as a store of value or as index of one's worth.

Being poor does not mean that one is free of avarice, stealing, foolishness or vanity but at least the poor are more free of the reductionist tendency of those who are rich who can literally measure everything in terms of money, much like David proudly measuring everything he had in terms of the census he carried out in 2 Samuel 24. God wants us to count our blessings, each one of them separately and uniquely, for God Himself is distinct and unique and loves each one of us separately and uniquely.

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Instructions to Authors of Articles

All articles, sermons and book reviews should be sent to Dr Roland Chia, Editor, Church & Society, Trinity Theological College, 7 Mount Sophia, Singapore 228458. The articles will be professionally refereed and any comments will be referred back to the author. The Editor will decide if the article is suitable for publication.

Submission of Manuscript

Manuscript of articles should be submitted in duplicate to the Editor and should be typed in double spacing. The article should be between 4,000 to 5,000 words. Notes should be located at the end of the article, preferably on a separate page. A diskette should accompany the hard copies (MSWord or WordPerfect preferred). Authors should retain a copy of the article.

Book Reviews

Book reviews should also be submitted in duplicate to the Editor and should not exceed 500 words. Books reviewed need not be Christian or religious, although it should be reviewed from a Christian perspective drawing out their relevance and implications to church and society. Reviewers should follow the format below:

Name of author/Title/Place of publication & publisher/Date of Publication/price (if known).

Example: Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern. A History*. London: Routledge, 1995. £12.99.

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A suitable note regarding the author's profession or official appointment, in no more than thirty words, should be included at the end of every article, sermon or book review.