



# OUR SOCIAL MISSION

BY CARITAS SINGAPORE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

## THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Does our faith bring earthly wealth? In the second of a series of articles on money, we examine wealth and the prosperity gospel.

In our previous article, we saw that God is not against material wealth per se but it is our attitude towards it that counts.

In fact, there are many instances in the Old Testament that God gave riches to His people. Solomon was promised riches more than any other king (1 Kings 3:11-13). King David (1 Chronicles 29:12), Abraham (Genesis 17-20), Jacob (Genesis 30-31), Joseph (Genesis 41), and several others were blessed by God with wealth.

Does our faith assure us of earthly prosperity? Is it the will of God for all Christians to experience wealth?

Indeed, many Christians are being inspired by those who preach a prosperity theology of "health and wealth" for all believers. Their basic premise is that God wants Christians to be "abundantly" successful in every way, with special emphasis on financial prosperity. They suggest that God who loves us does not want us to be poor. Hence, faithful Christians are not to expect anything less and should instead claim on God's promised generosity.

To support their views, the advocates of what has come to be variously known as "Prosperity Gospel," or "Prosperity Theology", etc, would quote and

provide their interpretation of biblical verses such as *John 10:10*: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

The Prosperity Gospel was first introduced to the public audience in America in the televangelism of the 1980s, but it then faded away with the scandals of Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart. In recent years, it is making a stronger comeback with some modifications (*some dub it "Prosperity Lite"*) in some of the Christian mega-churches.

However, not every Christian preacher agrees with this interpretation of the biblical scriptures. Rick Warren, pastor of the mega Saddleback Church and

author of the best-selling "The Purpose Driven Life" was quoted in Time magazine as saying, "This idea that God wants everybody to be wealthy? There is a word for that: baloney. It's creating a false idol. You don't measure your self worth by your net worth."

A key issue lies in the definition of "prosperity" which for the proponents of the Prosperity Gospel is synonymous with earthly riches and monetary wealth. Such believers tend to see God as a power to be put to use for whatever they will by claiming on God's promises. God's ability to "bless" the believers supposedly

hangs on their faith.

What is the Catholic view? Our approach goes much deeper spiritually than material prosperity. Yes, Jesus meant for us to have life more abundantly, but the abundance is of our spirit. It is for our soul to prosper and to be well (3 John 1-2). Jesus had asked, "What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mark 8:36). *Revelation 3:17* shows the end-time Laodiceans to live in wealth and richness. They carelessly assumed their financial status to be an indication of God's blessings. However God judges them as "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked" because of their spiritual poverty. In contrast, the church in Smyrna was poor by monetary standards, yet God considered them rich in His eyes because of their faithfulness to Him despite persecutions from the Jews and those loyal to the Roman Emperor (*Revelations 2:8-11*).

The Lord sends both poverty and wealth. When we see wealth as a promised blessing that God has made to all followers, we risk pursuing wealth and see God just as an avenue to material prosperity.

God wants us to be rich but not necessarily the way the world counts riches.

We are rich when we generously share what we have, be it our material wealth, time and talent with those who are more in need. Generosity is an important aspect of our Christian faith. Such an attitude is a demonstration of the generous heart of God who freely gives.

God pours His blessings in a multitude of forms on whoever he chooses, so that they can in turn be a blessing to others (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church 329*).

When God entrusts financial wealth, He wants us to use it responsibly. If we cannot be trusted with money, how can we be trusted with genuine riches - the heavenly reward of eternal life (*Luke 16:10-12*)? Our riches should be put to good use and must not be an end in itself but a means to an end. The giving of money, food, respect and justice is part of the mandate for giving to the poor (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church 328*).

According to St John Chrysostom, "Wealth is good that comes from God and is to be used by its owner and to circulate so that even the needy may enjoy it. Evil is seen in the immoderate attachment to riches and the desire to hoard."

Ultimately, God cares about everyone, rich or poor, because all are created in His image with equal dignity. No one is less important than the other. Jesus summed this up best when he commanded that "we love one another as He has loved us."

Make no mistake about it. God does want us to be rich - rich in faith and rich in love for our fellowmen.

### A getaway for married couples

FOR some years now, married couples have been taking off for a quiet weekend getaway and returning home recharged and renewed in their commitment to one another.

They haven't been heading to an exotic seaside resort or spa, but to a house in Ponggol, where wonderful things happen to people who have been married for anything between two and 50 years.

Here, they put aside the cares and worries about jobs, bills, raising the children and everything else that can distract a couple from remembering the reasons why they fell in love and decided to marry. They focus on their marriage, and rediscover ways to communicate, understand one another and rekindle those loving feelings.

It all happens during the Marriage Encounter Weekend, and couples who have invested the time to attend are the best advertisements of what a difference two days can make.

"We've been married for 17 years and always thought we had a good marriage. The ME weekend resurfaced the many emotions and feelings which we had taken for granted for many years," say one husband and wife.

Another couple learnt to communicate effectively without getting emotional. "Our dialogue will be truthful and from the heart."

Marriage Encounter has a long history going back to Spain in 1952, when a priest wanted to help couples develop an open and honest relationship within marriage. Out of that grew a



Participants of the Marriage Encounter Weekend in May were the latest to discover how some time out for reflection and discussion can rekindle the sparks of love.

worldwide movement which reached Singapore in 1979, and the Marriage Encounter Weekends have become a regular fixture here since.

The ME Weekend starts on a Friday evening and goes on until Sunday evening. The sessions are run by trained volunteer couples and a priest, who present a series of talks on the important areas of marriage, and teach participants a special technique of loving communication.

This is not marriage counselling or therapy, and there are no group discussions. Instead, couples get time out to go back to their room and reflect privately on what they have learnt and start practising the communication technique.

The Weekend also provides couples the opportunity to examine their relationship with God and to appreciate their marriage as a sacrament of the Church.

#### About Marriage Encounter

This is a weekend programme for married couples who want to recharge and have more fun, spontaneity, excitement, communication, understanding and more in their relationship.

#### Where it's held

The Marriage Encounter Weekend is held on the first weekend of every month, from Friday evening to Sunday evening. It is a live-in programme, held at the Marriage Encounter House at Ponggol 17th Avenue. Mandarin weekends are held three times a year.

#### How to register

Go to the Marriage Encounter website at [www.marriage-encounter-sg.org](http://www.marriage-encounter-sg.org). It costs \$50 to register and you may give a donation at the end of the weekend.

#### Who's Who at Marriage Encounter

Coordinating priest: Fr Paul Goh  
Coordinating couple: Daniel & Shelley Ee  
Board couples  
Alphonsus & Cyrene Gregory  
Patrick & Carolina Tan  
Joseph & Reenie Tan  
Stanislaus & Alice Poh

#### Mandarin Coordinating Team

Fr Henry Siew  
Titus & Grace Soh