

SPI

E. News

February 2009

Dear Friends,

The Chinese have an observation on the relationship between religious feeling and desperation. It translates roughly like this; "In good times people burn no joss, in bad times they cling to Buddha's leg." Standing at the top of 2009, there is agreement that the time for clinging has come.

Our economy is in a slump, many people have been laid off work and are finding difficulty getting re-employed. For the first time we have dipped into the national reserve to tide over this period. Our society has not grown less violent either. We are praying for peace in Gaza, as well as for a local politician who lies recovering from burns he received from a disgruntled citizen.

The feeling of insecurity is palpable. It is hard to find hope in the new year, and people of all faiths are

appealing to Providence in their own ways. As believers, we Christians also participate in this general cry for restoration to normalcy.

Let this solidarity of intent enable us to work alongside people of all faiths to create a remedy to our situation; to craft a humane reality that can sustain security without isolation, and prosperity without injustice.

Catholics engage in Christ's mission when they participate in the effort for the common good. For us, it is about bringing our world one step closer towards the reality which Jesus preached during his earthly ministry: the Reign of God.

Here's wishing all our readers a faith-filled new year of courageous Kingdom-building.

Arthur

God is preparing a great springtime for Christianity, and we can already see its first signs.

Redemptoris missio, #86
Pope John Paul II



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THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY

9 Feb is the 15th day of the Lunar New Year. Also called **Yuan Xiao Jie**, this day marks the end of spring festivities with lantern displays.

10 Feb celebrates the United Nations launch of **World Day of Social Justice**. May this remembrance make us practice fairness in our lives to all whom we meet, as well as call our social institutions to greater respect for human rights and promotion of solidarity, harmony, and equality.

11 Feb is the XVII **World Day of the Sick**. Please take a moment pray for those who labor under bodily or mental illness. Wherever possible, extend a generous hand in support of those who care for the sick.

25 Feb is **Ash Wednesday**. Please check with your parish for service times as we enter into the period of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving - the liturgical season of Lent.

28 Feb, the **Rite of Election** takes place in Church of St. Teresa for the City and East district parishes as catechumens complete their training and begin immediate preparations to celebrate the sacraments of Christian initiation at Easter. More details on the back page.





CATECHIZING FOR ELECTION

One of the problems of the church of our time is that the church is so often turned in on itself. The work of maintaining our identity and institutions, effecting internal renewal and wrestling with intramural problems can be very absorbing. Consequently; initiation into the community of faith often - too often - means initiation into a community turned inward, initiation into a church that is not in any significant sense a church of mission.

If this is the mindset that is brought into Christian initiation, the inevitable corollary is that to be God's chosen is to climb into the cocoon of the church community, to get on the glory train before it leaves the station, to "find myself" in the Catholic church. These are human project, and they are absorbing ones. They arise from the pressing needs for protection, affirmation, honor, and self-esteem - none of which are bad things. But they are not the end for which the people of God are elected.

Only a church turned outward in mission can initiate new members into such an outward-directed vision as the one we see in the gospels...

The first Christians were convinced that the coming of Christ was a crisis, a definitive turning point in history, the continuing reality of which is mediated by the Holy Spirit. That this conviction exercised a profound effect on Christian baptism is beyond question.*

That the Rite of Election, within the broad sweep of the order of Christian initiation of adults, should in various ways call to mind the reign of God, the end-times and eternal stakes, is altogether fitting. The "book of life" metaphor for the book of elect is appropriate. And a consciousness of Spirit-filled mission rightly informs both the vision and the goals of the catechumenate.

The obedience to which the elect are called, the "covenant life" to which the elect are called, is both for their own salvation and for the mission of the church. The two are inextricably united. So, of course, moral conversion is essential to the catechumenate; and, of course, apostolic works are the backbone of the Christian way of life that we teach. Catechesis must, then, pay great attention to how we live out the faith in the marketplace and at home, and pay great attention to how we are called to love our neighbor in word and in deed and by costly example every day.

This is where the sharpness of the cutting edge can be felt: in the mission, in the willingness, however clumsy or tentative, to be the means by which God's love abounds in the world. And these are, therefore, some of the clues we look for to tell us that the catechumens are ready to become "the elect." We need to taste their salt and see their light shining - not in the church but against the darkness of the night outside. The elect are the sign that God refuses to give up on the world; indeed they are coming to participate in God's reign, inaugurated by Christ. They are the means by which God continues to make his presence known, a presence that calls people to new life. If these words are not to be empty rhetoric, the church must always seek meaning of its election in the context of its mission.

* Cf. John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Excerpt from "Forum Essays 3: On the Rite of Election" by Rita Ferrone, Liturgy Training Publications, 1994. pp. 51-53

A TRIBUTE TO WENDY

Wendy Louis takes leave as Director of the Singapore Pastoral Institute

“With you, O God, is Wisdom, she who knows your works... she understands what is pleasing in your sight and what is right according to your commandments.”

Wisdom 9:9



It was refreshing when bemused foreign visitors coming to SPI for the first time would remark to me: “Your director is a woman?” I would feign seriousness and reply, “Is that not usual where you are from?”

Indeed it is not usual to have women in leadership of Catholic Archdiocesan organizations. Then again, Wendy Louis isn’t your usual woman.

Ever willing to put message before self, Wendy is known to many locally as a passionate proponent for a participatory and collaborative Church. Some may find her intimidating for her intellect and eloquence, but those who know Wendy see her boldness springing from a desire to share with all a deeply held vision of a better Christianity for our times.

An Auxiliary of the Apostolate, Wendy has committed herself to a lifetime of service for the good of the diocese and the church has benefitted immensely from her vocation. A tireless educator and natural leader, Wendy has not only brought SPI to greater heights, but has also made a mark for herself as a respected churchwoman through her valuable contributions locally and regionally.

As she sallies forth to greater things, we bid her God bless and *bonne chance*: Go forth and be fruitful, O handmaid of Wisdom!
- Arthur Goh

Thank You for the opportunity to work with you, your friendship and your caring ways. It has been an enriching experience. May God continue to bless you in your new assignment. - Teresa Hoe

Thank you for sharing the vision of church and inspiring others to believe in this vision. - Daphne Leong

*“May He grant you according to your heart’s desire, and fulfill all your purpose” Psalm 20:4
Thank you Wendy for everything and I wish you all the best in your new endeavours. - Melinda Reyes*

*Many thanks for all your help in setting up the Library at SPI. “May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind always be at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face, and rains fall soft upon your fields. And until we meet again, May God hold you in the palm of His hand”.
- Angela Fernandez*

A big & warm ‘Thank You!’ for the opportunity to work with you through the years. You have shown, taught & guided me in so many ways. Here is wishing you all the best in your new post. - Janice Ng

Wendy is presently Executive Director of the Archdiocesan Commission for Catholic Schools (ACCS). She also succeeds Cora Mateo as Executive Secretary for the ASIIPA Desk of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Office of the Laity and Family (FABC-OLF). Wendy may be contacted at wendyl@catholic.org.sg or 68587081



A COMMON WORD

*On the Catholic-Muslim Forum in Rome and the use of “Allah”
across the causeway.*

by Arthur Goh

On 13 October 2007 a group of 138 Muslim scholars issued an open letter addressed to all Christians. This letter, titled “A Common Word between Us and You”, was unprecedented in its representation. Never before had voices of leaders from so many different sectors of Muslim society converged in one missive. In this letter, they sought to affirm the unity of God in Islamic thought and to find common ground between Islam and Christianity.

Although “A Common Word” was received with skepticism and suspicion in some quarters, the general sentiment towards this letter from the Christian world was very positive. Four scholars from Yale University drafted a response, later endorsed by the larger Christian community, called “Loving God and Neighbor Together”.

After a series of exchanges, culminating in the recently concluded Catholic-Muslim Forum in Rome, theologians on both sides seem to have agreed, at least philosophically, that both Muslims and Christians worship the same divine reality. This point of view was well conveyed by Miroslav Volf of Yale University during a lecture delivered at Trinity Theological College.

Volf, a native Croatian and professor of theology at Yale Divinity School, was one of the four writers of “Loving God and Neighbor Together”. He stated that the Arabic proper noun *Allah* shares the same cognate (is derived from the same root) as the Hebrew address for God *Elohim*. For all logical purposes, *Allah*, *Elohim*, *God*, *Tien-zhu*, or *Bog* (the Croat noun for God) have the same referent: that supreme and unified being of which no greater can be conceived. Each of these nouns do not differentiate God into separate and distinct realities.

No word in any language changes God existentially, yet I believe there are special words chosen by communities of tradition not only to address the One whom they experience religiously, but also to express the intimacy of that community’s bond with the One. These words gradually become accepted and have imbued in them a sense of ownership by the community that grows with time. When outsiders invoke such words, what is

perceived is not limited to mere theft of tribal property but also a diminishment of the bond that is shared between the Divine and that tradition.

By analogy it is like a stranger entering your family, imitating your terms of endearment to the head of household and in turn receiving a share of the family fortune. It is possible to marvel at the generosity of the head of household, but human nature makes it far likelier that we feel indignance at the audacity of the stranger. Adherents to a tradition naturally feel upset when they witness the ‘hijacking’ of their sacred words or symbols, worse if these are not treated with respect because, by extension, the irreverence falls also on that which is signified.

This issue finds echo in the events taking place between the Malaysian Catholic newspaper, *The Herald*, and the federal authorities. Representatives from the Islamic community are affronted by the use of *Allah* in the decidedly non-Muslim newspaper. *The Herald*’s response to the threat of having its publishing licence revoked has been to hold ground on the validity of that usage based on the fact that 19th century literary great Munshi Abdullah used *Allah* for God in the translation of the bible.

While new heat has been generated from a recent ban on *The Herald* from using Bahasa Melayu, the argument presently revolves around constitutional freedoms, and there is a likelihood that the resolution may involve some theological hairsplitting. Theological differentiation, while necessary in preserving religious identity, finds its place in the religion class or at the table of inter-religious dialogue - not in a court of law. Moreover, it is difficult to distance this case from the reactionism emerging from the minorities in response to perceived Islamification of the nation.

There is a risk that the proceedings and the outcome will seriously sour relations between Muslims and Catholics in Malaysia. The question is: according to the social vision of the Reign of God proposed by Christ, and the spirit of understanding fostered by “A Common Word”, what rationale remains for this risk to be taken?

CATECHESIS: PREPARING FOR LENT



by Christi Disher

As a child, I remember Lent being a season of self-imposed denial leading up to the joyous, chocolate-filled celebration of Easter. Although I still look forward to the chocolates, I feel as though I now have a better understanding of Lent and why it is a season of fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

Having fallen victim to too many New Year's resolutions that are quickly derailed by trying to fix everything at once, I have found a practical discernment process regarding Lenten resolutions that I hope will be as useful to you as it has been to me. You can view the entire article at: <http://www.bustedhalo.com/features/the-practical-guide-to-lent/>

Typically, I start reflecting on my upcoming Lenten journey, several weeks before Ash Wednesday. I focus on the relationships in my life and what needs help and healing. How am I doing in how I relate to God, to myself and to others? In what areas do I experience life-giving love? In what areas do I feel tempted to sin?

These small moments of contemplation then fuel my prayer. I bring these thoughts to God and ask for help in deciding what I can tackle in Lent.

When considering your possible resolutions, ask yourself, "Are they..."

Balanced?

You're not the worst sinner in the world and it's prideful to think otherwise. If you're consumed with everything you're not doing right, consider speaking to a spiritual advisor to gain some fresh perspective.

Actionable?

What can you reasonably take on in the forty days of Lent that will enhance your spiritual life? If going to Mass each day isn't possible, perhaps going to daily Mass once a week is.

Current?

A friend of mine in college gave up eating French fries each Lent, a resolution she probably first made in eighth grade. When I asked her about the connection between fried foods and sin, she drew a blank on why she chose that each year. What current behaviors are you engaging in that might be separating you from God?

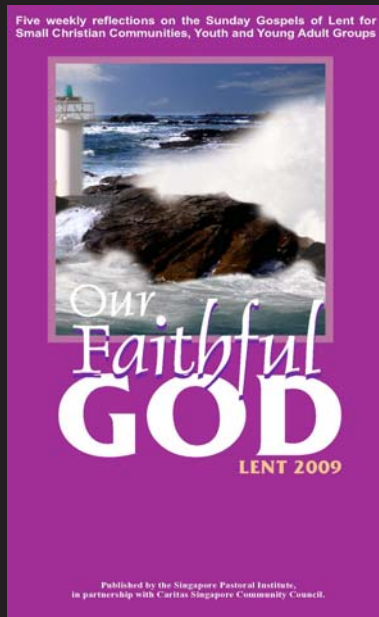
Sane?

Although counterintuitive, entertain the idea that Lent might see you doing less of something (even a good thing), rather than more. As one Ash Wednesday approached, I realized that I needed to stop working at a soup kitchen, something I had done for close to two years. It took most of the day and all of my energy and by the end I dreaded weekends. While my body was engaged in service, my soul was deadened to others. I needed time away to recover from volunteer burnout and to find Christ again in those I serve. Are you still able to see Christ in your service activities?

Whatever path you decide to take this Lent, keep in mind that what you are trying to achieve is a new closeness with God that may or may not be best obtained by eliminating desserts or turning off the television.

May this Lenten season
of repentance bring
you the blessing of
God's forgiveness and
the gift of His light.

THE BACK PAGE



Musing

What does it mean to “put on Christ”?

I would think it is to be Christlike in the way I act, speak and live. That means to act, speak and live in hope, faith, love and charity.

In truth, I act like the world owes me so much, I take and use without consideration whatsoever, and the concern is with my needs, my wants. Putting on Christ? I have no time.

I may speak well and know my rights. Yet, to speak from the heart and spread the message of hope and love? Get someone else; I don't want to be labeled as a 'goody two shoes'.

I live my life in nice neat compartments. There is one for the office, where I behave according to the office culture. Another one is for my family, one other for my friends and perhaps another for church. Does Christ live in all these compartments? Not necessarily, perhaps some. But it is taboo to be seen as too 'religious', I need to blend in. Putting on Christ? Yes, only if...

It seems this 'putting on' is harder than I thought.

Lenten Booklet 2009

Our Faithful God

This Lenten season, we turn our attention to God's faithfulness. Often, when faced with trials and difficulties, we either give up or try to keep things under control our way. More often than not, we forget God. Yet, God is there faithfully waiting for our response. This Lent, let us worship our faithful God and let God guide us through this trying time. Let us pray that we recognize the call of Christ inviting us back to communion with God and one another.

The Lenten booklet comprises six sessions designed for small group reflection. It will be available in English, Mandarin, and Tamil. Please enquire at your parish office for a complimentary copy on the weekend of 14 February.

Rites of Election & Call to Continuing Conversion

Saturday 28 February 2009
City and East district parishes
Church of St. Teresa, 3:00pm

Sunday 1 March 2009
Serangoon, West, and North district parishes
Church of Christ the King, 2:30pm

Archbishop Nicholas Chia presides.

A Call for Volunteers

The Pastoral Institute can benefit greatly from volunteer assistance in many aspects of its work. Among the areas we need talented people for are: research & data management, event logistic support, web page design & maintenance, and IT support.

Please contact Angela Fernandez at afern@catholic.org.sg and let us know your interest, availability, and expertise!