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VIEWS AND NEWS FROM TRINITY THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

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Staying Connected and Grounded

The Local Church in a Global Age

By Rev Dr Lim Teck Peng

A cross in the heart of the city

Photo: Simon Ng

Pentecost Sunday celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and the birth of the church as a witnessing community. Recorded in Acts 2, the multinational and multilingual aspects of this inaugural event bring to view the local dimension of the church, as well as her universal character. Attested in the New Testament and revitalised during the Reformation with the use of the vernacular Bible, the idea of the local church reminds us of the context of Christian witness in which language constitutes an important part.

By recognising the local character of the church alongside her universality, Christians should be better equipped to resist the temptations of religious globalism on the one hand, and religious tribalism on the other. Recognising the scope and impact of religious globalisation, the present reflection focuses on the space for local discernment by churches and Christian organisations that have the means of and desire for projecting a global influence.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, churches and Christian organisations from the developed countries – Singapore included – are agents of globalisation as much as multinational corporations. Armed with ever-advancing technologies in transportation, communication and media, they are able to impact the wider world in ways unimaginable a generation ago. What

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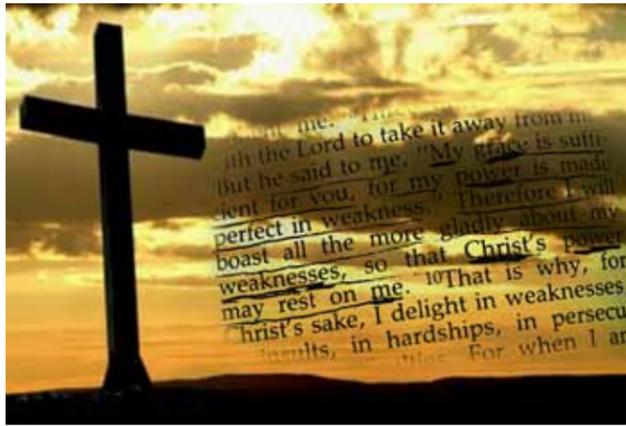
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goes around the globe is seldom information alone, but also includes ideas, values and practices. While such ideas, values and practices may evolve out of a particular context, they migrate globally and become transnational through advocacy.

For example, on the internet, it is not too difficult to encounter the anti-institutional church sentiment of the western media, or an advocacy for the culture wars among American Christians. These two sentiments are poles apart, but they share the same root of a Christian past. Despite the different assessments – one sees the church as still influential, the other sees her as being marginalised – the anti-church sentiment and culture-war mentalities similarly reflect the historical effects of Christendom that still linger on in western society.

Christians who advocate the idea of a culture war see American society as turning away from its biblical foundation, and therefore seek to persuade others to see the future of American Christianity as dependent on winning the culture war. There are even modern-day “apostles” and “prophets” who seek to energise followers by the erroneous teaching that the kingdom of God will be built on earth before the return of Christ.

In the light of the prejudice against Christianity in the west, and the popular Christian advocacy to battle for power and political influence, the following words of Mennonite ethicist John Howard Yoder ring true when he decisively dissociates witnessing for Christ from advocating western democracy: “The ultimate and most profound reason to consider Christ – rather than democracy or justice, or equality or liberty – as the hope of the world, is not the negative observation, clear enough already, that hopes of this kind generally remain incomplete and disappointing, or that they can lead those who trust them to pride or brutality”.

“The fundamental limitations of these hopes is found in the fact that in their search for power and in the urgency with which they seek to guarantee justice they are still not powerful enough. Those for whom Jesus Christ is the hope of the world will for this reason not measure their contemporary social involvement by its efficacy tomorrow nor by its success in providing work, or freedom, or food or in building new socialising structures, but by identifying with the Lord in whom they have placed their trust.” (*The Original Revolution*, 1971)

Jesus did not overturn the Roman empire. Yet, as recorded in Acts 2, those who accepted the Gospel already lived life differently. Their testimony does not lie in their political influence, or in their ability to change the social arrangement of the day. As Yoder pointed out, the power of this new community lies in its “identifying with the Lord in whom they have placed their trust.”

Asia does not have a Christendom-past like the western world. Furthermore, Christians remain a minority group in this part of the world which has been multi-racial and multi-religious all along. Our social context is therefore more akin to that of New Testament churches, who are still grappling with a post-Christendom and multi-religious situation. The New Testament, in preserving the pre-Constantinian memory of the church, reminds us how early Christians witnessed powerfully without access to the power game, deemed so important for the future of the church in the eyes of some nowadays.

Singaporean churches are now living in an age of rampant globalisation of anti-institutional sentiment on the one hand, and religious advocacy for power and influence on the other. The faithfulness to witness as a minority group despite prejudice against the church, the ability to examine the biblical basis and theological soundness of a religious advocacy, and the awareness to discern the uniqueness of the local milieu, are all attributes that will help a local church to stay grounded scripturally and contextually while remaining connected globally. ❖



Rev Dr Lim Teck Peng
Associate Dean
Lecturer in Christian Education

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Spiritual Formation through Study and Reflection

The goal of theological education is to develop the faith of the Christian community. This faith, although personal in nature, must ultimately result in a form of spirituality that promotes ethical behavior and genuine concern for the wellbeing of others. Often perceived as an academic pursuit, theological education actually takes the soul on a journey to engage heart and mind in order to find a closer alignment with the will and purposes of God for one’s life.

It does not mean that everyone has to complete a degree in theology to reach that goal, but it is essential for Christians who are earnest about their faith to keep on learning and to “be transformed by the renewing of [their] mind” (Rom 12:2). There are many lay people with busy schedules who have come to realise that they must make time to commune more intimately with God through study and reflection. Life in the urban environment is usually not conducive to listening to the voice of God, so these lay people often wish for opportunities to learn how to integrate spirituality with the various demands on their time and resources.

As a theological institution, TTC is fully committed to equipping lay people who are the backbone of congregational life and mission. In response to an increasing need for integration of faith and practice, our

college will be conducting weekend retreats for developing strong spiritual discipline.

We believe that a 24-hour retreat from Friday evening to Saturday evening will be short enough to initiate participants. It is our hope that retreatants will take similar retreats on their own once they had learned some basic spiritual disciplines. After attending the retreat, participants who so wish may arrange for individual meetings with their spiritual directors to further reinforce what they have learned. TTC will conduct three retreats this year, to be followed by four from next year. The first will be held on 6 – 7 May. Our lecturers, Dr Simon Chan and Dr Jimmy Tan, will be the instructors.

Equipping lay people is an ongoing commitment of our college. Many have attended our evening classes and have found them suitable for their needs. Increasingly, more are signing up for day-time lectures as occasional students, and because of full time employment, they are able to attend only one course per semester.

As we seek ways to serve the church, one feedback has prompted us to provide theological education at the Diploma level. The Diploma in Theological Studies (DipTS) is designed primarily to help lay Christians, who desire foundational but also high-quality theological education either for their own development or in preparation for serving as lay leaders in the Church. The DipTS will commence in July.

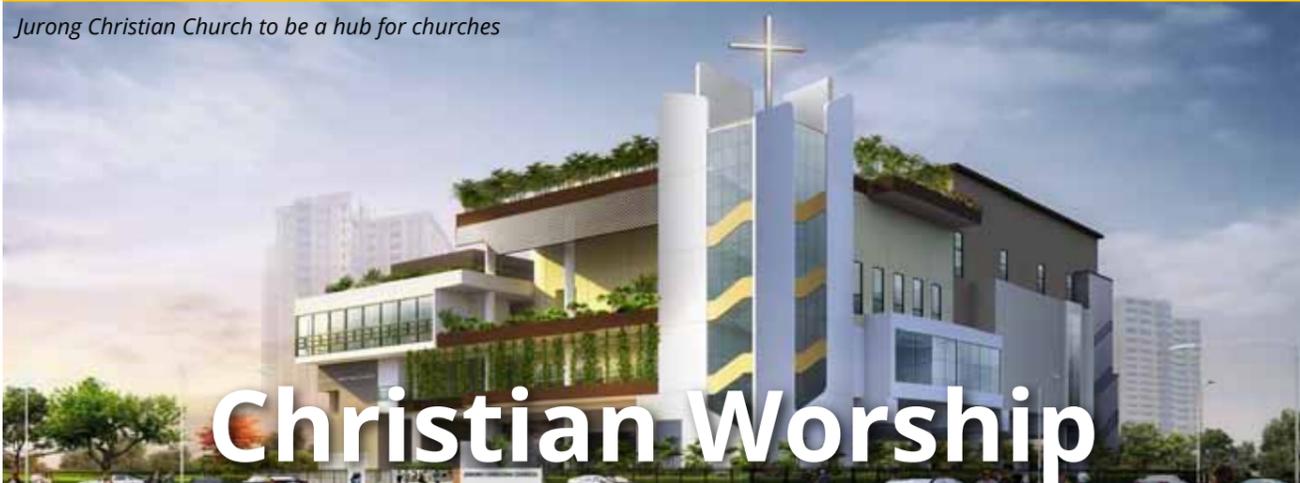
We are encouraged that Christians are seeking a deeper level of authentic faith. With churches putting more focus on spiritual formation, and increased emphasis on spiritual disciplines and training for discipleship, we can better prevent Christians from being overwhelmed by the secular culture we are called to transform.

As a partner of churches engaged in equipping people to be disciples, TTC will continue to offer sound and solid teaching as well as encourage the pursuit of spiritual disciplines so that our churches remain vibrant in their life and witness. ❖

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Jurong Christian Church to be a hub for churches



Christian Worship and the Shortage of Space

By Rev Dr Leonard Wee

Churches in Singapore have to deal with a reality that is unique, compared to many of their counterparts in other countries. Many of the churches here have been built on land that has a leasehold tenure of 30 years (or are located in buildings that have a similar leasehold arrangement). Every 30 years, these churches need to renew their leases to use the space for another 30 years, at the prevailing market rates. The net effect is a financial burden that few churches in other countries have to bear. Based on some estimates, the additional financial commitment necessary to sustain these leases can take up as much as 20% of a church's annual budget, considering the typical weekly combined worship attendance of between 1,000 and 1,500 worshippers.

Given such burdens, while churches that are sitting on freehold properties can channel much of their funds to useful ministries, other less fortunate churches are constantly on a fund-raising mode to sustain the use of their facilities. Many churches do so with the hope that, once the lease is renewed, their congregations would continue to grow. This would hopefully lessen the financial burden, per capita, for the next lease renewal. However, that hope is also limited by the fact that the church can only accommodate so many additional members on a Sunday, as far as the physical space is concerned. This is quite a sombre language to use in talking about the ministry of the gospel! But it is a stark reality that many churches in Singapore have to grapple with.

Coupled with this is another trend, which is the growing number of Christians. According to the latest population census report in Singapore (2010), the general population grew at the rate of approximately

2.34% p.a. in the past 10 years. The number of Christian worshippers, however, grew from 588,000 in 2000 to 930,000 in 2010 (as reported in the Straits Times on 23 Feb 2015), an annualised growth rate of 4.7% p.a. That is double the rate of the population increase. While the data on the physical space allocated for religious use in Singapore (especially for use by Christian churches) is not available to the public, it is nonetheless conceivable that the space crunch for churches in Singapore will be increasing in the years to come, based on the trends mentioned here. In other words, Christians in Singapore have a problem at hand.

So, what is the solution? Among other things, the Singapore government is encouraging the development of a new approach to the sharing of space for Christian worship — a hub for multiple churches to use. Quite recently, such a project was announced: a \$25m hub was proposed at a location in Jurong. Despite some teething issues in that particular project, such an approach can alleviate the space constraints to some extent. However, one might ask, will that be an adequate measure in the long run, given the trends? How effectively would a pro-



A Methodist congregation worships in this commercial building

ject for 3 or 4 churches be a solution for the more than 500 Protestant congregations (according to the Straits Times report mentioned above) that exist in Singapore? A more profound solution, I think, have to come from Christians themselves.

For the past two thousand years, most Christian communities have their worship on Sundays. This goes back all the way to the book of Acts, where it is mentioned that the Christians gathered together on the first day of the week, Sunday (Acts 20:7). Apparently, it was chosen because our Lord Jesus resurrected on a Sunday, and it is also the first day of creation (Justin Martyr, *I Apology*, 67). In 1 Cor 16:2, the apostle Paul also indicates that the church gathered on “the first day of the week”. At about 100 A.D., the Apostolic Father Ignatius also mentioned that the church met on a “Lord’s Day” (*Letter to the Magnesians*, 9). So, with some minor exceptions, Christians have gathered together on Sundays for worship since the earliest days of the church, as far as we know. However, can some adjustment be made to accommodate the growing number of worshippers in our churches?

Perhaps, in this regard, churches in Singapore should consider holding their worship services on Saturday evenings, in addition to Sundays. This is what some churches are already doing, in order to accommodate the growth in the size of their congregations. If we were to follow the Jewish reckoning of the day, our Lord’s day would have started on a Saturday evening, just as the Jewish Sabbath would have begun from Friday evening. In that way, Christians can still remain faithful to the significance of worshipping the Lord on a Sunday as a church.

As a Presbyterian pastor, I can in fact go one step further to take into consideration what Scripture says with regard to the question of worshipping on a Saturday evening. Regarding the keeping of special days, the Bible says that whether a person considers one day to be sacred, or everyday to be sacred, it is fine as long as he does so to the Lord (Rom 14:6). No one is supposed to make the observance of certain days a legal require-

ment (Gal 4:9-10), nor should Christians allow anyone to judge them on such a basis (Col 2:16-17).

Admittedly, the original contexts of these biblical injunctions are not whether a church can worship on a day other than Sunday. Nonetheless, I think the overall principle that can be drawn from these passages is that the specific day in which the church gathers is itself not the most crucial issue. In other words, whether Christians come together for their weekly worship on a Saturday evening or a Sunday, there is some room for flexibility. Then again, given the deep significance of Christian worship on a Sunday mentioned earlier (with Saturday evening being an acceptable time-frame

according to the Jewish reckoning), I would not venture further to suggest that any day of the week would be acceptable. It is still important, in my view, for the church service to gravitate towards the Lord’s Day (Sunday) itself, which is how Christians have regarded it since the earliest times.

Given the long-term implications of the severe cost of land use in Singapore, it is time for Christians to rethink their use of the available church space. It is not just about using the church premises for running other community services like kindergartens during the week. It is also about allowing the church to accommodate a much larger number of believers. This

must first begin with a renewal of our understanding of worship, and a reconsideration of what it means to come together as a congregation to render praise to God as a body of Christ, when we listen to the proclamation of his word. It requires a rethinking of our theology, and a recalibration of our set practices. This is something that the theologians from the West do not need to address, since it is not the situation their churches are facing! If churches in Singapore are able to make adjustments and seriously consider having worship services on Saturday evenings in addition to Sunday, it would contribute significantly towards alleviating our space constraints in the long term.

May the Lord grant us wisdom as we make decisions that would serve the interests of the kingdom of God and remain faithful to his sacred word! Amen. ❖

Christians have gathered together on Sundays for worship since the earliest days of the church, as far as we know. Nonetheless, it is pertinent for us to ask, is it absolutely necessary?



Rev Dr Leonard Wee
Lecturer in New Testament



Is True Worship "Use-less"?

By Dr Tan Loe Joo

The famous spirituality writer Prof James M. Houston once made an observation about North American Christianity: "The Church is much more influenced by its prevailing culture than the gospel".

That observation has remained with me, and I have often had occasion to ponder upon it throughout my ministry. Are our churches more influenced by our current culture than by the message of the gospel? Are Singaporean Christians any less susceptible to our culture than our North American sisters and brothers? In this article, I argue that we are, and that we have already drunk so deeply from the well of our culture that it has affected our Christian liv-

ing, especially our worship of God.

The one Singaporean cultural trait that has exerted immense influence upon Christians and churches today is functionalism. By functionalism, I refer to the belief/practice that every object should have a purpose; in fact, if no purpose is found or if an object does not produce tangible results quickly, it would be ruthlessly eliminated regardless of principle. Few today would question that the Singaporean model of progress over the past decades owes much to this adherence to functionalism (and its close cousins: pragmatism and utilitarianism). With that has come economic success such that our country is now often ranked amongst the top in terms of GDP

The one Singaporean cultural trait that has exerted immense influence upon Christians and churches today is functionalism



per capita, attractiveness as a location for investment and other macroeconomic indicators. Functionalism is so deeply embedded in our economic policies, educational institutions and social mechanisms that it is a part of the Singaporean psyche.

As we survey our local Christian scene, we find that churches often also subscribe to a form of functionalism. Great efforts are directed towards growth and progress through various forms of church ministry. I do not mean to suggest that it is undesirable for our churches to be vibrant and growing. However, there are significant problems with adopting a functional approach to the gospel. Taking worship as a case in point, I would argue that (1) our practice of it has been skewed due to a functional approach, and (2) that true worship of God is, by its very nature, meant to be use-less.

To expand on the second assertion, when I say that Christian worship is "use-less", I am not suggesting it is meaningless or futile. Rather, by "use-less" I mean that it should not be utilised to serve any function for the church or the individual Christian. In other words, authentic Christian worship should not be functional.

So what is amiss in our current Christian worship? Many of the worship practices taking place today are employed as tools to help the individual grow in her faith and increase church attendance. While aiming for growth in faith and church attendance is not wrong in itself, this view of worship deviates from its theological understanding, which is to accord the highest place to God. When we functionalise worship, even if it is for Christian growth, we are suggesting there is a higher purpose to the worship of God. To take a concrete example, a functional approach that says, "We should do worship using these songs and sermons, so that we may grow spiritually and numerically", means that worship of God has been turned from an end in itself into a means to another end. The stark biblical term that describes the suggestion of a higher end to the worship of God is simply idolatry. True worship entails the first commandment: "Thou shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:3). The clear imperative given to the Israelites is that the worship of God is the ultimate aim in itself. God and only God himself is to be adored and revered.

But doesn't worship done the right way lead to Christian and church growth? It does. But I would argue that these are derivative and secondary byproducts. They are derivative in that they flow naturally from our worship, and they are secondary because they should not be taken as the principal goals. The test is to ask ourselves the question: If our worship

does not lead to any of these beneficial effects, do we still worship God? And the proper answer is, "Yes, of course." Christians are commanded to worship and glorify God even if there are no favourable outcomes, simply because he is God. As the prophet Habakkuk reminds us,

Though the fig tree should not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.
(Hab 3:17-18)

This understanding of worship should not be taken as an excuse to be indolent about our worship sessions. Rather, the main purpose of this article is to argue that when we approach worship as a means to growth, we actually subvert it. Our thoughts are no longer on God the Giver, but on the gifts and benefits that accrue to us from worship. May I suggest a Singaporean paraphrase of Habakkuk's personal confession to summarise the proper theological attitude towards our God:

When we functionalise worship...we are suggesting there is a higher purpose to the worship of God

Though my prayers for healing do not seem to be answered,
and my material life is not improving,
my career is going nowhere,
and my children are not doing well in life,
our church is not growing in numbers,
and our giving has not increased,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.

Let us worship God because he is worthy, rather than for any benefits that it may bring us. ❖



Dr Tan Loe Joo
Lecturer in Theology

The Greening of TTC

Sowing and Harvesting on Campus

By Rev Dr Yu Chin Cheak, Lecturer in Christian Education and her husband Rev Dr George Martzen

What is the benefit of a community garden for Trinity Theological College?

For almost two years students and faculty have been raising the dust in the quad between the library and administration blocks, growing various crops, including corn, beans and herbs. More recently a “cutting edge” hydroponics system was added, providing not only salad greens, but also the relaxing sound of splashing water for residents.

There are a number of reasons for having a community garden, including the simple value of participating in one’s own food production. Growing your own vegetables brings more assurance of food security, as well as the satisfaction of eating what you have produced.

Angela Tay, wife of Dr Edwin Tay, has been part of the gardening group since the beginning. “It has opened our eyes to the joys and challenges of vegetable gardening, and brought appreciation for farmers who cultivate produce for our daily consumption,” she said, noting with appreciation the fellowship of those students and faculty members who work together to make the plot productive. “It’s a chance to enjoy the fruit of our labour, while remembering God, who sends the rain and sunshine and makes the seeds to grow. What a wonderful partnership we have with our Creator!”

Indeed, horticultural practices

offer some people a connection to God that might even be called spiritual. Student Genevieve Goh had never thought about why gardening is important, even though she has been doing it most of her life. When young, she grew papaya and pomelo. When she lived in places like New Zealand and West Africa, it felt like paradise, because she always had herbs and vegetables at her doorstep. “How wonderful it is to feel the earth between your fingers and toes,” she remarked, “to enjoy the privilege of breathing in fresh oxygen continuously produced by God-ordained chemical reactions in green plants.” For her the primary experience of gardening evokes a sense of worship, for as she perceives nature with the senses of sight, sound, touch and taste, she is moved to an attitude of praise, “Listen to God speak to you in all His Majesty, and give Him the glory!”

Gardening has helped student Kenny Lei to expand his theological reflection. He raises the question, “How can gardening be related to theology?” After all, one would think that students come to TTC to attend lectures, read books and write papers. However, Lei observes that his experience with the gardening team “helps [him] to reflect on God’s salvation plan for all the earth.” He notes how people typically think of God’s salvation plan as only for human souls. While this remains vital, he has come to see that God desires

to redeem all of creation. “Gardening,” Lei said, “reminds me that as a disciple of Christ, I must be concerned not only about human souls, but also the protection of God’s creation.” Care for creation involves both the big things, like supporting the Paris Climate Conference, and the small things, like rejecting disposable dishware during community lunch. “I believe a more holistic view of God’s salvation plan is to recognise God’s mission not only for humanity, but for all of creation”.

For student Kevin Ngan, the practice of gardening is naturally theological, because according to Genesis 2, God is the first gardener. Ngan observes in the Genesis text a God-given three-fold design for the garden of nature: beauty in the trees that were pleasing to the eye, provision in the trees that bore edible fruit, and the symbols of relationship in the trees of life and of knowledge. But this design has been forgotten. “Beauty defined by God is no longer pursued,” Ngan said. “Instead perversion prevails and sustainability is replaced by profit-seeking farming driven by greed.” In Christ, we are given the power to redeem what was lost in Eden. “So, let us choose to reflect this in the gardens God has placed us in, and continue God’s good work here on earth,” he said.

According to these members of the gardening team, the community garden has theological, as well as practical, value. It is certainly a complementary mode of doing theology, whereby the primary experience of working with God’s creation both evokes praise and worship and also expands the capacity to reflect on other theological studies in the classroom. ❖



Asia Journal of Theology Appoints New Editor

By Dr Limuel Equina, Executive Director of ATESEA

Dr Simon Chan, Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College, has been appointed the new Editor of the Asia Journal of Theology (AJT). Dr Chan has vast experience in publication and editorial work. His appointment affirms TTC's support for the work of the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA), of which TTC was one of sixteen founding members in 1957.

Since its first publication in 1987, the AJT has been one of the main resources for Asian biblical and theological scholarship and contextualisation. The ecumenical orientation of AJT also adds value in promoting common understanding and mutual cooperation through sharing of resources and personnel among the member seminaries of the three associations (see "A Short History of AJT").

AJT is a peer reviewed journal and is published twice annually with the main focus on Asian concerns. It is circulated primarily in South East Asia, India and North America. Submissions are welcomed and should be sent to the AJT editor, Dr Simon Chan, at ajt@atesea.net. ❖



A Short History of AJT

The Asia Journal of Theology (AJT) has a worldwide circulation. It was originally published by three major associations in Asia – the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA), the North East Asia Association of Accredited Theological Schools (NEAAATS), and the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC), India. As a product of a series of consultations, AJT aimed at linking up the said associations to promote the production of contextual theological resources.

Prior to the first publication of AJT in 1987, ATESEA and NEAAATS were the only ones engaged in collaboration through publication. Both merged their publications and formed The

East Asia Journal of Theology in 1983.

Before the merger, ATESEA had its own journal which was first published in 1959. It was conceived by ATESEA as a "means of communication" among its members so that the schools can "become better acquainted with each other" during the formation stage of the Association. Later, the three regional accreditation agencies formed a trilogy of theological associations in Asia. This cooperation also gave birth to the AJT.

Currently, ATESEA and BTESSC continue to publish the journal jointly and consider AJT their official publication. Their partnership also covers sharing in the management and administration of the journal. ❖

Religious Extremism and Our Response A Faith and Society Forum

By Rev Dr Chiang Ming Shun, Lecturer in Church History

The Islamic State is neither Islamic nor a State!" The participants at the FaithSOC Forum organised by the Centre for the Study of Christianity in Asia (CSCA) at TTC heard this point forcefully reiterated by the speaker Dr Mohamed bin Ali. Dr Mohamed was delivering his talk entitled "ISIS: The Threat of Extremism and the Muslim Community in Singapore" on 23 February 2016. This Assistant Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at Nanyang Technological University gave an informative and captivating presentation to the TTC community. Also in attendance were Mr Zainul Abidin bin Ibrahim, the Director of Strategic Engagement of the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore (MUIS) and Ustaz Muhammad Fazalee bin Ja'afar, the Head of the Harmony Centre (an organisation under MUIS).

Dr Mohamed's talk was divided into two main sections. In the first part, he traced the history of ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), helping the audience understand how this organisation has evolved through the decades to its current form. Dr Mohamed also explained certain aspects of ISIS' ideology and why Muslims all over the world might find it attractive and compelling. For example,



Dr Mohamed bin Ali addressing students and alumni

ISIS' teachings on how its endeavours are part of the fulfilment of end-time prophecies help it recruit sympathisers and soldiers

— all eager to play a role in these "end-time" events and even die as martyrs in the process. The success of ISIS can also be attributed to its astute use of technology to spread this ideology.

Dr Mohamed concluded this first part of his talk by mentioning briefly the threats arising from religious extremism faced by Singapore. In the past few decades, these have stemmed mainly from the activities of the radical group Jemaah Islamiyah.

In the second part of his presentation, Dr Mohamed shared his views on how we should respond to the threat of religious extremism. He pointed out the limited effectiveness of a military solution. In the long term, a 'softer' strategic approach is needed which focuses on challenging the ideology taught by ISIS in effective ways. To this end, Dr Mohamed shared about the work of the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) in Singapore, an organisation of which he is the Vice-Chairperson.

The RRG is a group of Muslim clerics who volunteer their time and energy to provide religious counselling to those detained for religious extremism. It also publishes materials and holds talks aimed at countering extreme interpretations of Islam. In their counselling, the members of the RRG seek to challenge the understanding of Islamic ideas and concepts held by these detainees. They also show care and concern for them, since many of them turn to religious extremism because of their marginalisation in society.

In the interaction with the audience which followed the talk, Dr Mohamed ably answered the many questions posed to him on this "hot topic" of the day. He ended the forum by observing that it is "important for us to continually speak out against ISIS. We cannot give them any legitimacy." ❖



The Role of Religion in Society

By Dr Roland Chia, Chew Hock Hin Professor of Christian Doctrine and Theological and Research Advisor to the Ethos Institute for Public Christianity

According to a recent study conducted by the Pew Research Centre, Singapore is the most religiously diverse nation in the world. Slightly more than 80 percent of the population have religious commitments and belong to faith communities. About 19 percent of the population are Christians.

Although ours is obviously a religious society, the question concerning the role of religion in the public square remains contentious. Some maintain that religious voices should be heard and that religion can make a contribution to society. But others are of the view that religion is a private matter and therefore should be excluded from the public square.

On 22 March, Ethos Institute for Public Christianity discussed this important topic with Minister Tan Chuan-Jin and Bishop Rennis Ponniah in its annual event called The Ethos Conversation.

Mr Tan Chuan-Jin is currently Minister for Social and Family Development. Bishop Rennis Ponniah is the 9th Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Singapore.

The conversation, which lasted for nearly 80 minutes, was wide-ranging and energetic. It covered issues as diverse as the contributions of the Church to nation building, the relationship between religion and politics, and how the Christian community can help make our society more secure.

About 200 Christians from different churches and



(L-R) Bishop Rennis Ponniah, Minister Tan Chuan-Jin and Dr Roland Chia during Q & A

denominations attended the event. Among the audience were a number of prominent Christian leaders, including the Bishop of the Methodist Church, the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, Singapore, key leaders of the Evangelical Fellowship of Singapore (EFOS) and the heads of several Christian organisations.

Ethos (<http://ethosinstitute.sg>) is a Christian think-tank formed by the National Council of Churches, Singapore, Trinity Theological College and the Bible Society of Singapore.

The Ethos Conversation is an annual event in which we speak to prominent Christian leaders and experts on the most important and pressing issues of our time. ❖

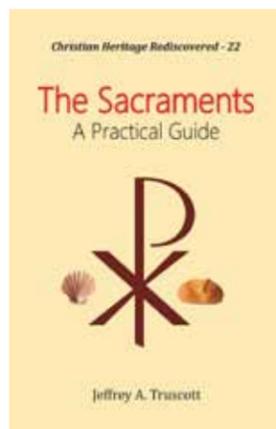
Our Chaplain's New Book

By Dr Tan Kim Huat, Chen Su Lan Professor of New Testament and Academic Dean

There is nothing quite like it", so writes the Rev Dr Gordon Lathrop, the Emeritus Professor of Liturgy at Lutheran Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), about the latest book by our very own chaplain, Rev Dr Jeffrey Truscott.

Readers all over the world will certainly be blessed by this highly practical, and yet profoundly theological, guide to the sacraments. In this regard, the TTC Community may be said to be doubly blessed, as the Community was privileged with an insider take on this special book during its launch at TTC on 2 February 2016. As icing on the cake, the book was sold at a very special price and autographed by the author. Not surprisingly, many copies were snapped up by the many who turned up. It's great to be at TTC! ❖

The book can be purchased at the TTC reception desk at S\$35.00.



Subversive Liturgy: Christian Worship and Its Implications for Social Ethics and Ecology

From a theological perspective, the liturgy is not one of many possible forms of worship, but is the very embodiment and expression of the Church's faith. Far from being a ritualistic activity, it has radical and far-reaching social-political and ecological implications. These lectures will show how the church's engagement with these societal issues develops out of the liturgy, and why the modern church needs to practice a theologically sound liturgy.



- 19 July The Liturgy as Enactment of the Faith of the Church
- 20 July The Liturgy and the Formation of an Ethical Community
- 21 July The Liturgy and the Transformation of Creation

7:45pm @ TTC Chapel

Speaker: Rev Dr Simon Chan

Rev Dr Simon Chan is Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College. He is author of numerous books including *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshipping Community* (IVP, 2006) and *Grassroots Asian Theology: Thinking the Faith from Ground Up* (IVP, 2014).

Free admission.

Please register online at www.ttc.edu.sg. For more information, email: csc@ttc.edu.sg.



Theological Students Enjoy Sports and Fellowship

By Mak Sue Ann, a 3rd year MDiv student

On Friday, 4 March 2016, hundreds of seminarians gathered excitedly at the ACS (Independent) sports field for the annual Inter-College Games. These yearly sports gatherings started in the 1970s between SBC and TTC, but by 2011, BTS, EAST and TCA were also participating. In line with the theme "Healthy Competition, Healthy Christian", a game of friendly dodgeball, which had teams made up of different schools, kick-started the programme. Included was a new game of Quiz Whiz, requiring participants to answer questions in church history, biblical studies, theology, and current affairs. At the end of the day, the prizes were secondary for we were all equally sticky and sweaty, exhausted and spent, yet collectively encouraged by an afternoon of new friendships that will hopefully last beyond our time in our various colleges. ❖



Photo: Simon Ng

Many Lives, Yet One in Christ

By Ian Chew, a 2nd year MDiv student and Student Council President 2016

I have always marvelled at God's grace in orchestrating the events that brought about the founding of TTC. It took more than a hundred years since the first missionaries arrived in Singapore and a catastrophic world war to engender a spirit of unity and cooperation among the different churches, which enabled the setting up of our college. As the new Student Council president, I recognise that our student life and leadership must also be undertaken in the same spirit of ecumenism, based on the recognition that there is only one body of Christ.

The students at TTC hail from many different countries and cultures; yet are one. The apostle Peter puts it beautifully when he refers to the community of believers as living stones, being built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). There is an appreciation of the diversity in the community, yet also the realisation that all of us together growing in faith and maturity constitute the temple of the living God.

The activities organised by the Student Council in 2016 provide the platform for us to express our

understanding of what it means to belong to the same body. Whether through the formal regular chapel services and family group and class group sessions, or the informal student-initiated activities, we aim to grow in love and appreciation for one another as fellow citizens in the kingdom of God.

As a lampstand on a hill cannot help but give light to its surroundings, a church whose members love God and one another is a sure testimony of God's goodness and grace to the community around her. Thus our activities must serve not only to build up the community, but also contribute to the poor and less privileged through compassionate service. One way in which we are doing this in the current season of Lent is to take up a collection amongst the TTC community, which will be presented to selected Christian organisations.

Finally, being mindful that we are all called to serve in different capacities after graduation, we all look to God to form us even as we are pursuing our studies, believing that His Spirit is already at work in us, transforming us as a people and preparing us for the works of His ministry. ❖

Introducing the Council Members...



Front Row (L-R): Tan Chee Wee, Tan Tiang Keng, Chua Chiew Poh, Ian Chew Houng Meing (President), Zhang Xinyu (Vice-President), Chadrick Yeo Yong Boon, Glenn Chan Jian Wen, Chee Ming Wei Alvin, Chen Xiaodong

Back Row (L-R): Rev Dr Edwin Tay (Acting Dean of Students), Yehezkiel Christofen Tang, Chek Jia Jun, Lei Chi Kin, Lam Kuok Wang, Lee Allan, Ang Si-En Sarah, Jasper Ngoh Jun Jie, Tan Chew Yean, Chew Yong Alex, He Yin, Wendy Lee Ying Ying, Lew Kiat Lern, Naw Winsome Paul, Luu Quynh Anh, Emanuel Goh Shengliang, Lin Mingzhong, Ong Chee Xiang Joshua, Jeremy James s/o Veda, Lim Kian Seng Jacob, Chan Ek-Ki Reginald, Rev Dr Ngoei Foong Nghian (Principal)

Alumni News | Punctuations in Time

Congratulations to...

Rev Isaac Raju Vedamuthu (BD 2009) on his ordination as Elder of the Emmanuel Tamil Annual Conference, Methodist Church in Singapore on 7 November 2015 at Tamil Methodist Church (Short Street).

Ticoalu Engelbert Hendrikus Peter (MTh 1) on his marriage to Stephanie Karijanto on 7 December 2015.

Pastor Teo Sau Chin (MDiv 2011) and her husband, Anthony Chok, on the arrival of their baby girl, Charis, on 22 December 2015.

Byron Teo Yongxin (MDiv 3) and his wife, Adel Yeo, on the arrival of their 2nd child, Thaddeus, on 6 January.

Benjamin Fong Guo Wei (BD 2014) and **Rev Peace Choi Pyong**

Hwa (MDiv 2013) on their marriage on 9 January.

Rev Steven Asirvatham (BD 2011) on his collation as Hon Canon of the Diocese of Singapore on 10 January, at St Andrew's Cathedral.

Rev Canon Terry Wong Yee Choong (MDiv 1992) on being instituted and inducted as the Vicar of the St Andrew's Cathedral on 10 January.

Rev Joseph Goh Thong Hoe, (BD 2000), who returned to the community of his alma mater to serve as the Warden of St Peter's Hall with effect from 1 February.

Joel Tay Zhiming (MDiv 2011) and his wife, Joyce, on the arrival of their baby girl, Josephine, on 25 February.

Condolences to...

The family of the late **Rev Rudy Chandra (MDiv 1998)** who passed away on 9 October 2015 in Indonesia.

The family of the late **Rev Benjamin Chiu Bing Kong (CTS 1957)**, who went home to the Lord on 1 January.

Rev Susanty Parsaoran Manullang (MDiv 2006) on the demise of his beloved mother on 7 January in Indonesia.

The family of the late **Preacher Ting Ai Nguet (MMin 2010)** who was called home to the Lord on 25 January.

Rev Jacob Vu Hong Thai (MDiv 2003) on the passing of his beloved father, the late Dr Vu Hoi, aged 80, on 18 February, in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The family of the late **Ms Wang Lip Bun (MDiv 2008)** who was called home to the Lord on 20 February.

Rachel Chua Meow Choo (MTS 1) and her family, on the demise of her brother, Chua Yong Kwan, on 20 March.

Betty Yu Shuet Kuen (BTh 1972) whose father, Rev Yu Li Chan, went home to the Lord on 28 March.

Caole Gladys Grace (MDiv 3) on the demise of her beloved father, Mr Eslim Raguindin Caole, on 1 April in the Philippines.

Thank You for Your Partnership in Theological Education

TTC depends fully on the generosity of well wishers. Your gifts will be used to train men and women for Christian Outreach and Ministry in Singapore and the region. We invite you to consider the following ways to contribute to our ministry:

- **By Cheque** payable to "Trinity Theological College". Mail to: 490 Upper Bukit Timah Road, Singapore 678093
- **By Bank or ATM transfer** to our DBS current account 033-017261-3
- **By way of Bequests** to TTC. We shall be pleased to discuss this plan with you. You may email the principal@ttc.edu.sg or call us at 67676677.

CDCM Evening Classes

1 Corinthians

Dates: 13 Jul – 31 Aug (8 Wednesday evenings)
Time: 7:30pm – 9:30pm
Venue: St. Andrew's Cathedral
Instructor: Rev Dr Oh Boon Leong

Christians and the Media: Constructive Engagement

Dates: 7 Jul – 25 Aug (8 Thursday evenings)
Time: 7:30pm – 9:30pm
Venue: TTC Lecture Room 2
Instructor: Ms Lucilla Teoh

Details are available on our website www.ttc.edu.sg

Spiritual Retreat for Lay Leaders

By Rev Dr Jimmy Tan, Lecturer in Pastoral Theology

Once, after an intense period of ministry, Jesus said to his apostles, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mk 6:31). Today, Jesus continues to invite us to a place of rest and refreshment after intense periods of work and ministry. Similarly motivated, Trinity Theological College is embarking on a new initiative to organise weekend spiritual retreats intended especially for lay leaders in Singapore.

Contemplative in nature, these retreats have much to offer to one who seeks the Lord in the midst of life and ministry. Gordon Smith, spiritual theologian and author of *Alone with the Lord: A Guide to a Personal Day of Prayer* (Regent, 2003), writes that a day of prayer “enables us to make spiritual and emotional space for an intentional encounter with Christ, through which we awaken the presence of the Spirit in our lives” (Smith 2003, 5). A spiritual retreat serves as a spacious place where we once again hear God affirming us as his beloved children. God’s restorative affirmation frees us to be ourselves and so helps us to do the deep soul soundings necessary to be in touch with the deep desires of God and our life in God through Christ. A

contemplative retreat ushers us into deeper communion with our Triune God to enable us to live from that sacred communion.

For this purpose, TTC will be organising three weekend spiritual retreats for lay leaders this year. They are scheduled for 6-7 May, 2-3 Sep and 4-5 Nov, each beginning on Friday at 4:30pm and concluding on Saturday at 5:30pm. Each retreat is limited to 12 participants and will include optional times for individual spiritual direction. The retreat leaders will be Rev Dr Simon Chan and Rev Dr Jimmy Tan. For more information, please visit www.ttc.edu.sg. ❖

Upcoming Spiritual Retreat Dates in 2016

- 6 - 7 May
- 2 - 3 September
- 4 - 5 November

Four Spiritual Retreats will be conducted annually from 2017

Each retreat is limited to 12 participants.

A First for Seminaries in Singapore

The Ethos Institute for Public Christianity is collaborating with seven seminaries in Singapore to organise a conference on “Marriage, Human Sexuality and the Church” on 6 July 2016 at the New Sanctuary, St Andrew’s Cathedral.

Our theological institutions and seminaries have been holding annual games for several years and their principals have also met for fellowship. At a recent meeting, the leaders of our seminaries felt the need for such a conference, leading to this first joint effort by our theological schools in Singapore.

Chaired by TTC, the planning committee invited Ethos Institute to be involved in the confer-

ence. The seminaries participating are Biblical Graduate School of Theology, Baptist Theological Seminary, Discipleship Training Centre, East Asia School of Theology, TCA College, Singapore Bible College and Trinity Theological College.

The main speakers at this conference are Dr Clement Chia (Singapore Bible College), Mr Quek Tze-Ming (Biblical Graduate School of Theology), Emeritus Bishop Dr Robert Solomon and Dr Roland Chia (Trinity Theological College).

The one-day conference will begin at 9:00am with registration and end at 4:30 pm. Registration details will be available in May. ❖

TRUMPET EDITORIAL:

Rev Dr Ngoei Foong Nghian (Editor), Rev Yap Seok Chin (Editor for Chinese),
Ms Eunice Low, Dr Leow Theng Huat, Dr Tan Loe Joo,
Ms Dawn Lee, Ms Nie Yicong

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