



Newsletter – July 2010

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Floods.

When I was young, every time there was a heavy rainstorm, Chin Swee Road (where I lived) which had a slight incline, would turn into a swift river, and at its junction with Havelock Road, at Pulau Saigon Circus, it would flood. This was despite the proximity of that area to the Singapore River.

Even into my late teens each time there was a rainstorm, Bukit Timah Road would flood. Cars would get stranded, and there was a decently lucrative sideline for boys to push cars out of the water. There were even itinerant mechanics on bicycles, to help motorists clean their carburetors, dry their distributors, and restart cars. I remember the flood waters remaining in the playing fields in the University of Singapore grounds for days. At night the reflections of the street lights made the area look like a mini Lake District. This flooding I learned was caused by cutting down trees, and the housing building boom around the Bukit Timah area. This prevented the land from absorbing the rain and all the rain water which fell on the roofs, roads, and the paved areas became “run-off” into the concreted drains, which inevitably overflowed.



Today, people think it is their birth-right as citizens of developed countries, to be entitled to a life free from the stresses and trials of floods, storms, tides, earthquakes and anything natural.

It took thousands of years for a mangrove to develop. On its own, it is an ecosystem with a wide diversity of life. It is one of nature’s transitional zones, between the land and the sea.

Then man came along and insisted on building their homes right on the shore and even into the sea. They dredged the mangrove shore, filled it with imported sand and build weather-proofed, sealed, buildings as homes. They seek to moor their pleasure boats out in front and park their limousines out in the back of their houses. Others build on hillsides in blatant disregard of natural vegetation cover, and slopes, “for the view”. “Me, and my pleasures

comes first”. No considerations needed whatsoever, to be accorded to “nature”. “We can conquer nature and subdue it.”

Mankind, armed with our sciences and technologies, can go down 3,000 meters under water, then drill another 1,500 meters through rock vertically, at an angle, or horizontally, to access and extract the oil that is under there, to be burned in our power stations and our cars.

We have the knowhow to dig deep tunnels and send people and equipment down to harvest the minerals deep in the bowels of the earth. We have the technology to pump out water, and pump in air, continuously, or bulldoze whole mountains for our men to continue to extract whatever traces of minerals we want the earth.

We have the ships, the sonar and the nets to trawl the deep seas and vacuum up all marine life in extensive areas for exotic sea food.

We have the technology and the transportation systems to harvest all the larger trees, burn the rest, and replant the land with oil palms to feed our food and cosmetics industry and for bio-fuels. Our satellites found only 1,365 hot spots (forest fires) so far, - to May this year, in Indonesia and Borneo. This is cause for celebration, because compared to the one single day in July last year, when 2,248 hot spots were counted.

We replace forests with grassland to feed our cattle, to convert grass into meat to excessively over-nourish us.

We can tame huge rivers, dam them for electricity – to light up casinos. We can control their flow to water farmland for “market crops”

Whatever we have used and whatever we don’t want, we can dump them in landfills, incinerate them, or just throw them into the oceans.

Singaporeans were all thrilled when we managed to persuade our Government not to despoil a tiny beach - Chek Jawa on a tiny island –Ubin and save it (temporarily) from development

CFSM members who went up to Cameron Highlands last month year for their annual commune with Mother Nature reported that the day temperatures there were no different from that of Singapore. The severely overloaded roads also meant hours of crawling in a cloud of carbon-monoxidized traffic jams.

“So God created human beings, making them to be like Himself. He created them, male and female, blessed them and said. “Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you I charge of the fish, the birds, and all the wild animals.....”

What have we become instead?

We became greedy, selfish, and arrogant.....

Greedy. A home and a chicken in the pot is not enough. We want a centrally heated/air conditioned house right on the edge of the beach with 2 cars in the garage, and a boat moored in front.

Selfish. Those who can't afford? Just too bad.... for them. Our buildings cause floods, our cars pollute, and yes, we generate too much garbage. Just too bad..... for future generations.

Arrogant. We can conquer Nature. We build levees, concrete typhoon shelters,. earthquake proofed skyscrapers. We can make our weather when we want it. We redirect rivers, erase forests, level mountains.

Twenty five, perhaps thirty years ago when I first wrote about "Gaia" in these pages, our Spiritual Director then, a well educated Redemptorist, immediately did some research. He told me that it was the first time he heard of the word and asked me how I came to learn of this concept. Today everyone, nearly everyone, talks about Gaia. Talk only.

More than 30 years ago I started reducing, reusing, and recycling as much as possible. I still separate my rubbish, pack them neatly and carry them off for recycling.

More than 10 years ago I stopped eating shark's fins, and speak about it at every opportunity as I had to "entertain" foreigners, often in my work.

Recently I learned that pomfret, a common deep water fish, regularly eaten "Teochew steamed", in Singapore, is endangered. It is time to stop eating them.

We have to live with Mother earth. This planet is the only home we have.

Any significant change in this our environment will cause untold hardships for the poorer and those less able to fend for themselves. Increasingly, and sooner rather than later it will also spell the end for those who are doing most of the "despoiling".

We have completely lost our solidarity with mother nature.

..article by mark

Reflections:

"....we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made...
.....this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands..." and yet

What did we/you do?

How have you contributed to despoiling nature?

What will you do to live more in solidarity with mother nature?

'The desire to completely devour nature is an example of how human beings no longer have any solidarity with each and with future generations.' (– Fr. Benny Susetyo)

...reflections by Fr A. Christophe