

## The kites of Bali

A few days ago, I was driving along the road in a friend's car, when we hit a traffic jam. We slowed down to a snail's pace, but could not see what was causing the jam, until, after five minutes or so, we overtook a small procession of young men and boys, triumphantly carrying a very large kite, made out of black plastic rubbish bags and other things. They were taking it to open ground to fly it, for this is the kite-flying season in Bali and the skies are dotted with kites of various shapes and colours, all dancing on the wind. What surprised me, however, was that the cars and motorbikes waited patiently to overtake this small procession. There were no horns being sounded or angry shouts that the "kilters" should get off the road. Everyone seemed to accept that taking a kite to the flying ground was as important as the motorists getting to their destination.

I have noticed a similar attitude on other occasions: roads being closed so that Balinese religious ceremonies can take place and while this may be a bit frustrating, if you are in a hurry, nevertheless I do not see outrage at religion getting in the way of people's right to travel, which would, I think, be the case in other parts of the world. And then there is Nyepi, Balinese New Year! On this day a Sabbath rest descends on the whole island and everything stops – and not even planes are allowed to land or take off on that day. I cannot resist a little shout of joy at the thought that there is one place in the world, where commerce does not always take precedence over every other activity. So, a "*hurrah*" for the kite flyers, who, at this time of the year, claim the right to be more important than the needs of motorists and the transportation of goods!

This is not to say that commerce is wrong, it is not. Commerce is always good, for it is for the benefit of people, but there are other things, which are also for the benefit of people, such as kite-flying and these, at certain times and places, become more important than commerce. So, as these young men and boys claim their right to fly their kite, they are also proclaiming the Gospel.

The story of Martha and Mary comes to my mind, *Luke 10:40*, where Mary sits listening to Jesus speak, while her sister Martha is busy preparing the meal. Martha asks the Lord to tell Mary to help her, but is told in reply, "*Mary has chosen the better part and it is not to be taken from her*". We have a tendency to give such statements an absolute value and assume that it is "always" better to sit listening to the Lord rather than be busy working. But this is not so – and I am sure that the Lord would have been a bit peeved if there had been no supper that night, because Mary and Martha were both sitting listening to him! The Lord may well have been explaining something, which Mary needed to hear – and so on that particular occasion it was "better" for Mary to listen than to help Martha, but that would not be true on other occasions. Situations and circumstances alter priorities.

This is not "*moral relativism*", which says that circumstances completely determine whether something is good or bad. Things are always good, but in a certain situation there may be something that is better and the "*good*" lies in choosing that, which is better – conversely, "*evil*" also lies in choosing something that is good, but, in that particular situation, you have to sacrifice something which is even better to get it. For example, it is good to have some money in your pocket, but, if to get that money you have to knock an old lady over and steal her purse, you are into evil - not because the money is evil, but because the welfare and dignity of the old lady is a greater good than the money you want. Thus, evil is not a thing; it lies in our actions, our choices of one good over against another of greater good.

This should be obvious to anyone who professes the Christian Creed, for we profess belief in One God, who created all things and created them all good. To say that there are “*evil things*” would mean either that the Creed was wrong, or that there was another God, who created the bad things of the world. Strange how we often do not see the consequences of what we profess to be true! But, I suppose, that if we did, we would not have movies, such as “The Omen”, to watch!! Hehe!

But back to our kite-flyers! When they walk the road, carrying their kites, they are not saying that kite-flying is always more important than work or commerce, but they are proclaiming the right to sometimes play - the right to a Sabbath. For the Sabbath, as the Lord points out in *Matthew 12:10*, is not about Sunday being a special holy day, but about our need to rest, to play, to have time for being together and while that can be done on any day, we need to agree on a day or we will not be together, which lies at the heart of a Sabbath – and that is the meaning of the Christian Sunday. So, my band of young men and boys, by their joyful procession, were, albeit unknowingly, proclaiming to the world that there is a hierarchy, a scale of values, which we need to be aware of, if we are to live richly and humanly. And they also proclaim that all these various “*goods*” need a place in our living – “*a time for everything under heaven*” as Ecclesiastes says. So, the next time I look up at the Bali skies and see the many and varied kites dancing on the wings of the wind, I shall also try to look inwards, at my scale of values and ask whether today I need to cause a traffic jam.

### **Diary**

I am involved in buying things for the house that I will be moving into, when I come back from Sarawak. Some things are easy to buy, but other things such as pictures etc have to be haggled for – and I am no good at that. I always come away with a feeling that I have lost out somehow. We are moulded very much by our background aren't we? I can't imagine going into a store in Reading, UK and trying to haggle – I just accept the price which is told me. So, my initial reaction here is to accept the price first offered by the seller – and then be told by friends that I was robbed!!! Oh well!

A while ago, I wrote about three of the Bali Nine, who were appealing the death sentence imposed on them. They are three young Australians who were charged not with drug dealing, but of possession, although they were involved in the plan to smuggle drugs into Australia, but they were the “mules” and not the ringleaders. Initially, they were given 20 year sentences, but when they appealed, this was changed to death. They have now finished their last appeal against the death sentence and I spoke with the mother of one of them last week and asked how the appeal was going. She told me that they will now have to wait about two years to find out whether it was successful. I am thinking of starting an appeal for clemency on their behalf, but first I need to find out who the appeal for clemency should be addressed to. I will also have to think if it is best to appeal just for these three or for all the Bali Nine. It seems to me, to condemn these young men to death is to say no good can come from them any more – and that I find an affront to all I believe in.

God bless,

Terry

