

UNPACKING OUR VALUES

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Synopsis

A Vote of Values

Our Core Values

Passing the Baton of Values

Partners with Similar Values

A Vision of Values

A Vote of Values

The other day, as I was watching PBS for the results and commentary of the recent American election, I suddenly saw Pastor Rick Warren with three other panelists on the screen. Looking at the results, the panelists all agreed that it was a vote of values – personal values, family values, social values, religious values. Pastor Warren then pointed out that this movement of value-based voting has been obvious within many churches and denominations and the media missed the writing on the wall because “the media is not in the church”.

Indeed, the media has sidelined the churches. It keeps telling us that churches are archaic, peripheral and marginalized institutions. Hence the media people were surprised to find the extent of opposition to same sex marriage. Ignoring the church people is their first mistake.

The second mistake the media made and continues to make is labelling Christian values as conservative and fundamentalist. Indeed some of them have likened Christianity in America to Islam in the Middle East. This simplistic division of the society into conservative and liberal, right and left has done much harm in causing disunity within the American society. This is now changing. There is now a fresh awareness that personal beliefs cannot be detached from our social responsibility.

Personal beliefs such as the sanctity of life, the sacredness of marriage and the foundational importance of the family form our core values. A man without core values is one without a backbone. These "conservative" values are non-negotiable, clearly taught in the Bible. They must not be used to trade for political power, career promotion or financial gain.

Social responsibilities such as concern for the poor, care for the dying, protection of the environment and good citizenship are often dubbed as “liberal” values but these are equally emphasized in the Bible.

In other words, the biblical values are both conservative and liberal, right and left leaning. Indeed, they should form the basic platform to unite the two sides. We must not follow the mistakes of the media.

A good illustration from the Bible may be found in the Psalms, the Hebrew manual of prayer. While it may not be commonly known, the first two psalms are actually the preface for the rest of the psalms. Psalm 1 teaches the importance of personal faith, emphasizing pious purity (1:1) and contemplative spirituality (1:2). Psalm 2, on the other hand, deals with public faith. It describes the role of faith in the political arena (2:1-2), the vanity of human race (2:3-4) and the gift of Messiah as the answer for all nations (2:6-7). World peace and environmental care are also mentioned (2:8). Hence we see that biblical faith is personal and public at the same time, capable of uniting the conservative and the liberal, the right and the left. The impact of this link is strengthened when we note that “meditate” in Psalm 1 and “plot” in Psalm 2 are the same verb.

Our Core Values

- Three Core Values

It is clear from the above discussion that we must know and have a firm grip of our values. Canadian Chinese Christian Business & Professional Association (CCCBPA) has three core values: a) – the visibility of Christian faith, b) the practice of Christian priesthood and c) the importance of good deeds.

a) The visibility of Christian faith

Christian faith not lived out is dead (James 2:2). Faith is not an abstraction or a belief. It must be visible in our behaviour and actions. Faith is personal but not a private matter. It involves our inner world as well as the outer world. It must be practised in the church, at home, in the playground and in the workplace. Faith is not a compartmentalized, fragmented concept. Our lives should not be divided into secular or sacred parts. Rather, it should be an integrated life of obedience to our Creator.

b) The practice of Christian priesthood

All Christians are priests of the gospel (Romans 15:16). We all are God's priests. Some are called to serve as priests inside the institution of the church while most of us are called to be God's priests outside. There is no higher or lower calling. God demands obedience from all of us. Christian professionals are God's priests in the workplace. Similarly, Christian business men and women represent God in the business world. As priests of the gospel, we are required to witness for God at all times and "if necessary, use words".

The main responsibility of a priest is to worship God and to help others to worship Him. The first job given to Adam was to "plant and guard" the Garden of Eden. The Hebrew word for "guard" in the Old Testament is a priestly term, usually translated as "worship". In other words, the first instance of human work is the priestly duty of worship. As a matter of fact Adam worshipped God first before he worked in the garden because he was created on the sixth day and the following day was Sabbath, the day of rest and worship. The linking of work and worship in the Bible helps us to form a proper perspective of our work. To paraphrase, we may say that "work is our worship for the weekdays and worship is our work for Sundays".

c) The importance of good deeds

Christians should shine for Christ with good deeds (Matthew 5:16). Facing a fast changing society with overt pagan practices, we tend to recoil and curse the darkness. However, the challenge for us is not to condemn our society but to contribute positively in Jesus' name. The purpose of our good deeds is not to get us to heaven but to show

God's love to the people around us. As the saying goes, God does not need our good deeds but our neighbours do.

It is easy to march against homosexuality but difficult to care for those suffering from AIDS. It is cheap to parade around an abortion clinic but costly to take care of the unwed mothers. It is one thing to demonstrate at the G8 summit but quite another to provide relief for the destitute. It is time for us to take an inventory of our core values. As expected, how the local chapters live out these core values differ from city to city. Providing residence for the elderly, teaching computer skills to the aboriginal young people in Canada and the natives in Ghana, providing free medical and dental services in Mexico, organizing blood donation, hosting outreach luncheons for colleagues are just some examples.

- Our Statement of Faith

We have adopted the statement of faith used by the Evangelical Fellowship of Christians.

- a) The Holy Scriptures as originally given by God are divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy, and constitute the only supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
- b) There is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- c) Our Lord Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh; we affirm his virgin birth, sinless humanity, divine miracles, vicarious and atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension , ongoing mediatorial work, and personal return in power and glory.
- d) The salvation of lost and sinful humanity is possible only through the merits of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, received by faith apart from works, and is characterized by regeneration by the Holy Spirit.
- e) The Holy Spirit enables believers to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.
- f) The Church, the body of Christ, consists of all true believers.
- g) Ultimately God will judge the living and the dead, those who are saved unto the resurrection of life, those who are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

Passing the Baton of Values

The other challenge related to our core values is that we must pass them on to the next generation. To reach a new generation, we need a new strategy.

- **The birth of Project Contempo**

I was first exposed to CBC ministry when I moved to Toronto for my internal medicine training in the late '70s. I learned much about and from them. Ever since then, I have been involved with CBC's. Later when I returned to Winnipeg, God used me to start an English speaking service at the Winnipeg Chinese Alliance Church. The congregation has now a weekly attendance of over 100 people.

In 2002, when I was asked to be the national president for CCCBPA, I made it clear that my passion was with the CBC's. There was unanimous support for my vision. When the opportunity came the following year for me to start a new project in Toronto, the idea of Project Contempo crystallised. The plan is to organize a compact but high-impact event aiming to help the English speaking-Chinese Christian young professionals to live out their faith in the workplace. It is hoped that the event will act as a focal point where interaction and networking among the CBC young professionals can occur. This in turn will serve as a stimulus for further dialogue and group learning.

The first meeting was a disaster. Most of the pastors concerned were out of town that weekend. I was ready to quit but the Lord gave me these words while I was still in Toronto: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you... because I have many people in this city." (Acts 18:9-10) After the initial false start, the project has made steady progress ever since.

The name "Contempo" literally means keeping up with the tempo of the contemporary society. It implies that we Christians should be watchful of the rapid changes in our society and workplace so that we can deliver a distinctive Christian message through our work and everyday life..

- **The basic tenets of Project Contempo**

These tenets were initially formulated for the Toronto project. They have since been refined for use across Canada. God willing, the project may become nationwide.

- 1) Project Contempo is a venture to reach and nurture the CBC young professionals.
- 2) Our main target are those who have entered workplace / marketplace after graduating from university. These are the twenty-something CBC's.
- 3) While the project is primarily for Christians, it should also be seeker-friendly.
- 4) This project is inter-denominational, inter-church and citywide.
- 5) We do this project in partnership with the local churches and parachurch organizations that share our vision.

- 6) CCCBPA will spearhead the project. In a sense, Project Contempo is the youth wing of CCCBPA, sharing its core values and statement of faith.
- 7) It is hoped that Christians involved with this project will support other events of CCCBPA (such as our biannual national conferences). Our next national conference will be held in Ottawa in early July, 2006. We hope that it will serve to carry on the momentum of Project Contempo.
- 8) The project should be financially self-sufficient.
- 9) We regard our ethnicity as a God-sent gift, recognizing at the same time that the gospel is for all nations. We are all equal in God's sight.
- 10) We encourage the CBC's to actively participating in their local community, without losing sight of their global responsibilities.

- **The target audience of Project Contempo**

Our target audience are the CBC young professionals. They often face the following challenges:

- A affluence (sudden wealth)
- B bicultural (racial background)
- C cloning (technology)
- D decay (morality)
- E Enron (ethics)
- F family (marriage, parenthood)
- G globalization (commercial)

- **The strategy in doing Project Contempo**

1. the Subaru approach
Trust needs to be earned. Credibility takes time to build. The Subaru company took a long time to win consumer confidence before it started to do major promotion. It is important that the local representatives know the chemistry of their respective city and be able to discern the proper timing.
2. the Saturn model
Saturnization refers to the drafting of the cream of the crop in order to venture out and create a new product of superior quality. We need to keep our eyes open for potential leadership among the CBC's, willing to mentor and care for them. We should learn and model after the best practices.
3. the hybrid stage
While future cars may entirely use alternative fuel, we are just entering the transitional phase with the hybrid models. Similarly, Project Contempo needs to go through the hybrid stage. Years ago, the prophet Joel wrote: "Your old men will dream dreams and your young men will see visions." Hopefully our young and old men will both see the same vision. Judging from our

experience in Toronto, initially the planning committee is best to have representatives from both the CBC and the parent generations. Once the CBC leadership is established, we should let them take more responsibilities and ownership.

In other words, let our past guide our future and let our future instruct our present.

- **the implications of Project Contempo**

1. the bridging ministry – wider co-operation

It is hoped that Project Contempo will serve as a bridge in the following ways:

- a. linking faith and career
- b. linking theology and daily living
- c. linking clergy and laity
- d. linking the CBC's with their parent generation
- e. linking the campus and the workplace
- f. linking the church and the parachurch organizations
- g. linking the church and the society
- h. linking the east and the west

2. the apprentice mentality – further research and study

The project will force us to take an inventory of the current CBC ministry, both its strength and its weakness. We have already been made painfully aware of the lack of good research and study in the so called “second generation syndrome” among the CBC's. None of the campus groups that we have approached could present us with statistics of how their graduates are doing after leaving campus.

We need to do meaningful surveys to learn more about the priorities, concerns and values of the CBC young professionals.

3. the global watch – broader scope

The issue of ethnicity needs to be addressed in more details. To be ashamed of our ethnicity is unbiblical since our roots come from God. To feel superior because of our race is equally unchristian. God does not play favouritism. It is God-honouring when we honestly offer our ethnic background back to him. This is of particular importance when China, already a major force in goods production, is poised to become a world superpower. Chinese Christians everywhere need to wait upon the Lord and find out what God wants them to do in the coming decades – the exciting decades of the Dragon.

- **The future of Project Contempo**

The potentials are great but we have to proceed with wisdom from above. On one hand, this is cutting edge ministry and yet we must not waste time and effort in re-inventing the wheel.

The following are possible avenues for consideration:

1. setting up a national council of references
2. requesting letters of endorsement
3. doing general survey
4. discussing issues e.g. politics, ethics, wealth management, family.
5. setting up resources website
6. matching established and young Christian professionals

Many of these can be done with an active website.

Partners with similar Values

With a challenge of this magnitude, we must pool our resources together. We need a co-operative spirit. Our goal must be kingdom building and not empire building. To see different organizations working together is in itself an encouragement.

Right from the start, IVCF and AFC have been our close allies. These campus ministry groups realize the importance of providing ongoing care and support for the graduates. Staff members of Campus Crusade and Navigators have also pledged their support and endorsement.

In July this year, Christian & Missionary Alliance had their general assembly in Winnipeg. The Winnipeg Chinese Alliance Church hosted a dinner for over 60 Chinese pastors from across Canada. I was given the opportunity to share the vision of Project Contempo with the visiting pastors. The response was exceedingly warm. Many of them talked to me afterwards and gave their blessings to the project.

As the vision of this project starts to spread across Canada, it becomes clear that God has already prepared different groups in various cities for reaching the CBC's. One example would be "City In Focus", a dynamic group based in Vancouver. Their aim is bring the good news of Christ to the city of Vancouver, especially the needy people. This is not a primarily Chinese organization but they have recently started ministry among the English speaking Chinese professionals. This is a worthwhile organization to support and work with. "The Tribe of Issachar" in Toronto is another example. This group specializes in helping churches with small numbers of CBC's by providing training and encouragement. We will be partners to these existing groups.

We will also tap into the new wave of interest in marketplace ministry. Paul Stevens of Regent College in Vancouver has recently conducted a conference on marketplace ministry in a Chinese church in Calgary. (It may be a first for the Chinese churches in Calgary.) He will be starting a "Vocatio Institute" in Toronto. AFC is co-sponsoring the Toronto venture and we certainly will be promoting these events within our network. We also look forward to consult various Canadian seminaries for their insight and advice. Trinity Western University is one example.

A Vision of Values

Although our primary target are the CBC young professionals, it is important to recognize our movement as a vision of values. Our vision is not just about understanding our ethnicity, bridging the generation gap, strengthening the local churches, important as these goals are. It is a vision of biblical values applied to the contemporary society. Our strategies will have to be updated from time to time, programs will come and go and our response to a rapidly changing society will be modified but our values do not change. No matter how the outside changes, we are still God's priests and His agents of change through good deeds. We will continue to live out our vibrant faith.