

E D I T O R I A L

Beware the Smug Rot

Many of you will be familiar with the parable of the frog in a jar of water. The water is clean and clear, and the frog is enjoying his bath. Meanwhile, there's a fire underneath the jar, warming the water in slow degrees. The poor frog, having cold blood, does not notice the increase in temperature. Slowly, the water heats up until it reaches boiling point and the frog is cooked. Moral: Beware of dangers that encroach gradually so that we are not caught off-guard.

The Apostle Paul puts it another way: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). His warning to individual Corinthians or the church at Corinth is an equally apt warning for the Church of Malaysia in our day.

Let's face it. Despite our protestations, we cannot deny that it is much easier to be a *Christian in Malaysia now than ever before. Gone are the days when parents dragged their kids out of church, fearing they had joined a "Western religion", or kicked them out of their homes. Gone are the days when churches were small and harassed, and lacked financial resources. Gone are the days when Christians had no voice in national government.

Today, Christian bodies ensure that our views are heard and taken into consideration. The latest census shows that Christians make up almost 10% of the population (the real figure is probably higher).

Christians in Malaysia are now among the rich, famous and influential. Missionaries from Malaysia have invaded the four corners of the world. Yes, the Church in Malaysia appears to have come of age. Praise the Lord!

Lesson from Amos

The question is: What's next? If we think we are standing firm, we must be careful that we do not fall. We must be vigilant and watchful. But what are we to watch out for?

The Lord has graciously pointed us



PRECARIOUS POSITION. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

to the Old Testament book of Amos. Amos was one of the 12 "minor" prophets with a major conviction and message. He prophesied in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II at about the same time when Isaiah was busy in the southern kingdom of Judah.

This was a period of unparalleled peace and prosperity in Israel. Some years back, Jeroboam's father Jehoahaz inflicted a decisive defeat on the kingdom of Judah and carried away much plunder (2 Kings 14:8-14). Later, Jeroboam had

himself expanded Israel's boundaries and restored to her most of her former glory (2 Kings 14:23-29).

But now the war was over. There was peace. Trade was blooming. Israel was strong. Everything in the nation was in good order. Yet, with penetrating insight and prophetic vision, Amos diagnosed the sickness that had engulfed the nation. In one word, this sickness was COMPLACENCY.

His denouncement of Israel was most succinctly expressed in Amos 6:1-8. "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure in Samaria" (v. 1a).

What were the *causes* of Israel's complacency? She relied on her military prowess instead of the Lord for security. Mount Samaria, the capital of Israel, afforded strong fortification and safety. She also trusted in her bureaucracy (v. 1b) and her large territories (v. 2).

Amos went on to describe the *conditions* of complacency. The Israelites dismissed all serious thoughts of impending peril (v. 3). They could not imagine that anything could go wrong. They spent their time indulging in choice foods and other extravagances (vv. 4, 6a). Picture them lying on beds of ivory and lounging on couches all day long (v. 4a). The pursuit of pleasure was their top priority (v. 5). They did not bother about the problems that beset the nation (v. 6b).

Last but not least, Amos thundered the *curses* or *consequences* of complacency. The Lord would send the Israelites into exile (v. 7a). Their self-indulgence would end (v. 7b). All this would happen because the Lord

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Are You On God's Side?

By Rev Datuk Dr Prince Guneratnam

There is a captivating truth that is relevant for us today given in 1 Chron. 12:32 – *“Men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do – 200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command.”*

Saul had died in battle. David had been anointed king over Judah at Hebron. However, Ish-Bosheth son of Saul was still king over the rest of Israel. 1 Chron. 12:23-37 lists men from the various tribes who rallied to David at Hebron to turn the whole kingdom over to him. Most of them were described as

the signs of the time.

But when Jesus was born, they failed to recognise Him as the Messiah, although there were all the “signs” that He was the One in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Israel recognised David who was Christ’s precursor, but when Christ was born, Israel was blind.

Fast forward again to our day. What “signs” are we given? Do we read the message? Do we believe that the mandate for world mission is not left in the hands of the West but that God has raised up many Asian countries with

“We must take advantage of God's blessings on our economy and affluence to advance the Kingdom of God.”

brave warriors skilled in battle.

The men of Issachar stood out from the pack. They were wise, courageous and united. They were men who knew how to discern the times, interpret the signs and do the right thing at the right time. They knew that the Lord had given the kingdom to David, and now that Saul was history, that that was the right time to act. They discerned God’s plan and chose to take part in it.

Fast forward to the time of Jesus. Listen to Jesus speaking to the crowd: *“When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, ‘It’s going to rain,’ and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, ‘It’s going to be hot,’ and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret the present time?”* (Luke 12:54–56)

Water vapour rising up from the Mediterranean in the west would cause rain. Scorching air blowing in from the deserts in the south would contribute to sweltering heat. The Jews were religious and also intelligent people who understood prophecy and could interpret

strong churches? These countries have prospered materially and are blessed with talented, skilled and gifted people.

Do we realise that Malaysia, now being the destination of multitudes of foreign students and workers, is not only a mission field but also has become a field for world mission?

Are we aware that the Lord has raised up Malaysia and that this is our prophetic opportunity to engage in effective evangelism, missions and nation building? We must not be complacent and contented with what we have and are doing. We must take advantage of God’s blessings on our economy and affluence to advance the Kingdom of God.

Let us learn from the mistakes of the religious Jews and not be blinded with regard to biblical admonishment and prophecy. God is working. Are we willing to be His co-workers?

During American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was told, “God is on our side.” He replied, “We trust, sir, that God is on our side. It is more important to know that we are on God’s side.”

Are you on God’s side?

abhorred their pride (v. 8). And Amos' prophesy came to pass. Forty years down the road, Israel had her land sacked by the Assyrians and her people taken into exile.

Self-Check

Let us compare the condition of Israel in Amos's day with the trend in the Church of Malaysia. Have we, too, become complacent? Have we begun to trust in our numbers, finances, church hierarchies, political connections, and lose sight of our faith in God? Have business meetings overtaken prayer meetings in the order of importance? Are we retaining only the form of godliness but denying its power (2 Timothy 3:5)? Have we begun to indulge in self-seeking and ignored the needs of the poor? Have our mega-churches become extravagant? Have our building funds become more important than missionary spending? It's time to take an honest look at ourselves and our churches!

One of the tell-tale symptoms of complacency is a spirit of self-sufficiency. This is the belief that one can make it without the assistance or partnership of others. The Israelites were self-sufficient. They did not believe that anything could go wrong for them, irrespective of the circumstances outside of them. Individual Israelites had no concern for the problems in the nation as those were considered other people's problems.

So we see that self-sufficiency leads to independence and individualism. Is this already happening in our churches? Do churches, especially the larger ones, feel that they have no need of the larger Body of Christ? Do the servants of God minister in isolation? Self-sufficiency further leads to self-seeking and fragmentation and disintegration. The final stage would be self-destruction.

Some may think that this picture is unrealistic and bleak. Many feel that things will not change. But change is here and everywhere. Change is with us. Subtle forces are working in our nation, in demography, religion and politics in particular, that threaten to undermine the Church. However, these external forces do not constitute our greatest enemy. It is the internal weakening that leads directly to the Church's downfall.

In addressing the 54th Umno General Assembly in June 2003, the then Deputy Prime Minister Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that Umno, as well as our nation, had inherited success from those who had gone before. Now, we

“One of the tell-tale symptoms of complacency is a spirit of self-sufficiency.”

must learn to manage this success and improve on it. Success often brought about complacency and forgetfulness, he cautioned. This showed up in self-seeking behaviour such as greed and corruption, and the jostling for power and position. These internal enemies will weaken Umno or the nation more than anything. The Opposition or foreign nations could do.

How true! Let the Church take this nugget of wisdom to heart. If we are to stand, we must stand together.

What led to the fall of the great ancient civilisations such as Egypt or Rome? In one word – COMPLACENCY. What has caused the east coast of America, home to the Great Awakening



“We must emphasise the sharing of struggles and the building of relationships instead of hiding behind a plethora of activities.”

in the 18th century, to become practically godless today? What has caused the Welsh Revival to cool off so much so that the cathedrals of Wales today are empty and pews warmed mainly by senior citizens? The same word – COMPLACENCY.

This same sickness led to the fall of Israel. Let us learn from this example and take heed.

Cures for Complacency

What then are the cures for complacency? Firstly, we must reorientate our mindset and attitude towards God and one another. We must emphasise the sharing of struggles and the building of relationships instead of

hiding behind a plethora of activities. We must recapture the discipleship and missionary vision of the early Church.

We must radically review our giving to ensure sufficient resources are released to touch a lost world. We must get out of our rabbit holes and contribute towards nation building. Above all, we must humbly pray to God to sustain and bless our efforts.

Some may think these measures are powerless to stop the “natural” unfolding of events. What must happen, must happen. Let us be encouraged that we have the supernatural help of the Holy Spirit. We can rise above the natural and change the course of history. But, we must first make the choice.

To close, let us learn from the frogs again. Listen to this tale of two frogs:

*Two frogs fell into a can of cream
or so I've heard it told.
The side of the can were shiny and steep,
the cream was deep and cold.
“Oh, what's the use?” croaked
number one.
“This is fate, no help's around.
Goodbye, my friend!
Goodbye, sad world!”
And weeping still, he drowned.*

*But number two, of sterner stuff,
dog-paddled in surprise
while he wiped his creamy face,
and dried his creamy eyes.
“I'll swim awhile at least,” he said,
or so I've heard it said,
“It really wouldn't help the world
if one more frog were dead.”
An hour or two he kicked and swam,
not once did he stop to mutter,
but kicked and kicked and swam and
kicked,
then hopped out, via butter!*

Let us make a deliberate choice to imitate frog number two. By God's grace, let us kick and swim and strive and struggle until threats are turned into opportunities and dangers into victories. And again by His grace, our best days shall not be over but are still to come. Amen.

(* Reference is made to the non-Malays.)

NECF to set up Mediation and Conflict Resolution Ministry

OUR courts are so overwhelmed with cases that the Government is looking into other means of resolving citizen disputes. Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Rais Yatim recently said one of the ways being considered to overcome the backlog of cases with the court registrar was mandatory conciliation process through mediation or arbitration – a method of settling disputes before they reach the court.

He may have heard of the success of Singapore-based Eagles Mediation and Counselling Centre (EMCC), the only agency appointed by the Singapore Subordinate Courts to mediate divorce cases. The Christian-run centre is the only non-profit organisation in the island that provides mediation and counselling services under one roof.

Recognising the need for mediation services in Malaysia, NECF Malaysia is establishing a Mediation and Conflict Resolution ministry and has officially adopted EMCC as its training arm to train Malaysian Christians to develop this mediation ministry in their own churches.

NECF aims to equip churches to be mediators of peace and reconciliation in their communities, and also help churches resolve internal conflicts so that they can remain united in reaching their communities for Christ. The long-term goal is to set up Christian mediation centres that are so reputable that the courts will refer them cases for mediation.

What is Christian mediation and how does it work? NECF Executive Secretary (Church Relations) PATRICK CHENG, who recently attended an EMCC workshop on "Mediating Family & Church Conflicts", explains.

What is Christian mediation?

Christian mediation is a process for reconciling people and resolving disputes out of court in a biblical manner. The process is conciliatory rather than adversarial in nature – that is, it encourages honest communication and reasonable cooperation rather than unnecessary contention and advocacy.

What are the benefits of Christian mediation?

Christian conciliation promotes traditional values, preserves relationships, encourages beneficial change, avoids negative publicity, provides a positive witness, and is relatively inexpensive. In addition, Christian conciliation is less constrained by rigid procedures compared to litigation, thus often allowing more creative remedies and faster results.

Another benefit is that Christian conciliators have more flexibility than civil judges when it comes to hearing testimony or reviewing evidence. Thus, if a dispute involves defects in the construction of a building or the repair of an automobile, a conciliator may personally inspect the building or drive the car. As a result of this flexibility, parties often feel that the facts



Increasing pressure in life and work have also given rise to tensions and conflicts in interpersonal relationships.

and issues in the case are given a more personal review than will a court of law.

Christian conciliation is especially beneficial for people who sincerely want to do what is right and are open to learning where they may have been wrong. Conciliators can help them to identify improper attitudes or unwise practices, to understand more fully the effects of their decisions and policies, and to make improvements in their lives and businesses that will help them to avoid unnecessary conflict in the future.

As one party wrote after conciliation: *"The most valuable thing we received from Christian conciliation was sound advice seasoned with godly wisdom. I really believe that the right answer was attained. The answers you gave were not what I came to hear, but I knew*

they were right. You could not have been more helpful. Our only regret was that we waited much too long to come to you."

How does Christian conciliation differ from other types of mediation?

Christian conciliation is more values-oriented than most other types of mediation. While all mediators will work towards helping the parties to come to a voluntary settlement, many mediators will be reluctant to go beyond this, especially if doing so would require that they evaluate others' attitudes and behaviour from a moral perspective.

In contrast, Christian conciliators make it a point to draw out the underlying reasons for a dispute, sometimes referred to as "matters of the heart." Believing that God has established timeless moral principles that He has recorded in Scripture and written in our hearts, Christian conciliators will draw the parties' attention to attitudes, motives, or actions that appear to be inconsistent with those standards.

This will be especially true with parties who profess to be Christians. Anyone who claims to be a follower of Christ will be encouraged to obey His commands and behave in a manner that will honour Him. Most importantly, Christian conciliation focuses not only on what *we should do* (law) but also on *what God has done and is doing* for those who trust in Him (gospel). God has forgiven our sins and made peace with us through the death and resurrection of His Son (Rom. 6:23; 1 Pet. 3:18). And He has given us the freedom and power to turn from sin (and conflict), to be conformed to the likeness of Christ (Eph. 2:1–10; Gal. 5:22–23; Rom. 8:28–29), and to become ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:16–20).

Who can provide Christian mediation services?

Unlike the legal profession, which only trained lawyers can practise, Christian mediation services may be provided by an

• GO TO NEXT PAGE

Our Christian Duty

BY the time this issue reaches our readers, Malaysians would have chosen their government in the country's 11th General Election. Did you – the eligible Christian voter – cast the ballot? If you did not, you have missed an opportunity of fulfilling your obligations to God and the country, for voting is an act of stewardship.

Perhaps your absence at the voting

centre was unavoidable and beyond your control. Whatever your reasons may be, it is too late to question the choice of government that has been elected. For we know that "there is no authority except that which God has established" (Rom. 13:1).

But it is not too late to discharge our responsibility of ensuring good governance, upholding righteousness,

preserving our Constitution, and maintaining freedom of worship in Malaysia.

There are many ways we can be involved in these processes, one of which is to pray. Check out this issue's *Prayer Digest* for prayer pointers and let us continue to bring our nation before God.

During the election period, we were reminded that as Christians, we practise dual citizenship – one of the Kingdom of God and the other of our earthly nation. As citizens of our earthly homeland, we must be responsible citizens. Jesus established this worldview when he declared, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

Responsible citizenship includes being aware of local issues, such as identifying the next development project in your neighbourhood and voicing your concerns, if any, to the appropriate authorities.

Responsible and accountable citizenship also requires us Christians to "always speak the truth in love." Having a right relationship with the authority is an open door for us to speak the truth.

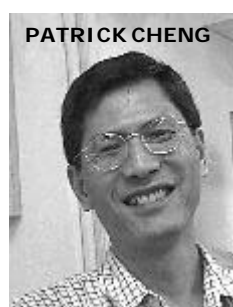
GET OUT AND VOTE

NECF Malaysia distributed this poster to all its member-churches to impress on them the importance of reminding their congregants to vote. The poster was accompanied by a statement on "Good Governance and Responsible Citizenship", which highlighted Romans 13 – a chapter that teaches that obedience to the authority is a Christian duty and responsibility.

"From voting to paying taxes, let us do it as good and responsible Christians," the statement concluded.

The NECF Prayer Commission also mobilised round-the-clock prayer for the election three days prior to the polling day (March 21).

• FROM PREVIOUS PAGE: NECF TO SET UP MEDIATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION MINISTRY



PATRICK CHENG

"Christian conciliators make it a point to draw out the underlying reasons for a dispute, sometimes referred to as "matters of the heart."

individual volunteer or a local church. When Christian mediators have proven themselves capable and successful to mediate between conflicting parties, they can further strengthen the church's image in nation building, like in the case of EMCC which is valued by the Singapore government.

What types of disputes can be resolved through Christian mediation?

1) Between Non-Christians

Christian mediation has helped to settle a wide variety of disputes including contracts, employment, personal injury, church, family, landlord/tenant and business. Helping people to resolve family disputes can be a powerful tool to bridge the

Church and the community. As our society becomes more and more industrialised, family breakdowns are more common. Increasing pressure in life and work have also given rise to tensions and conflicts in interpersonal relationships. Even the closest friends have disagreements. In view of our face-saving Asian mentality, many people will not seek counselling but legal arbitration to resolve their problems. Not many churches are able to offer free legal advice since they have to depend on their members who are lawyers. However, lay people can be trained to be mediators. Cases that can be resolved through Christian mediation range from family disputes – divorce, child support, properties – to seemingly petty issues such as a neighbour's barking dog.

2) Between Christians

The best-run church also experiences discord. A church is as susceptible to conflicts as any other secular organisation in the marketplace. A conflict between two people in a church may affect an entire congregation, unresolved tensions between pastors and leaders may rob the church of effective leadership, and disputes between members in business with one another may lead to lawsuits, and so on. As a result, people get hurt, some leave the church or ministry, division occurs and eventually leads to church split and unforgiveness. However, we can develop a Biblical approach to transform conflicts into something positive that can strengthen our partnership and ministry.

Single Women Flocking to the Field

SINGLE women make up the largest group of Malaysian missionaries serving overseas, while single men form the smallest group. Hardly earth-shattering information, but still, it is a sober reminder of the great gender imbalance on the mission field.

According to an NECF Malaysia study on single Malaysian woman missionaries (SWM), three out of the five local mission agencies surveyed have no single men on their lists. One agency's missionary list comprises 10 percent single men compared with 45 percent single women. Another agency's list comprises 75 percent single women, 25 percent married people and no single men.

NECF Research department conducted the study to identify the

unique challenges faced by SWM aged between 40 and 60 years who have been serving full-time overseas for more than five years.

Between March and September 2003, the department interviewed 20



The harvest is plentiful...and many single women are out there.

SWM and found that the majority of them have "reached the phase of contentment with regards to their marital status". For many of the interviewees, the contentment came after a long struggle with the issue of marriage.

Still, life as singles can be rather lonely despite all the attention lavished on them upon their return from the mission fields. Faithful supporters may heap generous gifts on them and even treat them to short vacations, but "not many people want to listen to our experience," lamented one interviewee.

One of the biggest realities of life for these SWM is planning for the future with the view that they remain single for the rest of their lives. Not many Christians will seriously consider these women's long-term future in their financial support. One interviewee expressed her struggle with finances thus: "In ministry, everyone earns less than if he/she holds a secular job, and that's a choice that has been made, but that doesn't mean I don't feel the tension."

The downside of being single on the mission field

WOMAN missionaries generally face restrictions in some cultures but it is worse for single woman missionaries (SWM). For example in the Mozambique society, single women are frowned upon; they even command less respect than unmarried mothers. The attitude towards singleness by the host culture can be, not only the source of discouragement for SWM but also, a tremendous obstacle to their ministry.

The aspect of safety in a different cultural setting is another problem for SWM who face daily danger when travelling and even in the confines of their homes. In some societies, travelling alone is not accepted.

Most of the interviewees feel that their sending agencies often overlook them in decision-making, strategising and communicating needs. Sometimes, decisions are made for them without their knowledge and agreement. Their feelings are reminiscent of Rose Dowsett's article "Globalisation, Women and Mission" which observes an irony in church history "that women have been the primary gospel pioneers in country after country and among people group after people group, yet mission strategy is normally devised by men." It is also noticeable that men lead most of the mission agencies where women (mostly single) are the majority. The fact that men are preferred for leadership role is

a major drawback for women who may be more capable, one interviewee said.

Women are socially recognised to be more relational than men. In many cultures, they are considered less threatening (than men) and thus, have easier access to other women and children in almost any society. Yet, SWM may find it difficult to minister to men and may be seen as a threat to married women. They also have to grapple with sexual temptation.

Their ability to give more time to the ministry may lead their married teammates to, perhaps unconsciously, load them with more responsibilities, and thus, "overwork" them. Unfortunately, some SWM are inclined to devote every non-working hour to ministry, maybe to purge their guilt feelings of not fully utilising their availability or to avoid loneliness.

The issue of mid-life (40 to 60) appears to have been overlooked by the mission agencies. The tasks of adjusting to physical changes and aging parents take place at this stage of life. The survey indicates that some SWM are obliged or expected by their married siblings to care for their elderly parents.

Meanwhile, they, like other married women of their age, undergo emotional, psychological and spiritual upheaval as a result of fading youth and fertility. During this tumultuous period, they may

manifest certain character flaws, which in turn affect their ministry on the field. However, people tend to mistake this manifestation as a result of their state of their being unmarried, some interviewees moaned.

"Generally, all women walk through this passage of life as they redefine themselves and their roles. Yet, single women have been stereotypically depicted as neurotic, emotional and miserable by many," the report noted.

Many SWM struggle to adjust to life upon their return from overseas assignment or upon retirement. "Reverse cultural shock is a lot harder than cultural shock," exclaimed one interviewee. Basic matters, such as finding a permanent place to stay, can be a major issue for some SWM.

Friendship is another major issue for these returning SWM. Many have learned the painful truth that years of being away from home have alienated them from the intimate friends of their youth. Hence, they will have to painstakingly establish a new network of friends. One interviewee commented: "Relationship with old friends and church members appear superficial. We just can't relate to each other anymore."

SWM need more than just support and prayers. In our next issue, we will see how these women sustain their contentment and confidence in God.



'One Shall Chase a Thousand'

By Pastor Susan Tang

T rue to Bible prophecy, the world has become so clever...indeed knowledge has increased and so has wickedness. The world and the devil have come up with all types of brilliant and mind-boggling strategies to lure millions away from God.

But let me tell you, God will not be left behind! He is the ORIGINAL MASTER STRATEGIST. In these end times, God will wield these five simple but thoroughly potent and effective strategies to bring in the lost, globalise church planting, manifest Himself and destroy the works of darkness. The five strategies are:

1) He will close up the gap between the clergy and the laity.

Result: Many ordinary, insignificant and 'faceless' but devoted people will rise up and do extraordinary feats for God all over the nations. God's name will be glorified and feared because the world will recognise that it is God's power working through these 'weaklings' and 'simpletons' who have literally become 'different persons' when the Spirit of God impacts them.

2) He will accurately position every redeemed life into its place of destiny.

Result: God will have His 'contact points' everywhere, ready to spring into action and carry out His directives accurately whenever and wherever He chooses to work. Like Joseph and Esther, those who have been positioned will have the spiritual stature and maturity to meet the needs in that specific place.

3) He will cause one to 'chase a thousand,' meaning, one of us can do the work of a thousand or cover the liabilities of a thousand, while two of us can put ten thousand to flight!

Result: God will have no lack of workers since one can accomplish the work of a thousand, and two, ten thousand. There will not be a lack (of righteousness, faith, love, mercy, etc) within the Body of Jesus Christ as we will be completing and complementing one another by 'covering' one another's liabilities. Even the unrighteous will be given special concessions as the righteous covers them with their righteousness and prevailing prayers.

4) He will cause the church to return to the Cross, which is His plumb line and ancient landmark.

Result: As the Cross levels us on the inside, we will possess genuine Holy Ghost power to level and change circumstances and situations on the outside. The return to God's ancient landmarks of self-denial, self-negation and self-renunciation will cause such an unleashing of the resurrection power of Jesus Christ on earth. The world will be shocked. The church will rise to the occasion and magnify

He will cause the church to return to the Cross.



Jesus to the world. The magnifying of self that was produced by a 'Crossless' Christianity and is so prevalent today will be a thing of the past.

5) He will remove the rift between heavenly and earthly beings and between humans and angels.

Result: There will be a great manifestation of angelic beings on earth as God accelerates His activities on earth. Angels will be working alongside us, who are the heirs of salvation, to fulfil God's great purposes. We will no longer be hampered by boundaries or distance when we learn to work with these heavenly beings who are mightier than us in functions.

THE THIRD STRATEGY

In this book (Book 3) I am writing on the third strategy. This strategy is about how God is going to use one life to 'chase a thousand' or 'to fill up the lack' of a thousand. In these end times where lust and licence, wickedness and lawlessness, blasphemy and unrighteousness abound, God will take into account even one righteous life and He will use it to cover or to chase a thousand more.

In this 'old-new' strategy, God will use the attainments of one righteous person to confound a thousand. He will also use that one righteous life to cover the liabilities of thousands. This is nothing new for Bible history reveals to us that God notices and takes into account even one life lived righteously before Him. So if you think that your life, lived in righteousness before God is of no avail, you are wrong.

THE POWER OF ONE LIFE

God made mention of His search for just one life to the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. He told Jeremiah that if He could find just one person in Jerusalem who would

• GO TO NEXT PAGE

live in righteousness, who executed judgment and sought the truth, He would pardon the entire city. Sadly, there was not even one. Even though He encouraged the prophet to 'run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem' to seek for such a person, such a person could not be found. How tragic. To the prophet Ezekiel, God lamented that He had the same problem – He could not find one man who would 'fill up the gap' and pray for the land so that He could deliver it (Jeremiah 5:1, Ezekiel 22:30).

How terribly the nation had fallen so that God could not find even one (not even one?) righteous life in that very religious nation. In the days of Isaiah, the Ancient of Days was already in pain when He realized that the nation had become so demoralized and degenerated that she could not even produce one citizen who would be God's champion to stand up for the oppressed and to intercede for the land. What dark days these must be when a country (with thousands and millions of very religious people) is incapable of producing just one righteous man to stand before God.

Since a dead nation (Israel) could not arise of itself, God Himself, in this instance, rose up for her. Since she could not produce any champion, God Himself, out of His own love for His people, became her champion. God Himself, as the Righteous One was more than qualified to rise up on her behalf to bring salvation and healing to the land.

Isaiah 59:16–17

*'And he saw there was **no man**, and wondered that there was **no intercessor**; therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.'*

From all the three incidents, we

realize that one life counts. God said that He would spare the nation of Israel with its thousands and millions if only that nation could produce just one man, one champion and one intercessor. What a brilliant strategy! A strategy where one person can cover the liabilities of a thousand and a strategy where God will regard the righteous attainments of one as the righteous attainments of a thousand others! He is in fact saying, 'Let one righteous man stand before Me and I will write off' all your liabilities and unrighteousness!' Such a strategy befits the Ancient of Days for it shows His endless love and His unwillingness to see people perish in hell. He wants to see everyone saved. Even if people had fallen so deep that they are incapable of producing



any righteousness of their own, God would gladly cover them with the righteousness of another... if they would turn to Him.

GOD WATCHES AND WEIGHS HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

Do you remember the story of King Belshazzar, the Babylonian king who saw the finger of God write these words on the wall of his palace: 'Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting'? Read it in Daniel chapter four and you will realize that God does not only observe human behaviour, He also weighs them in His balances!

In the midst of our busyness, we often forget that God does take into account human behaviour and He records what He sees. Yes, He is actually watching us when we

are most unaware of it and He is noting the auguries and forecasting our destiny.

He said, 'The very hairs of your head are all numbered' and 'Not even one sparrow falls to the ground without my Father's knowledge' (Matt 10:29–30). He also warned us in 2 Chronicles 16:19 that His eyes are active, 'running to and fro the earth' and when He sees someone pursuing Him with the entirety of his/her heart, He will reveal Himself fully to that righteous person. If God has not been revealing much of Himself to us, we should ask ourselves what type of lives we are living.

RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT FLAWLESSNESS

God observed the lives of Abraham, Moses, Samuel, Rahab, etc and weighed them in His balances. He found these lives to be substantial – substantial enough to cover the lives of others. God could use their attainments to cover the liabilities or the loss of their 'contingent', be it their families, relatives, communities, tribes or nations.

As I studied the life of each of these people, I was surprised to find that these whom God considered righteous enough to 'chase or to cover a thousand' were not without defects. They were not flawless human beings. Abraham, for example, was definitely not a flawless saint. On two occasions, he was guilty of gross selfishness and lying. He did not stand up for his wife and was willing to sacrifice her for his own safety. He set a bad example before a heathen king who rebuked him.

Samuel and David too had their own flaws while Rahab was once a harlot. This 'woman with a past' had so much prevailing power before God that God did not only use her to save her family, she was also given the honour of becoming a Messianic mother. Both Noah and Moses were far from flawless as both lost control of themselves, one through drunkenness and the other through anger and they had to reap untoward consequences. These people lived substantial lives that God considered as

'righteous' but they were not 'flawless.'

God's estimation of righteousness is so different from men's estimation. Has He not instructed us that His thoughts and His ways are indeed far, far above ours?

Isaiah 55:8

*'For your thoughts are not my thoughts,
neither are Your ways My ways, saith the Lord.'*

Although these great saints were not flawless, each one of them had tremendous prevailing power before God because **they lived in His revealed and authoritative will**, that is, they lived in obedience to God. As a result, He was able to use their lives to do exploits and to cover the lives of the unrighteous. In these end times when human wickedness is on the rise, God will once again cause us to rediscover the power of this ancient truth: one life can 'chase or cover a thousand' if that life is lived righteously in the revealed and authoritative will of God.

It behoves us to live in obedience to God for God rates this as righteousness. When we live in righteousness, we can, like Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, etc. use our lives to do the work of a thousand. We may also cover others by pleading with God to withhold judgment from the unrighteous (be they family members, friends, cities or nations) and give them more time to repent.

The life of a righteous man has incalculable worth in God's sight and definitely has inexpressible social worth. Abraham knew this secret and this is why he interceded, and asked God to spare the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah on the basis of just forty righteous men. The truth was, God was willing to spare the lives of those many thousands if there were just ten righteous men! In God's estimation, ten righteous lives could actually cover the liabilities of those thousands of unrighteous lives in those two sinful cities. **Yes, God was telling Abraham that He would consider the righteous attainments of ten righteous men as the attainments of those thousands of unrighteous people. In other words, God was using the righteousness of the ten men to 'cover' the unrighteousness of the rest.**

God harkened to the prayers of one righteous man called Abraham and promised to give Sodom and Gomorrah a 'concession' by withholding judgment if only ten righteous men could be found. Sad to say, Abraham could not even find these ten men. Now, if ten lives could cover for thousands upon thousands, then how many could one person cover?

In God's estimation, when one life is properly aligned with Him, it can possess such spiritual superiority that it can actually cover thousands of lives. God states it this way, 'One of you shall chase a thousand and two can put ten thousand to flight.' – *From God's Strategies for the End Times, Book Three: 'One Shall Chase a Thousand'* by **SUSAN TANG**, available in Christian bookstores. Used with permission.

Bury the Past

By Jill Bristoe

I was teaching in a Bible college not too long ago, and a young girl was assigned to look after me. She was beautiful, godly, and bright. She was a chartered accountant and was putting herself through college while keeping her career going. At the end of my week, I was eating dinner with her and teased her about not being married. 'How did you escape?' I kidded her.

She didn't reply for a moment; then she said hesitantly, 'I was married.'

'I'm so sorry,' I said. 'I didn't know.'

'That's all right,' she said. And I could tell it was. It wasn't all right that her husband had walked out on her in a particularly cruel way, but it was 'all right' in her heart. It was well with her soul. Peace like a river flowed there. She had been able to let go of the terrible wrong done to her. What was more, the Lord had helped her to look at the future as God's future for her, and she insisted on seeing a better day ahead. True love from God keeps you from being discouraged.

'But you don't know how my spouse treated me,' an abandoned man once told me. 'Let me tell you...,' he began.

But I stopped him. I knew it would not help him to tell the sad story one more time. I have observed what someone has said: 'Some people destroy their relationship by writing everything down with the 'pencil of memory' but never take anything off with the "eraser of forgiveness."' In contrast, my young friend had been busy with her eraser!

This young woman at Bible college shared very few of the salient points of her story with me. She gave me the bare bones and spared me, and herself, the details. I knew she had left a multitude of information out of her brief account, but she refused to wallow in self-pity, and she had not kept an account of every sin. She had forgiven him. Not that he had sought for forgiveness, but she stood ready to say, if he ever did get around to asking her, 'I forgive you fully and freely as Christ has forgiven me.'

What's Hanging Around Your Mind?

Years ago my husband was on a missionary trip to a primitive tribe. When he and the missionary he was travelling with arrived late in an isolated village, there was nowhere to stay for the night but the witch doctor's house. It was not surprising that they had a fitful night! All the ominous paraphernalia hanging from the high grass roof fascinated Stuart.

'What are all those objects hanging down!' he asked the missionary.

'That's his bookkeeping system,' he replied. 'Whenever someone in the village offends him or hurts one of his kids, he hangs an object of some sort up there to remind him of the wrong done to his family. It would be a terrible thing if he ever let himself forget what they did.'

'How primitive,' I hear you saying. 'No wonder we need to send missionaries to these primitive tribes.' But wait a bit! How much garbage have you and I got hanging around the roofs of our minds? Do we go to sleep determined to remember everything and wake up determined never to forget anything? Love doesn't keep a running record of someone else's wrongdoings. It's funny, no one ever forgets where they bury the hatchet.

Love is slow to anger and quick to forgive. My friend set out to forget the details of her husband's rejection and abandonment. She was equipping herself for ministry, and I knew the Lord loved her for it. She was truly a girl after God's own heart!

So how can I bear the grief and pain of rejection or betrayal without it destroying me? And if I have been so badly rejected, how can I ever love again? Well, that is what the love of God does so well in us and through us. In a spectacular way, love bears all things. Love loves again and again and again! That's how love behaves.

But it will take time, so give yourself time. If you have been hurt, you need to:

- spend time healing. Don't rush into another relationship too soon. Give yourself a chance to get



well.

- spend time 'minding your mind.' Concentrate on the things that have been good – good memories, for example. Paul said, 'Fix your thoughts on what is true and honourable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. (Philippians 4:8). You mind your mind, and God will mind your heart!

- spend time revisiting your theology. Remind yourself of the promises of God. God loves you. God forgives you. God provides for you. God has plans for you. God is with you. God will give you help. God will empower you.

- spend time being quiet. Love grows in quiet places. Wait on the Lord. Refocus your attention on your personal relationship with Him rather than your personal relationship with others.

- spend time reading the Word of God, not just snatching a few verses of Scripture as you dash out the door into the rest of your life. Bask in it. Soak it in. Drink it in. Read, mark, and inwardly digest it. Let the Word of God comfort you as only the Word of God can. Just give yourself time.

After giving yourself time, you will find love growing inside you, and with the growth of love, forgiveness. You will find yourself discovering the ability to cope. Love 'bears all things,' Paul says (1 Corinthians 13:7, NKJV). And what is more, it always protects the one it loves.

Love doesn't always seek to expose the bad stuff. It covers over the ugly in someone's life. That's why love doesn't gossip. Gossip sees to it that someone's faults are kept in the news; love refuses to do that. Proverbs 10:12 says, 'Hatred stirs up quarrels, but love covers all offences.'

In fact, love refuses to drag the skeleton out of the closet. It buries the past and refuses to rob the tomb. – **From Love that Lasts by JILL BRISCOE**

"Love buries the past and refuses to rob the tomb."

WOMEN to WOMEN

Advisor/Co-ordinator: Goh Poh Gaik

Women to women, a project of the NECF Commission on Women's Concerns, is a bimonthly supplement to Berita NECF.

It has the broad objectives of:

- educating and raising awareness of the social and theological issues affecting women
- stimulating efforts towards networking and dialogue amongst women
- encouraging one another in the use of our gifts and talents for the Lord's Kingdom

Your letters and contributions (feedback, suggestions, ideas, articles, poems, cartoons, etc.) are most welcome.

Send to: The Co-ordinator, **WOMEN TO WOMEN**
NECF, 32, Jalan SS2/103, 47300 Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

The views expressed in this supplement do not necessarily reflect those of the Commission or the NECF.

Qualified Religious Freedom

IT has been said that the United States of America is the foremost model of religious freedom based on the protection of religious and political liberty afforded by its Constitution. Nevertheless, its historical development and happenings evidently indicate many limitations in granting freedom to religious practices.

Moreover, the International Report of Religious Freedom 2003 – released by the Bureaucracy of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, US State of Department – draws our attention to the tendency in some nations to give their authorities the power to define what are the acceptable forms of religion.

Clearly, there is no absolute religious freedom in many, if not all, countries including Malaysia. While Article 11 of the Malaysian Federal Constitution grants every person, citizens or non-citizens in Malaysia, the freedom to profess, practise and propagate his religion, other constitutional provisions must be taken into serious consideration in the interpretation of such liberty. In addition, the pluralistic nature of this nation creates greater sensitivity with respect to the scope of religious liberty.

The freedom of profession, practice and propagation is subject to general laws that seek to maintain public order, public health or morality [Article 11(5)]. For example, Section 298 of the Penal Code reads:

"Whoever, with deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person, utters any word or makes any sound in the hearing of that person, or makes any gesture in the sight of that person, or places any object in the sight of that person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both." (For more on this section, see "Penal Code (Act 574), As of 25th July 2003".

The rationale here is to preserve public order and welfare and is therefore constitutionally justifiable. In other words, individual state or Federal Territory laws may not restrict the right of profession, practice and propagation unless the manner or method of propagation causes public disorder.

The Constitution also permits state law (or Federal law in Federal Territories) to "control and restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine" among Muslims [Article 11(4)]. Pursuant to this clause,

some states have passed specific laws to restrict and even prohibit the propagation of non-Islamic religions among Muslims. Except for the Federal Territories, Sabah, Sarawak, Perlis and Pahang, the other states in Malaysia have adopted the Control and Restriction Bill. The first of such legislation is The Control and Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religious Enactment, 1980 of the state of Terengganu.

For example, Section 4 of the Enactment imposes a fine of RM10,000 or imprisonment for one year or both on those found guilty of "Persuading, influencing or inciting a Muslim to leave Islam or to embrace another religion". The same sanction is applicable in Section 5, which covers those who cause "a minor Muslim (under the age of 18 years) to be instructed in or to participate in the rites of non-Islamic religion (the offence can be committed by a body or institution)."

Other sections of interests are:

- **Sec 6:** Approaching or contacting a Muslim for the purpose of subjecting him to any speech or display of material concerning a non-Islamic religion (approach can be by any means of communication, including telephone)

- *Sanction: Fine of RM5,000 or to imprisonment for 6 months or to both.*

- **Sec 7:** Sending or delivering to a Muslim any unsolicited publication concerning a non-Islamic religion.

- *Sanction: Fine of RM3,000 or to imprisonment for 3 months or to both.*

- *(Unrequested advertisement of publication would also be included in the above and under s.7(2), there is a deeming provision that a publication sent or delivered to or at the address of a person shall be held as delivered to that person.)*

- **Sec 8:** Distributing in a public place any publication concerning a non-Islamic religion to a Muslim.

- *Sanction: Fine of RM1,000.*



Former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Tun Haji Mohd. Salleh Abbas once remarked that such limitation was "logical as it is a necessary consequence of the fact that Islam is the religion of the Federation... to protect Muslims from being exposed to heretical religious doctrines, be they of Islamic or non-Islamic origin and irrespective of whether the propagators are Muslims or non-Muslims" (F. A. Trindade & H. P. Lee "The Constitution of Malaysia: Further Perspectives and Development").

Obviously, the issue of religion and freedom of religion is extremely sensitive in Malaysia. Most people will agree that limitations on freedom of religion or belief are necessary for public order and welfare. The question is whether these are imposed by law in a non-discriminatory manner.

While freedom of religion is guaranteed in Article 11 of the Federal Constitution, Article 3 states that Islam is the official religion of Malaysia. This raises another question: Should priority be given to Islam as the dominant religion in Malaysia, or to the freedom to choose one's religion, including the right to convert?

Reference:

Lee Min Choon. [Freedom of Religion in Malaysia](#). Kairos Research Centre, 1999.

Philip Koh Tong Ngee. [Freedom of Religion in Malaysia – the Legal Dimension](#). Petaling Jaya, SEL: Graduates Christian Fellowship, 1987.

CORRECTION

IN the article "NECF: Executive Summary Listing Not Fair" (*Berita NECF*, January – February 2004), NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong was quoted as saying: "There is greater religious freedom in Malaysia compared with some countries in the Middle East and other parts of the world".

He further said, "...**the people** (in Malaysia) have the liberty to believe, practise, propagate and govern their faiths according to Article 11 of the Federation Constitution – the country's supreme laws". The sentence should have read "...**non-Muslims** have the liberty to believe, practise, propagate and govern their faiths according to..."

We regret the error.

Intercessors 'do lunch'

WHEN food is served, somehow relationships deepen. So, last year, intercessors from churches in Petaling Jaya started meeting to "do lunch".

The first lunch fellowship was hosted by PJEFC (the churches take turns to play host) with some 30 prayer leaders from Petaling Jaya churches in attendance. Since then, CLC, DUMC, RLC and PJ Glad Tidings have generously fed – physically and spiritually – the growing number of participants at the bi-monthly fellowships. At the last gathering on Feb 12 at Glad Tidings, 46 prayer leaders from 15 churches showed up.

Organised by NECF Malaysia Prayer

Commission, the lunch fellowships provide the opportunity for the prayer leaders and intercessors to build relationships and gain experience from one another. Besides learning the various ways churches conduct their prayer meetings and prayer programmes, they also get to hear the heart of the pastor of the host church who will give a short exhortation at the gathering.

The next church privileged to play host is Grace Assembly, PJ. There are no shortages of hosts, says NECF Prayer Executive Ann Low. "People are coming up to offer to host the gatherings."

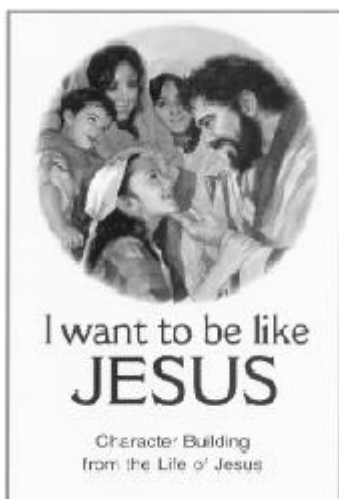
Basically, the lunch fellowships aim



EAT FIRST, PRAY LATER...
participants being treated to lunch by PJ Glad Tidings at the recent lunch fellowship.

to help intercessors get to know each other and learn how God is moving in specific regions, for example Petaling Jaya. "The enthusiastic response shows that there is a growing desire among Christians to move beyond their churches and see the bigger picture," Ann observes.

The right order – Believe, Become, Behave



HOW do we raise our children to be godly adults and remain godly in our troubled, fast-degenerating world that is ruled by materialism, hedonism, pluralism, relativism and secularism? How indeed, can we raise children who will respect authority, obey the covenant of marriage no matter what the cost, value friendship and human beings above things. In short, God-fearing and -pleasing adults.

Solution: Build character, and not just any character, but godly character.

"We tend to focus on the behaviour or conduct of our children," said Dr V Gilbert Beers at a recent seminar in Kuala Lumpur that was attended by some 300 parents, teachers and those involved in teaching children representing 71 churches, para-church organisations and others. "We don't grow godly children by merely helping them change their conduct. That's because character drives conduct. Conduct is what we do. Character is who we are. It shapes conduct. And who we are is shaped by belief, what we believe. So, believe

become, and behave," he taught.

His 16-year-old grandson, Kevin Cathey, who was his co-speaker, added: "Someone once said that character is what you do when you're not thinking."

Dr Beers conducted the seminar to introduce the Character Building programme which he designed to guide parents and teachers to help their children grow God's way – according to the Bible. The programme comes in the form of a one-year devotional book titled *I want to be like JESUS*. It contains 50 Bible stories (one for each week), with each story teaching a value, or what he termed, "building block of life".

The programme follows three simple steps: Growing Belief, Growing Character, and Growing Conduct. Building character begins with growing belief. For example, if a child believes honesty is right, he will want to become honest. Belief builds character, which then shapes conduct.

The 71-year-old author of many books reminded the participants that the ultimate goal is to help their children to become godly people in Christ Jesus. Hence, they are "builders" in a scheme where God is the "Architect". As builders, they are to shape their charges with the proper tools. Some of the tools he has found effective and indispensable in his parenting experience are prayer, family traditions, role modelling and heritage building – an unbroken chain of influence passed down from generation to generation.

I want to be like Jesus is available from Gadsounds at RM20 per set. The seminar was jointly organised by NECF Malaysia, Scripture Union, Children at Risk Network and Focus on the Family Malaysia.

Survey on Pastors' Feelings

NECF Malaysia has kicked off its nationwide pastor-congregation survey that seeks to discover the dynamics of the pastor-congregation emotional relationship.

Questionnaires have been sent out to over 700 pastors of English and Chinese churches in the first part of the *Emotional Connection Between Pastors and Congregations* survey, believed to be the first of its kind in Malaysia. Pastors of BM churches will be receiving the BM version of the questionnaire soon.

The questionnaire contains 50 statements on how the interviewees (pastors) feel about themselves and their ministry, and how they think their congregations perceive them and their contribution.

The interviewees will then rate the statements on a five-point scale of agreement, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Examples of statements: "My congregation will lose respect for me if I show them my weaknesses" and "If I have a choice, I will still choose to be a pastor."

The second part of the survey covers the congregation's response and will be conducted at a latter time. NECF will use the data collected to plan future programmes for pastors.

As the survey will greatly benefit pastors and ultimately the church, pastors are urged to fill in the questionnaires and return them to NECF without delay. The survey is initiated and facilitated by the NECF Research Commission as a follow-up to the ongoing NECF Malaysia Pastors Prayer Shield campaign that was launched in 1991.

Church Connection Key In Marketing "Passion"

ONCE upon a time, pastors warned churchgoers against the evils of the silver screen. Now they are packing believers and unchurched guests alike into movie houses across the land.

The difference is what's playing – "The Passion of the Christ," by Hollywood heavyweight Mel Gibson. With its R-rated, bloodstained recreation of the last hours of Jesus' life told in English-subtitled Aramaic and Latin, film insiders predicted Gibson's quixotic project would be a box-office flop. Instead, the movie opened with numbers rivaling Hollywood's biggest blockbusters. And in the audience sit many faithful church members, their seats often reserved for them by pastors.

Making its debut on Ash Wednesday (Feb 25), Gibson's movie opened on 4,643 screens in 3,006 theaters with \$10 million in advance ticket sales, according to Larry Ross, media representative for Icon Productions, which made the film.

Churches are buying out entire movie houses – "four-walling," as it's known in the trade – to encourage their members to attend "The Passion" and take their unchurched friends with them.

Using Gibson's widely publicized movie for evangelism is part of a multifaceted promotional effort by Vista, Calif.-based Outreach magazine. The magazine's website offers a variety of products based on the film, ranging from direct-mail postcards to "affordable

Passion-themed New Testaments." Outreach sent "most churches in the United States" a DVD that included a movie trailer.

Accompanying the recommendations are endorsements by prominent religious leaders, including well-known evangelicals Billy Graham, James Dobson, Jerry Falwell, and Southern Baptist Convention president Jack Graham.

In early January, Outreach screened the film at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., where best-selling author Rick Warren is pastor. More than 3,000 pastors and church leaders saw the movie and heard Gibson talk about it at the church, according to David Chrzan, pastor and chief of staff at Saddleback.

Warren's church subsequently bought 18,000 tickets to offer members.

With Warren offering a two-part sermon series on "Understanding the Passion," Chrzan said Saddleback already felt the impact of Gibson's movie. The weekend Warren began the series, 23,000 people attended, the largest crowd ever except Christmas and Easter.

In Plano, Texas, Prestonwood Baptist Church member Arch Bonnema decided to go beyond reserving seats for others, instead buying 6,000 tickets to give away. "When I saw it, it really changed my life," Bonnema said, adding, "It made everything else I had done look meaningless." – *MCJ*

Turkish newspaper claims 35,000 converts to Christianity

AT least 35,000 Turkish Muslims are supposed to have converted to the Christian faith last year. Most of them joined Protestant churches, according to the Turkish newspaper *Milliet*. For the most part they had been alienated from their religion.

Evangelicals in Istanbul explain that the converts are presumably descendants from Armenian or Greek Orthodox Christians. They had only been able to escape the genocide during the early years of the 20th century by claiming to be Muslims.

Many Protestants, however, would rather lose their homeland than denounce their faith. Most of them were deported to Greece, Cyprus, Lebanon and Iraq. As a consequence, the Christian percentage of the Turkish population dropped from 20 percent to 0.3 percent.

According to some observers, Turkish

citizens of Armenian or Greek descent are daring to become more visible as the Turkish government strives for admission to the European Union (EU). Most of them are however alienated from the churches of their forebears. They tend to join evangelical churches.

According to *Milliet*, there are approximately 50,000 evangelicals in the country. According to the International Society of Human Rights in Frankfurt there are signs of relaxation in the discrimination against Christians, as Turkey is trying to improve its human rights record in order to join the EU.

Other sources claim however that news of large numbers of Christian converts are disseminated by Islamic extremists in order to warn of the dangers of the EU.

Of the 66 million Turkish citizens, 99 percent are Muslims. – *idea*

Hindu Fundamentalists Target Christians

HINDU fundamentalists have launched an attack against the Catholic Church in India in the rural Catholic stronghold of Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, and the more sophisticated region of Goa. The attacks are directly linked to conversion issues in both states.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of India spoke out against the potential misuse of anti-conversion laws in its 26th biennial general meeting on Jan 7. In response, Hindu activists demanded an inquiry into the assets and activities of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity.

Meanwhile in Jhabua, government officials claimed the Jan 13 murder of a nine-year-old girl, whose body was found in the grounds of a Catholic school, was a "well-planned conspiracy" against the Catholic community. Finally, Hindus claim a stone found recently in the Bishop's Palace in Panaji, Goa, is an ancient Hindu relic. Catholic officials fear the stone may give grounds for "re-possession" of the Palace, which some Hindus claim was built on the ruins of an old Hindu temple.

In Mumbai, brothel owners have accused Christian activist Anson Thomas – who has rescued scores of girls 18 years and younger from prostitution – of "unlawfully converting" Hindu sex workers to Christianity. When a report of the allegations appeared in the *Times of India*, activists from the Hindu political party Shiv Sena protested Thomas' activities by gathering outside a local police station. Law enforcement authorities warned Thomas to refrain from giving Hindu child prostitutes Bibles. Thomas denied that he forced anyone to convert to Christianity. "By falsely giving a religious angle to my work, they are trying to stop me from organizing raids to rescue minor girls and those who are forced into the trade," he said. – *Compass*

Corruption

ABOUT five percent of the world's gross domestic product is wasted through corruption, World Bank officials say. Seventy countries have signed the first worldwide pact against it. The UN Convention Against Corruption seeks recovery of funds stolen by leaders and sheltered in foreign banks. – *World Pulse*

Chinese Seminar on End Times (April 2)

THE NECF Malaysia Chinese Commission is organising this end times seminar at the NECF office to help Chinese-speaking Christians learn how to look at current events in relation to Christ's second coming from the biblical perspective.

The speaker, Bible expositor Rev Dr Patrick Tang from the US, will cover the following subjects:

- Bible prophecies on the Middle East in relation to the end times
- Exposition on Matthew 24 (Signs of the end times)
- Various views of the rapture
- Revelation of end-time prophecies in the Bible

The seminar is open to pastors, elders and church leaders. It will be held free-of-charge from 9.30am to 3.00pm at

the NECF office. Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

Admission is by registration only and those planning to attend must register with NECF by **March 28**.

Rev Tang has a D.Min. from Dallas Theological Seminary and has lectured in many seminaries. He established the Hong Kong Bible Exposition Society in 1992 and Bible Exposition International in the US in 1999. He was instrumental in producing the *Chinese Analytical Layout Bible* where passages of the Bible are grouped according to subject for easier understanding. Contact Ngeh Hong Eng at the NECF office or 012-320 2324 for further information.



Rev Tang

National Prayer Conference (Aug 26-29)

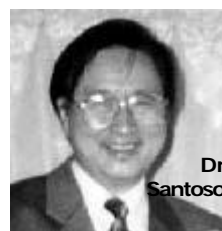
THE NECF Malaysia Prayer Commission is organising this conference as part of NECF's yearly Merdeka prayer programme. Themed "My House shall be called a House of Prayer", the commission hopes to impart the vision that prayer is a mandate for all Christians, and not just a ministry of a few elite intercessors – a misperception common among Christians.

The speakers are Dr David Demian and Dr Iman Santoso. **Dr Demian** gave



Dr Damien

up his medical career in 1985 to heed the Lord's calling and moved from Egypt to Canada in 1988. As Director of Watchmen for the Nations, Canada, his passion is to help prepare God's people to be the Bride of Christ ready for His return.



Dr Santoso

Dr Santoso, is the General Coordinator of National Prayer Network, Indonesia, where he helps to develop prayer networks in cities throughout Indonesia. To date, he has helped to set up prayer networks in 374 cities. In addition, he has helped to establish women's prayer networks in 118 cities and students' prayer networks in 55 cities.

The conference will climax at the Klang Valley Merdeka Prayer Rally on Aug 29 night, which is open to the public. More information will be available in our next issue.

BM Pastors and Leaders Conference (April 1-3)

"Gereja, Cabaran Trend & Respon Kristen" (The Church and Christian Response to Trends and Challenges)

THIS conference at PJ Glad Tidings, Jalan Gasing will benefit those involved in the Bahasa Malaysia ministry to help them know the trends of the times and understand how they affect the Church.

Organised by the NECF Malaysia Bahasa Malaysia Commission, the speakers will also share the challenges facing the BM Church in Malaysia and how to seize the opportunities before them.

As leadership is one of the most important factors to the success of a church or a ministry, those in leadership are strongly urged to attend the

conference so that they are adequately prepared to lead. Participation is by registration only. The night meetings are open to all BM churches, especially those in the Klang Valley.

Speakers: Rev Dr Bambang Widjaja, Head of the Indonesia Evangelical Fellowship, and widely known in Indonesia for his ministries in missions, youth and intercession; and NECF Secretary-General Rev Wong Kim Kong.

For further information, contact Alfred Tais at the NECF office or 016-228 3119 or 019-268 3119.



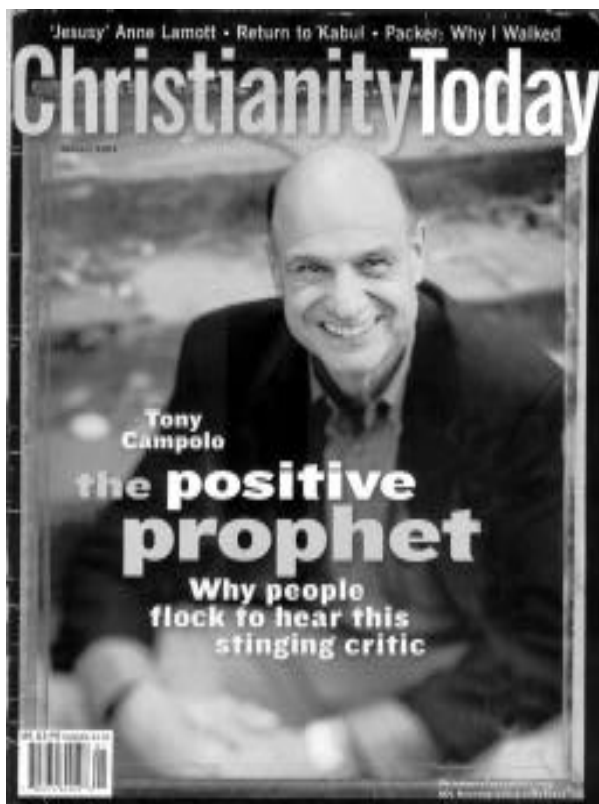
Special prayer guide for children for 40-Day Merdeka Fast and Pray (July 22-Aug 30)

For the first time, we will make available daily devotional guide for children who are participating in our yearly fast and pray season. To make it more meaningful and relevant, we have enlisted our youths to write the materials for the booklet.

The booklet will be available by end-May, together with the prayer guides for the adult participants. The NECF Prayer Commission is currently finalising the devotional guides which will be available in four languages – English, Chinese, BM and Tamil. Churches are urged to participate in this event as it has great bearing on our nation.



"Positive Prophet" to appear in Malaysia (May 26)



RENOWNED international speaker Dr Tony Campolo will be the guest speaker at the NECF Malaysia Pastors and Leaders Seminar on May 26. The author of 28 books, including bestseller *It's Friday, But Sunday's Comin'*, is well known in the Christian circle and equally renowned in the secular world as a motivational speaker.

In the US where he is based, he is a familiar face and voice on television and radio as a media commentator on religious, social and political issues. He has appeared on television programmes such as *Nightline*, *Crossfire*, *Politically Incorrect*, and *CNN News*. He co-hosted his own television series, *Hashing It Out*, on the Odyssey Network, and presently hosts *From Across The Pond*, a weekly programme on the Premier

Radio Network in England.

In January 2003, Christianity Today did a cover story on him. In "The Positive Prophet", he was described thus: "Tony Campolo is a ferocious critic of Christians left and right. Why do people still flock to hear him?"

The story continued: "Unlike other social critics on both the left and right, Tony Campolo is above all an evangelist who inspires rather than condemns. And his message is the same whether he's speaking inside the church or outside it: give your life completely to Jesus."

Despite a hectic speaking schedule, he still finds time to write and his most recent titles are *Revolution and Renewal: How Churches Are Saving Our Cities* and *Let Me Tell You a Story: Life Lessons From Unexpected Places and Unlikely People*.

An ordained minister, he has served American Baptist Churches in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and is presently recognised as an associate pastor of the Mount Carmel Baptist Church in West Philadelphia.

As the founder of Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education (EAPE), he has provided the leadership to create, nurture and support programs for "at-risk" children in cities across the US and Canada, and has helped establish schools and universities in several developing countries.

The NECF seminar is jointly organised with Youth For Christ and will be held in the morning prior to NECF's 9th Biennial General Meeting. Later the same night, he will speak at an evangelistic meeting organised by PJECF at the Heritage Centre, Petaling Jaya.

New Members

We welcome the following into our Fellowship as **Ordinary Members**:

- **Glory Sanctuary of Jesus, Batu Pahat**, pastored by *Rev Francis Ho Chee Fatt*
- **Praise Evangelical Church, Perak**, pastored by *Selvam a/l Benjamin*
- **Gereja Christian Vision Kulai**, pastored by *Rev Chong Soo Yin*
- **CREST, Petaling Jaya**, represented by *Mrs Lana Wong*
- **Gurun Gospel Mission, Gurun**, pastored by *Rev Samuel Lau Pee Chai*
- **River of Life Sanctuary, Puchong**, pastored by *Dr Paul Chen*
- **Calvary Life Assembly, Malacca**, pastored by *Peter Lim Heng Teik*

We also welcome four as **Associate Members**: Lum Chee Seng, Yvonne Young Ai Peng, Elder Ee Chong Kang, and Linda Tang.

Christian Charity Concert to Feature Malaysian Artistes (May 8 and 9)

FRANCESSCA Peter, Geoffrey Woo, Juwita Suwito, Prody G, Patrick Leong, James Yee, Chok Pui Fong, Gerry Alphonso, Celestino Valerio, The Court Minstrels Ensemble, Altered Frequency and MP3plus – these singers and bands will render their talents at a concert to raise funds for Bridges EIP (Early Intervention Programme), a centre to help children with learning disabilities.

The "Colours of the Rainbow" concert will be held at the Heritage Centre Auditorium in Section 13, Petaling Jaya. Bridges EIP, run by PJECF, has a long waiting list of children who want to enrol in the programme. Through the concert, PJECF hopes expand the centre to accommodate more children.

The organising committee is producing a souvenir programme as part of its fund-raising effort and is appealing to companies to advertise in it. For more on this, contact Dr Paul Lee at 03-7877 5577.

What's the latest

CHECK out the NECF Malaysia website (www.necf.org.my) for prayer pointers on the latest national issue or problem we are facing in Malaysia. Issues that have been posted in the "For Your Intercession" section thus far have included the general election, bird flu epidemic, corruption, suicide terrorism, Islamic State and hudud laws in Terengganu. The section is a joint effort between the NECF Research and Prayer commissions.

FOR YOUR PRAYERS



INDIA

CHRISTIAN tribals in India, especially in Orissa, are under great pressure to convert to Hinduism. Hindu nationalist groups are running 'Ghar Vaspi' (re-conversion) ceremonies for tribals who have become Christians to return to Hinduism. Though India's tribal groups are not traditionally Hindu, the Hindu government counts them as Hindu and deems them low caste. Therefore the conversions are called 're-conversions' or 'homecomings'. Hindu nationalists charge Christians with destroying India's Hindu fabric, traditions and society through "unethical conversions". On March 4, 212 Christians were publicly converted to Hinduism in a Hindu temple in western Orissa. Hindu activists boast that some 10,000 Christians have been 're-converted' in Orissa in recent years, and aim for 400,000. Christians refusing to convert are harassed and violently assaulted.

Pray for: all believers suffering because of their faithfulness, that God will provide their needs and redeem their suffering, bringing good from evil; Christians – who from fear, confusion or manipulation have converted to Hinduism through Operation Ghar Vaspi or threats of violence – that they will hear again the call of Jesus, receive strength and courage from the Holy Spirit, and return to the Saviour Redeemer; and God to raise up believers with public voices for justice from among India's elites.

AFGHANISTAN

IN spite of the continued influence of the Taliban, an underground Christian movement is growing in war-torn Afghanistan. Before the Taliban came to power and during their brutal regime, many Afghans fled their nation. After the war was over, officials expected about 600,000 of those refugees to return. But to their surprise, more than two million have come back – and some are bringing with them what they didn't have when they left – faith in Christ.

"It is surprising how many people found the Lord while they were in Pakistan," one relief worker told the *Charisma* magazine (January issue). "Many had supernatural dreams, where

Jesus appeared to them and revealed Himself to be the truth. Others were won to Christ through the network of Pakistani believers in remote, mountainous areas." Most foreign Christians working in the country are reluctant to give out information that might compromise their work and the safety of Afghan believers. But evangelism is alive, not only among the Christian workers who have come to help rebuild the country, but also among the Afghan believers themselves.

Pray for the many believers who have returned from overseas that they will continue to passionately and courageously share Christ; and for the new believers to grow in maturity.

PAKISTAN

ON Jan 15 terrorists attacked the Pakistan Bible Society in Karachi, injuring two staff workers. Fifteen minutes later a car bomb exploded, injuring 13 of the large crowd drawn by the grenade attack. Earlier on Jan 5, Pakistani pastor Rev Mukhtar Masih, 50, was murdered as he waited for a train around 3am. He had been receiving death threats from local Islamic militants.

President Musharraf has promised to tackle domestic terrorism. But that involves radical things like madrasa reform, curriculum reform, stopping the finance of terrorists, closing down extremist Islamist groups, upholding religious liberty in all provinces, and enforcing rights, justice and rule of law according to the constitution. However, he relies on the MMA – a coalition of six Islamist pro-Sharia, pro-Taliban, anti-West parties that hold the balance of power in Pakistan – to retain power and get motions through parliament. The MMA are pushing for the full Islamisation of Pakistani society.

On Jan 18 the MMA renewed their drive to advance their cause: the enforcement of Sharia law nationwide in accordance with the recommendations of the Islamic Ideology Council. The government is compromised by its dependence on the MMA. Pakistan's Christians are extremely vulnerable.

Pray for President Musharraf to have the conscience and courage to take those radical steps that are necessary to make Pakistan safe and truly free; for

the Christians of Pakistan, that they will not shy away in fear, but will draw closer to God and be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to live lives of faith and faithfulness in the midst of persecution, for the glory of God.

UGANDA

LAST Dec 31, Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) leader and spirit medium Joseph Kony killed 21 of his wives and children as they tried to escape his LRA camp in Sudan because they were starving. Many rebels, who are mostly kidnapped children, have deserted the LRA ranks in response to a government amnesty. The UPDF (Ugandan army) recently killed the LRA's chief army commander. The army claims to have virtually defeated the LRA.

However, Acholi Archbishop John Baptist Odama said, "The LRA presence in the north is still strong. They are still killing people in Lira, so I don't know what the UPDF thinks it is doing claiming they have nearly defeated them." (Jan 22).

The WEA Religious Liberty Prayer ministry took up this northern Ugandan conflict last May as a persecution issue rooted in intense spiritual warfare. Christians following the development have seen amazing answers to prayer in the past months. Let's persist to see this 17-year reign of evil defeated.

BOSNIA

THOUGH the war in Bosnia ended in 1995, people are still suffering from its legacy. Many still live in refugee camps because their homes were destroyed or are now occupied by other refugee families. In some areas, 90 percent are unemployed and a lot of people are dependent on soup kitchens for food. In the midst of the turmoil is the tiny evangelical Church estimated at no more than 700 believers out of four million.

Bosnia is one of the least evangelised countries in Europe. Despite the many obstacles, the Church is growing and ministering to the many suffering people. Many leading church plants are young and they often feel isolated and forgotten. Pray for God to meet the need for more experienced missionaries to work alongside them and for churches around the world to respond to Bosnia's spiritual and material need.