

The Gospel in Southeast Asia (1)

By Rev. Jason L. Kortering

Obviously, this is a big subject and needs refinement. We have been asked to focus on this part of the world because of our ministry in Singapore. We will focus on Singapore for this series and begin in part one to consider a general picture of the society and culture, and then say a few words about its religious makeup. In part two we will consider what kind of people this culture has produced, and tell a few of their stories. Then in part three we will discuss how this particular setting affects the way the gospel is brought to God's people.

Flying in and out of Singapore has become somewhat routine for us. Nevertheless, I am moved in my soul every time the plane circles the island city-state in preparation for landing at Changi Airport. The comparatively small island of 23 miles by 10 miles holds almost three million people. It is not as I had anticipated, arriving for the first time, that the island would be one mass of high-rise buildings and cluttered streets. From the air you see parks, reservoirs, tree-lined boulevards, even undeveloped land. What attracts attention is the expansive oil refining industry on the western part, the huge container shipment industry on the southwest as row upon row of the world's largest vessels await unloading, and the ship refurbishing business on the south and north. The business district is attractive because it is literally circled by some of the world's tallest hotels and is skirted on the east by the financial district, which includes banks from all over the world.

The rest of the island is made up, as you guessed, by housing. There is some landed, private property, which is sold by the government on a bid basis. This makes it very expensive, for there are plenty of people who have the money to out-bid those who have less. A small, single-dwelling bungalow, starts at one and a half million U.S. dollars. Most people live in government housing, which they buy from the government with a 99-year lease. The

average cost of such a flat now is about US\$125,000.00. These blocks (they go up, instead of stretching out on a street) are between 12 and 28 stories high. They are built-in estates, much like cities. Today the government is working harder at making them varied in height, with attractive designs and more fanciful architecture.

Even though autos are expensive to own, the streets are filled with autos, buses, motorcycles, bicycles, and lorries of every size and shape. The government purposely controls the number of available licenses, places a huge tax on just the right to own a car, adds a sizable tax to take it on the road, and charges high prices for petrol in order to control the number of cars on the road. If we wanted to spend about US\$50,000, it would hardly buy a used car on the level most of you drive in the States. Singapore offsets this with an excellent public transport system of both buses and trains.

If you would join us in taking the bus to our flat from the airport, the first thing that might attract your attention is the variety of people. This is increasingly true throughout the world. The races and nations are mixing continually. Here in Singapore this has been going on for many years and is entrenched within the culture itself. The big difference we notice is that; while in most countries different races and cultures live alongside each other, separate from one another, in Singapore there is more complete integration of the races and cultures than I have seen anywhere else. There is, for example, a real mixture of the races in public transport. In the specially reserved seat for the elderly (right by the door) sits a grandmother. She still dresses in her old-world attire, dark-colored high-neck blouse with black slacks. Probably sitting next to her is a young career woman on the way to the office. She is carrying her black leather case and is smartly dressed in a business suit with miniskirt. A few seats over is an Indian gentleman, literally wrapped in what looks like a white bed sheet, called a choti. Sitting next to me is a Muslim woman with her children. She could be wearing a scarf and sarong and her children playing in their jeans. This is not a special holiday,

this is every day. We are literally surrounded with such displays of dress and culture.

If we take note of the schools that we pass, we would notice that there are some separate schools for Chinese, Indians, and Malays (Muslim); but most of them are integrated. The children do not wear their own culturally distinct clothes to school however. They all wear the same uniform, which was designed for their particular school. For the children, it is shorts and shirts for the boys, and skirts and blouses for the girls. School is operated on two shifts, one group of students attends morning class from about 7:30 A.M. - 1:00 P.M. and the afternoon group follows till about 6:30 P.M. Families which have children in both shifts have children in school for about 12 hours a day. Imagine what that does to family and church life.

Most striking to westerners who visit Singapore are the religious places of worship. They are everywhere on the island. Though there are mosques, temples, synagogues, and churches in almost every country, the significant difference in Singapore is that one cannot escape taking note of them here. Sure, there may be a mosque down the road from First Church in Grand Rapids, but how many even look in that direction? However, when the Muslims worship here in Singapore on Friday, you can hardly catch a bus near the mosque. The overflow of worshipers fills the sidewalk and even streets. A huge pile of slippers is mounted just within the compound next to the trough used for foot washing. If you go to Covenant Church with us on Sunday morning, we would pass through a narrow street with a large Buddhist temple. The whole area is filled with chanting so loud that the whole neighborhood hears it. The smell of incense fills the air; and it has happened that by the time my wife and I arrive at church our clothes smell of burning, and even flecks of black soot have to be brushed off. From time to time we meet Buddhist monks with shaved heads, dressed in saffron robes as they walk toward their temple. You cannot travel or live in Singapore without some interaction with the peoples of different cultures and religions.

Finally we arrive at our own place of residence. We take the lift to the 11th floor and walk down to the 10th. We pass along a narrow corridor along the outside edge of the building past two other residences until we reach our flat. You can be sure that you will be greeted by two little Chinese girls who will say, "Hi," or "Bye." They are our immediate neighbors. Whenever we ask the many questions, they don't answer. Perhaps "Hi" and "Bye" is the extent of their English skills. Their parents work every day, and grandpa and grandma come to spend the day with them. Their parents are career oriented, speak good English, and are gone long hours. Their grandparents speak no English, only Mandarin. This is a typical Singapore family situation, one encouraged by the government. Our neighbors burn two joss sticks every morning, so the sweet aroma filters into our flat every day.

Right now, as I write this, I look out the front patio over against the block situated right across from us. There are 110 flats in that block. About 50 feet separate our two blocks. Both are 12 stories high. I counted the altars with offerings on them, which were within my view, and it came to 33. The altars are immediately discernible for their bright red and gold colors, auspicious for good luck. Besides that, there are the many joss-stick holders. That would give some indication of the preponderance of Chinese practicing their religion. We can pick out a few Muslim households by the writings about their doors. Hindus are harder to discern, for they have their own prayer rooms inside. The breakdown of religion in Singapore is about 53% Chinese religion (including Buddhists), 3% Hindus, 15% Muslim, 14% Christian, and the rest a mixture of other religions or people who are secular.

Since most of the people are Chinese and to some degree practice their own interesting mixture of religion, we should say a brief word about that.

True as it may be that the older Chinese people practice this religion, the fact remains that the Buddhists are working hard in the temples to indoctrinate

the younger generation. When we visit the Chinese temples we see children worshipping. Also, we must remember that the Chinese Christians were almost all brought up in homes where this religion was practiced. This religion is not to be dismissed as of little consequence. It is pervasive and, even now, only the grace of God can deliver one from the lasting evil effects of it.

It would not be correct to say that what is called the Chinese religion in Singapore is the same thing as Buddhism. There are Chinese Buddhists here. In fact, they are growing in numbers. The religion of the Chinese contains elements of Buddhism, especially its concept of life after death. The soul leaves the body and goes into the spirit world. They even describe eighteen stages of hell. If paper money, autos, or houses are burned, a deceased person will have them available as he moves through the spirit world. Eventually the soul is reincarnated into the physical body of a man, plant, or animal, determined by how good a life a person lived and by the Law of Karma. The only escape from this endless cycle is to attain nirvana by enlightened meditation, and by abstaining from worldly desires. Out of the Buddhist writings come the mythological gods of the Chinese. These include the Monkey God, Dragon God, Kitchen God, Goddess of Mercy, and such like.

Confucianism is a philosophical system of thought. It too has had an impact upon Chinese religion. The impact of this philosophy is seen in its emphasis upon filial responsibility. This has tremendous over tones. Family and social responsibility come before individual desires. A parent loses face if a son should violate any of the five virtues: live a principled life, be faithful to friends, be loyal to the state, be honest in official duty, and be courageous on the battlefield.

Finally, there is the animistic element introduced by Taoism. This addition includes such things as occultism, astrology, mediums in the temple, communication with the dead, and mystical superstitions. My wife and I were

struck with this when a young man stopped the entire process of trimming the tree behind our flat in Happy Mansion in order to build a temporary altar at the base of the tree, lest cutting its limbs would offend the spirits in the tree.

In our next article, D.V., we will examine in a little more depth how this affects the entire culture and society within which the gospel is being preached and also give some examples of how personal lives have been affected. Then we will be more appreciative of the gospel, which comes not in word only, but also in deed and in power (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

The Gospel in Southeast Asia (part 2)

By Jason L Kortering

The public media here in Singapore have been enjoying a lively discussion on the relationship between morality and religion. It was prompted by a monograph written by two professors of the National University of Singapore in which they analyzed the responses of citizens in connection with the 1990 Census. People were asked questions about their religious practices. By comparing these answers with the ones of the census of 1980, the government learned what changes had taken place.

They learned that Christianity had made the greatest gains - 45,000 new adherents, making up 12.5% of the population, or a total of 285,000 Christians. Since 88% of these new followers of Christianity are Chinese, the government observed that Christianity is taking on the more educated and wealthy of society. Buddhism still has the largest following, 31%. The religion had a 5% increase. The followers of Islam and Hinduism remained the same, and the Taoists declined in numbers.

What sparked the public debate was that 14.3% of the population profess to have no religion. This was the largest increase and raised the issue of

whether a person needs religion to be a good citizen. Li Jin Cai wrote, "You don't need a religion to tell you to be moral. Beliefs come from knowing what is right and wrong. It doesn't have to be from God or what people tell you. It comes from the goodness of your heart from your common sense." Ten other people responded in much the same way. Jacob Yap said, "I believe in myself." Stephen Ho wrote a summary article, which was the last one allowed in the Straits Times. He said, "Even the various religious leaders interviewed have a common theme running thru all their statements. A person can still be a morally good person from a purely naturalistic humanistic point of view, without the aid of religion. Religion merely adds a spiritual dimension, helps give a clearer definition of morals, is a source of strength and helps give morality a sense of objectivity and consistency."

Underlying much of this public thinking on morality is the influence of Confucian philosophy. Senior Minister Lee Kwan Yew is the greatest public advocate and spokesman of this thinking. He is a respected statesman throughout the world and has the greatest influence upon the thinking of Singaporeans. My understanding is that he is not a practitioner of any religion, but considers himself a free thinker. His favorite term is "Asian values," which are often played against "Western values." The subtlety of the use of such terms is great, and we Christians in Singapore must remain alert and realize that there is no greater moral superiority in either East or West. Fallen man is thoroughly depraved in sin, and apart from the God of the Lord Jesus Christ is lost in his sins forever. The sins of the West cry to God for judgment as well as the sins of the East. There is only one refuge and that is beneath the cross of the Lord Jesus.

Eastern religions tend to be legalistic and form a certain outward concept of the good life. People like to convince themselves that they are good and have a good society, yet inwardly they are beset with decay and unrest. If we have to generalize East and West regarding morality, which is always dangerous, the West lets it all hang out. All the rot is publicized, and

everyone can gawk at it as long as he likes. The East covers up all the rot and wants everyone to think they are the best.

Young Christian converts are taken out of this kind of life and brought to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Many carry with them the hurt and scars of past experiences. Some of them have to deal with additional hardships the moment they let their Christian profession be known. These difficulties are not of the measure that a Christian suffers in a Muslim country. It is more subtle and can wear one down in the long run.

Kim Choo (not her real name) is a Christian sister who learned in her adulthood that her mother is not her mother. Rather, the person whom she calls "mother" is the third person who had something to do with raising her. She learned that a friend of her biological mother visited soon after her birth. This friend admired the baby but the mother said, "So ugly, so chubby. You want her?" She said it jokingly, but the visitor took her seriously, and upon leaving asked if she could take the baby girl along. In order for the mother to save face, she couldn't go back on her word. She handed her the newborn. The woman took care of the baby for only a few years, and in turn gave it to another woman without even telling the original mother. These were the days before adoption laws were in place, and times were tough. After the young woman learned about her true mother, she felt resentment for this abandonment. Besides that, she did not receive as good an education as her siblings. The love of Christ ministers to this need.

Bee Lan (fictional name) comes from a home in which the father is a drunkard. Repeatedly the father would come home at 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. and terrorize the family. There were times he would take the kitchen cleaver and hold it at their throats and threaten them if they didn't do what he wanted. Bee-Lan had learned piano, and more than once at 2 a.m. she had to get out of bed to play Chinese favorites for her father's drunken buddies. The very day her mother gave birth in the hospital to her brother, her father came

home with another woman. To this day her mother “puts up with this man.” Face saving is more important than accountability. So the charade of a reasonable marriage and home life continues while inwardly all this hurt and terror build up.

Another sister, Mui Cheng (also not her real name), lives at home with her family while her brother is spoiled, lazy, and spends his funds on gambling. As is true with gambling throughout the world, her brother always loses more than he wins. When that happens, he borrows money from the “loan sharks”, illegal money lenders who charge high interest. They are among the most cruel and fearsome people in Singapore. The family does not call the police. Again, they must preserve some sort of face. Rather, they try to appease the loan sharks by pooling their personal funds to pay these debts. The parents will do anything, even borrowing money from other family members. If they do not pay, the loan sharks will harass the family. They threaten members of the family, sometimes coming in the middle of the night and making a ruckus at the door, or even setting fire to the door. The family is literally held hostage to these loan sharks. Yet no one does anything to the son who is gambling. He is “protected.” The sister lives in such a home situation, and has contributed her own funds as well. What should she do? Remember, in Singapore you don't just move out to be on your own. Housing is not available to you. If you leave, you have to live in with another family.

Not all families are of this character. Not all non-Christian families are this bad. There are those who “have the works of the law written in their hearts.” They have an outward form of decency. Yet even in these homes, problems arise. Problems arise when young people first become Christians. It is very threatening when children of those who practice traditional Chinese religion become Christians. It is a major upset in the family. The parents feel threatened and often strike out in anger. If we feel sorrow when our children may leave the church through marriage, try to imagine what these Chinese parents feel when they are afraid that after they die, their children will not

feed them, pray to them, nurture their spirits. What terrible children! How can they act this way to parents who raised them and met all their needs? The young Christians, more than likely, have to pass through a time of persecution. They must submit, but in many ways not obey. For, God's sake they must bear the suffering, but still honour father and mother. The key is to take a stand in all areas where compromise is forbidden. They cannot eat the family meal which is offered to idols. They cannot burn joss sticks. They cannot worship ancestors. But they can be supportive children, polite and respectful to parents. They try doubly hard to spend time with parents and show their love. In the end, the most wonderful testimony of non-Christian parents is that their children became better children when they became Christians. This is the most effective means to gain them for Christ.

Secondly, problems arise when the Christian marries, and out of tradition or need must live in with the parents in the parental home. I have five couples in my pre-marriage class. Three of them plan to live with parents when they marry. All of the parents are non-Christian. We were just discussing this past Sunday how much money they must pay their parents when they live with them. Some parents are very insistent that upon marriage they have two incomes so they can pay more than when they were single. Paying parents is deeply rooted in tradition. Respect and appreciation is shown by children giving parents money whether they need it or not. Privacy is not much available in such a home, so the newlyweds have to begin their life of "cleaving" under the watchful eye of an austere father, and the young bride often makes do with a domineering mother-in-law. If they stay long enough for children to be born, a whole new set of problems arise. Almost all Christians complain of the interference by non-Christian grand-parents in the discipline of the children. Different values clash directly in this area. You can't just leave your children by Grandma. Grandma may try to influence them in the worship of ancestors and the burning of joss sticks.

Difficulties sometimes arise when young Christians have to deal with the superstitions of most of the locals. Superstition includes the practice of geomancy. Everything comes under forces of Ying and Yang, or whatever name they use. Things must be situated in just a right way for the forces to be advantageous. Large companies are formed which advise clients on the positioning of a building on the land, where to face it, how the furniture must be arranged inside, which lights must be left on 24 hours a day, and even where a bag of rice must be set. Couples tell us of the times when parents enter into the house of their children and immediately begin to rearrange the furniture because it is not auspicious. One of the church members works for an architectural firm and receives instructions from geomancers repeatedly for certain details.

Besides this kind of superstition is the spiritism of the temple mediums. It is not that members of the church struggle with the temptation to visit mediums, but rather their family does and it affects them that way. One sister's father died in unbelief. She witnessed to him repeatedly, but he would have nothing to do with Christianity, the reason being that he lost the sight in his right eye. His left eye was becoming dim, so he went to the temple medium for advice. The medium spoke harshly to him and berated him for neglecting his ancestor's graves and not feeding their spirits. He cursed him and said he would go blind unless he changed his ways. The man trembled, and he asked his daughter, how did the spirit know that I was neglectful. He immediately burnt joss sticks and put out food for the spirits of his family and would hear nothing about Christianity lest he make the spirit angry and go blind in his left eye. This causes pain in the hearts of young Christians.

There are times when the young Christians struggle with the extent of the knowledge of these spirits. Some have claimed to hear their dead father's voice when the mother consulted a medium. Other times the medium tells

them to rearrange the furniture in the house and evil will end. They do it and the evil ends. How must such circumstances be explained?

Though we could continue with many stories and tell of other situations, yet we trust this will help you understand a little better what young Christians face. This is not to sound a note of defeat, for it is exactly the gospel which is God's power of salvation and transforms lives in just such situations. Yes, there are times of strength and weakness, but God is faithful. We praise His wonderful Name.

The Gospel in Southeast Asia (part 3)

By Jason L Kortering

When we first arrived in Singapore, it became evident to me rather quickly that I could not just open my file of sermons which were preached over the past thirty some years and use them here. Interestingly, I find the same thing now in reverse: when we visit in the States on holiday, it is not easy to use sermons written for Singapore to preach there. Though for the most part things are the same, it is in the application of the message that things are quite different. I well recall attending a public lecture which was given by a Westerner in Singapore on the subject of Christian education. It was advertised as one to give guidance to parents in the Singapore context. It took only a few minutes of listening to know that the speaker really did not know much about Singapore and that the lecture was prepared from the perspective of Western society. And when it came to making any applications, he admitted he did not know how it "fit" in Singapore. He drew principles out of the Word of God correctly, but he was handicapped in making that Word of God speak to the people in their own context.

This change falls under the buzzword "cross-cultural ministry." Much has been written about this over the years, some of it glamorized far too much, some of it written in such a muddled fashion that one hardly knows what it is

about, some of it worthwhile and to the point. This article is not about the theory or understanding of a cross-cultural ministry. Rather we want to demonstrate, though briefly and inadequately, how it is done in our setting in Singapore. Purposely, we limited our focus for this series of messages on Southeast Asia to Singapore. It is quite different when applied to Myanmar, where the culture, of course, has its own unique features.

Since there is a diversity of culture throughout the world, it is the task of the person bringing the gospel to take that into consideration when he prepares his message. By culture we use John Stott's description given in *Down to Earth*: "Culture may be likened to a tapestry, intricate and often very, beautiful, which is woven by a given society to express its corporate identity." Though God in His infinite wisdom formed and scattered the nations (cultures) at Babel, it is also His glorious purpose to unite these nations once again in true harmony and peace through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ the middle wall of partition that separated Jews and Gentiles was taken away (Ephesians 1:13- 15). By the work of His Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, all the nations, each with its own cultural diversity, are united by a true faith and look forward to the international host of saints in glory (Revelation 7:9).

To accomplish this, the gospel must be brought to them. That fact alone is a wonder of grace. Yes, it is a wonder from the point of view of gospel outreach. The church must be motivated to do this work and an open door must be granted in order to do it. But this is especially true from the point of view of effective communications. In a certain sense there are three cultures involved, the culture prevailing in Bible times, the culture of the people who hear the gospel, and also the culture of the person who brings the Word.

It is the calling of those who bring the gospel not to transport culture, but to transport gospel. Part of the beauty of the diversity of the church is seen in the culture of God's people. It is the task of every missionary to take special

care not to rape the culture of the people under the pretense of gospel. To accomplish this, the Bible must be viewed as a sieve through which the culture of the people must be passed. That which conflicts with the Word of God must be abandoned; that which conforms is allowed and practiced; that which is neither condemned nor advocated becomes a matter of Christian liberty. It is biblically correct for people to wear clothes, but what styles they wear are dictated by culture. What about cremation - is that biblically forbidden . . . or culturally permitted? In Singapore the majority of people are cremated after death; the Muslims forbid it; many Christians arrange for it. I am sure we would all agree that the old Hindu custom of the widow committing suicide by jumping onto the funeral pyre when the body of her husband was being cremated is not right. The Chinese observe Qing Ming when they worship their ancestors where the ashes are stored or at the graves of those who have been buried. Christians only participate in cleaning up the graves of their ancestors, much like Westerners do for Memorial Day.

This bears on the way in which the gospel must be brought to people of different cultures. Two areas of concern come to the foreground here. First, should the gospel itself be adjusted so that when it is proclaimed it takes on the local color of the people? This is generally called "contextualization." Second, consideration must be given to the way in which the gospel is applied to the people - that is, effort must be put forward to get the message across so that it speaks to the people in their own life's setting.

Contextualization might include things like these. If we would speak on the passage of the Bible where we are told that the Lord Jesus died outside Jerusalem, we could bring into the sermon a detailed reference to the tradition of the Chinese emperors who from 2,205 B.C. (almost 1500 years before Confucius) went yearly to sacrifice to the Sheng Ti, the Heavenly Ruler. This would impress old timers in two ways, it would indicate that Chinese emperors understood the idea of offering without the gate (they went to the border, outside China), and also it would connect that past

activity with Jesus' death. Even Confucius called this a riddle (Mysteries Confucius Couldn't Solve, by Nelson and Broadberry). Or as another example, if we were to preach on the doctrine of justification by faith, we could point out to the listener that even the language of Mandarin has the idea of atonement built into it. Mandarin is picture language, it has layers of calligraphy. The first layer projects the image of a hand and a lance (sword). The second layer pictures me plus a sheep. So the word translated righteousness comes from a word which means kill a sheep for me - a rather interesting description of Christ and atonement for our righteousness before God. This, by the way, is used as an argument that years ago, when the Chinese language was formed, those who composed it must have been Christians.

Use of that kind of approach has its limits not only, but dangers as well. I well remember the presence of an older Indian who appeared unexpectedly for evening worship. He say through the message and afterward argued vociferously that his guru was the same as the Lord Jesus Christ. Hinduism advocates openness to all religions – which explains why it is the root of the New Age religion. If we take as our starting point a local "god," and then argue from their understanding of this god to the true God, it never works. Remember, when Paul referred to an "unknown God" in Acts 17:23, he did not draw a comparison between their idol god and Jehovah. This god was unknown. If you try to begin the gospel on the level of their perception off religion, they will continue to take that perception into their understanding of the gospel. For this reason, many Chinese converts, especially young Christians, cannot understand how their God will afflict them or send them hardships, for the Chinese god never does evil for good, it always rewards good with good and punishes bad people. Many young Christians face their first real test of Christian fidelity in this area.

Far better it is to forget trying to build bridges to heaven by way of local culture and rather focus on understanding clearly what the message of the

gospel is and how to relate it to their own experiences. J.H. Bavinck, in *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, suggests we call it the point of attack rather than the point of contact. That will eliminate the temptation to make too much of dynamic equivalency, finding similarities between local culture and the Holy Bible.

This means that the missionary in a foreign culture has to be a careful expounder of the Word. We see this importance as we write to our Indian brothers and as we have the privilege to teach our friends from Myanmar and Singapore. All our time is spent in the Scriptures. They must learn the language of the Bible just as much as any Western pastor. To their best ability they must know the history of the Holy Bible, the message of the Word of God, and exposit carefully the Word itself. There are plenty of biblical examples that no matter where Paul preached he always preached "Christ crucified and risen, and thereby the power of God unto salvation" The call of the gospel is what is most significant. Whether the listener may be a nominal Christian from Myanmar, a backslider from the ERCS, a Chinese Taoist, an Indian Hindu, or a Muslim, all must hear the one Word of God: Repent from your sins, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, embrace the true God of heaven and earth and serve Him.

This Word of God must be made relevant to their daily lives. Just as Paul could make reference to the poets (Acts 17:28) or to God the Creator (Acts 14:15), so we can make reference to their local customs. I recall Pastor Lau doing that effectively in a pamphlet he prepared for distribution on Chinese New Year. The custom is for Chinese families to hang over their door a bright red and gold sash (auspicious colors for good luck). He used that as a point of contact how the Christians have a banner over them which is love (Song of Solomon 2:4). From there he directed the reader to the cross. Comparison can be made between the gods of the heathen and the true God of the Holy Bible, in order to show why the Christian God is the only God. The same is true when we deal with evil spirits. The Holy Bible recognizes the presence of

such spirits, and on that level has much to say to the local Chinese. The wonderful thing is that, even though evil spirits are around us all the time, Christ has overcome them, and once we are Christians we cannot be possessed of evil spirits, though we must constantly contend with them.

The more we are able to live in the life of the people, the more we are able to make the Word of God meaningful for them. Indeed, we cannot make the application of the Word in every instance. This is the Holy Spirit's domain. Thank God, He does His own applying. What I mean is that every Scripture message which speaks about certain godly behaviour must be applied to the hearer. The more the messenger understands the life of the people and lives among them in their own culture, the more he is able to bring that Word to their level of understanding and also to their special needs. Readers in the States may not need to know how to cope with ungodly parents and siblings. Singaporeans certainly do. Temptations for riches and the drive for excellency and reward is universal, but when it is the life-style of a kiasu Singaporean who lives in a culture saturated with Confucian thinking, it takes on special meaning and must be carefully 'seemed and applied. Christian Westerners who are tempted to use their liberty in excess have a different set of life-challenges than a Singaporean who lives under an authority which dictates most of his life-style.

This only indicates that for effective cross-cultural missions the missionary must live close to the people. It is good that we do not drive a car, live in a condo in the expatriate area of Orchard Road, or wine and dine in Western restaurants. If we did, we would miss all the local colour and just might cause some fellow saint to stumble. At the same time we are able to learn how the people live and relate to them and bring messages which speak in such a way that they know that we understand their frustrations and problems of life.

We are thankful to God that He continues to add to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47). The cross is still God's power unto salvation (1 Corinthians 1:18).