

## Water Repentance Performance – A Christian shares his perspective & experience

Written by Dr Eugene Tang Kok Weng  
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(Specially dedicated to those Christians who are hesitating to join Tzu Chi)

As a Christian, I was initially hesitant when asked to join in learning sign language for the presentation of the “Dharma as Water” stage adaptation to be held at the Singapore Indoor Stadium. First to flash through my mind was: will what I was going to do, conflict with my Christian beliefs? I told my TIMA sister (volunteer): “Give me some time to consider.” Actually, I needed time to check out the different themes and chapters in the “Water Repentance” text, and to find out if there were any elements that would work against my Christian faith.

I attended study sessions to know more about the text, learning how it was originally penned by the Venerable Dharma Master Wu Da during the Tang Dynasty, and after understanding more about the different themes and concepts contained within, I began to appreciate that the teachings are meant to cleanse as well as purify our minds.

One of the requirements for all participants is the need to partake of 108 days of vegetarian meals. The Christians’ book of truth is the Bible, and so, what does the Bible say about vegetarianism? It may surprise many that, according to the Bible, the first people on earth were vegetarians: *“Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food” (Genesis 1:29).*

Another evidence is that when the kingdom of heaven is established, all beings will become herbivores. The prophet Isaiah gave many descriptions of this kingdom, and all his visions point to all beings being vegetarian. Isaiah chapter 11 gives a lengthy description of the peaceful kingdom, and the 65th chapter has a particular verse that strongly supports the idea of a kingdom filled with nothing but herbivores: *“The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither hunt nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the LORD (Isaiah 65:25).*

Through the six months that I was involved with preparations and practices for the adaptation, I observed that though not everyone who took part in the adaptation practiced vegetarianism fully, no one stood up to criticize those who did not abstain from meat. This attitude of tolerance ties in with the Bible verse as follows: *“One person believes he may eat anything, while another eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?” (Romans 14:2-4)*



After ironing out the issue on vegetarianism, I began a study of the words “Water” and “Repentance”. As it turns out, “Water” plays a very important role in a Christian’s life. Two out

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of the ten Basic Beliefs of my church mentioned the use of “water”— firstly, “Water Baptism is the Sacrament for the remission of sins and for regeneration,” and secondly, “The Sacrament of Foot Washing enables a believer to have a part with the Lord Jesus Christ. It also serves as a constant reminder that a believer should have love, holiness, humility, forgiveness and service.”

Some bible verses related to water are: *“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. John 3:5 - Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Ezekiel 36:25)*

Similarly, in the Christian faith, “repentance” or seeking forgiveness, is a most common prayer and principle in our daily lives. We seek forgiveness for wrongdoings and trespasses and we are urged to forgive others despite their wrongdoings and trespasses. Repentance is the adoption of a right attitude towards self e.g., The Prodigal Son came to himself. Repentance is also the right attitude toward others. Repentance must be followed by actions that prove that change. All men need to repent. All men sin, and as a result, all men need to turn from sin and turn to righteousness. *Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17 30).*

How about the issue of “hell” mentioned in the text? The section entitled: Hell on Earth states clearly: “The Buddha cautioned all sentient beings, hell is not a fictional place; it is not someplace far beyond, all of Hell’s suffering is visible before our eyes.”

The word “hell” or words conjuring the same, are mentioned so many times in the Bible, e.g. Psalm 55:15 states “Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell, for wickedness is in their dwellings and among them. In Matthew 25 41-43, it is written: Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison, and you did not visit Me.

So my heart was at ease, and I had inner peace because of the full conviction that the teachings in the adaptation do not conflict with my Christian belief at all, and in fact, it cements the importance of many concepts common to both Buddhism and Christianity. Yes, there may still be differences between the two, but rather than magnifying the differences, would it not be better to celebrate the similarities, in an effort to create a society that is more peaceful and tolerant of one another? After all, the sutras point us to the Way, and the Way is a path meant to be walked upon. If we can walk the path and not deviate from it, with one mind and one heart, our minds will be clear and pure, we will be able to expand the horizons of our aspirations, and then we will surely be able to uphold our vows, never wavering over countless eons.

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