



## Good BOOKS

Sng, Bobby E.K. and Choong, Chee Pang (Eds.) (1991). *Church and Culture: Singapore Context*. Singapore: Graduates' Christian Fellowship. 130 pp.

The relationship and tension between Christianity and culture has been an issue that captures the interest of Missiologists, Bible Scholars and Theologians for research and debate. Adopting a different perspective, both Dr. Bobby Sng and Dr. Choong direct the focus of the issue to the attention of the church and her response to the tenacious impact culture has upon the Gospel and, the impact Christian faith has upon culture for Christian living. The dual impact is discussed in the context of the church in the multicultural society of Singapore.

The purpose of the book is to bring to the awareness of the church the three fundamental questions (p.4) that need to be addressed to find an acceptable way of approaching culture and remaining committed to the authority of the Scripture. The first question is, "How do we communicate the Christian message accurately to people of another culture?" Secondly, "How should Christians live out their new-found faith in the midst of a culture rich in rituals and traditions?" and "Should converts be taught to discontinue the practice of certain customs and festivals?" Thirdly, "Are there certain local customs and rituals that can rightly be adapted by the church to express the Christian message?"

The questions are addressed by various Singaporean writers (chapters 2-7) with discussion covering different cultural beliefs and practices related to filial piety, ancestral worship, ancestral honour, ethnic festivals, arts, customs, rites and others. The approach taken by each contributor is holistic. The content of their discussion includes the historical background of the specific cultural behaviour to explain the importance of knowing its origin and reason for its existence as Chen (p.45) affirms, "it is essential that one should understand one's culture and roots. . . . The two principal reasons for observing Chinese cultural practices is to acknowledge the importance of the family as well as to establish common bases of communication with family and friends" and "sensitivity to one's culture increases one's effectiveness in witnessing" (p.44). An understanding from the historical viewpoint itself may not warrant a certain cultural practice "Christian." It requires a

careful examination in the light of the Scripture. For example, the value of filial piety is both cultural and biblical, "The Old Testament has revealed the pervasiveness of the parental-children relationship as being integral to the history and life of the Israelite people. Parents are to be appreciated, honoured and revered." Hence, "filial piety should be taken seriously by Christians" and the church needs to "challenge and manifest the true nature of filial piety as being integral to God's design for his people" (Chew, pp.62,63).

The book is not a recent publication, nevertheless, the content holds valuable insights and research for the church of today in her quest to be biblical and cultural relevant, "The Tamil Christian is thus a Christian expressing his Christian faith and the Lordship of Christ through his Tamil culture. He discards whatever is inconsistent with his primary relationship with Christ, but he keeps the rest – and this with new meaning or with new power to live in such a way" (Solomon, p.123). It also serves as a timely reminder when the church in Singapore is also seeking to be relevant to the many International students and workers present in her midst. The specific focus on the church in the Singapore context may be limiting its application to cultures similar to the Republic but the book is an acknowledgement that,

The Christian faith is supracultural. It draws attention to certain universal truths that are binding on all mankind and which do not change with situations. However, the Christian faith is also multicultural as it takes seriously the particulars of each culture. It is always seeking to express it in ways that can best be appreciated by the people. The Christian faith is both universal and particular (Sng, p.130).

*(Review by Dr Ng Peh Cheng)*

*Note: Christians in Asia share a cultural heritage of diversities but how much do we know about our ASIAN CHRISTIAN HERITAGE? Dr. Bobby Sng is our Guest Lecturer for the course, "Christianity Comes to Asia" (ME 325, 1.5 credits), commencing 22<sup>nd</sup> March.*

## Chapel Notes

Rev. Samuel Goh was the chapel speaker on 27<sup>th</sup> February. The topic was, "Salt and Light – Being Cultural Relevant."

While the apostle Paul maintained the purity of the gospel by preaching only "Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23), he was also aware that cultural traits could play a significant part in evangelism. He knew the Jews demanded miraculous signs but the Greeks looked for wisdom. He did not give in to their demands but he used different approaches to reach them for Christ, "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews ... to those not having the law [the Gentiles] I became like one not having the law ... so as to win those not having the law" (1 Cor 9:20-21).

Likewise, we must be faithful in preaching Christ crucified and be aware of the cultural nuances involved in reaching out to the non-Christians in our society. Cultural traits do not always work against the gospel. As a matter of fact, a number of them are parallel to biblical teachings serving as a bridge between non-Christians and the gospel. I have found two cultural traits helpful in evangelism amongst the Chinese - the need for family ties and the need for a personal God.

First, our God is family oriented and the Bible uses family related imagery to describe God-man relationship. The Chinese culture yearns for such a relationship that the family will remain together even after death. In Christ, the fear of separation is eliminated. Christians can convey the message of the "Great Reunion" in heaven to their non-Christian parents. Often, they would respond favourably to the children's expression of love and some have been led to Christ in this manner.

Secondly, our God is a personal God and in the Chinese psyche, there is a deep longing for a living and personal God who understands and responds to their pains and cries for help. As their needs cannot be met by their gods, the presentation of the God in the Bible who wants a personal relationship with them may appeal to them as in the case of Job's experience (Job 38:1). From personal experience, the Chinese tend to respond positively when we present a personal God through the life and work of Christ.

In conclusion, the two moral attributes of God are strong biblical truths to be used as effective tools in evangelism. May the Lord help us to communicate them wisely.

Chapel speaker for this week (6 Mar) will be led by the Dean, Dr Quek Swee Hwa. We shall have a "Prayer and Song Chapel". Come, join us at the usual time, 12 pm.

## NEWS BITS

1. **OUR APOLOGIES TO MICKEY CHIANG.** Last week it was announced that "Jesus's Secret Service and his Public Service" was the final contribution. To our chagrin and deep embarrassment we discovered that the appended note by Mickey to BGST Office, "This is my latest Thinking Points article", was misread as "This is my last ... article." There is really no excuse and we must offer Mickey our profound apologies for the error. We are consoled, however, by the good that came out of this as we have received a flood of email and sentiments expressing the hope that "Thinking Points" must continue. We hope that Mickey will continue to release more contributions. Sorry, Mickey (Dr Quek Swee Hwa).

2. **NT101 (NT Foundations 1).** There will be a special tutorial on Monday, March 11, 7.00-9.30 pm in Room 3-02 of our Bishan campus. Students who have not taken Quizzes 1-4 please take note. Revised Reading Assignment questions will be sent by email to the class members.

3. **Congratulations for a New Addition to the Family.** We rejoice with Francis Wong & Karen Quek on the arrival of their first born, Janna Eshton Wong, on 28 Feb 2002. Here's what grandfather, Dr Quek has to say: Esther and I are very happy and thankful to God for this bundle of joy.

4. **Welcome Home to BGST!** Sharon Quek & little Hannah are back from Regent during this special time to welcome her little niece to the extended family.

5. **Greetings from Rev. Yoon Jeong Yong (M.Div, 1998) and Chae Yun Joo (Dip CS, 1997).** Rev Yoon is ordained and ministering full-time at the Yardley First Korean Presbyterian Church in Bensalem, Philadelphia. He and his wife, Yun Joo completed their respective M.Th and M.A.(Counselling) from Biblical Theological Seminary. Presently, he is a D.Min. candidate at Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary.

## Wishing you God's blessings on your Birthday!



Ms Grace Gay Sai Choo 03/04  
 Rev Dr Danny Goh 03/04  
 Mrs Jenny Lun 03/05  
 Mr Oliver Chia 03/06  
 Mr Wilfred Leow 03/06  
 Mr Lawrence Tan Kang Seng 03/06  
 Mr Liew Cheng San 03/07  
 Ms Grace Tan Geok Pek 03/07  
 Mr Benedict Cheng 03/08  
 Dr Lim Cheng Geok 03/08  
 Mr Sonny Tan Hock Seng 03/08  
 Mr Yoon Jeong Yong 03/08  
 Mr Ng Kai Seng 03/09  
 Prof Lim Kian Guan 03/10  
 Ms Yap Foon Lyn 03/10