

Short speech given on the Time Capsule Ceremony at Tao Fong Shan
Friday Sept 22, 2023

Greetings in Christ! Greetings from Areopagos in Denmark and Norway. It is such an honor for us to be here together with you, on this memorable occasion.

How long is a centennial? Well, it is easy to answer in numbers. 100 years, 36 500 days, 876 000 hours, give or take. But what else does a centennial hold, besides years gone by? How many stories, memories, and moments have passed, and – how many of these have been passed on? From one generation to the next, from Karl Ludvig Reichelt to his heirs to us, from Notto N. Thelle (Sr.) to Notto R. Thelle (Jr.), whose book we will leave in the time capsule for someone to recover in another centennial or so. Last year, Areopagos celebrated our 100th anniversary, and in not too long, Tao Fong Shan will do the same.

The Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han laments that our generation has lost the ability to linger in time. We are too busy to get to the next place, the next ceremony, the next summit, whatever's next.... And thus, the present is rendered meaningful only insofar that it is a step towards another goal.

This Time Capsule Ceremony is a unique opportunity to pause from our hasting to whatever's next; pause and behold, sense, and imagine another time in history, about a hundred years ago. When we open the capsule that Reichelt and his partners saved for us, we turn our gaze to attend to those who have gone before us.

In doing so, what do you see? Do you see the pilgrim monks climbing the hills, to fellowship with brethren on this mountain? Do you see the sisters of Ai Tao Yuan, caring for both the existential and diaconal needs of their time? Do you see the backpackers who in the eighties and nineties travelled to what was the far East to them- but home to many of you here?

At what point in history do you see yourself pilgrimaging for the first time to the Tao Fong Shan? When did you first set your foot on this holy hill? When we think of this mountain as holy, it is in the positive sense that it is set apart. Through generations this site has been a sanctuary for pilgrims, from near and afar.

At times they were many, at times they were few. At times they were seeking refuge from war, and at yet other times they thought they were tourists, but likely their wanderings were far more intentional than they were aware of themselves.

For some of you here, you were born and raised in Hong Kong. You have seen people come and go from this place, and from this mountain. For others here, you arrived for the very first time just a few days ago.

Yet, at this very moment, *we* are the pilgrims in this place, present at this particular time in history. Throughout the past centennial the partnership between Christian Mission to Buddhists – now, Areopagos – and Tao Fong Shan has developed and adapted to different seasons and conditions. However, we are acutely aware of our mutual dependence if we are to fulfill our mission. There is a saying that goes “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” 100 years is a decent walk, but let us go even farther, together.

Let’s turn our gaze towards the future. Not because we are in a rush to get there. But because we are aware that our time is short, and soon enough our descendants will recover the time capsule we are preserving for them today. What is it in our shared heritage that, if possible, we would like to sustain in a time capsule for generations to come?

As you know, there are some limits to the capacity of the time capsule. But, if there was room for only one more thing, I would suggest *hope*. A few weeks ago, we had an inspiring and brave Chinese artist visiting us in Norway. We talked about his art, and we talked about hope taking time. In the sense that hope is patient. Not unlike love – remembering 1 Corinthians 13, right.

However, hope cannot be contained in a time capsule. Which leaves us the task of keeping hope as our walking stick. Much like Reichelt used a walking stick for his pilgrimages, we all need hope for our journey. *And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Rom 5,5)*

So, dear fellow pilgrims who are here today; no matter what the next days, years, or even centennial will hold for us, and those who come after, there is hope. Our shared history is a testimony to that hope; through war, fire, and typhoons, Tao Fong Shan has endured. Despite quarrels and conflicts, we are here today.

And if we want to, this ceremony can be a sign of hope. Because God’s love has indeed been poured out into each and every heart of ours, and the Lord who holds all of our times, also has given his promise to us, to Tao Fong Shan and Areopagos:

“And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of time” (Matt 28,20b)

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