As the name suggests, psalms of enmity and vengeance are prayer psalms that invoke curses on the enemies. The curses all originated from the lips of the persecuted psalmist. Such psalms have always been difficult and, no doubt, the substance of the imprecation was not desirable. The most notable psalm of enmity should be none other than Psalm 137:8-9, “Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction. Happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.” This psalm advocates revenge, even against innocent children. The moral standard was shocking. Psalm 69:22-29 was not any better. Verses 22-25 made a clean sweep and cast curses on the pleasures, health, faith and the next generation of the enemies. This is embarrassing for a faith based on love and forgiveness. However, does this mean that the Scripture should not include such psalms?

Perhaps we are just paranoid about psalms of enmity? We have always placed our focus on the curses that most catch our attention, and overlook the fact that they do not represent the entirety of the psalm. Taking Psalm 137 as an example, the attention of the readers may be focused on the prayer for retribution on Babylon and ignores the curses self-imposed by the psalmist. Verses 5-6 contain two sets of oaths sworn on the psalmist himself, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget…. / May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy” (a direct translation). The psalmist would rather deliver up his passion for music than to sacrifice his loyalty to Jerusalem. The wellbeing of Jerusalem was so close to his heart that he pledged his love to it. It is therefore not difficult to understand the intense pain that he felt when his beloved was violated. The outcry for vengeance was not just to instigate a quarrel, nor was it a loutish outburst that got out of control due to grief and rage. Instead, it was made to uphold the essence of his values, something that he would be prepared to sacrifice for the sake of his beloved.

Psalm 69 also expresses a strong plea of the psalmist, an appeal for authentic faith, behind the cursing language. Verses 22-25 mentioned above list out the psalmist’s desire for the demise of his enemies. Verses 26-30 explain why he so desired. These verses adopt a diachronic structure: the words “pain” and “distress” in v26 and v29 derive from the same Hebrew root “sorrow”. The bearer of “sorrow” from the enemies’ continuous attacks and cruel ridicule and mockery was the psalmist himself. Verses 27-28 compose the central part of this passage, in which the psalmist prayed that these wicked people “cannot enter into your (God’s) righteousness” and “will not be listed in the book of life with the righteous” (a direct translation). The curses that the psalmist proclaimed on his foes were caused by his persistent quest for righteousness. The wicked should not be seated together with the righteous. Otherwise, a perfunctory existence and a useless life of the wicked could signify that God’s judgment was meaningless, or might even mean that God might be viewing such wicked people as righteous. It is only when their final destiny was like what the psalmist described that God’s justice could be displayed. Endless curses did not just represent retribution, but was an expression of faith in God. If the psalmist did not truly believe that God was faithful on His promises, why should he use such full-blown language to bring out the fact that our God who punishes the wicked and blesses the righteous is a truly just God? It is worth noting that in the verses that follow the curses in verses 22-29, the psalmist excitedly proclaimed that he could wholeheartedly glorify God with thanksgiving (v30-31). It is only when the psalmist could unreservedly lay down all his negative emotions before the God whom he trusted that his commitment to trust God can be found, which in turn led him to worship God in heart and spirit. By contrast, if he felt the need to come before God under pretense, that would only take him further away from God. Then gradually, the praises that came out of his mouth would no longer be words from his heart.

Is it appropriate to read such psalms in a corporate worship? It is my view that we should. Reading psalms of enmity means that there is space for disappointment and anger in the worship. In an era filled with unrighteousness and violence, church congregations have to be able to worship truthfully while being in touch with reality. They cannot ignore the existence of suffering, yet in an environment that advocates retributory violence, the psalmists chose to hand back the sovereignty on retaliation to the Lord whom they prayed. Regardless of how and his loved ones had been ravaged by evil and brutality, he would not want to be the executioner of punishment. Although his pains had not healed and problems were still unresolved, the psalmist would wait for God to restore things to order. The word “wait” in Hebrew יָכֹה incorporates the meaning of “hope.” A corporate recital of psalms of enmity is an action to bring about hope, especially during an insane age filled with power corruption, rampant violence and perversion. Powerless people in a society will all the more need to recite psalms of enmity so that their roars of rage can be heard, but at the same time ensure that they would not be consumed by the desire to take vengeance as they would wait for the return of their covenantal God. He will restore and make everything new.

Extended Reading:

Examples include Psalm 10:40: “I will not forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget…. / May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy” (a direct translation). The psalmist would rather deliver up his passion for music than to sacrifice his loyalty to Jerusalem. The wellbeing of Jerusalem was so close to his heart that he pledged his love to it. It is therefore not difficult to understand the intense pain that he felt when his beloved was violated. The outcry for vengeance was not just to instigate a quarrel, nor was it a loutish outburst that got out of control due to grief and rage. Instead, it was made to uphold the essence of his values, something that he would be prepared to sacrifice for the sake of his beloved.
Fellowship after the Thanksgiving Service.

President Stephen Lee shared CGST's latest news and development with the Canadian and US Boards.

Rev Dr & Mrs Wilson Chow together with Rev Dr & Mrs Che-Bin Tan at Jonathan Chao Center in Westminster Theological Seminary.

President Emiritus Rev Dr Wilson Chow was the youngest of these four Chinese divinity students. He used Deuteronomy 8:11-20 to encourage the congregation not to forget the vision and mission that God has given CGST, and firmly believed that the establishment of CGST was a movement to bring about theological education to equip and train leaders of strong academic standards for Chinese churches generally and in particular in Mainland China. The past forty years that CGST has gone through was entirely God’s grace and provision. We should therefore not boast about individual achievement but should move forward unremittingly. The Israelites were reminded not to worship idols but only to God. Rev Dr Chow told the CGST community not to overly uplift our vision while embracing it. Otherwise, our vision may become our idol.

After the sermon, Dr Ching Lau led the congregation to light up the small lamps which CGST gifted to each of them. About 100 small lights were shining in the hall and symbolised that CGST’s mission would be upheld and passed on.

Towards the end, CGST President Rev Dr Stephen Lee shared his outlook of CGST’s future. He reiterated that CGST’s vision originated from a burden for China and that has remained unchanged. He also shared that some faculty members who have retired or soon retire have been considering settling down in China to devote the rest of their lives towards theological education in Mainland China. He hoped that supporters of CGST could continue to give their support in prayers, and that the Lord will lead the future path of CGST.

Daniel Law
Director of Development
DipCS 2014
My sharing today is about the vision and mission of the earlier generation. I believe God is giving a greater vision to the second and third generations, at the same time renewing our original vision, so that the School will move on with the times and respond to new situations. A series of books came out in the 1970s-1980s entitled “I Believe”, such as “I Believe in the Church”, “I Believer in Evangelism”. I can best describe CGST’s vision as “I Believe in Theological Education”. Theological education is not just one among the church’s many ministries. It is the indispensable one which produces the manpower for the various ministries.

Some important beliefs of the CGST vision became fully developed when we put our mission into practice. I would like to share five aspects today:

First, CGST’s vision and mission is for theological education to serve the Church. Different from religious studies at universities, theological education aims to train leaders for the Church. Theological study is not an end in itself, nor is it a personal interest, but it is for equipping oneself for church ministries, building up God’s Church and extending His kingdom. Therefore, the success of theological education is measured by its impact and contributions to the Church. CGST was formed with the needs of China’s churches in mind, considering how the Church in China. We began with training university graduates, before it went independent and gave birth to another organization. Other creative ministries include theological training for homemakers, programs in Mandarin, and for those in the marketplace. Lately the Word of Life Bible Study movement encourages believers to study God’s Word and has been received with great enthusiasm. We must not be content with what we are doing. We need to be spiritually discerning to see the needs of the people and step forward as the Spirit moves and leads us.

Lastly, CGST’s vision and mission is to serve the Church in China. We are rooted in Hong Kong yet committed to serving China. The challenge is immense. We must have our own orientation and know where we stand. We are part of China but we are not in the mainland. We follow the One Country Two Systems policy. As a seminary, we wish to get in touch with our counterparts, that is, theological schools in China. Over the years, we have had opportunities to visit schools, have mutual exchange, attend conferences and have been invited to teach short term. All these help to build up friendship and trust. It is a blessing that we can share our experience and resources in theological education with the church leadership in China. It is exciting to receive qualified applications from China for our Mandarin programs, and we have accepted pastors and seminary teachers recommended by the national TSPM/CCC to come for further studies. We hope the door to serve remains open and our partnership continues.

Jesus said to His disciples, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also, and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.” (John 14:12) May the second and third generations of teachers and students carry on our vision and continue with the mission. I also believe that you will do greater things.
Stephen Lee
President

I believe in the communion of saints

In a recent Chapel service at CGST, we were overrun by 15 minutes because of the numerous announcements. Before the end of the gathering, a representative from the student union led the staff and student community to pray together for the Syrian war and the refugees. During the moment of silence, I recalled an article just received a few days ago written by my friend, a Christian brother-in-Christ from the Middle East.

This article was posted on the website of “Lausanne Movement”. Based on the concern of personal safety, the author did not disclose his name. I remembered when I met him 13 years ago; we talked about the history of the faith community he belonged to, which could be traced back to the church at Antioch in Acts chapter 11. As pointed out in his article, “The Arab Christian Church has survived from the Day of Pentecost to now, nearly 2,000 years. It has had some good times as well as bad. It has survived pressure and persecution.”

Christians form 10% of the Syrian population — they were well-educated, and held good positions in business, education, and government. Suddenly everything has been turned upside down in the past four to five years. A city in the middle of Syria was repeatedly bombarded. The Christian community was no exception. The Presbyterian Church over there was the largest church in Syria, but 80-90% of Christians have been displaced. Although no one has exact numbers, some 400,000 to 500,000 Christians have become refugees. Ever since 2011, there were some 45 terrorist groups in Syria. They wanted to separate and took over the country by force. Even after the ceasefire, it is not optimistic that Christians can rebuild their homes. The Islamic State (IS) is committed to control and destroy all the Christian communities step by step in their territories.

In the midst of trials and suffering, God still has His wonderful purpose. Christians in the Middle East no longer work for their own interest. Coptic churches in Egypt are praying for the believers in Iraq for the first time; five church networks in Syria engage in various domestic humanitarian aid. Lebanon hosts 1.5 million refugees, among them 400,000 are refugee children. Local churches seek to provide medical care, food, education and other resources for them. Over the years, caring for people of other faiths was not a priority of the church. However, in view of the crisis today, evangelism and social action should go hand in hand, which is an indisputable consensus among the leaders and believers.

Church should be prepared to continue to witness Christ in the reality of persecution, but not be discouraged or dismayed. The church can still trust in God’s sovereignty and goodness in the midst of very difficult circumstances, even if we cannot understand what is going on. A Syrian MBB, who was in prison for ten days in solitary confinement, said afterwards that he was expecting a miracle from God to open the doors, but instead he had a clear vision of the presence of God in the cell. He said God’s presence was enough for him.

Lebanese and Syrian pastors said that in the last two to three years, they have seen more Muslims come to faith in Christ than in their whole lives.

Some Lebanese churches have a separate Sunday worship service for the Muslim Background Believers (MBB) among the Syrian refugees. In one church, 80% of the refugee congregations are converts who have now been baptized. Some came from northern Syria where IS is in control and Christians would never have dared to go. Now they came to Lebanon and Jordan to hear the gospel. The author mentioned about a very strict Muslim whom he knew personally and has now become a committed Christian.

Church should be prepared to continue to witness Christ in the reality of persecution, but not be discouraged or dismayed. The church can still trust in God’s sovereignty and goodness in the midst of very difficult circumstances, even if we cannot understand what is going on. A Syrian MBB, who was in prison for ten days in solitary confinement, said afterwards that he was expecting a miracle from God to open the doors, but instead he had a clear vision of the presence of God in the cell. An almost audible voice said to him: ‘False witnesses and close friends brought you here; they did the same to me on the cross.’ He said God’s presence was enough for him.

1 https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2016-01/the-crisis-in-syria
• Rev Dr Kin Yip Louie attended the Annual Meeting of the Executive Committee of Hong Kong Theological Education Association (HTEA) for one year during their Annual General Meeting on February 19.

• President Lee was invited by Kowloon West district of The Methodist Church, Hong Kong, to preach at the Maundy Thursday Communion Service on March 24.

• President Lee visited Toronto and Vancouver between March 8 and 31 to preach at the CGST North America Revival Seminar, Vision-sharing dinner, Pastorl Luncheon, Sunday Service as well as meeting with local Regional Council members and supporters.

• Vice President Kang Phee Seng attended The Global Forum of Theological Educators (GFTE) in Frankfurt, Germany, from May 16 to 20. “The Future of Theological Education: Serving the Church and Its Mission” was the theme of the Forum.

• Vice President Kang was invited to speak at the Justice Conference Asia 2016 hosted by The Vine Centre, Hong Kong between May 13 and 14.

• Vice President Luke Cheung was invited to attend the China Theological Association Symposium in Shanghai on March 28.

Faculty Engagements

• Dr Annie Pan Ng accepted the invitation to attend and lead workshop at the Theological Students Day organized by Hong Kong Theological Students Prayer Fellowship on February 19.

• Dr Simon Cheung was invited by Shatin Baptist Church to teach a series of classes on Psalm and Contemporary Hong Kong on February 19, 26 and March 4.

• Rev Dr Kin Yip Louie attended the Annual Meeting of World Reformed Fellowship Board in Indonesia between March 6 and 12, during which he also participated in a series of Theological Seminars. “Reformed Theology and its Contribution to the World” was the theme of the seminars.

• Dr Simon Cheung attended the Langham Partnership International Research Conference at Tyndale House in Cambridge, England, between March 13 and 18.

• Dr Raymond Au is on leave for research writing from February to July.

• Dr Daniel Lee was invited to speak at the forum on reflections on violence / just war hosted by Public Ethics Education and Research on March 17.

• Dr Bernard Wong was invited to speak at a youth theological seminar hosted by Christian & Missionary Alliance Church Union of Hong Kong on April 15.

Staff News

• Mr Kwok Kuen Leung went to Los Angeles, Seattle in the US and Vancouver in Canada to preach at revival meetings, to attend volunteer sharing gatherings and preach at Sunday services between February 19 and March 1. Mr Leung also visited Melbourne, Brisbane, and Canberra for the same from March 5 to 14.

• Rev Dr Song Jun, Director of Chinese Culture Research Center, was invited to speak at a public lecture co-hosted by the Center for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society, Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Society for the Study of History of Christianity in China on February 2. “Making Choices in the Midst of Change: The End of the National Christian Council of China (1949-1951)” was the topic of the public lecture.

• Mrs Doreen Chan came on board on April 1 to become the Executive Consultant of Word of Life Ministry.

Revival Seminar in North America

• President Lee preached at the CGST North America Revival Seminar on May 19. Being held at Richmond Hill Chinese Christian Church in Toronto, the Seminar was simulcast and video broadcast to 27 locations in 19 cities in North America.

In Memoriam

• The late Mr Michael Wong, retired Board member of the Australian Board, passed away on April 17 2016.

• Prof Robert L. Griswold, Professor of Theology at the China Theological Association Symposium in Shanghai on March 28.

• Rev Dr Wilson Chow, CGST President Emeritus, addressed the Paramount International Banquet Hall in Kowloon Bay in that evening.

Prayer Items

1. Pray for the students who are graduating in June, that God will grant those entering full time ministry a humble heart to serve in faithfulness wherever God places them. Pray also for those who have completed the evening part time programs. May God use them to integrate what they have learnt in their workplace and to witness Christ in their own lives.

2. Pray for the applicants who are being considered for the new school year. May God direct the selection process and give wisdom to the Admission Committee members.

Save Trees

Subscribe to electronic version of CGST English Bulletin

Thank you for subscribing to our print edition of English Bulletin. More trees are being torn down when we continue to print the quarterly Bulletin. We now would like to invite you to take part in protecting the environment by subscribing to our electronic version. You can simply visit https://www.cgst.edu/ebulletin_eng and fill in the form as requested. From next issue onwards, you will receive an email notificiation to view the electronic version of the English Bulletin. Thank you for making an effort to save the earth!

General Fund Financial Report

Jan to Apr, 2016

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*Note: 1. Tax deductible receipts issued to Hong Kong and Canada credit card donations. 2. For US credit card donation and receipts issued by U.S. please go to http://www.cgstus.org/donation.php

Response

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