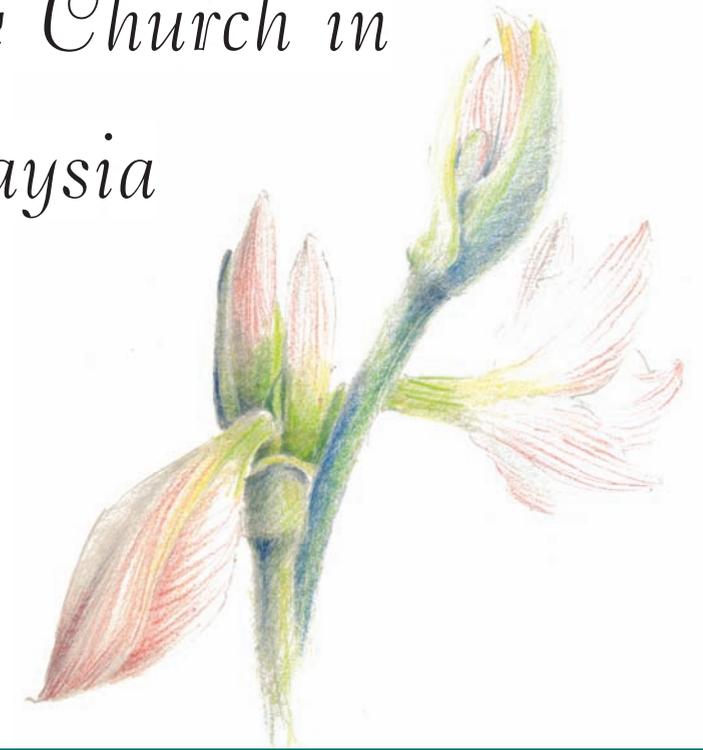


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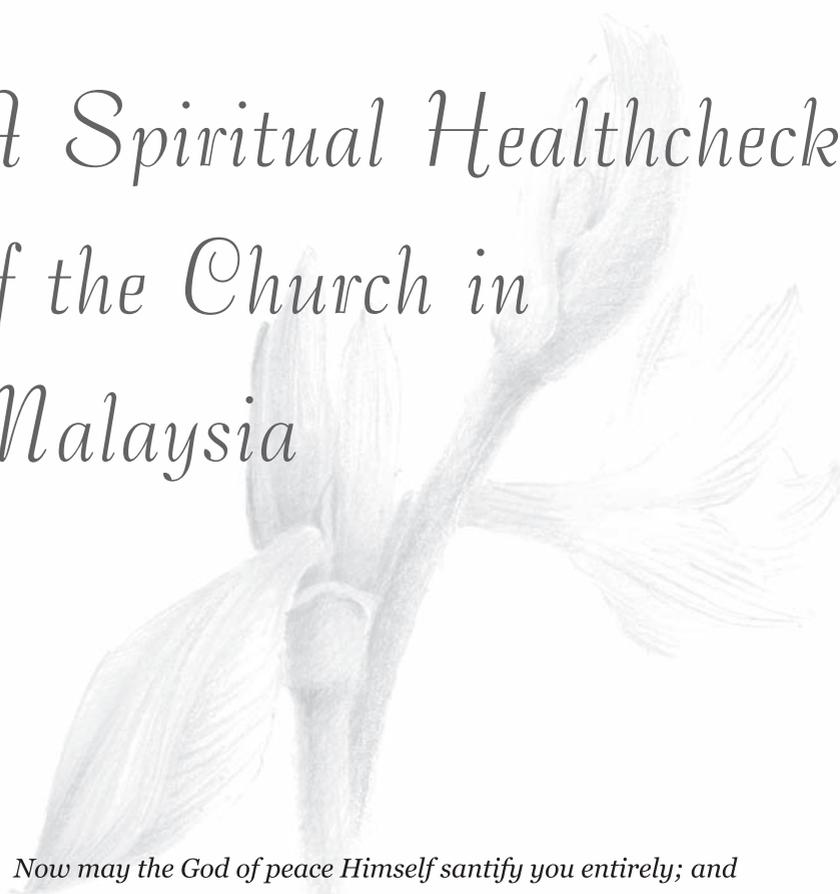
*A Spiritual Healthcheck  
of the Church in  
Malaysia*



NECF MALAYSIA

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*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and  
may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete,  
without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*– 1Th 5:23*

A SPIRITUAL HEALTHCHECK OF THE CHURCH IN MALAYSIA  
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# Foreword

**W**hat does a healthy church look like?

It is a mature and spiritually transformed church, comprising people of godly character who are conformed to the image of Christ, prepared and equipped, doing the will of the Father. It is not about numbers, hype or “good worship”.

Disciple-making must follow salvation. The Church plays an important role in helping the new believer as he or she embarks on the journey of intimacy with the Lord

Believers must be taught that their lives are not only about personal salvation and blessing, but also growth and discipleship. Discipleship involves discipline and dying to self.

Too many believers focus on God blessing them and meeting their wants. However, being a Christian means embracing God’s agenda and the willingness to pay the price to advance His kingdom.

There is no shortcut to spiritual health.

Personal and corporate holiness and lives that honour God are the most basic prerequisites of a healthy church. Effective leadership is essential to its long-term sustainable growth.

There is no point in being big but weak. A church full of immature self

indulgent believers may self-destruct. Egocentric leaders may attract crowd but does not contribute to true spiritual growth.

Finally, the source of a healthy church is Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11).

My prayer is that this book will not only challenge us to self-examination, but also encourage us to live on solid spiritual food.

Ω

REV. EU HONG SENG  
NECF MALAYSIA CHAIRMAN

# Introduction: The Critical Role of Self-

STEVEN WONG, CHAIRMAN OF NECF RESEARCH COMMISSION

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**T**he first church management audit ever conducted took place less than fifty years after the church had been established. The ‘Auditor’ was no less than Jesus Christ Himself and His findings were published in Revelations 2–3. We do not know exactly why these seven churches of Asia were chosen or what their leaders might have thought of the appraisals. Some of the outwardly successful ones, perhaps Sardis or Laodicea, may have had no inkling about the assessment they would receive and could have been rudely brought down to earth.

Others, maybe those in Smyrna or Philadelphia, had had little success and perhaps expected a low grade, only to be comforted by His sympathy and words of encouragement. Whatever the case, the Malaysian church can draw two conclusions. First, Jesus Christ personally holds each church accountable to Him. Second, the criteria used in this accounting can be radically different from the ones that are frequently used.

Given the absolute seriousness of the matter to Christ, churches everywhere ought to be in a constant state of prayerful contemplation of their true spiritual condition. The basis for self-examination does not lie in the organisational or managerial but in the spiritual realm. Indeed, an absence of concern would strongly indicate that there is reason for concern. Apocalyptic literature cannot be taken too literally as words and imagery are often used for a desired effect. The fact that none of the seven Asian churches survive today, not even the highly acclaimed Ephesian church, may or may not therefore mean that they

had their 'lampstands removed'. This is a matter of speculation. Christ alone has the prerogative to rebuke, restore or remove and when this fact has been forgotten, trouble usually ensues. What the Malaysian church has to note is that hard work, great sacrifice and rapid growth are no guarantees that it will have a lasting impact.

Christians also need to constantly remind themselves that while the church is a sacred institution, it is also an imperfect one. For all the claims to truth and transformation, church history shows the bitter truth that churches and their leaders have not been immune to base human motivations. In truth, some of the greatest acts of inhumanity and immorality have occurred when the church wielded the most political power. In the name of doctrinal purity and the removal of heresy, the church conducted programmes of imprisonment, torture and murder that lasted six hundred years. Those who wish to disassociate themselves from this bloody past should remember that the New Testament church itself was marred by leadership disputes, disunity, greed, materialism, sexual immorality and bad discipline. Today, the scandals that rock the evangelical church, both abroad and in Malaysia, serve as a cilice (a spiked belt worn around the thigh) to speak to ourselves of the ways that churches have brought dishonour to the Almighty.

What this means is that in addition to the raised-hands triumphalism that pervades so many churches, there must be a spirit of knee-bending watchfulness, even suspicion, of our innate capacity to hijack meanings and messages for our own purposes. This is a tension that has to be balanced but difficult as it is, it is a productive one. The gospel's central message is on the Jesus who has overcome but the epistles' message is one of encouragement to churches that have yet to overcome. Christ's promise to the church is that the "gates of hell will not prevail" (Mt 16:18) and not that there will be no contest. Too often, we claim the victor's prize before the race is finished and sadly this results in races never being finished.

For better or worse, the Church Growth Movement (CGM) has permeated the Malaysian church to its roots. This movement has laudable aims but a critical question can be asked as Os Guinness does, namely, “Will the church-growth movement remain self-critical, or has the reliance on the so-called ‘new ground’ become an insidious new idolatry?”<sup>1</sup> Others are even less generous, calling it the ‘new apostasy’. None of this is to say that the detractors of the CGM are wholly correct. To do so would be to discount the thousands upon thousands who have experienced real life transforming experiences and dedicated themselves to spreading the Word and discipling others. The key, as Guinness points out, is to be self-critical. In an age of mega-churches, super-personalities and hyper commercialism, it is all too easy to forget who the real head of the church is and who absolute primacy must lie with. Humans being humans, we are greatly impressed by large numbers, slick professionalism and grand claims. The branding and marketing of ministers and ministries have now made them so much more visible than Jesus Christ Himself. Often times He ends up being reduced to merely being a legitimising factor for, or an appendage of, man’s programmes. In borrowing mass promotion techniques, the Malaysian church will want to be discerning and sensitive to the possible drawbacks of wholesale adoption.

The advantage of using modern media is that messages can be communicated easily and fluently. In a world dominated by high expectations and low attention spans, and where the dominance of electronic broadcasting means that most messages have to be compressed into sound bites, the message of the gospel runs the danger of being ‘sold’ little differently to detergent. Of even more concern are the subtle and not-so-subtle changes to the message. What exactly do new converts think they are being saved from and to? The practice of ‘seeker sensitive’ services is not (yet) prevalent in Malaysia but the subtext of many evangelisation efforts today is that it is the promise of a more fulfilled, prosperous and healthy life rather than a restored relationship with Christ and, through Him, with God the Father rather than

the real realisation of sin, the need for repentance and redemption and the living of lives holy and pleasing to God.

Packed seats, good music, emotional worship, inspired preaching and crowded altar calls can all mean very little in the larger scheme of things. Even the act of accepting salvation can be rendered empty of meaning if it is simply the result of skilful manipulation of symbols and metaphors and clever use of suggestion. Rick Warren says in his “The Purpose Driven Life”,<sup>2</sup>

*It is my deep conviction that anybody can be won to Christ if you discover the key to his or her heart. . . . It may take some time to identify it. But the most likely place to start is with the person's felt needs.*

One would imagine that hoards of fair weather Christians would be of concern to churches. While no church likes to be described as ‘two kilometres wide and two centimetres deep’ but the sad fact is that overselling the promises of Scripture and being light on commitment makes strong commercial sense. Church growth is about numbers and even with attrition, the remainder are more than enough to ensure increasing numbers. Once inside the church, a non-stop stream of activities conveys the very strong impression of urgency and a pressing forward in fulfilling the divine mandate. The relational gives way to the programmatic and the lines between corporate and spiritual endeavours become blurred.

Malaysian Christians today, as in many places in the world, practice a highly individualistic form of religion. One of the chief manifestations of this is that from songs to the sermons, the focus is as much on as man's purposes for God as God's purposes for man. This inversion is probably due to the atomisation of modern society where so much emphasis is now put on the individual. Rather than seek to challenge the notion, the church has

been quick to capitalise on it by promising identity in place of anonymity. Of course, the church tries to temper all of this to some degree by the usual Christian teachings such as discipleship, stewardship social concerns and missions but the centrality of the individual remains. This emphasis on individual 'felt needs' means that the church has increasingly become a counselling and therapy centre dispensing marital, psychological (or inner healing), health, financial, parental and teenage advice and services. John McArthur put it this way,

*Contemporary evangelism has been beguiled and sabotaged by a ruinous lack of confidence in God's word... They have accepted the notion that scripture does not contain all we need to minister in these complex times. So they turn to human expertise in the fields of psychology, business, government, politics, entertainment, or whatever they think might supply some recipe for success that's lacking in scripture.<sup>3</sup>*

Yet all of these are seen as positive developments leading individuals to greater dependence on God.

The centrality of the individual has other implications. Charisma, eloquence and affability of church leaders are at least as, if not more, important as the fruit of the Spirit, knowledge of the Word and zeal for His Kingdom. Personality cults form around those who are particularly successful. With increasing individualism comes ever increasing proportions of blockers, aggressors and dominators, egos can run rampant leading to problems in church governance, including dissention, rivalries and splits.<sup>4</sup> Moving within the confines of comfort zones of individuals becomes important and this can lead to an exclusivist and enclave mentality.

Yet another manifestation is that some Christians adopt a highly mystical

form of the faith to a point where there is virtually the practice of Christian magic. This creates the impression that it is possible to resolve all types of problems with the right prayers taking the place of spells, formulas and invocations. Obviously, the promise of formulaic solutions and instant gratification are hugely appealing but while it is not entirely out of the question (given a sovereign God), it can also give a totally false assumption. It must be said that most of those whom God has called to operate in these ministries dearly love the Lord Jesus and want nothing more than to bring glory to His name. Nevertheless if one starts out with an unbalanced view of the Scripture and what God 'intends' for mankind, it becomes almost natural for errors to compound and snowball. Promises become claims, and claims become presumptions. These lend themselves to ever more extreme interpretations of what are required for prophecies to be fulfilled, sicknesses to be healed or miracles to happen, and why they do not happen. The latter, in particular, have had troubling consequences for the church, as when someone who is sick is instructed to exercise faith and refuse medicine and then dies.

If this sounds highly critical it is not meant to be. None of these complaints are particularly new and in practically every age there have been many more who were attracted by the message of the gospel than were taken by the life of discipleship. By the operation of grace, the Malaysian church has had much to offer and much to celebrate. God has called many leaders of quality and this has given a depth and maturity to the church and its constituents that is praiseworthy. Whether all of this is backed up by collective character that expresses Christ-like attributes, glorifies the Father and draws mankind back to Him, however, is another matter. Like it or not, the church has many times indicted itself through exceedingly poor witness. It behaves with an imperious arrogance that courts cynicism and disdain. It repels rather than invites. This witness almost seems to transcend its spiritual condition, that is, whether the church is in red-hot revival or cold-blue sleep. But if nothing else, the past millennia show that God accomplishes His purposes despite a

flawed creation. He merely calls churches to remain passionate, to be loyal and to endure to 'the end', which in the context of the growing persecution of the day meant exactly that. When all is said and done, perhaps this alone is the yardstick of whether the church has sufficient mettle: The willingness to lay down everything on the line without question or hesitation.

## NOTES

Ω

<sup>1</sup> Os Guinness, 'Sounding Out the Idols of Church Growth', Accessible at <http://www.gospel-culture.org.uk/guinness.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995, p219.

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *Hard to Believe: The High Cost and Infinite Value of Following Jesus*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003

<sup>4</sup> These are church management terminologies: Aggressors are those who raise rational objections in church and calling for compromise; dominators are those who insist that they are right and refuse to seek common ground; and blockers are the 'nay sayers' in the church.



# Spiritual Formation: Commentary on NECF Survey<sup>1</sup>

P. VIJAYAN, DBA (AUS)

***“Crave spiritual milk so that you may grow into the fullness of your salvation.” – 1Pe 2:2***

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## INTRODUCTION

**S**piritual formation is defined as a return to the original model of the nurturing pattern of the early church. Three elements mark the approach to spiritual formation:

- (1) it is intentional and involves the whole ministry of the church,
- (2) knowledge is viewed as a means to Christian growth and not an end in itself, and
- (3) there is a distinct emphasis on the work of God’s grace in the process of formation.

While salvation is spiritual birth, spiritual formation is spiritual growth and comes from a positive response to God’s call to obedience and holiness. It is the activity of the Holy Spirit who moulds us into the likeness of Christ in the sanctification process. This process includes spiritual disciplines and ‘trials and tribulation.’

“Spirituality” refers to an individual’s orientation towards seeking and relating to God expressed by certain characteristic behaviours. Within Christianity, there are different spiritualities organised around different

theological emphases. Jesuit, Carmelite, Evangelical, Anglican, Reformed, Methodist and Pentecostal spiritualities represent different ways of living out our Christian life based on what one perceives to be the most significant concerns within its own distinct framework<sup>2</sup>. Some have even argued that Asians should quest for an authentic Asian Christian theology and spirituality<sup>3</sup>.

### **DEATH TO SELF**

At the beginning of our Christian lives, as a result of our new inborn sense, we may be overwhelmed with the feelings of ecstasy and joy that usually accompany those who have been forgiven of their sins. On one hand, these feelings are the confirmation we have in our hearts that we are accepted before God; we also assume that He will be pleased with whatever we offer to Him so long as it appears to stem from our good intentions. On the other hand, we actually stumble in the face of this newfound approval, because we are still ignorant of the fact that we may not be mature enough nor discerning enough spiritually to fully grasp the truth of salvation. We forget that God still rejects all that emanates from our flesh, just as He did before we were saved.

For some of us, the change that has taken place upon receiving Christ may have only touched our spirits and has not entered into the realm of our souls and bodies. And yet in our ignorance, we set out to serve Him, with some of the very things He came to deliver us from ‘self’ – that is our old nature. There is a multitude of things which are not sinful; nevertheless our attachment to them prevents us from being completely filled with the Holy Spirit. Infinite wisdom takes us in hand and arranges to lead us through deep internal crucifixion and to die to all selfish desires not of Him.

### **THE EXCHANGED LIFE**

Every now and then we come across a life that is radiant, revealing richness, warmth, and triumph that intrigues and challenges us. We find it in biographies with different details of individual experiences. As we study these biographies, we begin to see a pattern that reveals their secret. Edman<sup>4</sup> succinctly writes that many Christians have come into victory out of discouragement and defeat. Out

of weakness and weariness they have been made strong. Out of ineffectiveness and apparent uselessness they have become efficient and enthusiastic. There seems to be a familiar pattern: initially the noble effort to serve the Lord, yet based on self-centredness and self effort, but soon realise these efforts bear no fruits. Eventually, there comes an increase dissatisfaction and discouragement followed by a temptation to give it all up, and finally, when at the end of themselves, total surrender and finding the Spirit of God to be their strength, their guide, their confidence and companion – in one word, their Life.

Personal crisis is the key that has unlocked the secret of transformation in these individuals. It is the beginning of the “exchanged life”, a phrase first used by Hudson Taylor, a physician and founder of the China Inland Mission. After six years of missionary work in China, Taylor was forced to return home to England due to serious illness. For the next five long years, his life was hidden from ministry – forgotten by man but not by God. Yet, without those hidden years of growth and testing, how could the vision and enthusiasm of a youth be spiritually matured for eventual leadership?

This “exchanged life” is not some thing – it is some One. It is the indwelling of the Lord Jesus Christ made real and rewarding by the Holy Spirit. Taylor writes<sup>5</sup>:

“I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realise this, for He, I know, is able to carry out His will and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for in the easiest position He must give me His grace and in the most difficult His grace is sufficient. So, if God places me in serious perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial much strength? No fear that His resources will prove unequal to the emergency! And His resources are mine, for He is mine and is with me and dwells in me. I am no better than before. In a sense, I do not wish to be, nor am I striving to be. But I am dead and buried with Christ and risen too! The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son

of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

These individuals learned what the apostle Paul testified, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

The new life has been exchanged for the old. God wants changed lives, and to some degree it requires us to come to terms with allowing God to change us, to control our thinking, our will and even the affections of our hearts. While there will be those who run from meeting to meeting to experience the phenomenal, yet many are not one bit transformed from the spiritual condition they brought to the meeting. “Runners around, ever hearing, ever listening and never able to come to a deep knowledge of the truth.”<sup>6</sup>

When God looks for a man to groom him, prepare him, and set him in place for a special assignment, He will begin to work in areas of his life usually not thought of by others. God tests him in every area, not only physically, but also emotionally, mentally and financially, until he learns to know God as his total Source.

### **THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL<sup>7</sup>**

At some point in our spiritual pilgrimage, God permits us to encounter a situation in which our previous spiritual experience is unable to sustain us. How many of us have, at such times, cried to God, “Where are you? Why are you so distant? Why am I spiritually dry inside? Is there something spiritually wrong with me? What have I done wrong?”

The experience is typically confusing for struggling new believers who feel that they alone are at fault for such spiritual dryness or the crisis. Their guilt feelings are often reinforced by immature Christians who tell them they are indeed responsible and God’s judgement is upon them. However, it may be that in this stage of the spiritual development, God is bringing the spiritual

beginner into a place of growth where he would not go on his own accord. St. John of the Cross calls this the 'dark night of the soul'<sup>8</sup> in which the Spirit secretly does a deep work in the human spirit – a work that is so profound yet so foreign to a person's spiritual experience that it is often misinterpreted as the absence of God or the cause of crisis from which there is no escape. Christians must learn to discern such dark hour and allow God to complete His spiritual formation process.

God has two specific goals for believers at such times: (a) to assist them in letting go of something that they trust in more than Him (e.g. their pet theology and extraordinary spiritual experience), and (b) to encourage them towards a deeper trust in Him without any corresponding pleasurable feeling or experience. While in the past they may have relied on spiritual feelings and the phenomenal as the criterion for spirituality, God now desires to help them re-focus, to see that feeling and the phenomena's are not the proper measure of His presence. God takes the initiative to encourage the believers to trust Him by faith, even in darkness, rather than in themselves and their senses.

### **RESEARCH ISSUES**

Few of us go through life without encountering critical moments. These critical periods may involve regular trials and transitions of life, taking the form of spiritual dryness, unfruitful ministry, quarrels, personal conflicts, financial troubles, problems at church/work, illnesses and death. Expected or not, these moments can push us beyond our limits. However, people do not simply react in knee-jerk fashion to problems in life. In the coping process, they seek resources (including the spiritual resource) to assist them in understanding and dealing with life situations. An empirical research combining the perspective of spiritual experience, spiritual coping theory and spiritual typology will provide Christian leaders and counsellors with effective means to counsel people coping with spiritual dryness and/or crisis.

Many churches have as a stated goal the spiritual development of their members. However, the ability to achieve that goal is difficult to assess since

spiritual development and spirituality are not easily measured attributes. Researchers studying the effect of Christianity on coping ability agree that the believer's faith is "put to the test" primarily in situations that are stressful and involve suffering. The questions often asked are: Is there reliable empirical evidence to support the premise that Christians engage their spiritual beliefs in coping with stressful events? Are there specific types of spiritual coping methods? Are some more effective than others?

## **BRIEF COMMENTARY ON NECF SURVEY**

The NECF Survey on Spiritual Formation sets out to measure the spiritual health of the local evangelical churches<sup>9</sup> on the following three areas (a) spiritual experience, (b) spiritual coping orientation and (c) spiritual typology. We now explore the different models used respectively in the assessment and briefly comment on the survey findings. The attributes are described in the respective sections and the detailed result of the survey is presented in Appendices 1 and 2.

### **1. SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE OF CONGREGATION**

To impact contemporary culture in significant ways, Christianity has to understand and implement methods that facilitate human transformation, especially the ability to cope with the unexpected<sup>10</sup>.

To an extensive degree, the church has concentrated its resources and restricted its understanding of the Great Commission to the first half of the command, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). It has omitted, neglected or misunderstood the second half, "and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (v20).

Both Henry Blackaby and Claude King<sup>11</sup> stress that spiritual maturity does not come through a program, a study or a method. It comes from knowing God through a personal relationship. By examining the way God has used men and women of the Bible and others throughout history to accomplish His

purposes, some common experiences may be identified. These experiences are not dogmatic principles to knowing God or doing His will. Rather, they are some common pattern in the way God identifies and raises a person to be directly involved in His work. *The Blackaby and King Experiencing God Model* has the following attributes and is displayed in Figure 1A:

- (1) *God has a divine plan and purpose for us.* Taking things into our own hands and living by self-management only lead to problems. A costly example from the bible is the birth of Ishmael by Hagar (Gen 16:1–6).
- (2) *God seeks a personal love relationship with us.* In every situation God demands that we depend on Him and not on some methods. Circumstances such as ‘open’ and ‘closed doors’ alone are not clear direction for God’s guidance. We need spiritual discernment and test circumstances by the Word and the inner peace before taking action.
- (3) *God invites us to become involved in His divine purpose.* God wants us to wait patiently and to trust Him to reveal His divine purpose. In Ge 12: 10–13, we read that there was famine in the place Abram was called to and without consulting God, Abram went down to Egypt to escape the famine which resulted in more troubles until the Lord intervened and delivered him. Here lies the danger – we initiate a service/ ministry without first seeking God’s will on the matter.
- (4) *God waits for us to respond to His purpose – not our selfish plans.* God reveals Himself and His purposes through the Holy Spirit, the Bible, prayer, circumstances and the church. George Mueller ascertained the will of God by first getting his heart into such a state that it has no will of its own with regards a given matter. Most of the trouble is just that - we do not seek God’s will but want God to endorse our will.
- (5) *God’s invitation to His divine purpose involves testing of our faith – a crisis of belief* that requires faith to cope with ‘dark

night of the soul encounters'. Baxter<sup>12</sup> writes that crisis has a purpose in the life of a Christian. Crisis serves to demonstrate: (i) the Lord's supreme power in a never-to-be-forgotten-way (ii) blessings often comes through our sorest trials, and (iii) divine guidance involves seasons of divine delays.

- (6) *God wants us to die to our plans and purposes.* We need to surrender our life if we want to become God's co-worker. Andrew Murray illustrates this principle during a painful episode. He says,<sup>13</sup> "It was God who brought me here, it is by His will I am in this difficult situation – in that fact I will rest. Next, He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace to behave as His child. Then, He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn and working in me the grace He means to bestow. Last, in His good time He will bring me out again – how and when He knows. Let me say I am here by His appointment, in His keeping, under His training and for His time."
- (7) *Obedience leads to an experiential knowledge of God.* When we surrender and accepts God's divine purpose, He accomplishes His work through us. When we are in the centre of God's will, every blessing and affliction is a means to receive God's fresh revelation and learn new spiritual lessons.

### **Brief Comment on Survey Findings**

Figure 1B (on the next page) is the model derived from the sample data obtained from the NECF survey. Overall, the survey only partially fits the *Blackaby-King Model* because it has rejected two guiding principles, i.e. #3 '*God invites us to become involved in His divine purpose*' and #4 '*God waits for us to respond to His purpose – not our selfish plans*'. This may be explained by analysing the bar charts for questions Q7 to Q13 obtained from the sample data (Appendix 1).

According to *Blackaby-King Model*, the bar charts observed for spiritual

mature Christians would be *extremely skewed* either to the left or right. Bar charts that are *generally bell shaped* imply a greater number of the respondents were undecided or unsure on the issue and thus provided a moderate or neutral response. Since the bar charts for Q7 to Q13 are generally bell shaped, it may be implied that a significant number of the respondents have the propensity to rationalise and make decisions or initiate a service for God without waiting for divine guidance on important life issues.

Herein is the danger of being pragmatically minded. The respondents' intentions to seek God's will and to serve Him may appear noble, but they may lack the wisdom to discern the Scriptural warnings against self-managing one's own life when God is silent. It appears that, based on the sample, the respondents are not wholly convinced that Jesus Christ is able to provide divine guidance as promised in Scripture (Is. 48:17). Thus, many may not know the profound peace that comes from allowing the Lord to assume responsibility for their calling and ministry. Divine silence is part of the maturing process; it does not necessarily mean denial – it may mean 'wait'!

## **2. SPIRITUAL COPING ORIENTATION**

Spiritual coping describes the way a Christian exercises his faith in the management of stress and problems in life. Different approaches in the problem-solving process have been found to relate differently to religious motivations, conceptualisation of God and psychological adjustment. Pargamant *et al*<sup>14</sup> propose a theoretical model (Figure 2A) with twelve styles of spiritual coping orientations, i.e. seven "negative coping orientations" (1 – 7) resulting in greater stress in the believer's life, and five "positive coping orientations" (8 – 12) contributing towards spiritual well-being. It is envisaged that spiritually mature Christians would strive to have all of the five positive coping orientations and none of the negative coping orientations.

### **a. Negative Coping Orientations**

- (1) *Discontented with religion*: The crisis event has caused the believer's faith to take a nosedive. Due to lack of spiritual understanding, the believer is dissatisfied with his religion,

Figure 1A: Blackaby-King Experiencing God Model

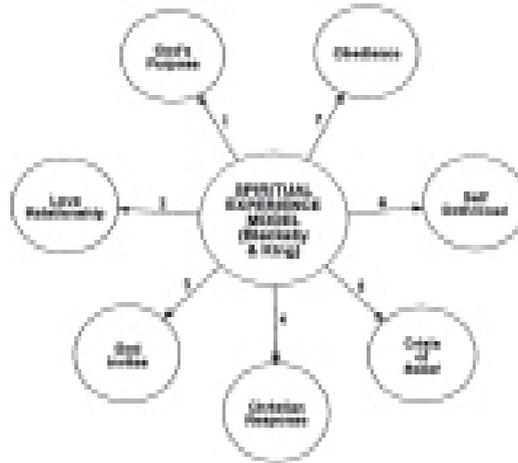
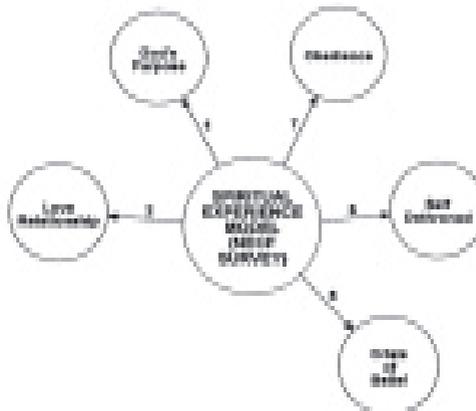


Figure 1B: Blackaby-King Model – Based on NECF Survey\*



backslides and eventually exits the church.

- (2) *Self-directing coping*: The believer perceives that it is his responsibility to resolve problems without expecting divine intervention. Faced with this responsibility, the believer takes on a self-active problem-solving stance and is of the opinion that seeking God's will is not beneficial and a waste of time. He strongly believes God only helps those who help themselves.
- (3) *Punishment from God*: The believer perceives the crisis as a punishment from God for personal sin or unbelief.
- (4) *Act of Satan*: The crisis is perceived as an act of Satan to weaken the faith of the believer.
- (5) *God's power is limited*: The crisis is perceived as a limitation of God's power to foresee and control the future. He can only guess what free-willed man will do. Hence, future events are subject to the freewill acts of people.
- (6) *Pleading for God's action*: The believer pleads with God for direct intervention to solve His problem. While pleading to God is an acceptable spiritual action, but the act of attending as many altar calls as possible or running from one church service to another implies a lack of faith and spiritual discernment.
- (7) *Passively wait for God's Action*: Rather than actively solving

the problems himself, the believer waits passively for solutions to emerge through the active efforts of God alone. He perceives God is the source of solution; whatever happens is preordained or fated and cannot be changed. He transfers his problem to God. While this may be an acceptable spiritual action, the failure to seek and examine alternative avenues may imply laziness or lack of faith in discernment and action. For example, some Christians reject medical treatment because of the false presumption that divine healing and human intervention are mutually exclusive. Yet, God is the ultimate Healer regardless of the means of healing.

Figure 5a: Pergament et. al, Spiritual Coping Model

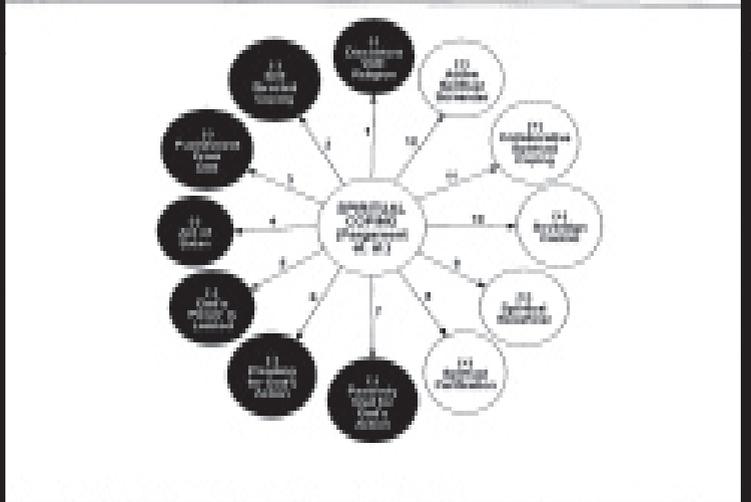
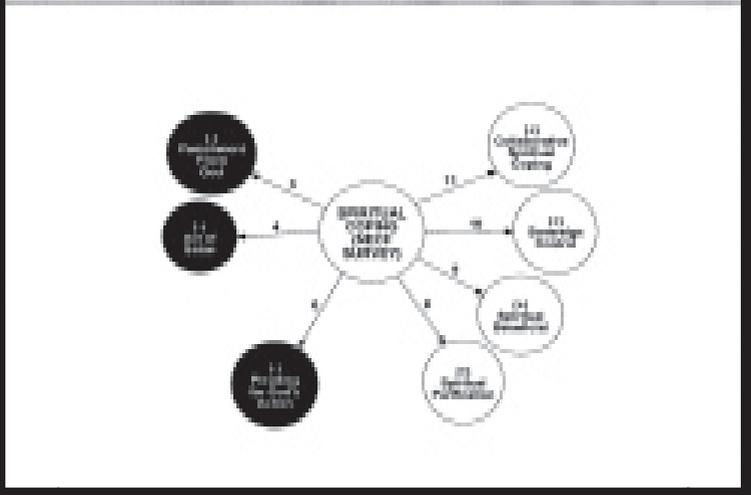


Figure 5b: Spiritual Coping Model - Based on NECF Survey



## **b. Positive Coping Orientations**

(8) *Spiritual purification*: The believer seeks holiness and purity, as he is aware that unconfessed sin in his life acts as a barrier to the throne of God.

(9) *Spiritually beneficial*: The believer perceives crisis as God's plan for developing spiritual maturity and preparing him for greater blessings in the future.

(10) *Sovereign control*: The believer has faith in God's sovereign power over all matters. God is the first cause of all life events.

(11) *Collaborative spiritual coping*: In this orientation, the believer and God jointly hold responsibility for the problem-solving process. Neither the believer nor God is seen as passive participants. Both are viewed as active contributors working together to solve problems.

(12) *Active spiritual surrender*: This orientation represents the biblical concept of "self relinquishment" or "dying to self". When the God's solution differs from the believer's expectations, the surrendering believer chooses to follow God's way even if it means suffering. He seeks God's will above his own and does what is right in God's eyes. The emphasis is "not as I will, but as God wills" (Mt 26:39). There is a sacrificial aspect in submitting to God's will, a letting go of what one wants, and is often considered as strong evidence of spiritual maturity.

The ultimate question is whether our mistakes, presumptions, the deeds of evil man or Satan, negative life events and circumstances, upset the will of God for God-fearing Christians.

Arthur Mathews writes<sup>15</sup> that walking with God is more than our interpretation of what we think God is doing. Spiritual guidance is not just based on single events but on the sovereign God working through various threads in a pattern that work together for good for His purposes. Adverse events or a person's decision, which Mathews calls 'Second Causes', cannot

override the ‘First Cause,’ i.e. God. We are not at the mercy of circumstances or others, anymore than Jesus was at the mercy of Herod, Pontius Pilate and the mob at His trial. Scripture affirms that they were limited in their actions to what God’s “power and will had decided beforehand should happen” (Ac 4:28). God uses even negative circumstances and evil men to work out His purposes, but sets limits to what they can do.

### **Brief Comment on Survey Findings**

Overall, the model based on NECF survey data (Figure 2B) only partially fits the *Pargament Spiritual Coping Orientation Model*<sup>16</sup>. According to Pargament, the model for spiritually matured Christians should have the five positive coping attributes (#8 – #12). However, the NECF survey model only retains four positive coping orientations, that is, *spiritual purification*, *spiritually beneficial*, *sovereign control* and *collaborative spiritual coping*. The rejection of #12 attribute ‘*active spiritual surrender*’ (Q40 to Q42) is alarming. It may be inferred that when God’s solution to the crisis differed from the respondents’ expectation, they may be unwilling to sacrifice their plans. They may rationalise and adopt their own means of coping rather than die to self and let God out-work His purposes. This corresponds to the above-mentioned findings on the ‘Spiritual Experience of Congregation,’ affirming the respondents’ propensity to rationalise. It suggests that many may not have the spiritual stamina to trust and wait for divine guidance when there is a divine silence, delay or when God’s answer to the crisis is not according to their expectations.

Pargament’s model for spiritually matured Christians also dictates that all the negative coping attributes (#1 – #7) should be rejected. However, the survey shows that three out of the seven negative spiritual coping attributes (*Bar charts for Q25 to Q30 are bell shaped*) are retained: (i) *punishment from God*, (ii) *act of Satan* and (iii) *pleading for God’s intervention*. The implications are: a significant number of the respondents perceived crisis event as a form of punishment from God (due to their lack of faith, sins in life or because they had angered God); and/or initiated by Satan to weaken their faith and cause them to doubt God.

While all adversities are the result of original sin, it needs not necessarily be due to a specific sin of the sufferer. Scripture tells us plainly that God does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men (La 3:33). One of the principal lessons in the book of Job is that adversity is neither accidental nor meaningless; it has benevolent purposes. Watchman Nee adds that we seldom learn anything new about God except through adversity. In fact, God does not promise the absence of persecution and suffering in life. We are told to expect suffering as part of our spiritual maturing process (1Pe 4:12–19).

A majority of the respondents also indicated that they readily respond to altar calls made for those who need prayers (*Bar chart for Q46 is bell shaped*). While attending to altar calls has its benefits, especially to new believers, Billheimer<sup>17</sup> however observes that the price of spiritual progress requires a mature believer to refrain from running from one altar call to another to find more of God there. Spiritual progress is the result not of nurturing the religious self-life but of yielding it to the cross and entering God's rest (Heb 4:1–11).

Dr. A.B. Simpson in his poem says it well,<sup>18</sup>

*Once it was the blessing, now it is the Lord;  
Once it was the feeling, now it is His Word;  
Once His gifts I wanted, now the Giver own;  
Once I sought for healing, now Himself alone.*

*Once it was painful trying, now it is perfect trust;  
Once a half salvation, now the uttermost;  
Once it was ceaseless holding, now He holds me fast;  
Once it was constant drifting, now my anchor's cast*

*Once it was busy planning; now it is trustful prayer;  
Once it was anxious caring; now He has the care;  
Once it was what I wanted, now what Jesus says;  
Once it was constant asking, now it is ceaseless praise.*

*Once it was my working, now I rest in His finished work,  
 Once I tried to use Him, now He uses me;  
 Once the power I wanted, now the Mighty One;  
 Once for self I laboured, now for Him alone.*

### 3. Spiritual Typology

Typology models that not only identify spirituality types but are also useful in providing direction for spiritual growth. Based on the lives of some renowned spiritual leaders, Holmes<sup>19</sup>, Sager<sup>20</sup> and Ware<sup>21</sup> have each developed variant models that conceptualise spirituality as a function of how individuals seek to know God.

Holmes emphasises that there are two kinds of congregational growth: growth in the number of members and growth in depth of spiritual experience. While numerical growth is practical and necessary, the motivation must be focused on spiritual growth (discipleship) and not for the leader's glory. Holmes describes Christian spirituality as an approach of the mind or heart for knowing God and seeking Him. Christian spirituality is composed of spiritual preferences and habits that come in patterns. He identifies these patterns as the *kataphatic-apophatic* dimension and *mind-heart* dimension. An emphasis on any combination of the two scales results in four possible spirituality types Holmes calls *Kataphatic-Mind* (KM), *Kataphatic-Heart* (KH), *Apophatic-Heart* (AH) and *Apophatic-Mind* (AM). Sager calls his four dimensions: Theological Renewal (KM), Personal Renewal (KH), Inner Life (AH) and Social Regeneration (AM) while Ware simplifies and labels them as Head (KM), Heart (KH), Mystic (AH) and Kingdom (AM) spirituality respectively. Figure 3 summarises the four dimensions or approaches to seeking God according to individual personality.

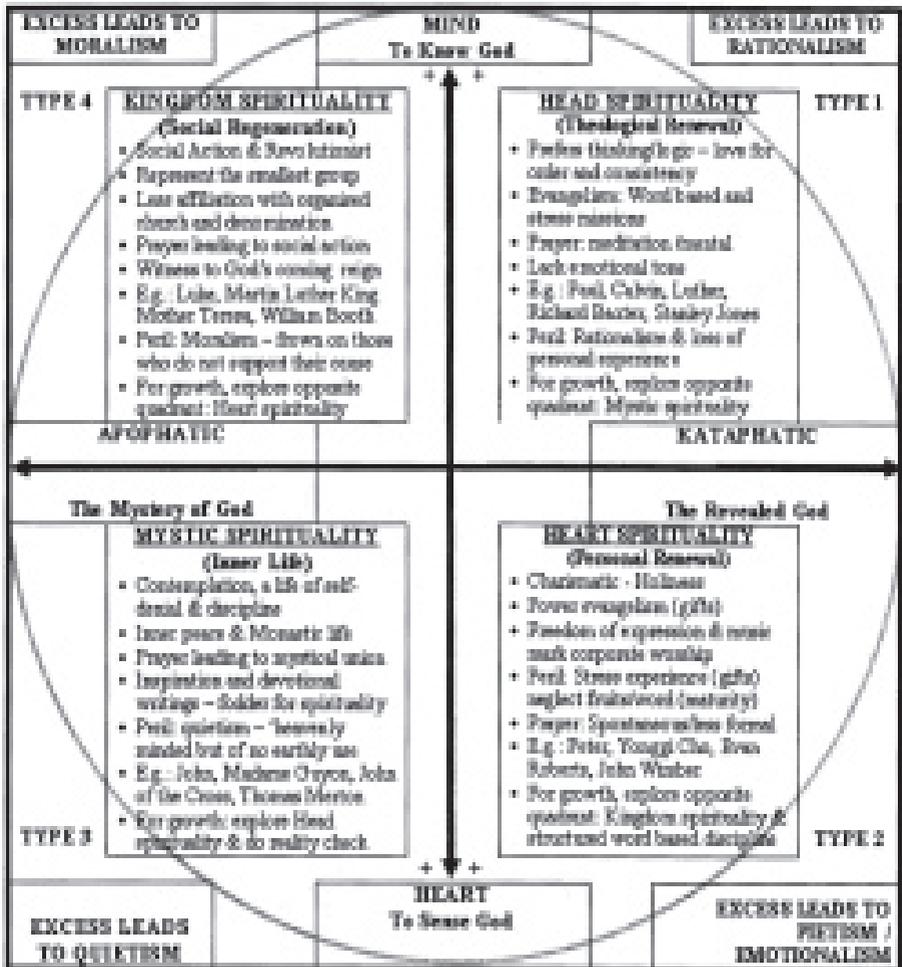
Each dimension has its own unique strength and weakness and no one quadrant should be considered superior than the others. The vertical axis of the circle is labelled *mind-heart* and the two poles pose the question of how

one goes about knowing, that is, through the activity of the rational mind or by accessing feelings. Holmes says both modes – learning and knowing – are needed by Christians to know God. The horizontal scale is labelled *apophatic-kataphatic* and poses the question of how one conceptualises God. The two poles present an emptying (*apophatic*) way of praying and meditating, or an imaginal or imaging (*kataphatic*) technique. The *apophatic* implies that God is mysterious and unknowable while the *kataphatic* implies that God is revealed and knowable. The former approach emphasises the radical difference between God and man, especially that God is mysterious and can be experienced only through the way of contemplation. The latter emphasises the similarity that exists between God and man and recommends the use of concepts, images, and symbols as a way of meditating with a God who is revealed and knowable.

Holmes equates spiritual health with staying within the circle and ill health (extremes) being outside the circle. He suggests using both reflective thinking and mystical experience in spiritual growth by exploring the spiritual types offered by the other quadrants. He also attests that the four spirituality types are manifested in private and public life by behaviours oriented to an individual's personality type. A brief description of the four quadrants is as follows:

- Quadrant Type 1 (Head Spirituality) – It greatly emphasises the centrality of Scripture and is a thinking spirituality that favours logic and consistency. Type 1 is characterised by a seeking after knowledge of God and a pursuit of truth through theological or Biblical study. Prayer is mostly word-based. Excesses in Type 1 lead to rationalism of one's spiritual life with consequent loss of emotional experience, which is perceived as dry and out of touch with reality.
- Quadrant Type 2 (Heart Spirituality) – It emphasises the centrality of Scripture combined with affective and charismatic spirituality. Type 2 is oriented to a concern for emotional experience and moral transformation by God. Some stress piety

Figure 3: The Four Quadrants of Christian Spiritual Typology  
(Developed for this research based on Holmes, Sager and Ware)



and quietness while others stress the charismatic gifts and freedom of expression. The strength of a Type 2 individual is his ability to experience God in the moment and enter into His presence. However, he needs to guard against excesses that may lead to extreme pietism or sensationalism.

- Quadrant Type 3 (Mystic Spirituality) – Its strength is in ‘being’ than in ‘doing’. A life of self-denial and self-discipline is appealing to Type 3 individuals – not necessarily because of self-punishment but because the simplicity of life quiets outside distractions. They push the frontiers of spirituality and introduce other dimensions of God through their publication. Excesses lead to quietism and they are often branded as ‘heavenly minded but of no earthly use’.
- Quadrant Type 4 (Kingdom Spirituality) – Type 4 individuals are revolutionists and represent the smallest group. They have an active visionary mind for the Kingdom of God on earth and a passion for transforming society, pushing for social justice and equality. Excesses can lead to ‘moralism.’

In reality, the portrait of one’s spirituality is generally a combination of a predominant tendency and a strong second preference. Each of us has a disposition towards the type that seems most natural. The primary value of spiritual typology is not to pigeonhole oneself or other people or groups saying, “I am this category or type.” Rather, it shows that we all have tendencies towards certain ways of living out our spirituality. Once we have found and understand where we fall within the circle, we can be challenged to explore new spiritual experiences that are balanced and have the opportunity to grow by:

- (1) Acknowledging and strengthening our present gifts
- (2) Growing towards our opposite quadrant and
- (3) Appreciating more perceptively the quadrants on either side of our dominant type.

## Brief Comment on Survey Findings

The spiritual typologies of the participating churches are shown in Appendix 2. The predominant spiritual typology is Heart Spirituality followed by Head, Mystic and Kingdom Spirituality (smallest group). The dominant existence of Heart Spiritual typology is not surprising as two-third of all professing Christians in Asia, including Malaysia, have been influenced by the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement to some extent<sup>22</sup>. Although such influence has produced a growing vitality in Asian Christianity, the models Asians are adopting are nevertheless, consciously or unconsciously, predominantly American Pentecostal-Charismatic model with various versions of the 'health and wealth gospel', without recognising its detrimental impact. Yung<sup>23</sup> argues that we should revisit the teachings of our own Asian heroes such as Sadhu Sunder Singh and John Sung who certainly knew the meaning of Pentecostal power. Both combined the outstanding demonstration of signs and wonders with strong biblical stress on holiness and sacrificial living, that is, they presented a more holistic spirituality in their ministry. Missiologists are constantly reminded that the Church in the non-western world has important truths to impart to the churches in Europe and the United States<sup>24</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The survey has revealed interesting facts and figures as detailed in Appendices 1 and 2. As a result, some insightful conclusions may be drawn. Due to limitation in sample size, the prescriptive discussion is confined to the local evangelical churches participated in the survey. Further in-depth research is required for specific recommendations. However, some broad general conclusions which may be helpful to the churches are summarised in this section.

### SUMMARY OF THE AREAS OF CONCERN:

1. The propensity for the respondents to ignore the dangers of self-management and the avoidance of the Cross (when God's action is delayed and/or God's will differs from their expectations) may *possibly* be due to the lack of preaching on the centrality of the Cross and disciple-making.

2. The danger of pragmatically minded respondents with noble intention to serve the Lord but unsuccessful may be due to an independent spirit that fails to completely surrender to the will of God.
3. The need for the respondents to have spiritual discernment to appreciate that God uses crisis as a means to spiritual maturity and that they should not readily perceive all crisis events are: (i) a form of punishment from God, (ii) the anger of God due to their sins or (iii) an act of Satan.
4. The false perception that responding to altar calls alone is sufficient for spiritual progress without the corresponding transformation in behaviour and lifestyle.
5. The *inferred possible* danger of being absorbed, consciously or unconsciously, into a predominantly American Pentecostal-Charismatic spiritual model with various versions of the 'consumerist- oriented health and wealth gospel', without recognising the equal importance of teaching repentance, holiness and reverence.
6. The necessity to explore other forms of Christian spiritual types that may better fit the unique personality type and the level of spirituality of each church member instead of subscribing to 'one size fits all' spiritual typology.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

No saint should interfere with the way God disciplines another saint and hence, recommendations discussed here are mere suggestions. Simon Chan<sup>25</sup> has advised embracing rules of life where various spiritual exercises and knowledge can be used to reconstitute one's personal life. The rules of life are not about observing a set of rules in order to make us acceptable before God – that would be legalism. Rather, the rules are about living a life under a certain pattern of discipline that helps reinforce desirable habits in the long term until the habits become second nature. The following 'Rules of Life' summarised from various resources are presented to enhance our spiritual growth and address

some of the shortcomings identified in the survey:

**(a) Explore other Streams of Living Water<sup>26</sup>**

Today, we see new churches that have adopted new names, new methods and new worship expressions. The glue that binds these new churches and denominations together is the Great Commission and time tested biblical methods, not their particular doctrinal statements or their traditions. It is the positive impact of a church, a group or an individual in the community that matters. God uses diverse means to achieve His purposes<sup>27</sup>.

**(b) Solitude & Prayer<sup>28</sup>**

It is important to ask the Holy Spirit to quieten our mind and remove all distraction. This should be followed by prayer, including a time of searching our heart and confessing known sins. Christians are hungry for a spirit-filled life; exploring the contemplative stream may address the human longing for the practice of God's presence.

**(c) True Worshipers<sup>29</sup>**

God seeks those who worship Him in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23). Worship begins with holy expectancy and ends with holy obedience. To address the deep yearning for God's presence among His people, we cannot afford to overlook the empowering gifts of the Spirit and the nurturing fruit of the Spirit.

**(d) Formative Reading<sup>30</sup>**

Formative reading is the kind of reading that nourishes the life of the spirit. It is inspirational rather than informational and qualitative than quantitative. We are called to listen with our inner ears of faith to what God may be saying or doing. The urgent need of the church is the Christ-centred preaching. This can be obtained as we spend quality time before the Lord and let the Holy Spirit illuminate the Word with His power.

**(e) Bodily Disciplines<sup>31</sup>**

The hallmark of a disciple of Christ is fasting, self-control and simplicity of life. Such a lifestyle is the only safeguard that can sufficiently reorient our lives

so that possessions can be genuinely enjoyed without destroying us. There is a need to focus on the inward re-formation of the heart and the development of godly habits.

**(f) Keeping a Personal Journal<sup>32</sup>**

A journal is a sound way to record the application of our faith in daily living – it is ‘my spiritual history’. It records the multiple unfolding patterns of God’s action upon our lives and helps to guide our future decision making, especially in times of crisis.

**(g) Spiritual Direction & Mentoring**

Spiritual formation requires mentorship, in which a mentor assumes the multiple roles to bring about the enhancement of the mentee’s spiritual development. He may be a spiritual role model. To be effectively mentored, we must develop an open heart and a sincere desire to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. Anderson & Reese<sup>33</sup> suggest the following biographies to help us in the mentoring process: *Augustine of Hippo*, *Julian of Norwich*, *Ignatius of Loyola*, *Teresa of Avila*, *John of the Cross* and *Jeanne Guyon of France*. These will help us understand the spiritual formation process these protégés had experienced as they were trained by their mentors. The biographies also provide guidance on the required characters of good mentors.

**(h) Spiritual Discernment<sup>34</sup>**

Human nature has a weakness for extraordinary phenomena; and many Christians are told that to question a spiritual manifestation is to ‘touch the Lord’s anointing’ and to quench the spirit. We have not been taught to discern spiritual matters and consequently consigned to perpetual spiritual bankruptcy with any wind of doctrine or spiritual experience. Christian discernment must be regarded as a necessary skill to overcome the common obstacles to spiritual progress. On one end of the scale is a prejudicial attitude of rejecting everything that does not conform to our preconceived ideas. The opposite extreme is the gullibility to all that is dished out from a person’s experience without searching

the Scripture for support. Edward<sup>35</sup> warns that it is insufficient to evaluate an experience solely in terms of its psychological or numerical benefits. The sense of a personal wellbeing after an extraordinary spiritual experience or numerical growth in the church is not adequate for the ultimate condition of the person or the church. The decisive question is, what impact has the phenomenon or numerical growth exerted on the character of the people who experienced it or on the members of the congregation? A genuine spiritual experience must manifest moral qualities such as unifying truth, submissiveness, humility and Christ-centredness. A counterfeit experience is accompanied by pride, vanity, confusion, false humility and extreme presumptions. Discernment requires wisdom that no amount of formal study can impart. In fact, the mature Christians “because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Heb 5:14b). Discernment is greatly needed today as God continues to move His people from the old wineskin to the new wineskin<sup>36</sup>.

### **(i) Righteous Anger<sup>37</sup>**

Those who desire spiritual maturity must understand the art of gracious disagreement. The attitude of ‘taking grace for granted’ may rob us of our power to confront lovingly and deal with situations that need correction such as immorality or erroneous teachings in the church. Leaders must understand the importance of preaching contrition, repentance, justice and holiness as loudly as preaching salvation, forgiveness, and sound theology in the social arena<sup>38</sup>.

We must lament if churches are not producing disciples who worship in spirit and in truth but a generation of spectators or religious onlookers who lack a true encounter with God, being deprived of both the tangible sense of God’s presence and the supernatural relationship. When worship degenerates into spectators, boredom will eventually set in and the church will require a continuous flow of creativity and resources to sustain the ‘entertainment’ factor. “The clientele is prone to drift away to the next show in town!”<sup>39</sup>

The gospel is more concerned with people’s holiness than with their

happiness. The goal of salvation is not just to receive a passport to eternal life but that we may be transformed to be more like Jesus.

C.T. Studd<sup>40</sup>, the pioneer missionary to Africa and founder of the Worldwide Evangelical Crusade (now WEC International) writes,

*Some wish to live within the sound  
Of church or chapel bell;  
I want to run a rescue shop  
Within a yard of hell.*

Let us too make that our goal.

#### APPENDIX 3: Emerging Issues

Real spirituality leads to spiritual formation (or discipleship) which is the process whereby the inmost being (will, heart or spirit) takes on the character of Jesus Christ. The aim of spiritual formation is the transformation of the self and this only happens through the transformation of thought, feeling, social relationships, body and soul.

There is a great deal of disappointment expressed today about the character and effects of Christian people and institutions. Most of the disappointment comes from Christians who find great disparity between the hope for life expressed in the Bible (as exemplified by the lifestyle of Jesus and His disciples) and the actual day-to-day behaviour of today's professing Christians.

Sadly, spirituality in many Christian circles has simply become another dimension of consumerism where Christian 'consumes' services and the 'process of consumption' (that is, being entertained by the worship leader and the pastor) has been perceived as spiritual growth! Dallas Willard<sup>41</sup> calls this the *Great Omission* and argues that such great disparity is due to the assumptions among professing Christians that they can be 'Christians' forever without becoming disciples – that is a Christian practitioner who continuously grows in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2Pe 3:18). The missing note in evangelical life today is biblical spirituality which is complete obedience to Christ. There is no 'short cut' to spiritual power – one cannot fool God for God looks at the heart, while men look at the outward appearance.

Eddie Gibbs<sup>42</sup>, Brian McLaren<sup>43</sup>, George Barna<sup>44</sup>, and Peter Wagner<sup>45</sup> believe the institutional churches in the West will look very different in 25 years from now and possibly several denominations may no longer exist. Gibbs<sup>46</sup> has argued that our world has become a global village and lessons learned in one place have an application in another. Churches in Malaysia should learn from such lessons. In the West, for several decades churches have relied on greater sums of money, better techniques, bigger numbers and facilities and more impressive credentials as the means to influence society at large. Irrespective of size, no

pre-packaged 'market driven gospel presentations' or 'seeker sensitive' model has adequately responded to the challenges presented by the current generation. The underlying issue is not the method but the exercise of spiritual discernment.

Any church leader applying any model must be driven by a concern to reach the lost and transform lives rather than simply to fill the church. The ministry model should be fundamentally a missional model and not simply an ecclesiastical one. The only offence that must remain is that of the cross of Christ<sup>47</sup>. The confidence of the witness must be in Christ alone and not in religious institutions or the impregnability of a Christian apologetic. Any hint that the witness is motivated by a desire to enhance an institution or to convenience the hearer on the superiority of the Christian religion is bound to fail. Only in so far as Christians are prepared for their lifestyle and deeds to be scrutinized at close quarters by people of other religion will they be in a position to persuade the unsaved to critique their own assumptions and acknowledge the power of Christ<sup>48</sup>.

Evangelistic and church growth strategies developed out of 'marketing' or 'seeker-sensitive' insights must be handled with care. Such methodologies tend to make the audience sovereign and turn the gospel message into a means of personal fulfilment instead of Christ being supreme. Jesus was acutely aware of the people's felt needs: feeding the hungry, healing the sick and delivering the oppressed. Yet, it was not the demand of the crowd, the disciples or the authority that determined His agenda. He restricted Himself to doing the will of the Father. Not all are fed, healed or delivered unless His Father says so! Hence, it is not the customer who determines the agenda of the church but the Lord. His command is to make disciples who will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

In communicating the gospel, our confidence is not in the effectiveness of our technique but in the inherent power of the gospel message itself (Ro 1:16). Some power-evangelism emphases place too much significance on experience, healing and deliverance, downplaying the power of the Holy Spirit working through the preaching of the Word to reveal the mystery of the gospel. Ω

**NOTES**

1 The NECF Spiritual Formation Survey was conducted from 2 Aug 2006 to 30 Sept 2006. The main objective of the survey was to perform a spiritual health check on the evangelical churches in Malaysia, to determine their Spiritual Experience, Spiritual Coping Orientation and Spiritual Typology. This task was undertaken by fitting survey data collected from participating Malaysian churches to spiritual models (empirically tested in the United States and the United Kingdom) by using a statistical technique called Structural Equation Modelling. Of the 1800 questionnaires distributed, 568 usable questionnaires (31.5%) were returned for analysis. Please refer to Appendix 1, bar charts (i) to (iv) for the age range, number of years Christian, gender and education level of the respondents. The survey reliability and fit indices based on *Structural Equation Modelling* goodness-of-fit test are summarised in the following:

Reliability & Fit Indices (n = 568)	FIG 1B: Spiritual Experience Survey	FIG 2B: Spiritual Coping Survey	ACCEPTABLE LEVEL*
Coefficient alpha ( $\alpha$ )	0.79	0.76	$\alpha > 0.70$ adequate
Probability value ( $p$ )	$p > 0.05$	$p > 0.05$	$p > 0.05$
Normed chi square ( $\chi^2/df$ ) or CMIN/DF	2.68	1.74	$1.0 < \chi^2/df < 3.0$
Standardised Root Mean Squared Residual	0.04	0.04	$\leq 0.05$ preferred
Parsimonious Goodness-of-Fit Index (PGFI)	0.59	0.71	$> 0.5$ preferred
Increment fit index (IFI)	0.94	0.96	0.95 (near)
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.94	0.96	0.95 (near)
Hoelter 0.05 Index (CN)	337	365	$> 200$ preferred.
KL Index BIC	0	0	BIC = 0

Note: Problems/Crisis Experienced by Respondents – The NECF survey indicated that Relationship, Health, Family, Financial and Depression are the major problems.

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28 Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.

29 Dallas Willard, *op. cit.*

30 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers*, Hodder & Stoughton,

1971.

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34 Simon Chan, *op. cit.*

35 Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, The Banner of Truth, 1991.

36 Peter Wagner, *The New Apostolic Churches*, Regal 1998.

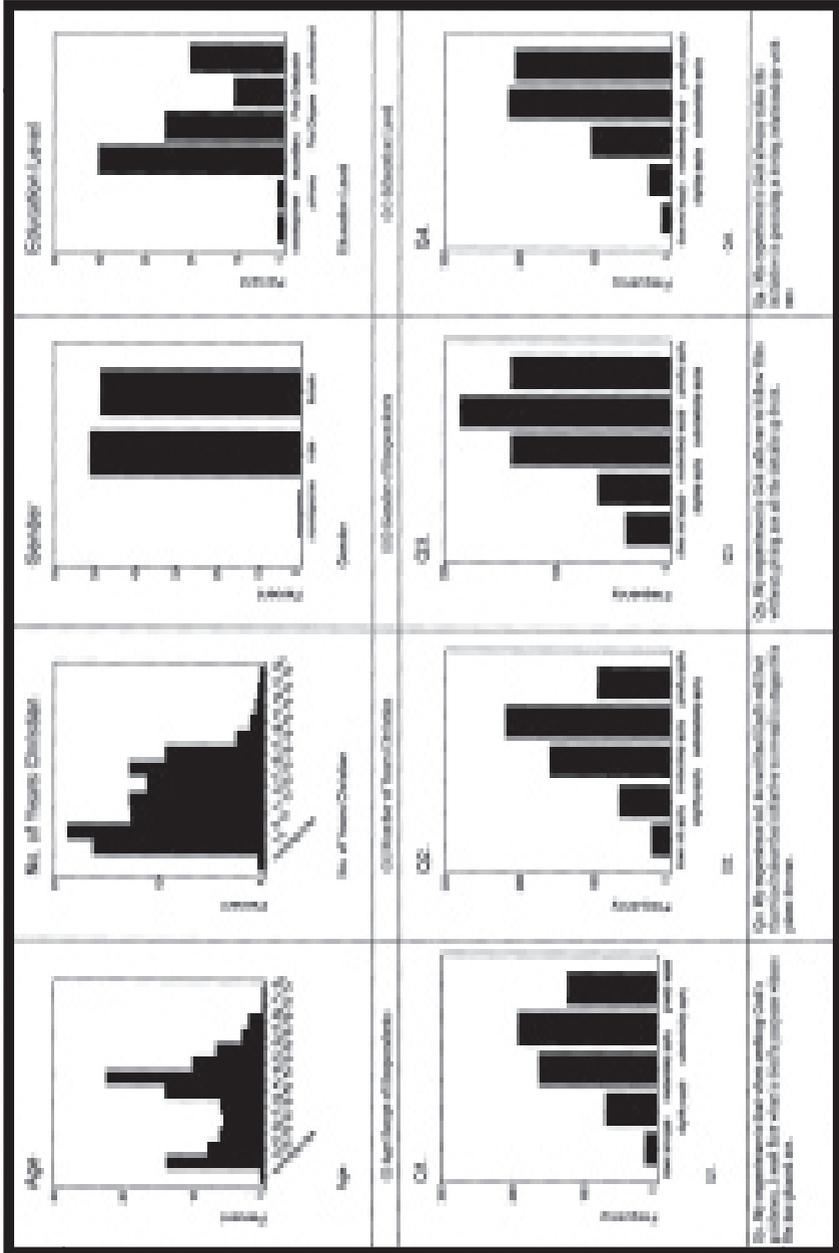
37 Hugh Black, *Reflections from David*, New Dawn Books Scotland, 2000.

38 Henry Blackaby, *Holiness*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003.

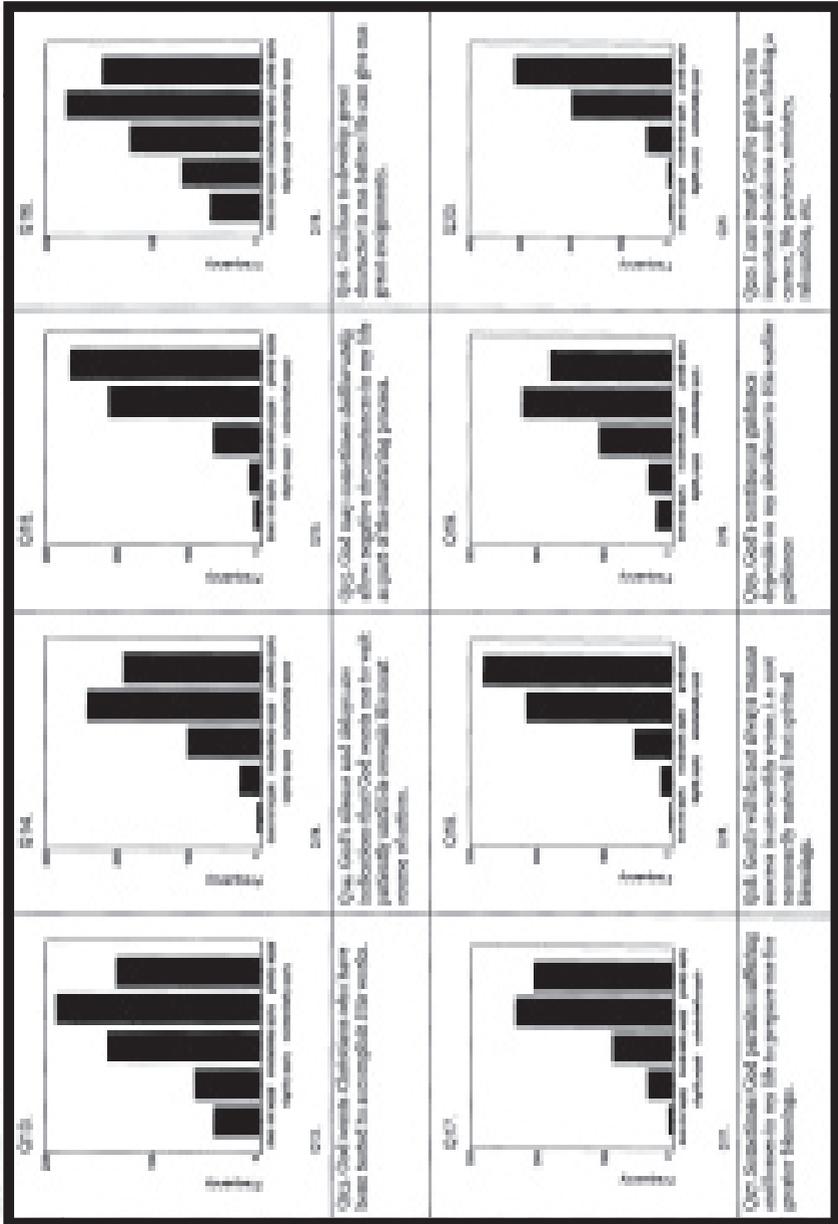
39 Eddie Gibbs & Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, Baker Academic 2005.

40 Jean Walker, *C.T. Studd: Fool or Fanatic*, WEC Publication, 1980.

APPENDIX 1: Results of the Survey of the Members of Participating Churches



<p>Q1. My experience of how God through a personal relationship with Him.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree</p>	<p>Q5. My experience because God does not allow pain and suffering to afflict me.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree</p>	<p>Q6. My experience because I do not receive any assignment from God. I must take the initiative to seek an assignment and God blesses it.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree</p>	<p>Q8. My experience where God does not reveal to me what I need to do. I must wait and trust Him to reveal His will before I act.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree</p>
<p>Q2. When God's love for the Lord's will is important matters by which I manage to carry through I justify what seems most logical.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree</p>	<p>Q3. My experience is that even if there are no good indicators of His will for my life.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree</p>	<p>Q4. When seeking God's direction, I look at the beginning to get my bearings and understand that there will be one will respond to prayer.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree</p>	<p>Q7. God always guides me not through supernatural signs and wonders but His will still rules.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree</p>



<p>Q24</p> <p>Strongly Disagree</p> <p>Disagree</p> <p>Agree</p> <p>Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Q24. I do not believe in miracles or a supernatural world beyond my ability.</p>	<p>Q25</p> <p>Strongly Disagree</p> <p>Disagree</p> <p>Agree</p> <p>Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Q25. I am disappointed with events in the world's plan for human destiny.</p>	<p>Q26</p> <p>Strongly Disagree</p> <p>Disagree</p> <p>Agree</p> <p>Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Q26. I do not believe that God is reaching out to those of other faiths.</p>	<p>Q27</p> <p>Strongly Disagree</p> <p>Disagree</p> <p>Agree</p> <p>Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Q27. I do not believe that God helps with human freedom that is independent of God's grace.</p>	<p>Q28</p> <p>Strongly Disagree</p> <p>Disagree</p> <p>Agree</p> <p>Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Q28. I wonder what I have done that makes God angry with the church in Malaysia.</p>	<p>Q29</p> <p>Strongly Disagree</p> <p>Disagree</p> <p>Agree</p> <p>Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Q29. I wonder if God allows a church to prosper because of its size.</p>	<p>Q30</p> <p>Strongly Disagree</p> <p>Disagree</p> <p>Agree</p> <p>Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Q30. I wonder whether God is punishing us with the small number of the flock of faith.</p>	<p>Q31</p> <p>Strongly Disagree</p> <p>Disagree</p> <p>Agree</p> <p>Strongly Agree</p>	<p>Q31. I wonder whether God is punishing us with the small number of the flock.</p>
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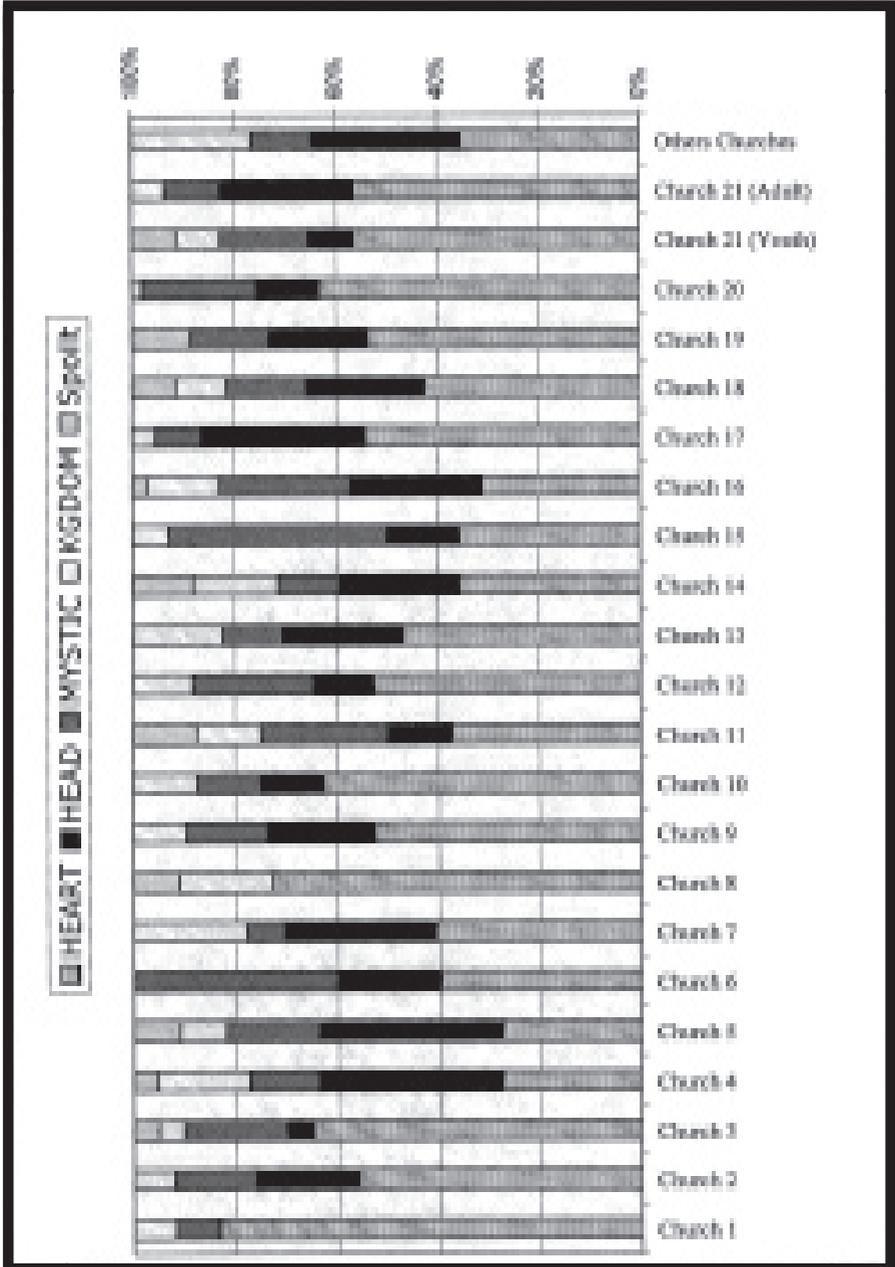
<p>Q26. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q26. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p>	<p>Q27. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the cult to make me doubt the love of God.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q27. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the cult to make me doubt the love of God.</p>
<p>Q28. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q28. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p>	<p>Q29. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the power of God to control adverse circumstances.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q29. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the power of God to control adverse circumstances.</p>
<p>Q30. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q30. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p>	<p>Q31. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the power of God to control adverse circumstances.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q31. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the power of God to control adverse circumstances.</p>
<p>Q32. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q32. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p>	<p>Q33. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the power of God to control adverse circumstances.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q33. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the power of God to control adverse circumstances.</p>
<p>Q34. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q34. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p>	<p>Q35. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the power of God to control adverse circumstances.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q35. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the power of God to control adverse circumstances.</p>
<p>Q36. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q36. I wonder whether Satan is trying to tempt me away from God through the cult.</p>	<p>Q37. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the power of God to control adverse circumstances.</p> <p>Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly agree</p>	<p>Q37. I wonder whether Satan has influenced the power of God to control adverse circumstances.</p>

<p>Q41. I partner up with God through prayer, sacrifice, giving, and service.</p>	<p>Q42. I cooperate with God to solve my problems and will probably become a failure if He does.</p>	<p>Q43. I try to make sense of life with God, but I have God already has a solution to my problem because of His knowledge.</p>	<p>Q44. While I remember the Bible is God, I do my best to solve the problem.</p>
<p>Q45. I rely on God to solve my problems through His wisdom and knowledge.</p>	<p>Q46. I depend on God to solve all my problems and I will become a failure if He does.</p>	<p>Q47. I don't seem to do anything - God will do everything to solve the problem.</p>	<p>Q48. I could use my strength with the Bible. I just expect God to solve my problems.</p>
<p>Q49. I rely on God to solve my problems through His wisdom and knowledge.</p>	<p>Q50. I am grateful, and even if I can't solve my problems, I will become a failure if He does.</p>	<p>Q51. I don't seem to do anything - God will do everything to solve the problem.</p>	<p>Q52. I could use my strength with the Bible. I just expect God to solve my problems.</p>

<p>Q46. When I am very sick I do not seek medical attention because I believe God will heal me.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Q46</p>	<p>Q46. When I am very sick I do not seek medical attention because I believe God will heal me.</p>	<p>Q47. I often see doctors when an other faith healer has done who work.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Q47</p>	<p>Q47. I often see doctors when an other faith healer has done who work.</p>	<p>Q48. I often see many medical services as possible to seek solutions to my trials.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Q48</p>	<p>Q48. I often see many medical services as possible to seek solutions to my trials.</p>	<p>Q49. I often see the and call God to help me.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Q49</p>	<p>Q49. I often see the and call God to help me.</p>	<p>Q50. I feel religious ways which many one believe reflect their teaching God.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Q50</p>	<p>Q51. I believe my own and call God to help themselves.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Q51</p>	<p>Q52. I make decisions what to do when praying to God helps their who help themselves.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Q52</p>	<p>Q53. I believe my own and call God to help themselves.</p> <p>Frequency</p> <p>Q53</p>
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APPENDIX 2: Spiritual Typology of Participating Evangelical Churches in Malaysia (Names of Churches Withheld)



Francis Schaeffer, more than 20 years ago, has decried the adoption of methods that treats experience as the final authority without the preaching of truth based on God's Word<sup>49</sup>.

Measuring results in terms of increased attendance at worship service and other church-related activities creates a premature sense of achievement. Leaders must always ask who the new people are and where they are coming from. Is the church winning people simply at the expense of other churches that do not have the resources to compete on equal terms in the religious market place? In any church, small or large, we need to ask what percentage of the congregation is finding support and being held accountable in face-to-face relationships that are essential to discipleship. What percentage is moving from a passive, consumerist-oriented mentality to one of sacrificial and fruitful Christian service? Congregations that lack a shared memory and relationship are unstable communities and a significant percentage of the members drift from church to church looking for the illusive experience. The issue is not the size of the congregation but the impact the congregation is making on society. Numbers must not be confused with spiritual vitality. The presence of one does not guarantee the existence of the other<sup>50</sup>. "Let each look not to your own interest, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus... who emptied himself and became obedient to the point of death – even the death of the cross" (Php 2: 4–7).

Unless and until we are prepared to die to self, we shall never be in a position to live for Christ. The example of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus is a case in point. He had to face the fact that his riches had become an obstacle in his life; refusing to do so, he went away sorrowful (Mt 19:16–30). The considerable assets of the individual became his liability. We need to set our mind on things above, not on things that are on earth (Col 3: 1–4).

In Indonesia, Turkey, Albania and Kosovo, Christians have given help to non-Christians affected by tsunami, earthquake and ethnic cleansing. Because national Christians were prepared to share their lives with others of different culture and religions in their own country, there is a new openness to the story of Jesus. The gospel of grace delivered by a lifestyle that imitates Christ is the only message with the power to liberate. Churches cannot stand apart from society and invite people to come to them on their terms. Rather, churches must adopt a missional strategy and make true disciples out of the congregations to reach out passionately to the unsaved and communicate in ways that make sense to them.<sup>51</sup>



## NOTES

41 Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*, Monarch Books, 2006.

42 Eddie Gibbs & Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, Baker Academic 2005.

43 Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, Zondervan, 2006.

44 George Barna, *Revolution*, Tyndale House, 2005.

45 Peter Wagner, *Changing Church*, Regal, 2004.

46 Eddie Gibbs & Ian Coffey, *Church Next*, InterVarsity Press, 2005.

47 Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism*, Zondervan, 1995.

48 George Barna, *Think Like Jesus*, Integrity, 2003.

49 John Armstrong, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, Moody Press, 1996.

50 Eddie Gibbs & Ian Coffey *op. cit.*

51 *Ibid.*

