

Fasting for Vietnam in Australia and the visit of June [Darby] Perrin to Sydney

Carl Redmond

April 1975



Australian members join the protest fast of Vietnamese students seeking help in rescuing their families before the communist takeover

A number of significant events happened in the Sydney center in April. During one week, I met Al Grassby (former minister for immigration) with his wife and television personalities outside the Boulevard Hotel, my third contact with him. Professor Alice Tay, who spoke at an all-day seminar on women's year, warmly received me in her offices in the Law School. She accepted a copy of Unification Thought and spoke forthrightly on her anti-communist views. Professor Heydon, a Christian, also received a copy of Unification Thought.

Friday, April 18, saw the arrival of June Perrin from England as mother to the family here. This was a great day for all of us who gathered at the airport to welcome June. Immediately prior to this we were stimulated by the visit of Vic Jessop direct from Barrytown, who gave us all the first-hand news during his three-day stay. Vic left the same morning June arrived.

But by far the highlight of the month came at the end. On April 28, members of our group were on our way home when we observed a demonstration in progress. Curious, we found thirty or so Vietnamese students fasting and staying the night in a nearby park in a protest to awaken the Australian government to rescue their families still trapped in Saigon immediately prior to the communist takeover. We were somewhat moved, and later decided a group of three of us should represent our church and give them moral support. We spoke with the organizers and offered our sympathy.

We met there Michael Darby, son of Minister Douglas Darby, who invited us to the university to discuss whether something could be done. Here we met Professor Grose, Dean of Sydney University, and his wife. Together we were able to formulate some scheme for an airlift, but perhaps even then it was too late. Last-minute offers of planes did not include the huge risk of life one faced in attempting to enter or leave the country with refugees. We returned to the demonstration and offered to stay with them. This was received very warmly and I think they were rather overwhelmed to find European support for what was so obviously a national cause. Later on, other European students arrived and stayed overnight,

leaving early next morning. There were some hopeful faces that night. The next morning we awoke to find a sea of blankets. At 6 a.m. the ground was cleared and the fasters were all given one cup of milk each. The fast continued.

During this time, it was possible for us all to really get to know these students and share with them Father's love. Many came to trust in us and respond to us, particularly when they could realize we were not doing it for any motive but humanitarian reasons. To some, we were able to talk directly about the Principle. During the day there were large numbers of reporters and television cameramen present. We were certainly on film many times over, and one radio reporter took detailed interviews from some of the students, including myself.

The reason the students were fasting was to try and bring about a last-minute effort to bring their families to Australia before the communists came. They filed a case several weeks ago with the Australian government, but absolutely no action was taken. This raises a serious question concerning Australia, just how far left is she prepared to go. Certain recent developments didn't suggest anything but sympathy by the present government for communist regimes.

As I and other members took part in the demonstration, the prime minister was involved in a storm over an encouraging telegram he sent to the Vietcong in North Vietnam, advising them on battle procedure. This had been denied by the prime minister earlier, but now his intentions and his dishonesty were made clear to the people.

At 6 p.m. came the news, communists had invaded Saigon and Vietnam had fallen. The students decided to end their fast at midnight coinciding with a final candlelight service in the park and a press conference. The candlelight service was moving, and several church leaders spoke to encourage the disappointed students.

Many were in tears. There were over 200 at the final service. Then I was invited to speak and introduced as the "Rev. Carl Redmond." I addressed the crowd of students with authority, being the only religious figure who had bothered to fast with them. I felt I understood them more, and said so. I told them not to give up hope that, sooner or later, things would come out good. I gave a prayer and could hear the crying of many students as I prayed. This apparently was the closing address and prayer and the meeting was dispersed.

We were able to offer our minibus to transport fifteen or more of them home, and this increased their joy. Many expressed their gratitude to me and wished to keep in touch. I was given Vietnamese soup to break my fast. It really was a tremendous opportunity to personally encourage and befriend these students, and to ease their sorrowful hearts. One or two remained in cheerful spirits but the majority, I think, were clearly discouraged. However, with our support I think they took heart. Also, many other Europeans expressed their support during the fast. At one a. m. Wednesday morning we arrived back at the university to the profound gratitude of the students as we said goodbye. As I journeyed homewards, the minibus empty, I felt somehow lonely, that I wanted to be with them again, to share with them. But, time was moving on.

A few days later the organizer of the committee expressed his gratitude over the phone and said he could feel we were the only ones who could understand their situation. We feel sure that in the future our Vietnamese brothers and sisters will come to recognize our Father and the spirit of our movement. Providentially, the demonstration was moved by the council from the original location, the town hall steps, to a location adjacent to... our witnessing area.

We couldn't help but notice it. Our thanks to Father on this special effort.