



This week, in place of "Good Books" we have an introduction to an unusual research tool. Dr Lee Soon Tai, BGST student and orthopaedic surgeon combines love for the things of God with unabashed enthusiasm for cyberspace technology to give us this great expose on how the Web can help those with very little time to read and meet the deadlines of their assignments in BGST. Here's what he's written:



Let me introduce you to a very faithful, always available and most trusted friend, "CECIL".

"CECIL" is the name given by Calvin computer science Professor Harry Plantinga, creator of the website, Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL). The URL is www.ccel.org. "CECIL" is hosted by Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Plantinga chose the word "ethereal" to suggest the library does not have physical form, existing only "in the ether," and that it contains spiritual matter.

"The love of those old classic Christian books, the deep appreciation for their continuing value, and a desire to 'pay back the net' for benefits accrued motivated me to continue to scan books and put them on the Internet," Plantinga wrote. During a spiritual crisis brought on by discovering that his children were hearing impaired, Plantinga stumbled across an Internet edition of *The Imitation of Christ*, the 1418 landmark work by the German monk Thomas a Kempis. Although Plantinga had never heard of it, he downloaded the book and began reading.

Inspired to share the book with others, Plantinga scanned a library copy into his computer and put it on his own site on the Internet. Soon he scanned another classic, Augustine's "Confessions." By 1979, there were at least 300 such works available in his website for cyberspace users.

FREE

This is too good to be true. All the information you get from this website is entirely free of charge. However, you can pay \$29 plus shipment for a 'partial mirror' in one CD. The proceeds from the sale of this CD-ROM will go toward the further development of the Christian Classics Ethereal Library and its distribution overseas.

Besides being a free information site there are four compelling reasons for me to recommend its use

for BGST students.

1. CONTENT

The content is the most important reason for a website to be revisited. Based on the number of user hits on the site, Plantinga reckons it is visited by about 4,000 readers making 40,000 accesses per day giving a total of more than 10,000,000 accesses per year. This is downloading information equivalent to about 1,000,000 books per year. These users come from more than 100 countries from Australia to Zimbabwe.

If you are still wondering about the definition of 'Christian Classics', visit the site and read the recommended list. It includes authors like St. Augustine (*The Confessions of St. Augustine*), John Bunyan (*Pilgrim's Progress*), G.K. Chesterton (*Orthodoxy*), Jonathan Edwards (*Religious Affections*), George Fox (*Autobiography*), St. Ignatius of Loyola (*The Spiritual Exercises*), St. John of the Cross (*Ascent of Mount Carmel & Dark Night of the Soul*), Thomas à Kempis (*The Imitation of Christ*), William Law (*A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*) and Brother Lawrence (*The Practice of the Presence of God*).

CCEL contains writings by theological giants such as Martin Luther, John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas. It includes a 37-volume survey of the early church fathers such as Pope Leo and Pope Gregory, Christian cornerstones from the Apostles and Nicene Creeds to the Book of Common Prayer and the Heidelberg Catechism, sermons by John Wesley and hymns by Isaac Watts.

The ether encompasses more than strictly religious works. There's also room for Gibbon (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*), Erasmus (*In Praise of Folly*), Dostoevsky (*The Brothers Karamazov*) and Dorothy Sayers (*Catholic Tales and Christian Songs*).

For the assignments of the courses on "Christian Spirituality" and "Work and Ministry" taught by James Houston and Paul Stevens respectively in the



last semester, students had to review one Christian classic for each of the courses. I managed to download my selection. Quotations from the books were easily obtained using "cut and paste." In one of the assignments, I had to review the issue of "embodiment" as understood by the early Church Fathers. I downloaded the complete set of 40 volumes in ZIP files, unzipped the files and conducted a word search on "body." In this way, I was able to read and analyze the views of Clement of Alexandria (2nd century), Origen (3rd century) and Augustine (4th century).

(For the other 3 reasons why "CECIL" is such a goldmine you need to keep your eyes peeled next week. So, readers, don't forget - the secret to those A's is out there!)

✠ Chapel

Our speaker in Chapel last Wednesday was our guest lecturer, Professor Marva Dawn. We were also glad to welcome her husband Myron to worship with us.

Professor Dawn spoke to us from 2 Timothy 4:1-5. Paul begins his final exhortation to Timothy with solemn words: 'I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom' (v. 1). These words remind us of some fundamental truths relating to Christian life and service: (1) Christ will come again, and we need to repent and prepare ourselves for his coming. (2) In Jesus God has 'appeared' in human form, and has begun the work of restoring the cosmos. God has not left us to right the world's wrongs on our own, but calls us to be fellow-workers with him. (3) Christians are resident in two kingdoms, the earthly states of which they are citizens, and God's kingdom. The fact that we belong to God's kingdom transforms the way in which we exercise our citizenship on earth.

Why such solemn and theologically weighty language? Because Paul saw that the need for faithful Christian ministry was urgent. The need is no less urgent today: our world is one wracked by hunger and poverty, and becoming increasingly violent. It is a world that needs to hear Christian truth, a world that cries out for a ministry of reconciliation.

And so, in a way, our task is simple: to preach the word, the 'bad news' that we can't save ourselves, and the 'good news' that God has made our salvation possible. We preach this message whether people want to hear it or not. (Perhaps the gospel is 'in season' in Singapore. If so, let us seize the opportunity.) We build up believers by correcting, rebuking and exhorting (whichever is appropriate), patiently teaching the truth (v. 2). We resist the temptation to alter or 're-package'

the message to pander to those who are no longer excited by the gospel (v. 3). And we identify the myths of our day and challenge them in the light of the gospel (v. 4). (In Singapore might one such myth be the idea that hard work by itself brings success, with no reference to God?). In all this, we must keep a clear head, and be ready to endure hardship if that is what God calls us to (v. 5): our perseverance in the face of hardship may be the most effective part of our witness, indeed. What, then, is our ministry? How is God calling us to bear witness? The call to live out the gospel remains as urgent as ever. (PES)

NEWS BITS

ANSWERED PRAYERS

There was an enthusiastic response to the two courses by Dr Marva Dawn, 37 students for "Cyberspace Stress, Serenity and Sabbath" and 72 for "Rethinking Worship for the New Millennium".

Quite a few students who came informed us that they did not get the publicity material, otherwise they would have invited more of their friends to attend.

Marva was an excellent communicator. She had important things to say to the Church which even those who cannot agree with her cannot ignore. We had actually printed 5,000 brochures and sent them out to our mailing list. Judging from those who kept coming even after the courses began, we can see that there is a general awareness of what she is saying in her books. But all is not lost. We are in the process of preparing both the audio and video tapes of the lectures for churches to utilize what was presented.

MORE ANSWERED PRAYERS

We would like to welcome two telemarketing volunteers, Mrs Judy Chow and Mrs Angeline Goh, who are helping promote BGST courses. Believe it or not, we have been in existence for eleven years and we keep hearing from some that they have not heard of BGST, nor are they aware of the training we offer to the general Christian public in Singapore and to Christians overseas. Recently I was told by some well-wishers, "We have not heard about BGST. If we have known earlier about the exciting range of courses you are offering we would have recommended others to train at BGST". Thank God for encouragement that comes our way from time to time when we are trying to improve the way we do things (QSH).

We wish all these who celebrate their birthdays this week God's richest blessings

Mr Tay Hock Chuan Alan	10/4
Dr Whey Poh Yee Elizabeth	12/4
Rev Dakhum Joesph	14/4
Mr Yong Teck Meng	14/4