



Newsletter – Nov. 2008

CFSM Singapore

2 Highland Road, #03-12

Singapore 549102

Website: <http://www.cfsm.org.sg/>

Email: cfsmmsg@gmail.com

Of Creation, Food Prices and Christianity

The CFSM organized a trip to Cameron Highlands during the June school holidays. It was for a closer bonding for families and members of the Movement. At the same time it enabled families to rejuvenate themselves away from the urban environment. Through excursions to the forest, tea plantations, and vegetable/ fruit farms we got more intimate with the source of our food (farms and plantations) and with nature (sources of pristine water, air and oxygen). We learned that the highland primary forests formed when the mountains started forming (as the land began folding upwards) some 140 million years ago. In the evenings, our group reflected on our day's experiences and we truly felt that God had provided generously for the world. I, for one felt that we humans are really so insignificant. It is one of those rare times that I fully grasped that it is not through my income alone that got me that packet of tea, or that cauliflower but it is God's providence (the soil, the air, the water) and man's labor that gave us our food and drink.

“Lord, God of all creation, through goodness we have this ... (*food and drink*) which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us ... (*nourishment to do Your will*).”

- adapted from our mass offertory prayer

We had Brother Mark Aloysius, a Jesuit novice who kindly came to facilitate reflections with us. He pointed out that when God created the world, God 'saw that it was good'. The earth can produce sufficiently to feed and cloth us.

However, after we came back home (to Singapore), harsh reality confronted us. The prices of food and essentials have been increasing fast. A 5 kg pack of average grade rice was \$6 just a year ago. Today it is \$9. When eating out, \$2.50 used to buy us a plate of simple 'economic rice' (rice with 2 or 3 varieties of vegetable/meat). The same meal today would cost \$3, probably more.

Why? We were told that this could be attributed to a combination of factors such as rising oil prices, and increasing demands from the two giant economies (China and India). However, a significant possible reason was mentioned in a Straits Times article (25/6/08)

Biofuels pushing 30m into poverty:

Oxfam

“...BIOFUELS are responsible for 30 per



cent of the increase in global food prices, pushing 30 million people worldwide into poverty, aid agency Oxfam said in a report on Wednesday.

The use of biofuels is soaring as developed countries try to reduce their dependence on imported oil and cut emissions of carbon dioxide, but critics say they have led to a shortage of grain, pushing up commodity prices.

'Rich countries' demands for more bio-fuels in their transport fuels are causing spiraling production and food inflation,' said Oxfam biofuels policy adviser Rob Bailey, who wrote the report. 'Grain reserves are now at an all-time low.'... ”

Resources (land, investments and labor) that would otherwise be available for food production are channeled to bio-fuels production. We saw it for ourselves, en-route back to Singapore from Cameron Highlands (along the plains from Klang to Johore) miles and miles of palm-oil estates¹. Palm oil can be used as cooking oil, making margarine and pharmaceuticals, but increasingly, more of the world's palm oil production is converted into biodiesel and the making of other plastic-related products.

We are told that we need to change to bio-fuels because mankind's relentless pursuit of industrialization in the last two hundred years had placed a strain on nature and the environment. The consequence of our industrialization (and quest for quick profits with cheap fossil fuels) is ozone depletion, carbon emission, and exhaustion of minerals and arable land. It is clear that the current rate of industrialization is not sustainable. Being the creative and solution-oriented species that we human are, the preferred solution is ... to look for an alternative fuel. Industrialization (and all the modern conveniences that it brings) is our new sacred cow and must go on. To amass wealth, the industrialists, agriculturalists ...and consumers of the rich countries would rather feed capital rather than people.

Two centuries ago, a similar situation happened in America when the pioneers moved westwards to develop and industrialized the 'new world'. They took the native Indians' lands and turn them into ranches, cities and industries. The Indians who had been living harmoniously with the land for thousands of years just could not understand the white man's obsession with money.

*"Only after the last tree has been cut down,
Only after the last river has been poisoned,
Only after the last fish has been caught,
Only then will we realize that money cannot be eaten."* - Cree Indian tribe prophesy

In an apparently unrelated article on the same day (25/06/08, prominently at the top of page 3 of Prime news section) a headline announced "***S'pore now has 77,000 millionaires***". The article ranked countries with fastest growth in the number of millionaires. Most of the *nouveau riche* come from the developing economies like Brazil, Slovakia and the "newly industrialized giants" (Russia, India and China). We read about how these countries had attracted investments as the

¹ In 2004, Malaysia produced 14 million tons of palm oil from more than 38,000 square kilometres of land, making it the largest exporter of palm oil in the world. as a major producer of palm oil, the Malaysian government is encouraging the production of **biofuel** feedstock and the building of **biodiesel** plants that use palm oil. Domestically, Malaysia is preparing to change from diesel to bio-fuels by 2008, including drafting legislation that will make the switch mandatory. Malaysia is emerging as one of the leading biofuel producers with 91 plants approved and a handful now in operation, all based on palm oil.

developed economies of the west and North invested in manufacturing capacity where land, labor is cheap. The industries create a thirst for fuel, and in its people - a hunger to consume more.

It does not take much to notice that the world's food shortage can be attributed to the channeling of world's resources to industrialization. In the process a few thousand people gets richer while millions get hungrier.

“Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, not every man's greed.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

In the beginning God created everything and he saw that all his creation was good. It was only because man's self-indulgence and willful disobedience that we separated ourselves from God and departed the Garden of Eden. Throughout history, this has been the main source of grief in our man-made calamities – war and destruction, poverty, earth's degradation, etc. The global warming and the now the shortage of food is mainly caused by humanity's greed.

Despite mankind's greed, God has taught us by word and by deed: God was the Word who then made into Flesh to teach (and to save us). God's Law is to “Love our Neighbor as Ourselves”. And who is our neighbor? It is the 30 million people who are driven to starvation by the industrialized, it is the future generation of humans yet to be born, whose earth we are using and polluting.

Jesus has shown by example the extent of selfless-ness by His servitude and His death for us when we are sinners. God, through his Church teaches ...

2415 The seventh commandment [thou shalt not steal] enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity. Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation. ...

2417 God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives. (Catechism of the Catholic Church)

Creation (the environment and all its issues), food prices and Christianity are not isolated topics. They are related. Our faith teaches us to live in love, and that means moderation in consumption and sharing of resources with the poor - truly a recipe for a happier world (and the Kingdom of God).

.....article by Andrew

Reminder:- CFSM Parenting Session 2008

Date 9 Nov (Sunday)

Venue: Novena Church

Fee : \$12 per family (incl of tea break)

More details in the attached.