

MY CONVICTION AND COMMITMENT

*“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”*
(Ps 23:6)

My maternal grandmother was one of the few first fruits of Quinhon Evangelical Church in the early years of the 1950s. The Lord by then found her through Chester and Mary Travis, an American Missionary Couple who could sit with us the Vietnamese in our huts and eat steaming hot rice with nuocmam sauce, who learned to enjoy the taste and the odor, who endured malaria and dysentery while ministering to their assigned districts and towns of provinces in Central Vietnam and our hometown Quinhon was one of them. It was Christ’s love seen in the impressive life of the Travis’ impressed my grandmother, drawing her near to His teaching in the Bible taught by this couple, nurturing her to become a faithful Christian and an excellent vehicle for the Lord to find me as I was a little girl.

My grandmother lived with us in a paternalistic family of five and all were non-believers. My grandmother experienced from failure to failure as she sought to share her faith to our parents despite her tireless efforts, the ancestor-worship belief in my father's heart stonewalled all of them. However, failure with our parents could not prevent her love of reaching out to her grandchildren for Christ.

My grandmother could not read and write Vietnamese and this defectiveness was very common among Vietnamese in the old days and she took it as an excuse to get my sister and I to go to Church with her in order to read the verses in her Bible for her. My sister was so shy to go to such a large congregation so all the opportunities were mine exclusively!

Our God seems to have a sense of humor, He takes my grandmother’s illiteracy in human language to promote me to the literacy of His language in the Bible! Week after week, month after month, and year after year I kept accompanying my grandmother to Church and what God taught her through the Bible taught me also; what convinced her convinced me also. . . . At my age of fourteen I was fully convinced that I should have God’s forgiveness through Christ for His eternal salvation and I’ve been following Christ as my own Savior and Lord since then.

In the early years of my Christian life there was a war between my eagerness of living a new life and the inhibitive power of tradition from both family and society and it was not easy for me. I had to find hard against all kinds of unbiblical beliefs and practices and at times I was tempted to quit the race. I also found out that there were so many weaknesses and limits in me as obstacles on the racecourse that the Lord has called me to run. . . . Thinking back to those days I’m now so grateful to the Lord for positioning my grandmother beside me to encourage me, urge me, guide me, teach me, and pray for me. It was her ministry to me that helped build me up in my walk with

Christ to the point where I now can boldly say that nothing can hinder me from pressing on toward the goal “to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus”.

When my husband and I first met each other in the last year of senior high school our Christian faith was relatively tested in both lives and we could easily share the same values, beliefs, and directions for life. We got engaged in the first year of college and we married each other right after graduation from college. We thought our course of life will be smooth and we will live teaching as our lifetime career. We had no idea of the upcoming historic event of our country, the victory of the Communists and their taking over the South part of the country in Summer 1975.

The overthrow of the South Vietnam Government by the Communists from the North marked a turning point of Vietnam as the beginning of a Communist country, putting the whole country under a totalitarian Government. Christians like us were seen as traitors to the country because Christianity was considered as just a tool of American Imperialism to fool the indigenous people. For the first few decades after Summer 1975 to be a Christian is to be a criminal and to be a Christian worker is to be a double criminal and all American missionaries were believed as CIA high rank officers. My father in law who was the chairman of the staff in our Church was condemned as a CIA agent because he worked closely with American missionaries before the fall of the South regime, he and his household were punished with an expulsion to a mountainous region and my husband and I were included. We were stripped of everything we had and my husband was dismissed from teachership because he was also a youth leader in our Church.

After overcoming his own mental crisis and despite strict control during our exile my husband began his ministry with scattered Church members by sneaking to their homes for teaching and exhorting them to keep persevering the faith. His beginning of ministry was my start of being a sort of caretaker for our own family who took over the responsibility of covering physical needs for a family of four people. It'd been almost three decades since that moment I did everything I could to support our family financially until my husband met Dr. Russell F. Lloyd and began to work for IBL some twenty years ago. It's been almost five decades I patiently and gladly shared with my husband every hardship in life and in ministry, taking them as privileges of being yokefellow with a faithful servant of God.

Now that my husband's ministry with IBL facing a crunch but the fire in his belly is still full and he wants to take this as an opportunity to restore Russ' original vision and mission for the Church in Vietnam I feel proud of him and believe that I now can do it over again what I'd done many years ago to support him for his ministry. I think I may start a street vendor to sell fruits or vegetables to cover our daily needs so that my husband could have time and freedom to serve those who serve the Churches in our country.

My prayer now is that we may maintain our course of life as it's been since Christ found us more than half a century ago and that we may, through His indwelling grace and power, overcome difficulties and temptations to glorify Him.

(Deborah Tran)